

Lighting the sullen face of discontent  
With smiles for blessing sent.  
Enough of selfish wailing has been had,  
Thank God! for notes more glad.

Life is indeed no holiday; therein  
Are want, and woe, and sin,<sup>30</sup>  
Death and its nameless fears, and over all  
Our pitying tears must fall.

Sorrow is real; but the counterfeit  
Which folly brings to it,  
We need thy wit and wisdom to resist,  
O rarest Optimist!

Thy hand, old friend! the service of our  
days,  
In differing moods and ways  
May prove to those who follow in our train  
Not valueless nor vain.<sup>40</sup>

Far off, and faint as echoes of a dream,  
The songs of boyhood seem,  
Yet on our autumn boughs, unflown with  
spring,  
The evening thrushes sing.

The hour draws near, howe'er delayed and  
late,  
When at the Eternal Gate  
We leave the words and works we call our  
own,  
And lift void hands alone

For love to fill. Our nakedness of  
soul  
Brings to that Gate no toll;<sup>50</sup>  
Giftless we come to Him, who all things  
gives,  
And live because He lives.

1892. 1892.

## OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

### OLD IRONSIDES<sup>1</sup>

AY, tear her tattered ensign down!  
Long has it waved on high,  
And many an eye has danced to see  
That banner in the sky;  
Beneath it rung the battle shout,  
And burst the cannon's roar;—  
The meteor of the ocean air  
Shall sweep the clouds no more.

Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,  
Where knelt the vanquished foe,  
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,  
And waves were white below,  
No more shall feel the victor's tread,  
Or know the conquered knee;—  
The harpies of the shore shall pluck  
The eagle of the sea!

Oh, better that her shattered hulk  
Should sink beneath the wave;

<sup>1</sup> One genuine lyric outburst, however, done in this year of the law, almost made him in a way actually famous. The frigate *Constitution*, historic indeed, but old and unseaworthy, then lying in the navy yard at Charlestown, was condemned by the Navy Department to be destroyed. Holmes read this in a newspaper paragraph, and it stirred him. On a scrap of paper, with a lead pencil, he rapidly shaped the impetuous stanzas of 'Old Ironsides,' and sent them to the *Daily Advertiser*, of Boston. Fast and far they travelled through the newspaper press of the country; they were even printed in hand-bills and circulated about the streets of Washington. An occurrence, which otherwise would probably have passed unnoticed, now stirred a national indignation. The astonished Secretary made haste to retrace a step which he had taken quite innocently in the way of business. The *Constitution's* tattered ensign was not torn down. The ringing, spirited verses gave the gallant ship a reprieve, which satisfied sentimentality, and a large part of the people of the United States had heard of O. W. Holmes, law student at Cambridge, who had only come of age a month ago. (*Morse's Life of Holmes*, vol. i, pp. 79, 80.)

This is probably the only case in which a government policy was changed by the verses of a college student. The frigate *Constitution* was launched in 1797, first served in the war against the pirates in the Mediterranean, and made a brilliant record in the war of 1812. In 1834 she was almost entirely rebuilt, and continued in commission until 1881. From that time she was kept at the navy yard at Portsmouth, N. H., until in 1897 she was taken to the Charlestown Navy Yard for the celebration of the centenary of her launching.

Her thunders shook the mighty deep,  
And there should be her grave;  
Nail to the mast her holy flag,  
Set every threadbare sail,  
And give her to the god of storms,  
The lightning and the gale!

1830.

1830.

### THE BALLAD OF THE OYSTER-MAN<sup>2</sup>

It was a tall young oysterman lived by the  
river-side,  
His shop was just upon the bank, his boat  
was on the tide;  
The daughter of a fisherman, that was so  
straight and slim,  
Lived over on the other bank, right oppo-  
site to him.

It was the pensive oysterman that saw a  
lovely maid,  
Upon a moonlight evening, a-sitting in the  
shade;  
He saw her wave her handkerchief, as much  
as if to say,  
'I'm wide awake, young oysterman, and all  
the folks away.'

Then up arose the oysterman, and to him-  
self said he,  
'I guess I'll leave the skiff at home, for  
fear that folks should see;  
I read it in the story-book, that, for to kiss  
his dear,  
Leander swam the Hellespont, — and I will  
swim this here.'

<sup>2</sup> Except for the ballad of 'Old Ironsides,' the 'Metrical Essay on Poetry' written for the Phi Beta Kappa meeting in 1836, and a few other occasional poems, Holmes wrote little but humorous verse from 1830 to 1848; most of this he excluded from the later editions of his work. 'The Ballad of the Oysterman,' and 'The Spectre Pig,' are the best of his parodies on the pseudo-ballads so popular at that time.

And he has leaped into the waves, and  
crossed the shining stream,  
And he has clambered up the bank, all in  
the moonlight gleam;  
Oh there were kisses sweet as dew, and  
words as soft as rain, —  
But they have heard her father's step, and  
in he leaps again!

Out spoke the ancient fisherman, — 'Oh,  
what was that, my daughter?'  
'T was nothing but a pebble, sir, I threw  
into the water.'  
'And what is that, pray tell me, love, that  
paddles off so fast?'  
'It's nothing but a porpoise, sir, that's been  
a-swimming past.'

