

But he never will die if he lingers below
Till we've paid him in love half the bal-
ance we owe!

1877.

1877.

VERITAS¹

TRUTH: So the frontlet's older legend ran,
On the brief record's opening page dis-
played;
Not yet those clear-eyed scholars were
afraid
Lest the fair fruit that wrought the woe of
man
By far Euphrates — where our sire began
His search for truth, and, seeking, was
betrayed —
Might work new treason in their forest
shade,
Doubling the curse that brought life's
shortened span.
Nurse of the future, daughter of the past,
That stern phylactery best becomes thee
now:
Lift to the morning star thy marble
brow!
Cast thy brave truth on every warring
blast!
Stretch thy white hand to that forbidden
bough,
And let thine earliest symbol be thy last!

1878.

1878.

THE SILENT MELODY

'BRING me my broken harp,' he said;
'We both are wrecks, — but as ye
will, —
Though all its ringing tones have fled,
Their echoes linger round it still;
It had some golden strings, I know,
But that was long — how long! — ago.

¹ The original motto on the seal of Harvard College, adopted in 1643. In a letter enclosing this sonnet and another entitled 'Christo et Ecclesiae,' to be read at a meeting of the New York Harvard Club, Holmes says: 'At the first meeting of the Governors of the College under the Charter of 1642, held in the year 1643, it was "ordered that there shall be a College seal in forme following," namely, a shield with three open books bearing the word *Veritas*. This motto was soon exchanged for *In Christi gloriam*; and this again shortly superseded by the one so long used, *Christo et Ecclesiae*.' Holmes's sonnet was meant as a plea that the older and broader motto, *Veritas*, be restored. (See Morse's *Life of Holmes*, vol. i, pp. 236-240. This has now been done, but without displacing the other motto, *Christo et Ecclesiae*.)

'I cannot see its tarnished gold,
I cannot hear its vanished tone,
Scarce can my trembling fingers hold
The pillared frame so long their own; 10
We both are wrecks, — awhile ago
It had some silver strings, I know,

'But on them Time too long has played
The solemn strain that knows no change,
And where of old my fingers strayed
The chords they find are new and
strange, —
Yes! iron strings, — I know, — I know, —
We both are wrecks of long ago.

'We both are wrecks, — a shattered
pair, —
Strange to ourselves in time's dis-
guise . . . 20
What say ye to the lovesick air
That brought the tears from Marian's
eyes?

Ay! trust me, — under breasts of snow
Hearts could be melted long ago!

'Or will ye hear the storm-song's crash
That from his dreams the soldier woke,
And bade him face the lightning flash
When battle's cloud in thunder
broke? . . .

Wrecks, — nought but wrecks! — the time
was when
We two were worth a thousand men!' 30

And so the broken harp they bring
With pitying smiles that none could
blame;

Alas! there's not a single string
Of all that filled the tarnished frame!
But see! like children overjoyed,
His fingers rambling through the void!

'I clasp thee! Ay . . . mine ancient
lyre . . .
Nay, guide my wandering fingers. . . .
There!

They love to dally with the wire
As Isaac played with Esau's hair. . . . 40
Hush! ye shall hear the famous tune
That Marian called the Breath of June!

And so they softly gather round:
Rapt in his tuneful trance he seems:
His fingers move: but not a sound!
A silence like the song of dreams. . . .

'There! ye have heard the air,' he cries,
'That brought the tears from Marian's
eyes!'

Ah, smile not at his fond conceit,
Nor deem his fancy wrought in vain; 50
To him the unreal sounds are sweet, —
No discord mars the silent strain
Scored on life's latest, starlit page —
The voiceless melody of age.

Sweet are the lips of all that sing,
When Nature's music breathes unsought,
But never yet could voice or string
So truly shape our tenderest thought
As when by life's decaying fire 60
Our fingers sweep the stringless lyre! 1878.

THE IRON GATE¹

WHERE is this patriarch you are kindly
greeting?

