

HOLMES'S
COMPLETE
POETICAL
WORKS

Cambridge
Edition

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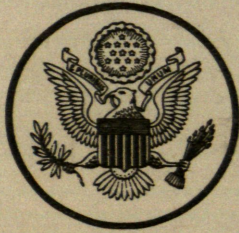
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The Cambridge Edition of the Poets

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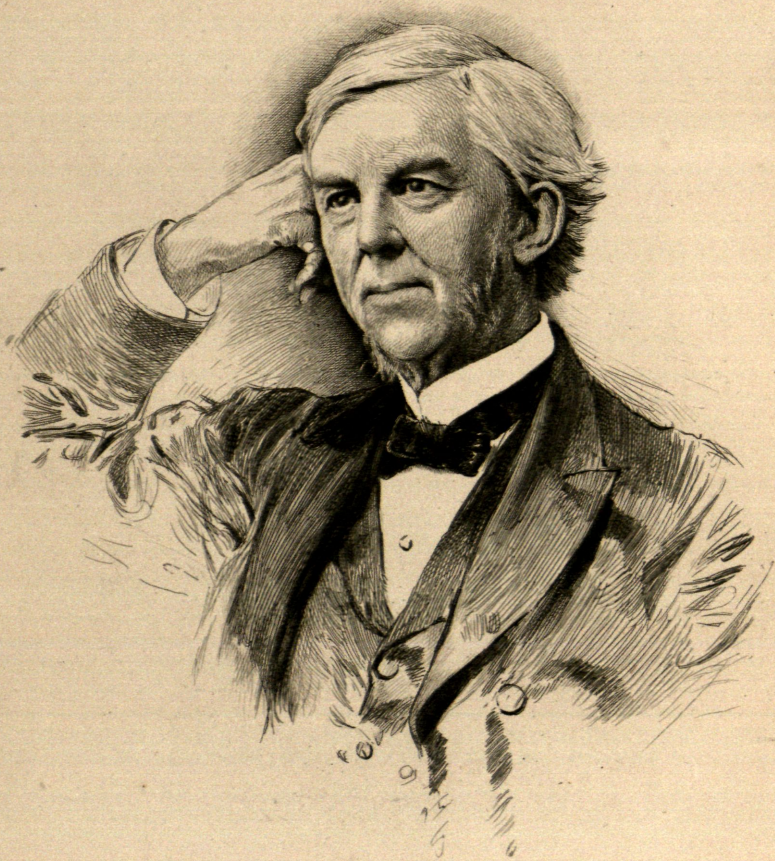
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THE COMPLETE
POETICAL WORKS OF
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES
Cambridge Edition



The Complete Poetical Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes

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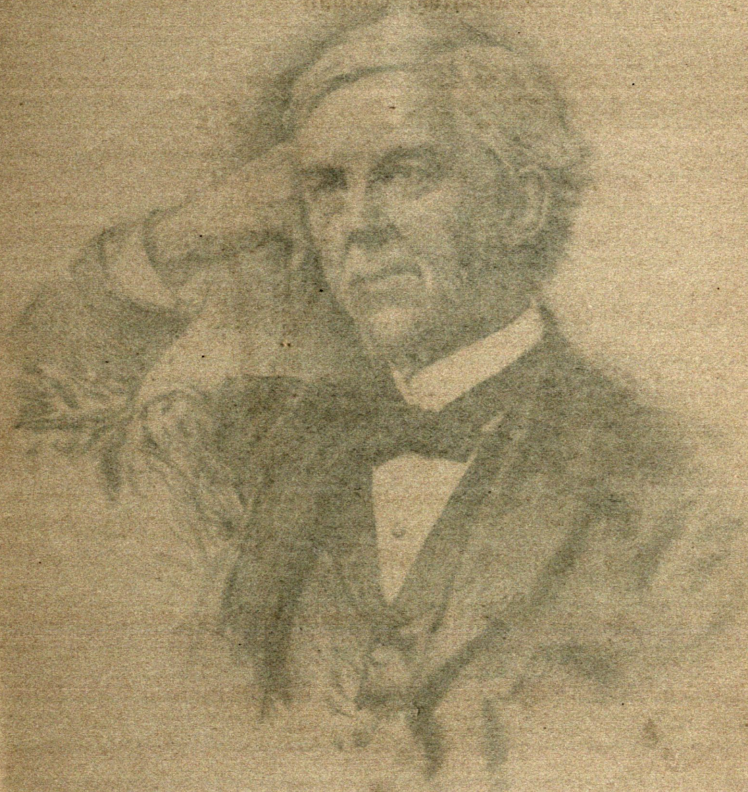
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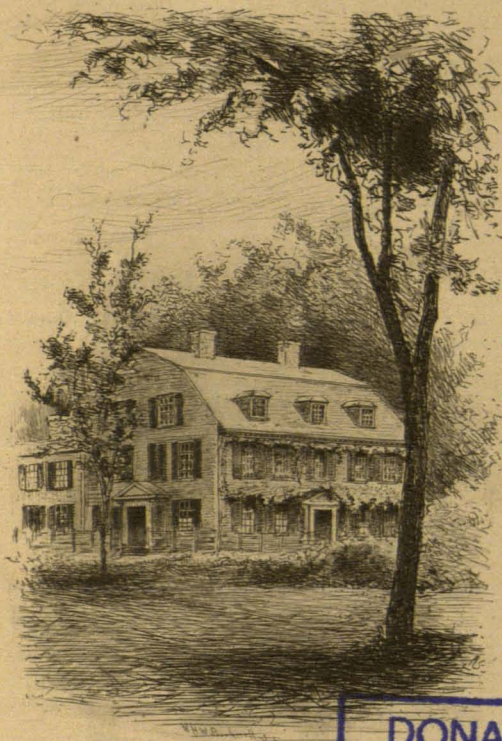