Out spoke the ancient fisherman, — 'Now  
bring me my harpoon!  
I'll get into my fishing-boat, and fix the  
fellow soon.'  
Down fell that pretty innocent, as falls a  
snow-white lamb,  
Her hair drooped round her pallid cheeks,  
like seaweed on a clam.

Alas for those two loving ones! she waked  
not from her swoond,  
And he was taken with the cramp, and in  
the waves was drowned;  
But Fate has metamorphosed them, in pity  
of their woe,  
And now they keep an oyster-shop for mer-  
maids down below.

1830?

#### THE HEIGHT OF THE RIDICU- LOUS

I WROTE some lines once on a time  
In wondrous merry mood,  
And thought, as usual, men would say  
They were exceeding good.

They were so queer, so very queer,  
I laughed as I would die;  
Albeit, in the general way,  
A sober man am I.

I called my servant, and he came;  
How kind it was of him  
To mind a slender man like me,  
He of the mighty limb!

'These to the printer,' I exclaimed,  
And, in my humorous way,  
I added (as a trifling jest),  
'There'll be the devil to pay.'

He took the paper, and I watched,  
And saw him peep within;  
At the first line he read, his face  
Was all upon the grin.

20

He read the next; the grin grew broad,  
And shot from ear to ear;  
He read the third; a chuckling noise  
I now began to hear.

The fourth; he broke into a roar;  
The fifth; his waistband split;  
The sixth; he burst five buttons off,  
And tumbled in a fit.

Ten days and nights, with sleepless eye,  
I watched that wretched man,  
And since, I never dare to write  
As funny as I can.

1830.

#### TO AN INSECT

I LOVE to hear thine earnest voice,  
Wherever thou art hid,  
Thou testy little dogmatist,  
Thou pretty Katydid!  
Thou mindest me of gentlefolks, —  
Old gentlefolks are they, —  
Thou say'st an undisputed thing  
In such a solemn way.

Thou art a female, Katydid!  
I know it by the trill  
That quivers through thy piercing notes,  
So petulant and shrill;  
I think there is a knot of you  
Beneath the hollow tree, —  
A knot of spinster Katydids, —  
Do Katydids drink tea?

Oh, tell me where did Katy live,  
And what did Katy do?  
And was she very fair and young,  
And yet so wicked, too?  
Did Katy love a naughty man,  
Or kiss more cheeks than one?

20

#### MY AUNT

MY aunt! my dear unmarried aunt!  
Long years have o'er her flown;  
Yet still she strains the aching clasp  
That binds her virgin zone;  
I know it hurts her, — though she looks  
As cheerful as she can;  
Her waist is ampler than her life,  
For life is but a span.

My aunt! my poor deluded aunt!  
Her hair is almost gray;  
Why will she train that winter curl  
In such a spring-like way?  
How can she lay her glasses down,  
And say she reads as well,  
When through a double convex lens  
She just makes out to spell?

10

Her father — grandpapa! forgive  
This erring lip its smiles —  
Vowed she should make the finest girl  
Within a hundred miles;  
He sent her to a stylish school;  
'T was in her thirteenth June;  
And with her, as the rules required,  
'Two towels and a spoon.'

20

They braced my aunt against a board,  
To make her straight and tall;  
They laced her up, they starved her down,  
To make her light and small;  
They pinched her feet, they singed her hair,  
They screwed it up with pins; —  
Oh, never mortal suffered more  
In penance for her sins.

30

So, when my precious aunt was done,  
My grandsire brought her back  
(By daylight, lest some rabid youth  
Might follow on the track);  
'Ah!' said my grandsire, as he shook  
Some powder in his pan,  
'What could this lovely creature do  
Against a desperate man!'

40

Alas! nor chariot, nor barouche,  
Nor bandit cavalcade,  
Tore from the trembling father's arms  
His all-accomplished maid.  
For her how happy had it been!  
And Heaven had spared to me  
To see one sad, ungathered rose  
On my ancestral tree.

1831.

I warrant Katy did no more  
Than many a Kate has done.

Dear me! I'll tell you all about  
My fuss with little Jane,  
And Ann, with whom I used to walk  
So often down the lane,  
And all that tore their locks of black,  
Or wet their eyes of blue, —  
Pray tell me, sweetest Katydid,  
What did poor Katy do?

30

Ah no! the living oak shall crash,  
That stood for ages still,  
The rock shall rend its mossy base  
And thunder down the hill,  
Before the little Katydid  
Shall add one word, to tell  
The mystic story of the maid  
Whose name she knows so well.

40

Peace to the ever-murmuring race!  
And when the latest one  
Shall fold in death her feeble wings  
Beneath the autumn sun,  
Then shall she raise her fainting voice,  
And lift her drooping lid,  
And then the child of future years  
Shall hear what Katy did.

1831.

#### L'INCONNUE

Is thy name Mary, maiden fair?  
Such should, methinks, its music be;  
The sweetest name that mortals bear  
Were best befitting thee;  
And she to whom it once was given,  
Was half of earth and half of heaven.

I hear thy voice, I see thy smile,  
I look upon thy folded hair;  
Ah! while we dream not they beguile,  
Our hearts are in the snare;  
And she who chains a wild bird's wing  
Must start not if her captive sing.

So, lady, take the leaf that falls,  
To all but thee unseen, unknown:  
When evening shades thy silent walls,  
Then read it all alone;  
In stillness read, in darkness seal,  
Forget, despise, but not reveal!

1831.