Not unfamiliar to my ear his name,
Nor yet unknown to many a joyous meet-
ing
In days long vanished, — is he still the
same,

Or changed by years, forgotten and for-
getting,
Dull-eared, dim-sighted, slow of speech
and thought,
Still o'er the sad, degenerate present fret-
ting,
Where all goes wrong, and nothing as it
ought?

Old age, the graybeard! Well, indeed, I
know him, —
Shrunk, tottering, bent, of aches and ills
the prey; 10
In sermon, story, fable, picture, poem,
Oft have I met him from my earliest
day:

In my old Æsop, toiling with his bundle, —
His load of sticks, — politely asking
Death,
Who comes when called for, — would he
lug or trundle
His fagot for him? — he was scant of
breath.

¹ Read by Holmes at the celebration of his seventieth birthday.

And sad 'Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher,' —
Has he not stamped the image on my
soul,
In that last chapter, where the worn-out
Teacher
Sighs o'er the loosened cord, the broken 20
bowl?

Yes, long, indeed, I've known him at a dis-
tance,
And now my lifted door-latch shows him
here;
I take his shrivelled hand without resist-
ance,
And find him smiling as his step draws
near.

What though of gilded baubles he bereaves
us,
Dear to the heart of youth, to manhood's
prime;
Think of the calm he brings, the wealth he
leaves us,
The hoarded spoils, the legacies of time!

Altars once flaming, still with incense fra-
grant,
Passion's uneasy nurslings rocked asleep,
Hope's anchor faster, wild desire less va-
grant, 31
Life's flow less noisy, but the stream
how deep!

Still as the silver cord gets worn and
slender,
Its lightened task-work tugs with lessen-
ing strain,
Hands get more helpful, voices, grown more
tender,
Soothe with their softened tones the
slumberous brain.

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. 40

Dear to its heart is every loving token
That comes unbidden ere its pulse grows
cold,
Ere the last lingering ties of life are broken,
Its labors ended and its story told.

Ah, while around us rosy youth rejoices,
For us the sorrow-laden breezes sigh,
And through the chorus of its jocund
voices
Throbs the sharp note of misery's hope-
less cry.

As on the gauzy wings of fancy flying
From some far orb I track our watery
sphere,
Home of the struggling, suffering, doubt-
ing, dying,
The silvered globule seems a glistening
tear.

But Nature lends her mirror of illusion
To win from saddening scenes our age-
dimmed eyes,
And misty day-dreams blend in sweet con-
fusion
The wintry landscape and the summer
skies.

So when the iron portal shuts behind us,
And life forgets us in its noise and
whirl,
Visions that shunned the glaring noonday
find us,
And glimmering starlight shows the
gates of pearl.

I come not here your morning hour to sad-
den,
A limping pilgrim, leaning on his staff, —
I, who have never deemed it sin to glad-
den
This vale of sorrows with a wholesome
laugh.

If word of mine another's gloom has
brightened,
Through my dumb lips the heaven-sent
message came;
If hand of mine another's task has light-
ened,
It felt the guidance that it dares not
claim.

But, O my gentle sisters, O my brothers,
These thick-sown snow-flakes hint of
toil's release;
These feebler pulses bid me leave to oth-
ers
The tasks once welcome; evening asks
for peace.

Time claims his tribute; silence now is
golden;
Let me not vex the too long suffering
lyre;
Though to your love untiring still beholden,
The curfew tells me — cover up the fire.

And now with grateful smile and accents
cheerful,
And warmer heart than look or word
can tell,
In simplest phrase — these traitorous eyes
are tearful —
Thanks, Brothers, Sisters, — Children,
— and farewell!

1879.

1879.

THE SHADOWS¹

'How many have gone?' was the question
of old
Ere Time our bright ring of its jewels
bereft;
Alas! for too often the death-bell has tolled,
And the question we ask is, 'How many
are left?'