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Cambridge Edition



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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THIS Cambridge Edition of *The Complete Poetic Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes* is the fourth in a series which includes the poems and dramas of Longfellow, Whittier, and Browning. It follows in its scheme the plan of the previous volumes. The editor was at some disadvantage in not being able to avail himself of the Life of Dr. Holmes which is now in preparation, but the frequent autobiographical passages in the writings of the author enabled him to illustrate a career devoid, even more than that of most poets, of adventure or dramatic incident. The head-notes, in like manner, could frequently be supplied from comment occurring in the author's prose writings and in prefaces to separate publications of poems, but very many of the poems are so self-explanatory that the reader requires no introduction.

The policy has been pursued, as in the former cases, of taking the latest collective edition issued in the poet's lifetime as the pattern to be followed both in text and in arrangement, but the opportunity has been used to include a few poems which were written after the latest edition appeared or had by some accident failed to receive the author's attention when he was making up his final collection; no attempt, however, has been made, in gathering the early poems, to go outside of the volumes in which they were originally included. It is assumed that Dr. Holmes when making up these volumes intentionally disregarded some of the poems scattered through periodicals. This is confirmed by the attitude which he took when his attention was called to the omission upon the occasion of the issue of the Riverside Edition. He refused to give them a refuge even in an appendix. The arrangement here is the same as in the Riverside Edition, with some slight modification, chiefly caused by the introduction of new material. In accordance with the plan of this series and with Dr. Holmes's original intention when the Riverside Edition was prepared, the *Juvenilia* are placed in an appendix in smaller type. Throughout the volume, whether in head-notes or in those placed in the appendix, the editor's work is distinguished by the use of brackets.

BOSTON, 4 PARK STREET, October 21, 1895.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

DR. HOLMES had much to say in his writings of the problems of heredity, and was apparently as ready to recognize the caprices as the regular action of inherited tendencies. He may have speculated over his own descent when he wrote, in *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*, "The various inherited instincts ripen in succession. You may be nine tenths paternal at one period of your life, and nine tenths maternal at another. All at once the traits of some immediate ancestor may come to maturity unexpectedly on one of the branches of your character, just as your features at different periods of your life betray different resemblances to your nearer or more remote relatives." One would fain believe that the thin poetic blood of his early ancestor Anne Bradstreet had been enriched by its secret passage through the veins of several generations before it issued in the warm pulsations of this poet of our day; but as for those generous, even passionate instincts of patriotism, and that strong impulse toward lawful freedom which characterized the wit and philosopher, one may readily take into account the whole strain of Dr. Holmes's ancestry on both sides.

With the exception of a Dutch strain a few generations before, these ancestors were of New England origin, going back to the early colonial days. John Holmes, of Puritan birth, settled in Woodstock, Connecticut, in 1686. His grandson, David Holmes, served as captain of British troops in the French and Indian war and later as a surgeon in the Revolutionary army. The son of this David was the Reverend Abiel Holmes, who was graduated at Yale College in 1782, and after a six years' pastorate in Georgia came to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he was pastor over the first parish for forty years, and during his pastorate beside other writings and lectures compiled *The Annals of America*, a trustworthy and creditable historical survey. His second wife was a daughter of Oliver Wendell, and her ancestry besides its Dutch strain was connected with the Philipses, Quineys, and other well-known New England families.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, the third child and eldest son of Abiel and Mary Wendell Holmes, was born at Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 29, 1809. "The year 1809," he says, in *Our Hundred Days in Europe*, "which introduced me to atmospheric existence, was the birth-year of Gladstone, Tennyson, Lord Houghton, and Darwin." But the circumstances of his birth were as distinct from those that attended the appearance of his illustrious contemporaries as New England was sharply discriminated from old England. The atmosphere, however, into which he was born, was a fresh, clear, and not unscholarly one. It was, moreover, charged with historical traditions. Cambridge was a village, but a village dominated by college life. The house in which the poet was born shared until a recent day the honors with the Craigie House, its neighbor. For in the early days of the Revolution, when studies at Harvard College were suspended, this old gambrel-roofed house had been the headquarters of General Artemas Ward and of the Committee of Safety. Upon the steps of the house stood President Langdon of Harvard College, so tradition says, and prayed for the men, who, halting there a few moments, marched

forward under Colonel Prescott's lead to throw up entrenchments on Bunker Hill on the night of June 16, 1775; and in this house the boy's father, who had passed his own youth in the days of the Revolution, was collecting the memorabilia for his substantial contribution to American history. His mother, too, had her memory of a hurried exit from Boston during the siege, when she was six years old.