THE LAST LEAF<sup>1</sup>

I SAW him once before,  
As he passed by the door,  
And again  
The pavement stones resound,  
As he totters o'er the ground  
With his cane.

They say that in his prime,  
Ere the pruning-knife of Time  
Cut him down,  
Not a better man was found  
By the Crier on his round  
Through the town.

But now he walks the streets,  
And he looks at all he meets  
Sad and wan,

<sup>1</sup> The poem was suggested by the sight of a figure well known to Bostonians [in 1831 or 1832], that of Major Thomas Melville, 'the last of the cocked hats,' as he was sometimes called. The Major had been a personable young man, very evidently, and retained evidence of it in

The monumental pomp of age —

which had something imposing and something odd about it for youthful eyes like mine. He was often pointed at as one of the 'Indians' of the famous 'Boston Tea-Party' of 1774. His aspect among the crowds of a later generation reminded me of a withered leaf which has held to its stem through the storms of autumn and winter, and finds itself still clinging to its bough while the new growths of spring are bursting their buds and spreading their foliage all around it. I make this explanation for the benefit of those who have been puzzled by the lines,

The last leaf upon the tree  
In the spring.

The way in which it came to be written in a somewhat singular measure was this. I had become a little known as a versifier, and I thought that one or two other young writers were following my efforts with imitations, not meant as parodies and hardly to be considered improvements on their models. I determined to write in a measure which would at once betray any copyist. So far as it was suggested by any previous poem, the echo must have come from Campbell's 'Battle of the Baltic,' with its short terminal lines, such as the last of these two,

By thy wild and stormy steep,  
Elsinore.

But I do not remember any poem in the same measure, except such as have been written since its publication. (HOLMES.)

Holmes wrote to his publishers in 1894: 'I have lasted long enough to serve as an illustration of my own poem. . . . It was with a smile on my lips that I wrote it; I cannot read it without a sigh of tender remembrance. I hope it will not sadden my older readers, while it may amuse some of the younger ones to whom its experiences are as yet only floating fancies.'

Lincoln called the poem 'inexpressibly touching,' and knew it by heart. Holmes possessed a copy of it written out by Edgar Allan Poe. Whittier (*Prose Works*, vol. iii, p. 381) called it a 'unique compound of humor and pathos.'

And he shakes his feeble head,  
That it seems as if he said,  
They are gone.'

The mossy marbles rest  
On the lips that he has prest  
In their bloom,  
And the names he loved to hear  
Have been carved for many a year  
On the tomb.

My grandmamma has said —  
Poor old lady, she is dead  
Long ago —  
That he had a Roman nose,  
And his cheek was like a rose  
In the snow;

But now his nose is thin,  
And it rests upon his chin  
Like a staff,  
And a crook is in his back,  
And a melancholy crack  
In his laugh.

I know it is a sin  
For me to sit and grin  
At him here;  
But the old three-cornered hat,  
And the breeches, and all that,  
Are so queer!

And if I should live to be  
The last leaf upon the tree  
In the spring,  
Let them smile, as I do now,  
At the old forsaken bough  
Where I cling.

1831 or 1832.

1833.<sup>2</sup>

## LA GRISETTE

AH, Clemence! when I saw thee last  
Trip down the Rue de Seine,  
And turning, when thy form had past,  
I said, 'We meet again,' —  
I dreamed not in that idle glance  
Thy latest image came,

<sup>2</sup> Just when it was written I cannot exactly say, nor in what paper or periodical it was first published. It must have been written before April, 1833; probably in 1831 or 1832. It was republished in the first edition of my poems in 1836. (HOLMES.) It was in fact published in *The Harbinger*, Boston, 1833.

And only left to memory's trance  
A shadow and a name.

The few strange words my lips had taught  
Thy timid voice to speak,  
Their gentler signs, which often brought  
Fresh roses to thy cheek,  
The trailing of thy long loose hair  
Bent o'er my couch of pain,  
All, all returned, more sweet, more fair;  
Oh, had we met again!

I walked where saint and virgin keep  
The vigil lights of Heaven,  
I knew that thou hadst woes to weep,  
And sins to be forgiven;  
I watched where Genevieve was laid,  
I knelt by Mary's shrine,  
Beside me low, soft voices prayed;  
Alas! but where was thine?

And when the morning sun was bright,  
When wind and wave were calm,  
And flamed, in thousand-tinted light,  
The rose of Notre Dame,  
I wandered through the haunts of men,  
From Boulevard to Quai,  
Till, frowning o'er Saint Etienne,  
The Pantheon's shadow lay.

In vain, in vain; we meet no more,  
Nor dream what fates befall;  
And long upon the stranger's shore  
My voice on thee may call,  
When years have clothed the line in  
moss  
That tells thy name and days,  
And withered, on thy simple cross,  
The wreaths of Père-la-Chaise!

1836.

## OUR YANKEE GIRLS

LET greener lands and bluer skies,  
If such the wide earth shows,  
With fairer cheeks and brighter eyes,  
Match us the star and rose;  
The winds that lift the Georgian's veil,  
Or wave Circassia's curls,  
Waft to their shores the sultan's sail, —  
Who buys our Yankee girls?

The gay grisette, whose fingers touch  
Love's thousand chords so well;

The dark Italian, loving much,  
But more than *one* can tell;  
And England's fair-haired, blue-eyed dame,  
Who binds her brow with pearls; —  
Ye who have seen them, can they shame  
Our own sweet Yankee girls?