Bright sparkled the wine; there were *fifty*
that quaffed;
For a decade had slipped and had taken
but three.
How they frolicked and sung, how they
shouted and laughed,
Like a school full of boys from their
benches set free!

There were speeches and toasts, there were
stories and rhymes,
The hall shook its sides with their mer-
riment's noise;
As they talked and lived over the college-
day times, —
No wonder they kept their old name of
'The Boys'!

The seasons moved on in their rhythmical
flow
With mornings like maidens that pouted
or smiled,
With the bud and the leaf and the fruit
and the snow,
And the year-books of Time in his al-
coves were piled.

¹ For the class reunion, 1880.AT THE SATURDAY CLUB¹

THIS is our place of meeting; opposite
That towered and pillared building: look
at it;
King's Chapel in the Second George's day,
Rebellion stole its regal name away, —
Stone Chapel sounded better; but at last
The poisoned name of our provincial past
Had lost its ancient venom; then once more
Stone Chapel was King's Chapel as before.
(So let rechristened North Street, when it
can,
Bring back the days of Marlborough and
Queen Anne!)

¹ About the time when these papers [*The Autocrat*] were published, the Saturday Club was founded, or, rather, found itself in existence, without any organization, almost without parentage. It was natural enough that such men as Emerson, Longfellow, Agassiz, Peirce, with Hawthorne, Motley, Sumner, when within reach, and others who would be good company for them, should meet and dine together once in a while, as they did, in point of fact, every month, and as some who are still living, with other and newer members, still meet and dine. If some of them had not admired each other they would have been exceptions in the world of letters and science. [Holmes here alludes to the fact that the profane sometimes called this club 'The Mutual Admiration Society.' It is related that when a book by one of its members was reviewed by another member in the 'North American Review,' some outsider wrote below the heading of the article, 'Insured in the Mutual.'] The club deserves being remembered for having no constitution or by-laws, for making no speeches, reading no papers, observing no ceremonies, coming and going at will without remark, and acting out, though it did not proclaim the motto, 'Shall I not take mine ease in mine inn?' (HOLMES.)

Outside the sacred *penetrabilia* which were shut within his own front door, nothing else in Dr. Holmes's life gave him so much pleasure as did this Club. He loved it; he hugged the thought of it. When he was writing to Lowell and Motley in Europe, he seemed to think that merely to name 'The Club' was enough to give a genial flavor to his page. He would tell who were present at the latest meeting, and where they sat. He would recur to those who used to come, and mention their habitual seats, — matters which his correspondents already knew perfectly well. But the names were sweet things in his mouth; and, in fact, he was doing one of the dearest acts of intimacy in thus touching the chord of the dearest reminiscence which their memories held in common. By this he seemed sure that he would make his letter welcome, however little else of news or interest it might convey. In the later days there came to be something pathetic about his attachment to that which still had existence and yet for him was almost all a memory. In 1883 he wrote to Lowell: 'I go to the Saturday Club quite regularly, but the company is more of ghosts than of flesh and blood for me. I carry a stranger there now and then, introduce him to the members who happen to be there, and then say: There at that end used to sit Agassiz; here at this end Longfellow; Emerson used to be there, and Lowell often next him; on such an occasion Hawthorne was with us, at another time Motley, and Sumner, and smaller constellations, — nebulae if you will, but luminous more or less in the provincial firmament.' (Morse's *Life of Holmes*, vol. i, pp. 243, 244.) Cf. Lowell's 'Agassiz,' and Holmes's *Life of Emerson*.

There were *forty* that gathered where fifty
had met;
Some locks had got silvered, some lives
had grown sere,
But the laugh of the laughers was lusty as
yet,
And the song of the singers rose ringing
and clear.

Still fitted the years; there were *thirty* that
came;
'The Boys' they were still, and they an-
swered their call;
There were foreheads of care, but the smiles
were the same,
And the chorus rang loud through the
garlanded hall.

The hour-hand moved on, and they gath-
ered again;
There were *twenty* that joined in the
hymn that was sung;
But ah! for our song-bird we listened in
vain, —
The crystalline tones like a seraph's that
rung!