The appearance of the gambrel-roofed house has been preserved, fortunately, in various sketches and photographs; Dr. Holmes himself, who took a lively interest in the camera long before amateur photography was the fashion, made several copies of it from different points of view. But the most indelible picture of the house is in the affectionate portrait contained in Dr. Holmes's writings. It is a notable expression of the intense ardor with which he clung to places and scenes identified with his life and that of his forbears. By his literary workmanship he made the house, now vanished, a literary shrine. Not only in the detailed description contained in *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*, but in random passages elsewhere, he delighted in recalling the dignified yet homely structure which was his first outward shell. "The slaughter of the Old Gambrel-roofed House," he says, "was a case of justifiable domicile," but he mourned over the necessity of its destruction. "Personally," he adds, "I have a right to mourn for it as a part of my life gone from me. . . . The house in which one drew his first breath and where he one day came into the consciousness that he was a personality, an *ego*, a little universe with a sky over him all his own, with a persistent identity, with the terrible responsibility of a separate, independent, inalienable existence, — that house does not ask for any historical associations to make it the centre of the earth for him."

In the Introduction to *A Mortal Antipathy*, Dr. Holmes has dwelt upon the conditions of his childish life, the rural simplicity of nature, the hills which were the playground of his imagination, the glimpses of sails in the distance, even though the water itself was invisible. "I am very thankful," he says, "that the first part of my life was not passed shut in between high walls and treading the unimpressible and unsympathetic pavement." The combination of almost rustic life with academic dignity and high breeding which he has witnessed to in autobiographic passages, which Lowell has described so felicitously in his *Cambridge Thirty Years Ago*, and which struck Clough so forcibly when he was a sojourner there a decade or two later, was a note of that culmination of New England provincialism so notably reflected in much of Holmes's writings. As we get farther away from the period roughly circumscribed between 1815 and 1850, we shall see more clearly that it was the flowering time of the plant whose seeds were sown in 1620-1640, and Holmes was instinctively its poet and historian, as he was in point of years the last of the remarkable group always to be associated with New England's intellectual aristocracy.

Holmes's early schooling after an initiation in a dame school, where a companion was the late Bishop Lee of Delaware, was under Master William Bigelow, and when ten years old he went to a school in Cambridgeport, where he had for schoolmates Margaret Fuller and Richard Henry Dana, whose famous kinsman, Washington Allston, glorified the rather unkempt Port with his studio. At fifteen he was sent for special preparation to Phillips Academy at Andover. His life there, and the companionship he enjoyed, he described in his pleasant paper *Cinders from the Ashes*, and touched with a kindly light in his reminiscent poem *The School-Boy*.

He spent a year at Andover and then entered Harvard College with the class which was to graduate in 1829. In those days the classes at college were smaller than now, and as they all joined in common studies, the members of a class came to know one

another familiarly and to have such a sense of organic unity that long after college days, when the members were scattered and rarely came together, each still felt himself a member of his "class," as he might feel himself a citizen of some particular city. The complete roll of this class will be found in the appendix at the close of this volume, and though no titles or signs of honor are attached to the names, the reader will easily detect the presence of men who afterward came to great distinction, George Tyler Bigelow, for a while Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts; James Freeman Clarke, the humane, independent, and courageous preacher and public-spirited citizen; Benjamin Robbins Curtis, the eminent lawyer; Benjamin Peirce, the illustrious mathematician; Dr. S. F. Smith, who won national repute by writing four seven-line stanzas three years after leaving college; and others of less widespread fame, who yet were honored in their professions and offices. But the class enjoyed a distinction not granted to other classes, for though another college class, nine years later, had a great poet in James Russell Lowell, this alone had a poet who year after year at the class-meeting sang for them a song of memory and affection. It was the same song sung in many keys, and some of the music could not be shut up within narrow limits, but has found universal acceptance in such lines as *Bill and Joe*. The group of poems under the title *Poems of the Class of '29* extends from 1851 to 1889. On that sixtieth anniversary of their graduation, Holmes laid down his instrument with the tender lines *After the Curfew*. The class met once more at Parker's. Three only were present, Holmes, S. F. Smith, and Samuel May. Then came a meeting each of the few remaining years, at Dr. Holmes's house, quiet, social talks, with four at the most, five being the total number of the survivors; but no more poems.

The college, meanwhile, was so small a body, and was so representative of neighboring families, that Holmes naturally found comrades and intimate friends outside his own class. Charles Sumner was in the class below him, and two classes below were his own famous cousin, Wendell Phillips, and his life-long friend John Lothrop Motley. It became his privilege to write Motley's memoir, and the correspondence between the two, given in part in Curtis's *Letters of John Lothrop Motley*, intimates the closeness of their relation. As Holmes struck root deeply in the soil of his forefathers, so his nature went out in steadfast affection toward his fellows. His rosary of class poems shows this, and the many passages in which he recalls his early associates. When he had finished his memoir of Motley, he wrote in warm remembrance of his task: "Did not my own consciousness migrate, or seem, at least, to transfer itself into this brilliant life history, as I traced its glowing record? I, too, seemed to feel the delight of carrying with me, as if they were my own, the charms of a presence which made its own welcome everywhere. I shared his heroic toils, I partook of his literary and social triumphs, I was honored by the marks of distinction which gathered about him, I was wronged by the indignity from which he suffered, mourned with him in his sorrow, and thus, after I had been living for months with his memory, I felt as if I should carry a part of his being with me so long as my self-consciousness might remain imprisoned in the ponderable elements."