And what if court or castle vaunt  
Its children loftier born?  
Who heeds the silken tassel's flaunt  
Beside the golden corn?  
They ask not for the dainty toil  
Of ribboned knights and earls,  
The daughters of the virgin soil,  
Our freeborn Yankee girls!

By every hill whose stately pines  
Wave their dark arms above  
The home where some fair being shines,  
To warm the wilds with love,  
From barest rock to bleakest shore  
Where farthest sail unfurls,  
That stars and stripes are streaming o'er, —  
God bless our Yankee girls!

1836.

ON LENDING A PUNCH-BOWL<sup>1</sup>

THIS ancient silver bowl of mine, it tells of  
good old times,  
Of joyous days and jolly nights, and merry  
Christmas chimes;  
They were a free and jovial race, but  
honest, brave, and true,  
Who dipped their ladle in the punch when  
this old bowl was new.

A Spanish galleon brought the bar, — so  
runs the ancient tale;  
'T was hammered by an Antwerp smith,  
whose arm was like a flail;  
And now and then between the strokes, for  
fear his strength should fail,  
He wiped his brow and quaffed a cup of  
good old Flemish ale.

'T was purchased by an English squire to  
please his loving dame,

<sup>1</sup> This 'punch-bowl' was, according to old family tradition, a *caudle-cup*. It is a massive piece of silver, its cherubs and other ornaments of coarse repoussé work, and has two handles like a loving-cup, by which it was held, or passed from guest to guest. (HOLMES.)

Who saw the cherubs, and conceived a  
longing for the same;<sup>10</sup>  
And oft as on the ancient stock another  
twig was found,  
'T was filled with caudle spiced and hot,  
and handed smoking round.

But, changing hands, it reached at length a  
Puritan divine,  
Who used to follow Timothy, and take a  
little wine,  
But hated punch and prelacy; and so it  
was, perhaps,  
He went to Leyden, where he found con-  
venticles and schnapps.

And then, of course, you know what's  
next: it left the Dutchman's shore  
With those that in the Mayflower came, —  
a hundred souls and more, —  
Along with all the furniture, to fill their  
new abodes, —  
To judge by what is still on hand, at least  
a hundred loads.<sup>20</sup>

'T was on a dreary winter's eve, the night  
was closing dim,  
When brave Miles Standish took the bowl,  
and filled it to the brim;  
The little Captain stood and stirred the  
posset with his sword,  
And all his sturdy men-at-arms were  
ranged about the board.

He poured the fiery Hollands in, — the  
man that never feared, —  
He took a long and solemn draught, and  
wiped his yellow beard;  
And one by one the musketeers — the men  
that fought and prayed —  
All drank as 't were their mother's milk,  
and not a man afraid.

That night, affrighted from his nest, the  
screaming eagle flew,  
He heard the Pequot's ringing whoop, the  
soldier's wild halloo;<sup>30</sup>  
And there the sachem learned the rule he  
taught to kith and kin:  
'Run from the white man when you find  
he smells of Holland's gin!'

A hundred years, and fifty more, had  
spread their leaves and snows,

A thousand rubs had flattened down each  
little cherub's nose,  
When once again the bowl was filled, but  
not in mirth or joy, —  
'T was mingled by a mother's hand to  
cheer her parting boy.

Drink, John, she said, 't will do you good,  
— poor child, you 'll never bear  
This working in the dismal trench, out in  
the midnight air;  
And if — God bless me! — you were hurt,  
't would keep away the chill.  
So John *did* drink, — and well he wrought  
that night at Bunker's Hill!<sup>40</sup>

I tell you, there was generous warmth in  
good old English cheer;  
I tell you, 't was a pleasant thought to  
bring its symbol here.  
'T is but the fool that loves excess; hast  
thou a drunken soul?  
Thy banè is in thy shallow skull, not in my  
silver bowl!

I love the memory of the past, — its  
pressed yet fragrant flowers, —  
The moss that clothes its broken walls, the  
ivy on its towers;  
Nay, this poor bauble it bequeathed, —  
my eyes grow moist and dim,  
To think of all the vanished joys that  
danced around its brim.

Then fill a fair and honest cup, and bear it  
straight to me;  
The goblet hallows all it holds, whate'er  
the liquid be;<sup>50</sup>  
And may the cherubs on its face protect  
me from the sin  
That dooms one to those dreadful words,  
— 'My dear, where *have* you  
been?'

(1848.)

## THE STETHOSCOPE SONG

## A PROFESSIONAL BALLAD

THERE was a young man in Boston town,  
He bought him a stethoscope nice and  
new,  
All mounted and finished and polished  
down,  
With an ivory cap and a stopper too.

It happened a spider within did crawl,  
And spun him a web of ample size,  
Wherein there chanced one day to fall  
A couple of very imprudent flies.

The first was a bottle-fly, big and blue,  
The second was smaller, and thin and  
long;<sup>10</sup>  
So there was a concert between the two,  
Like an octave flute and a tavern gong.

Now being from Paris but recently,  
This fine young man would show his  
skill;  
And so they gave him, his hand to try,  
A hospital patient extremely ill.