How narrow the circle that holds us to-
night!
How many the loved ones that greet us
no more,
As we meet like the stragglers that come
from the fight,
Like the mariners flung from a wreck
on the shore!

We look through the twilight for those we
have lost;
The stream rolls between us, and yet
they seem near;
Already outnumbered by those who have
crossed,
Our band is transplanted, its home is not
here!

They smile on us still — is it only a
dream? —
While fondly or proudly their names we
recall;
They beckon — they come — they are cross-
ing the stream —
Lo! the Shadows! the Shadows! room
— room for them all!

1880.

1880.

Next the old church your wandering eye
will meet —
A granite pile that stares upon the street —
Our civic temple; slanderous tongues have
said
Its shape was modelled from St. Botolph's
head,
Lofty, but narrow; jealous passers-by
Say Boston always held her head too high.
Turn half-way round, and let your look
survey
The white façade that gleams across the
way, —
The many-windowed building, tall and
wide,
The palace-inn that shows its northern
side
In grateful shadow when the sunbeams
beat
The granite wall in summer's scorching
heat.
This is the place; whether its name you
spell
Tavern, or caravansera, or hotel.
Would I could steal its echoes! you should
find
Such store of vanished pleasures brought
to mind:
Such feasts! the laughs of many a jocund
hour
That shook the mortar from King George's
tower;
Such guests! What famous names its re-
cord boasts,
Whose owners wander in the mob of
ghosts!
Such stories! Every beam and plank is
filled
With juicy wit the joyous talkers spilled,
Ready to ooze, as once the mountain pine
The floors are laid with oozed its turpen-
tine!

A month had fitted since The Club had
met;
The day came round; I found the table set,
The waiters lounging round the marble
stairs,
Empty as yet the double row of chairs.
I was a full half hour before the rest,
Alone, the banquet-chamber's single guest.
So from the table's side a chair I took, 41
And having neither company nor book
To keep me waking, by degrees there crept
A torpor over me, — in short, I slept.

Loosed from its chain, along the wreck-
strown track
Of the dead years my soul goes travelling
back;
My ghosts take on their robes of flesh; it
seems
Dreaming is life; nay, life less life than
dreams,
So real are the shapes that meet my eyes.
They bring no sense of wonder, no sur-
prise,
No hint of other than an earth-born source; 50
All seems plain daylight, everything of
course.
How dim the colors are, how poor and
faint
This palette of weak words with which I
paint!
Here sit my friends; if I could fix them so
As to my eyes they seem, my page would
glow
Like a queen's missal, warm as if the
brush
Of Titian or Velasquez brought the flush
Of life into their features. *Ay de mi!*
If syllables were pigments, you should
see 60
Such breathing portraitures as never man
Found in the Pitti or the Vatican.

Here sits our POET, Laureate, if you will.
Long has he worn the wreath, and wears it
still.
Dead? Nay, not so; and yet they say his
bust
Looks down on marbles covering royal dust,
Kings by the Grace of God, or Nature's
grace;
Dead! No! Alive! I see him in his place,
Full-featured, with the bloom that heaven
denies
Her children, pinched by cold New England
skies, 70
Too often, while the nursery's happier few
Win from a summer cloud its roseate hue.
Kind, soft-voiced, gentle, in his eye there
shines
The ray serene that filled Evangeline's.
Modest he seems, not shy; content to
wait
Amid the noisy clamor of debate
The looked-for moment when a peaceful
word
Smooths the rough ripples louder tongues
have stirred.

In every tone I mark his tender grace
And all his poems hinted in his face; 80
What tranquil joy his friendly presence
gives!
How could I think him dead? He lives!
He lives!