The slight references which Dr. Holmes makes to his college life have to do with external things, trifling oddities which stick to the memory like burrs. The student life in its formal relation made but little impression on him apparently, and in later years he was more likely to take pride in the great advance made by the University than to dwell upon its worth in his own day. "During all my early years," he says, "our old Harvard Alma Mater sat still and lifeless as the colossi in the Egyptian desert. Then all at once, like the statue in Don Giovanni, she moved from her pedestal. The fall of that 'stony

foot' has effected a miracle like the harp that Orpheus played, like the teeth that Cadmus sowed." But that was long after his own college days. His predilection for literature and his irrepressible humor were evident in the spontaneous, mirthful verses which came from him at this time, some before and some just after graduation. Many of them were printed in *The Collegian*, the college paper of the day, and in the collection of his poems they are divided between the group of *Earlier Poems* and the *Verses from the Oldest Portfolio*. The most active pen production was in the year after graduation, when he was studying law.

It was then that he wrote the poem *Old Ironsides*, in a burst of indignation as he has described in the note at the head of the poem. The verses are fresh evidence of that well of patriotism which lay near the surface of his nature, ever ready to spring forth into song or impassioned prose. It is notable that two young men of the same college class should so shortly after their graduation have produced two pieces of verse which are among the most famous of American patriotic poems, the one a fervent hymn, the other a trumpet call. The study of law was an experiment and apparently not carried on with very close or serious application. "For during that year," says Holmes, "I first tasted the intoxicating pleasure of authorship. A college periodical conducted by friends of mine, still undergraduates, tempted me into print, and there is no form of lead poisoning which more rapidly and thoroughly pervades the blood and bones and marrow than that which reaches the young author through mental contact with type-metal. . . . In that fatal year I had my first attack of author's lead-poisoning, and I have never quite got rid of it from that day to this."

Dr. Holmes, writing fifty years or more after first taking up the study of medicine, was unable to recall the precise reasoning which led him to make the change of intended profession. The aptitude which he disclosed for it is sufficient explanation now, and it is very possible that, though his tastes were strongly literary, he yielded to that conviction which so sane a man was sure to have, that it would be unwise to depend upon letters for his daily bread, and so chose a profession which appealed to the humane interest and the scientific temper which were scarcely less prominent in his make-up. He studied partly in a private medical school carried on then by physicians and surgeons in Boston in good practice, two of whom were also professors in the Harvard Medical School, and he attended lectures also in this school, a division probably not unlike that which still prevails more or less in the legal profession. In April, 1833, however, he went abroad to avail himself of the more considerable opportunities for study in Paris, and remained abroad until October, 1835.

Upon his return to America, Dr. Holmes began the practice of his profession in Boston, but a phrase or two in his reminiscences suggests one reason for the readiness with which he soon turned to academic work, and they substantiate the notion already formed of a very fundamental characteristic. In recalling his initiation into the study of medicine in Boston, he refers lightly to the first impressions produced upon him by the anatomical skeleton and the white faces of the patients in the hospital. "All this had to pass away in a little time," he adds. "I had chosen my profession, and must meet its painful and repulsive aspects until they lost their power over my sensibilities." A half-century after that first experience he could still write, upon the occasion of his second journey, after the long interval, to Paris, that he shrank from seeing La Pitié, the hospital where he worked in his student days. No one would know him there; they would scarcely remember anything of his old master, Louis, and besides, he goes on, "I have not been among hospital beds for many a year, and my sensibilities are almost as impressible as they were

before daily habit had rendered them comparatively callous." Something, also, may have been due to the very close scientific methods with which he became enamored when studying in Paris, methods which constantly lend themselves to the service of the investigator, and tend to lead one to make his practice experimental rather than therapeutic. At any rate, he accepted the professorship of anatomy and physiology at Dartmouth College in 1839, though he remained in that position only a few months, not abandoning the practice of medicine in Boston; he married Amelia Lee Jackson, daughter of Judge Charles Jackson of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, and in 1847 was made Parkman Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Medical School of Harvard College, a position which he retained until the close of 1882.

In a biographical sketch designed to accompany a collection of Holmes's poems, it is not to be expected that much attention should be given to the scientific side of his activity, but it would be an unequal sketch which failed to take account of both sides of so animated a life, especially since they could not be, in the order of nature, absolutely dissociated. It is a coincidence worth noting that the year when Dr. Holmes took his degree as doctor of medicine, 1836, was the year also in which he published his first volume of verse. The Phi Beta Kappa society is a somewhat loose league of scholarship in American colleges, an order in which the merit system, as governed by the standard of collegiate rank, determines membership, though after admission to the league the members have nothing to do but to perpetuate it. At Harvard there has long been a double yearly function for the society, a dinner, at which wit is more abundant than wine, and a public meeting with an oration and poem. Oratory has flourished in this soil, and notable addresses have been made by Everett and Emerson in early days, by Adams and Fiske in later ones, and by many more who have chosen the occasion for saying what they have wished to say to an audience of their peers. But poetry, which shuns occasions, has only now and then jumped with the hour. Scarcely a poet of distinction, however, but has hoped he too might so force nature that poetry would somehow find wings for Phi Beta Kappa.