Some said that his *liver* was short of *bile*,  
And some that his *heart* was over size,  
While some kept arguing, all the while,  
He was crammed with *tubercles* up to his  
eyes.<sup>20</sup>

This fine young man then up stepped he,  
And all the doctors made a pause;  
Said he, The man must die, you see,  
By the fifty-seventh of Louis's laws.

But since the case is a desperate one,  
To explore his chest it may be well;  
For if he should die and it were not done,  
You know the *autopsy* would not tell.

Then out his stethoscope he took,  
And on it placed his curious ear;<sup>30</sup>  
*Mon Dieu!* said he, with a knowing look,  
Why, here is a sound that's mighty  
queer!

The *bourdonnement* is very clear, —  
*Amphoric* buzzing, as I'm alive!  
Five doctors took their turn to hear;  
*Amphoric* buzzing, said all the five.

There's *empyema* beyond a doubt;  
We'll plunge a *trocar* in his side.  
The diagnosis was made out, —  
They tapped the patient; so he died.<sup>40</sup>

Now such as hate new-fashioned toys  
Began to look extremely glum;  
They said that *rattles* were made for  
boys,  
And vowed that his *buzzing* was all a  
hum.

There was an old lady had long been sick,  
And what was the matter none did  
know:  
Her pulse was slow, though her tongue was  
quick;  
To her this knowing youth must go.

So there the nice old lady sat,  
With phials and boxes all in a row;<sup>50</sup>  
She asked the young doctor what he was  
at,  
To thump her and tumble her ruffles  
so.

Now, when the stethoscope came out,  
The flies began to buzz and whiz:  
Oh, ho! the matter is clear, no doubt;  
An *aneurism* there plainly is.

The *bruit de râpe* and the *bruit de scie*  
And the *bruit de diable* are all combined;  
How happy Bouillaud would be,  
If he a case like this could find!<sup>60</sup>

Now, when the neighboring doctors found  
A case so rare had been descried,  
They every day her ribs did pound  
In squads of twenty; so she died.

Then six young damsels, slight and frail,  
Received this kind young doctor's cares;  
They all were getting slim and pale,  
And short of breath on mounting stairs.

They all made rhymes with 'sighs' and  
'skies,'  
And loathed their puddings and buttered  
rolls,<sup>70</sup>  
And dieted, much to their friends' surprise,  
On pickles and pencils and chalk and  
coals.

So fast their little hearts did bound,  
The frightened insects buzzed the more;  
So over all their chests he found  
The *râle sifflant* and the *râle sonore*.

He shook his head. There's grave dis-  
ease, —  
I greatly fear you all must die;  
A slight *post-mortem*, if you please,  
Surviving friends would gratify.<sup>80</sup>

The six young damsels wept aloud,  
Which so prevailed on six young men

That each his honest love avowed,  
Whereat they all got well again.

This poor young man was all aghast;  
The price of stethoscopes came down;  
And so he was reduced at last  
To practise in a country town.

The doctors being very sore,  
A stethoscope they did devise <sup>90</sup>  
That had a rammer to clear the bore,  
With a knob at the end to kill the flies.

Now use your ears, all you that can,  
But don't forget to mind your eyes,  
Or you may be cheated, like this young  
man,  
By a couple of silly, abnormal flies.

(1848.)

THE STATESMAN'S SECRET<sup>1</sup>

Who of all statesmen is his country's  
pride,  
Her councils' prompter and her leaders'  
guide?  
He speaks; the nation holds its breath to  
hear;  
He nods, and shakes the sunset hemisphere.  
Born where the primal fount of Nature  
springs  
By the rude cradles of her throneless  
kings,  
In his proud eye her royal signet flames,  
By his own lips her Monarch she pro-  
claims.

Why name his countless triumphs, whom  
to meet  
Is to be famous, envied in defeat? <sup>10</sup>  
The keen debaters, trained to brawls and  
strife,  
Who fire one shot, and finish with the  
knife,  
Tried him but once, and, cowering in their  
shame,  
Ground their hacked blades to strike at  
meaner game.  
The lordly chief, his party's central stay,  
Whose lightest word a hundred votes obey,  
Found a new listener seated at his side,  
Looked in his eye, and felt himself defied,

<sup>1</sup> Originally called 'The Disappointed Statesman.' See the notes on Emerson's 'Webster,' p. 61, and Whittier's 'Ichabod,' p. 282.

Flung his rash gauntlet on the startled  
floor,

Met the all-conquering, fought, — and  
ruled no more. <sup>20</sup>

See where he moves, what eager crowds  
attend!

What shouts of thronging multitudes as-  
cend!

If this is life, — to mark with every hour  
The purple deepening in his robes of  
power,

To see the painted fruits of honor fall  
Thick at his feet, and choose among them  
all,

To hear the sounds that shape his spread-  
ing name

Peal through the myriad organ-stops of  
fame,

Stamp the lone isle that spots the seaman's  
chart,

And crown the pillared glory of the mart, <sup>30</sup>  
To count as peers the few supremely  
wise

Who mark their planet in the angels'  
eyes, —

If this is life —

Who strides alone beside the sounding  
sea?

Alone he wanders by the murmuring shore,  
His thoughts as restless as the waves that  
roar;

Looks on the sullen sky as stormy-browed  
As on the waves yon tempest-brooding  
cloud,

Heaves from his aching breast a wailing  
sigh,

Sad as the gust that sweeps the clouded  
sky. <sup>40</sup>

Ask him his griefs; what midnight demons  
plough

The lines of torture on his lofty brow;  
Unlock those marble lips, and bid them  
speak

The mystery freezing in his bloodless  
cheek.

His secret? Hid beneath a flimsy word;  
One foolish whisper that ambition heard;

And thus it spake: 'Behold yon gilded  
chair,

The world's one vacant throne, — thy place  
is there!'

Ah, fatal dream! What warning spec-  
tres meet

In ghastly circle round its shadowy seat! <sup>50</sup>

Yet still the Tempter murmurs in his  
ear

The maddening taunt he cannot choose but  
hear:

'Meanest of slaves, by gods and men ac-  
curst,

He who is second when he might be first!  
Climb with bold front the ladder's topmost  
round,

Or chain thy creeping footsteps to the  
ground!'

Illustrious Dupe! Have those majestic  
eyes

Lost their proud fire for such a vulgar  
prize?

Art thou the last of all mankind to know  
That party-fights are won by aiming low?

Thou, stamped by Nature with her royal  
sign, <sup>61</sup>

That party-hirelings hate a look like thine?  
Shake from thy sense the wild delusive  
dream!

Without the purple, art thou not su-  
preme?

And soothed by love unbought, thy heart  
shall own

A nation's homage nobler than its throne!  
1850? (1861.)

AFTER A LECTURE ON WORDS-  
WORTH<sup>1</sup>

COME, spread your wings, as I spread mine,  
And leave the crowded hall  
For where the eyes of twilight shine  
O'er evening's western wall.

These are the pleasant Berkshire hills,  
Each with its leafy crown;  
Hark! from their sides a thousand rills  
Come singing sweetly down.

A thousand rills; they leap and shine,  
Strained through the shadowy nooks, <sup>10</sup>  
Till, clasped in many a gathering twine,  
They swell a hundred brooks.

A hundred brooks, and still they run  
With ripple, shade, and gleam,

<sup>1</sup> This and the following poem were read by Holmes as postludes to lectures given by him at the Lowell Institute in Boston, in 1853, on English Poetry of the Nineteenth Century. Two years later Lowell lectured at the same Institute on English Poetry from its Origins to Wordsworth.

Till, clustering all their braids in one,  
They flow a single stream.

A bracelet spun from mountain mist,  
A silvery sash unwound,  
With ox-bow curve and sinuous twist  
It writhes to reach the Sound. <sup>20</sup>

This is my bark, — a pygmy's ship;  
Beneath a child it rolls;  
Fear not, — one body makes it dip,  
But not a thousand souls.

Float we the grassy banks between;  
Without an oar we glide;  
The meadows, drest in living green,  
Unroll on either side.

Come, take the book we love so well,  
And let us read and dream <sup>30</sup>  
We see whate'er its pages tell,  
And sail an English stream.

Up to the clouds the lark has sprung,  
Still trilling as he flies;  
The linnet sings as there he sung;  
The unseen cuckoo cries,

And daisies strew the banks along,  
And yellow kingcups shine,  
With cowslips, and a primrose throng,  
And humble celandine. <sup>40</sup>

Ah foolish dream! when Nature nursed  
Her daughter in the West,  
The fount was drained that opened first;  
She bared her other breast.

On the young planet's orient shore  
Her morning hand she tried;  
Then turned the broad medallion o'er  
And stamped the sunset side.

Take what she gives, her pine's tall stem,  
Her elm with hanging spray; <sup>50</sup>  
She wears her mountain diadem  
Still in her own proud way.

Look on the forests' ancient kings,  
The hemlock's towering pride:  
Yon trunk had thrice a hundred rings,  
And fell before it died.

Nor think that Nature saves her bloom  
And slights our grassy plain;

For us she wears her court costume, —  
Look on its broïdered train; 60

The lily with the sprinkled dots,  
Brands of the noontide beam;  
The cardinal, and the blood-red spots,  
Its double in the stream,

As if some wounded eagle's breast,  
Slow throbbing o'er the plain,  
Had left its airy path impressed  
In drops of scarlet rain.

And hark! and hark! the woodland rings;  
There thrilled the thrush's soul; 70  
And look! that flash of flamy wings, —  
The fire-plumed oriole!

Above, the hen-hawk swims and swoops,  
Flung from the bright, blue sky;  
Below, the robin hops, and whoops  
His piercing Indian cry.

Beauty runs virgin in the woods  
Robed in her rustic green,  
And oft a longing thought intrudes,  
As if we might have seen 80

Her every finger's every joint  
Ringed with some golden line,  
Poet whom Nature did anoint!  
Had our wild home been thine.

Yet think not so; Old England's blood  
Runs warm in English veins;  
But wafted o'er the icy flood  
Its better life remains:

Our children know each wildwood smell,  
The bayberry and the fern, 90  
The man who does not know them well  
Is all too old to learn.

Be patient! On the breathing page  
Still pants our hurried past;  
Pilgrim and soldier, saint and sage, —  
The poet comes the last!

Though still the lark-voiced matins ring  
The world has known so long;  
The wood-thrush of the West shall sing  
Earth's last sweet even-song! 100  
1853. (1861.)

## AFTER A LECTURE ON SHELLEY

ONE broad, white sail in Spezzia's treacherous bay;  
On comes the blast; too daring bark, beware!  
The cloud has clasped her; lo! it melts away;  
The wide, waste waters, but no sail is there.