It is indicative of the reputation which Holmes had already formed that though he had been absent on his professional study for two or three years, he was called on, seven years after graduation, to deliver the poem at the commencement in 1836. With an instinct for what was appropriate on occasions which never failed him, he read the poem, *Poetry, a Metrical Essay*, which is included in the first division of his poetical writings. As the reader will see by the notes, the poem carried as interludes two lyrics already printed, *The Cambridge Churchyard* and *Old Ironsides*. The introduction of these verses was doubtless most effective in delivery, and served to interrupt the essay in an agreeable fashion, but both the body of the poem and the preface with which it was introduced, when shortly after it appeared with a collection of poems written in the interval since leaving college, as a single volume, indicate the seriousness with which the young poet regarded his vocation. Spontaneity was a birthright, but he did not therefore disregard or flout at traditional form and accepted standards. On the contrary, he showed unmistakably that he belonged to the order of poets, not to the disorder of the poetic mob, and thus the volume which heralded his accession to literature was a witness to the permanence of his foothold.

This volume *Poetry*, as we have said, was published in 1836, and the next year he published a medical treatise. Thus neck and neck at the start were the two horses he continued to ride for many years. He did not publish a volume of poetry again until 1847, the year in which he abandoned the practice of medicine, and then he gathered the

fugitive poems which had been appearing in periodicals, or had been used on occasions since the publication of *Poetry*. It is interesting to note that among the occasional poems were some called out by his professional relations, as well as one or two, not occasional, which were inspired by his study and practice; so impossible was it for him to sever his life, as did Bryant, who seemed to keep journalism in one cell of his brain and poetry in another, each in solitary confinement and forbidden to hold intercourse with each other. The volume of 1847 contained also the contents of the volume of 1836, and the poetry in this consolidated volume was substantially that included in the first three divisions of the present collection and the group of poems which form the first section of the Appendix. The volume was reprinted in England, and for some time to come represented the claim which Holmes might make to a place among poets.

The decade which followed the publication of this volume was nevertheless a period both of ripening and of product. It was undoubtedly the time in which a large part of the work was done in the preparation of the long series of lectures which the Parkman professor delivered before his classes. The volume of *Medical Essays* in his collected works contain papers and discourses which belong to this decade and to the whole period of his professorship, but the printed matter bears a very small proportion to the whole volume of his professional writing and speaking. In his *Farewell Address* to the Medical School, delivered November 28, 1882, he says: "This is the thirty-sixth Course of Lectures in which I have taken my place and performed my duties as Professor of Anatomy. For more than half my term of office I gave instruction in Physiology, after the fashion of my predecessors and in the manner then generally prevalent in our schools, where the physiological laboratory was not a necessary part of the apparatus of instruction." President Eliot bore testimony to the fidelity with which he carried on his academic work: "He did a great deal to make the school what it has become. He lectured regularly five times a week throughout the school year, and never failed to be on hand. He was the most careful of men in preparation of his lectures, and very painstaking in his experiments. He was very exact in dissection. His prosectors, whose duty it was to prepare his dissections, were always kept on the *qui vive* and spurred to their very best effort." It should not be overlooked that one of his medical writings, *The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever*, first published in 1843 and reissued in an enlarged form in 1855, was a distinct contribution to science and revolutionized the practice of physicians.

But the sessions of the medical school were not continuous through the year, and Dr. Holmes's intellectual activity, moreover, could not be confined within the limits of his professional duties. His scientific studies took him further afield, and his literary interests, with which we have mainly to do, had already been determined by his early taste and inclination. At the time of which we are writing, the lecture system was popular, and offered to men of letters a means of livelihood and a form of publication. As the lectures, however, were for the most part during the academic year, it was not expedient for Professor Holmes to stray very far from home; so, unlike Emerson, he was practically confined to a circle within a short radius of Boston. In the *Autocrat* he has given humorous reminiscences of some of his experience as a lecturer, and in a bit of scholastic fun has hinted at the very close connection between speaking and writing in the vocation of a man of letters. He made his own lectures also the occasion for postludes of song. This he did with special grace in a course before the Lowell Institute of Boston on *The English Poets of the Nineteenth Century*. The characterizations of Wordsworth, Moore, Keats, and Shelley were here produced. On special occasions, also, he was orator, though the more insistent demand was for his poetry.

Dr. Holmes is strongly identified with Cambridge and Boston by his residence in those two places; but, as some of his poems hint, he had another home at Pittsfield in the western part of the State, where he lived for seven summers. He was drawn to the locality by the association of Pittsfield with his great-grandfather, Colonel Jacob Wendell, who had a homestead there in the eighteenth century. In 1844 he was invited to attend the Berkshire Jubilee, where he read the lines beginning

“Come back to your mother, ye children, for shame.”