Morning: a woman looking on the sea;  
Midnight: with lamps the long veranda burns;  
Come, wandering sail, they watch, they burn for thee!  
Suns come and go, alas! no bark returns.

And feet are thronging on the pebbly sands,  
And torches flaring in the weedy caves, 10  
Where'er the waters lay with icy hands  
The shapes uplifted from their coral graves.

Vainly they seek; the idle quest is o'er;  
The coarse, dark women, with their hanging locks,  
And lean, wild children gather from the shore  
To the black hovels bedded in the rocks.

But Love still prayed, with agonizing wail,  
'One, one last look, ye heaving waters, yield!'  
Till Ocean, clashing in his jointed mail,  
Raised the pale burden on his level shield. 20

Slow from the shore the sullen waves retire;  
His form a nobler element shall claim;  
Nature baptized him in ethereal fire,  
And Death shall crown him with a wreath of flame.

Fade, mortal semblance, never to return;  
Swift is the change within thy crimson shroud;  
Seal the white ashes in the peaceful urn;  
All else has risen in yon silvery cloud.

Sleep where thy gentle Adonais lies,  
Whose open page lay on thy dying heart; 30

Both in the smile of those blue-vaulted skies,  
Earth's fairest dome of all divinest art.

Breathe for his wandering soul one passing sigh,  
O happier Christian, while thine eye grows dim, —  
In all the mansions of the house on high,  
Say not that Mercy has not one for him!  
1853. (1861.)

THE HUDSON<sup>1</sup>

## AFTER A LECTURE AT ALBANY

'T WAS a vision of childhood that came with its dawn,  
Ere the curtain that covered life's day-star was drawn;  
The nurse told the tale when the shadows grew long,  
And the mother's soft lullaby breathed it in song.

'There flows a fair stream by the hills of the West,' —  
She sang to her boy as he lay on her breast;  
'Along its smooth margin thy fathers have played;  
Beside its deep waters their ashes are laid.'

I wandered afar from the land of my birth,  
I saw the old rivers, renowned upon earth,  
But fancy still painted that wide-flowing stream  
With the many-hued pencil of infancy's dream.

I saw the green banks of the castle-crowned Rhine,  
Where the grapes drink the moonlight and change it to wine;

<sup>1</sup> See the notes on Whittier's 'The Last Walk in Autumn,' p. 292, and on Emerson's 'Written in Naples,' p. 60, and compare a recent sonnet on the Hudson by Mr. George S. Hellman: —

Where in its old historic splendor stands  
The home of England's far-famed Parliament,  
And waters of the Thames in calm content  
At England's fame flow slowly o'er their sands;  
And where the Rhine past vine-entwined lands  
Courses in castled beauty, there I went;  
And far to Southern rivers, flower-besprent;  
And to the icy streams of Northern strands.  
Then mine own native shores I trod once more,  
And, gazing on thy waters' majesty,  
The memory, O Hudson, came to me  
Of one who went to seek the wide world o'er  
For Love, but found it not. Then home turned he  
And saw his mother waiting at the door.

I stood by the Avon, whose waves as they glide  
Still whisper his glory who sleeps at their side.

But my heart would still yearn for the sound of the waves  
That sing as they flow by my forefathers' graves;  
If manhood yet honors my cheek with a tear,  
I care not who sees it, — nor blush for it here!

Farewell to the deep-bosomed stream of the West!  
I fling this loose blossom to float on its breast;  
Nor let the dear love of its children grow cold,  
Till the channel is dry where its waters have rolled!  
1854. (1861.)

## TO AN ENGLISH FRIEND

THE seed that wasteful autumn cast  
To waver on its stormy blast,  
Long o'er the wintry desert tost,  
Its living germ has never lost.  
Dropped by the weary tempest's wing,  
It feels the kindling ray of spring,  
And, starting from its dream of death,  
Pours on the air its perfumed breath.

So, parted by the rolling flood,  
The love that springs from common blood  
Needs but a single sunlit hour  
Of mingling smiles to bud and flower;  
Unharm'd its slumbering life has flown,  
From shore to shore, from zone to zone,  
Where summer's falling roses stain  
The tepid waves of Pontchartrain,  
Or where the lichen creeps below  
Katahdin's wreaths of whirling snow.

Though fiery sun and stiffening cold  
May change the fair ancestral mould,  
No winter chills, no summer drains  
The life-blood drawn from English veins,  
Still bearing wheresoe'er it flows  
The love that with its fountain rose,  
Unchanged by space, unwronged by time,  
From age to age, from clime to clime!  
(1861.)

THE OLD MAN DREAMS<sup>1</sup>

OH for one hour of youthful joy !  
Give back my twentieth spring !  
I'd rather laugh, a bright-haired boy,  
Than reign, a gray-beard king.

Off with the spoils of wrinkled age !  
Away with Learning's crown !  
Tear out life's Wisdom-written page,  
And dash its trophies down !

One moment let my life-blood stream  
From boyhood's fount of flame !  
Give me one giddy, reeling dream  
Of life all love and fame !

My listening angel heard the prayer,  
And, calmly smiling, said,  
'If I but touch thy silvered hair  
Thy hasty wish hath sped.

'But is there nothing in thy track  
To bid thee fondly stay,  
While the swift seasons hurry back  
To find the wished-for day ?'