He seems to have heeded his own invitation, for in the summer of 1848 he built a cottage on his inherited estate. Longfellow, who, through his wife's family, the Appletons, had also an interest in Pittsfield and spent many weeks there, wrote in his journal, under date of August 5, 1848: “Drove over, in the afternoon, to Dr. Holmes's house on the old Wendell farm,—a snug little place, with views of the river and the mountains.” And Dr. Holmes himself, writing in January, 1857, says, “Seven sweet summers, the happiest of my life. I would n't exchange the recollection of them for a suburban villa. One thing I shall always be glad of; that I planted seven hundred trees for somebody to sit in the shade of.” There is more than one reference in his writings to his country life there, and among his poems some which owed their origin to occasions in his neighborhood. Others there are which sang themselves out of the nature in which he lived. Indeed, as Mr. Smith points out in his interesting sketch,¹ the poems which were written in Berkshire were lacking in scientific reference and in fun; “It is Nature herself that breathes through each and every line.” Later in life he made a summer home for himself at Beverly Farms on the north shore of Massachusetts Bay.

With the close of this decade, 1847–1857, there came a new flowering forth of Holmes's genius, which took a form worth noting, since, being his own, it served most perfectly to embody his spiritual power. In the third of what is popularly known as The Breakfast-Table series, namely, *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*, the author distinctly says, what the observant reader of the series will be pretty sure to discover for himself:—

“I have unburdened myself in this book, and in some other pages, of what I was born to say. Many things that I have said in my riper days have been aching in my soul since I was a mere child. I say aching, because they conflicted with many of my inherited beliefs, or rather traditions. I did not know then that two strains of blood were striving in me for the mastery,—two! twenty, perhaps,—twenty thousand for aught I know,—but represented to me by two,—paternal and maternal. But I do know this: I have struck a good many chords, first and last, in the consciousness of other people. I confess to a tender feeling for my little brood of thoughts. When they have been welcomed and praised it has pleased me; and if at any time they have been rudely handled and despitefully treated, it has cost me a little worry. I don't despise reputation, and I should like to be remembered as having said something worth lasting well enough to last.”

This passage presents briefly three very noticeable characteristics of Dr. Holmes's prose as contained in the series of *Atlantic* papers and stories. They give the mature thought of the writer, held back through many years for want of an adequate occasion, and ripened in his mind during this enforced silence; they illustrate the effect upon his thought of his professional studies, which predisposed him to treat of the natural history

¹ *The Poet Among the Hills*. Oliver Wendell Holmes, in Berkshire. By J. E. A. SMITH. Pittsfield, Massachusetts. George Blatchford, 1895.

of man, and to import into his analysis of the invisible organism of life the terms and methods employed in the science of the visible anatomy and physiology ; and finally they are warm with a sympathy for men and women, and singularly felicitous in their expression of many of the indistinct and half-understood experiences of life. Yet behind this threefold manifestation of individual genius one looks for the personality itself thus disclosed, and, guided by the clue offered in the biography of the author as already traced, sees the vivid nature, sensitive to impressions, yet stable through a substantial hold upon a highly developed community, the product of generations of specialized forces charged with electrical power and leaping into the light with gladness. We may please ourselves with the notion that the pent-up experience of New England found a vent in Dr. Holmes, but after all the nearest fact, behind which we need not go unless we choose, is that of a person speaking outright and not afraid of a large *I*. This note of egotism which was struck at once in the very title, so felicitous, of the first book, sounds throughout the series and gives it its undying charm ; for the man who does not shield himself behind the autobiographic form is rare, and the man who can dramatize other figures about a central one, and make that central one at once dramatic and dominant, is rarer still.

For the form of these writings, it may be said that the impression produced upon the reader of the *Autocrat* series, which was finally gathered into a volume, is of a growth rather than of a premeditated artistic completeness, and this makes more evident the mature character of the work and its closeness to the personality of the writer. The first suggestion, as Holmes points out in *The Autocrat's Autobiography*, is to be found in the two papers published, under the title of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*, in *The New England Magazine* for November, 1831, and January, 1832. These were written by Dr. Holmes shortly after his graduation from college, and before he entered on his medical studies. They consist of brief epigrammatic observations upon various topics, the desultory talk of a person engrossing conversation at a table. The form is monologue, with scarcely more than a hint at interruptions, and no attempt at characterizing the speaker or his listeners. Twenty-five years later, when *The Atlantic Monthly* was founded, the author remembering the fancy resumed it, and under the same title began a series of papers which at once had great favor and grew, possibly, beyond the writer's original intention. Twenty-five years had not dulled the wit and gayety of the exuberant young writer ; rather they had ripened the early fruit, and imparted a richness of flavor which greatly increased the value. The maturity was seen not only in the wider reach and deeper tone of the talk, but in the humanizing of the scheme. Out of the talk at the breakfast-table one began to distinguish characters and faces in the persons about the board, and before the *Autocrat* was completed there had appeared a series of portraits, vivid and full of interest.

Two characters meanwhile were hinted at by Dr. Holmes rather than described or very palpably introduced, — the Professor and the Poet. It is not difficult to see that these are thin disguises for the author himself, who, in the versatility of his nature, appeals to the reader now as a brilliant philosopher, now as a man of science, now as a seer and poet. *The Professor at the Breakfast-Table* followed, and there was a still stronger dramatic element ; some of the former characters remained, and others of even more positive individuality were added ; a romance was inwoven and something like a plot sketched, so that, while the talk still went on and eddied about graver subjects than before, the book which grew out of the papers had more distinctly the form of a series of sketches from life. It was followed by two novels, *Elsie Venner* and *The Guardian*

Angel. The talks at the breakfast-table had often gravitated toward the deep themes of destiny and human freedom ; the novels wrought the same subjects in the form of fiction, and action interpreted the thought, while still there flowed on the wonderful, apparently inexhaustible stream of wit, tenderness, passion, and human sympathy. Fourteen years after the appearance of the first of the series, came *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*. A new group of characters, with slight reminders of former ones, occupied the pages ; again talk and romance blended ; and playfulness, satire, sentiment, wise reflection and sturdy indignation trooped across the pages.

The Breakfast-Table series forms a group independent of the intercalated novels, and with its frequent poems may be taken as an artistic whole. It is hardly too much to say, that it makes a new contribution to the forms of literary art. It was not altogether novel. Such a book as Southey's *The Doctor*, for example, might be cited as a progenitor. Still all that went before it were characterized more by negligence and an unordered freedom. The distinctive mark of the *Autocrat* and its fellows was, as we have hinted, the frank dominance of the author's personality. The elasticity of the scheme rendered possible a comprehensiveness of material ; the exuberance of the author's fancy and the fullness of his thought gave a richness to the fabric ; the poetic sense of fitness kept the whole within just bounds. It is illustrative of the native, personal character of this series, so stamped with his genius, that when in his old age Holmes felt a desire to write again, deliberately and at length, he returned to the same form, and in *Over the Teacups* essayed the old happy blending of prose and verse, the vivification of characters supposed to carry on discussion about a social board, when in reality one dominant voice, even if sometimes ventriloquial, is heard throughout, — that of the inventor of the characters. And it is interesting to observe how shadowy at the last these characters have become, so that they are scarcely more than numerical, and how instinctively the old man, musing over the board, has surrounded himself with the gracious presences of women.

The form of these books made poetical interludes easy and natural. Sometimes the verses introduced were not blossoms upon the wandering vine, but cut flowers fastened carelessly for the lightening of the effect ; for the most part, however, they seem to belong where we find them, and a survey of the groups as presented in this volume confirms this impression. When arranging his poems for a final collective edition, Dr. Holmes brought together in successive sections the poems from each of the Breakfast-Table series, but removed those poems which had been more arbitrarily placed first in these books, such as those more properly arranged under the heading *Poems of the Class of '29*. Thus the poems included in *The Professor* are quite distinctly the outgrowth of that strain of religious speculation which characterizes the work ; they are positive affirmations, as if the author found a relief in occasional clear poetic expression when engaged in the heat of theological discussion. The series *Wind-Clouds and Star-Drifts*, on the other hand, which constitutes the main poetic apparatus of *The Poet*, is more distinctly philosophical in its nature ; but when one turns to the volume and notes the form of insertion, he is reminded that the whole book is soberer in tone and more taken up with the structural treatment of the mysteries of human life, whereas *The Professor* was quite as markedly critical and more than once destructive of notions and conventions. The poems in *The Autocrat* partake of the swift, varied play of that book, and those in *Over the Teacups* show the flaring up now and then of the old flame as the book itself is more or less of an effort.

For the purpose of treating this notable series as a whole, we have departed from a

strictly chronological survey of Dr. Holmes's career. *The Autocrat* appeared in 1857-1858, *The Professor* in 1859. The gap of fourteen years which intervened between this book and *The Poet* is represented in the poetical writings by the collection under the title *Songs of Many Seasons*, and both the subdivisions of that section and the titles of many of the poems intimate how much the author's thoughts were upon the great affairs which stirred his own country,—the war, the restoration of peace, and the beginning of that second great ingathering of the nations which will render the period following the war a great period in American history. He has left his impressions both in prose and in verse. *The Atlantic Monthly* afforded a convenient vehicle, as did the several occasions now kept alive by his verses. One of his notable papers was that entitled *My Hunt after "the Captain,"* and details his experience when going to the seat of war in the fall of 1862 on the occasion of the wounding of a son, who bears his father's name and is now a justice on the bench of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts.