'Ah, truest soul of womankind !  
Without thee what were life ?  
One bliss I cannot leave behind:  
I'll take — my — precious — wife !'

The angel took a sapphire pen  
And wrote in rainbow dew,  
*The man would be a boy again,  
And be a husband too !*

'And is there nothing yet unsaid,  
Before the change appears ?  
Remember, all their gifts have fled  
With those dissolving years.'

'Why, yes,' for memory would recall  
My fond paternal joys;  
'I could not bear to leave them all —  
I'll take — my — girl — and — boys.'

The smiling angel dropped his pen, —  
'Why, this will never do;  
The man would be a boy again,  
And be a father too !'

<sup>1</sup> Written for a reunion of Holmes's college class.  
See the note on 'The Boys,' p. 374.

And so I laughed, — my laughter woke  
The household with its noise, —  
And wrote my dream, when morning broke,  
To please the gray-haired boys.  
1854. (1861.)

## BIRTHDAY OF DANIEL WEBSTER

JANUARY 18, 1856

WHEN life hath run its largest round  
Of toil and triumph, joy and woe,  
How brief a storied page is found  
To compass all its outward show !

The world-tried sailor tires and droops;  
His flag is rent, his keel forgot;  
His farthest voyages seem but loops  
That float from life's entangled knot.

But when within the narrow space  
Some larger soul hath lived and  
wrought,  
Whose sight was open to embrace  
The boundless realms of deed and  
thought, —

When, stricken by the freezing blast,  
A nation's living pillars fall,  
How rich the storied page, how vast,  
A word, a whisper, can recall !

No medal lifts its fretted face,  
Nor speaking marble cheats your eye,  
Yet, while these pictured lines I trace,  
A living image passes by:

A roof beneath the mountain pines;  
The cloisters of a hill-girt plain;  
The front of life's embattled lines;  
A mound beside the heaving main.

These are the scenes: a boy appears;  
Set life's round dial in the sun,  
Count the swift arc of seventy years,  
His frame is dust; his task is done.

Yet pause upon the noontide hour,  
Ere the declining sun has laid  
His bleaching rays on manhood's power,  
And look upon the mighty shade.

No gloom that stately shape can hide,  
No change uncrown its brow; behold !

Dark, calm, large-fronted, lightning-eyed,  
Earth has no double from its mould !

Ere from the fields by valor won  
The battle-smoke had rolled away,  
And bared the blood-red setting sun,  
His eyes were opened on the day.

His land was but a shelving strip  
Black with the strife that made it free;  
He lived to see its banners dip  
Their fringes in the Western sea.

The boundless prairies learned his name,  
His words the mountain echoes knew.  
The Northern breezes swept his fame  
From icy lake to warm bayou.

In toil he lived; in peace he died;  
When life's full cycle was complete  
Put off his robes of power and pride,  
And laid them at his Master's feet.

His rest is by the storm-swept waves  
Whom life's wild tempests roughly tried,  
Whose heart was like the streaming caves  
Of ocean, throbbing at his side.

Death's cold white hand is like the snow  
Laid softly on the furrowed hill,  
It hides the broken seams below,  
And leaves the summit brighter still.

In vain the envious tongue upbraids;  
His name a nation's heart shall keep  
Till morning's latest sunlight fades  
On the blue tablet of the deep !  
1855-56. (1861.)

FOR THE MEETING OF THE  
BURNS CLUB

1856

THE mountains glitter in the snow  
A thousand leagues asunder;  
Yet here, amid the banquet's glow,  
I hear their voice of thunder;  
Each giant's ice-bound goblet clinks;  
A flowing stream is summoned;  
Wachusett to Ben Nevis drinks;  
Monadnock to Ben Lomond !

Though years have clipped the eagle's  
plume

That crowned the chieftain's bonnet,  
The sun still sees the heather bloom,  
The silver mists lie on it;  
With tartan kilt and philibeg,  
What stride was ever bolder  
Than his who showed the naked leg  
Beneath the plaided shoulder ?

The echoes sleep on Cheviot's hills,  
That heard the bugles blowing  
When down their sides the crimson rills  
With mingled blood were flowing;  
The hunts where gallant hearts were  
game,  
The slashing on the border,  
The raid that swooped with sword and  
flame,  
Give place to 'law and order.'

Not while the rocking steeples reel  
With midnight tocsins ringing,  
Not while the crashing war-notes peal,  
God sets his poets singing;  
The bird is silent in the night,  
Or shrieks a cry of warning  
While fluttering round the beacon-light, —  
But hear him greet the morning !

The lark of Scotia's morning sky !  
Whose voice may sing his praises ?  
With Heaven's own sunlight in his eye,  
He walked among the daisies,  
Till through the cloud of fortune's wrong  
He soared to fields of glory;  
But left his land her sweetest song  
And earth her saddest story.

'Tis not the forts the builder piles  
That chain the earth together;  
The wedded crowns, the sister isles,  
Would laugh at such a tether;  
The kindling thought, the throbbing words,  
That set the pulses beating,  
Are stronger than the myriad swords  
Of mighty armies meeting.

Thus while within the banquet glows,  
Without, the wild winds whistle,  
We drink a triple health, — the Rose,  
The Shamrock, and the Thistle !  
Their blended hues shall never fade  
Till War has hushed his cannon, —  
Close-twined as ocean-currents braid  
The Thames, the Clyde, the Shannon !  
1856. (1861.)