When John Lothrop Motley died, Dr. Holmes wrote a sketch of him for the Massachusetts Historical Society, which was afterward expanded and published as a volume. The book is more than a friendly testimony, it is an expression of patriotism. No one need be told who has read that, and the letters which he himself wrote to Motley, his *Bread and the Newspaper*, his oration on *The Inevitable Trial*, and the lyrics which are comprehended under the title *In War Time*, that the author of *Old Ironsides* had an ardent affection for the nation and a large-hearted belief in it. And yet great crises brought these expressions to pass; his familiar habit of mind was cordially local. His affection fastened upon his college, and in his college on his class; he had a worthy pride in the race from which he had sprung, and the noble clannishness which is one of the safeguards of social morality; he loved the city of his life, not with the merely curious regard of the antiquary, but with the passion of the man who can be at home only in one place; and he held to New England as to a substantial entity, not to a geographical section of some greater whole. He did not travel, because Boston and Berkshire contented him. His laboratory was at hand; human nature was under his observation from the vantage-ground of home. With the instinct of a man of science, he took for analysis that which was most familiar to him, assured that in the bit of the world where he was born, and out of which he had got his nourishment, he had all he needed for the exercise of his wit. There is no more pathetic yet kindly figure in our literature than Little Boston. With poetic instinct, Dr. Holmes made him deformed, but not ugly. He put into him a fiery soul of local patriotism, and transfigured him thus. Under the guise of a bit of nature's mockery he was enabled to give vent to a flood of feeling without arousing laughter or contempt. All Little Boston's vehemence of civic pride is a memorial inscription, and whatever may be the fortune of the city, however august may be its presence, there lies embedded in this figure of Little Boston a perpetual witness to an imperishable civic personality.

The poems which occupy the closing sections of this volume, *Bunker-Hill Battle and other Poems*, *The Iron Gate and other Poems*, and *Before the Curfew*, bear frequent witness to the strength of Dr. Holmes's fidelity to his people and his country. They hint also, as do his later writings, of that temper which was growing upon him, so beautifully reflected in his own verse :—

" Youth longs and manhood strives, but age remembers,
Sits by the raked-up ashes of the past,
Spreads its thin hands above the whitening embers
That warm its creeping life-blood till the last."

Thus he wrote for the breakfast given him by the publishers of *The Atlantic Monthly* at the close of 1879. Yet in 1886 he made with his daughter a journey to Europe. Most of the time was passed in England, where the journey was like a Royal Progress. "The travellers," says the *London Daily News*, "had barely arrived when invitations came pouring in upon them. They received their 'baptism of fire' in that long confiet which lasts through the London season, on the first evening of their arrival in town. It consisted of a dinner, where twenty guests, celebrities and agreeable persons, were assembled to meet them. The dinner was followed by a grand reception. Then began a perpetual round of social engagements. Breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, teas, receptions, two, three and four deep of the evening, was the order of the waking hours. Society was charmed with the genial philosopher and poet. His courteous manner, his ready wit, the fascinating nobility of his countenance, made up a charming personality. There was something magnetic in the glance of his blue-gray eye, in the hearty grasp of his hand. Dr. Holmes went to the Derby, impelled by the wish to live again the impressions of fifty years ago. But this time he went down in company with the Prince of Wales, and witnessed the race from the grand stand. The animation with which the old man describes Ormonde, the beautiful bay of the Duke of Westminster, flashing past ridden by Archer, belongs to spirits as buoyant as were those that stirred the blood of the youth half a century before." The record of the journey is preserved in *Our Hundred Days in Europe*.

He had a mellow evening of life. As one after another of his comrades left the world, he bade them good-by with a song. Thus in his old age he sang after Lowell and Whittier and Parkman; at last his own voice was silent, and there was no one left in his generation to sing his farewell, for he it was who brought up the rear of the procession of American writers of the great period, as one by one passed into the firmament of fame.

He died in his home in Boston suddenly, while talking with his son, at half-past one, Sunday afternoon, October 7, 1894, in the eighty-sixth year of his age.

H. E. S.

TO MY READERS

[Written to introduce the Blue and Gold edition of Holmes's Poems.]

NAY, blame me not; I might have spared
Your patience many a trivial verse,
Yet these my earlier welcome shared,
So, let the better shield the worse.

And some might say, "Those ruder songs
Had freshness which the new have lost;
To spring the opening leaf belongs,
The chestnut-burs await the frost."

When those I wrote, my locks were brown,
When these I write — ah, well-a-day!
The autumn thistle's silvery down
Is not the purple bloom of May!

Go, little book, whose pages hold
Those garnered years in loving trust;
How long before your blue and gold
Shall fade and whiten in the dust?

O sexton of the alcoved tomb,
Where souls in leathern cerements lie,
Tell me each living poet's doom!
How long before his book shall die?

It matters little, soon or late,
A day, a month, a year, an age, —
I read oblivion in its date,
And Finis on its title-page.

Before we sighed, our griefs were told;
Before we smiled, our joys were sung;
And all our passions shaped of old
In accents lost to mortal tongue.

In vain a fresher mould we seek, —
Can all the varied phrases tell
That Babel's wandering children speak
How thrushes sing or lilacs smell?

Caged in the poet's lonely heart,
Love wastes unheard its tenderest tone ;
The soul that sings must dwell apart,
Its inward melodies unknown.

Deal gently with us, ye who read !
Our largest hope is unfulfilled, —
The promise still outruns the deed, —
The tower, but not the spire, we build.

Our whitest pearl we never find ;
Our ripest fruit we never reach ;
The flowering moments of the mind
Drop half their petals in our speech.

These are my blossoms ; if they wear
One streak of morn or evening's glow,
Accept them ; but to me more fair
The buds of song that never blow.

April 8, 1862.