There, at the table's further end I see
In his old place our Poet's *vis-à-vis*,
The great PROFESSOR, strong, broad-should-
ered, square,
In life's rich noontide, joyous, debonair.
His social hour no leaden care alloys,
His laugh rings loud and mirthful as a
boy's, —
That lusty laugh the Puritan forgot, —
What ear has heard it and remembers
not? 90
How often, halting at some wide crevasse
Amid the windings of his Alpine pass,
High up the cliffs, the climbing moun-
taineer,
Listening the far-off avalanche to hear,
Silent, and leaning on his steel-shod staff,
Has heard that cheery voice, that ringing
laugh,
From the rude cabin whose nomadic walls
Creep with the moving glacier as it crawls!
How does vast Nature lead her living
train
In ordered sequence through that spacious
brain, 100
As in the primal hour when Adam named
The new-born tribes that young creation
claimed! —
How will her realm be darkened, losing
thee,
Her darling, whom we call *our* AGASSIZ!

But who is he whose massive frame belies
The maiden shyness of his downcast eyes?
Who broods in silence till, by questions
pressed,
Some answer struggles from his laboring
breast?
An artist Nature meant to dwell apart, 109
Locked in his studio with a human heart,
Tracking its caverned passions to their lair,
And all its throbbing mysteries laying bare.
Count it no marvel that he broods alone
Over the heart he studies, — 't is his own;
So in his page, whatever shape it wear,
The Essex wizard's shadowed self is there, —
The great ROMANCER, hid beneath his veil
Like the stern preacher of his sombre tale;

Virile in strength, yet bashful as a girl,
Prouder than Hester, sensitive as Pearl. 120

From his mild throng of worshippers
released,
Our Concord Delphi sends its chosen priest,
Prophet or poet, mystic, sage, or seer,
By every title always welcome here.
Why that ethereal spirit's frame describe?
You know the race-marks of the Brahmin
tribe, —
The spare, slight form, the sloping shoul-
der's droop,
The ealm, scholastic mien, the clerkly
stoop,
The lines of thought the sharpened features
wear,
Carved by the edge of keen New England
air. 130
List! for he speaks! As when a king
would choose
The jewels for his bride, he might refuse
This diamond for its flaw, — find that less
bright
Than those, its fellows, and a pearl less
white
Than fits her snowy neck, and yet at last,
The fairest gems are chosen, and made fast
In golden fetters; so, with light delays
He seeks the fittest word to fill his phrase;
Nor vain nor idle his fastidious quest,
His chosen word is sure to prove the best.
Where in the realm of thought, whose
air is song, 141
Does he, the Buddha of the West, belong?
He seems a winged Franklin, sweetly wise,
Born to unlock the secrets of the skies;
And which the nobler calling, — if 't is fair
Terrestrial with celestial to compare, —
To guide the storm-cloud's elemental flame,
Or walk the chambers whence the light-
ning came,
Amidst the sources of its subtle fire,
And steal their effluence for his lips and
lyre? 150
If lost at times in vague aerial flights,
None treads with firmer footstep when he
lights;
A soaring nature, ballasted with sense,
Wisdom without her wrinkles or pretence,
In every Bible he has faith to read,
And every altar helps to shape his creed.
Ask you what name this prisoned spirit bears
While with ourselves this fleeting breath it
shares? 158

Till angels greet him with a sweeter one
In heaven, on earth we call him EMERSON.

I start; I wake; the vision is withdrawn;
Its figures fading like the stars at dawn;
Crossed from the roll of life their cher-
ished names,
And memory's pictures fading in their
frames;
Yet life is lovelier for these transient
gleams
Of buried friendships; blest is he who
dreams!

1884.

THE GIRDLE OF FRIENDSHIP ¹

SHE gathered at her slender waist
The beauteous robe she wore;
Its folds a golden belt embraced,
One rose-hued gem it bore.

The girdle shrank; its lessening round
Still kept the shining gem,
But now her flowing locks it bound,
A lustrous diadem.

And narrower still the circlet grew;
Behold! a glittering band,
Its roseate diamond set anew,
Her neck's white column spanned.

Suns rise and set; the straining clasp
The shortened links resist,
Yet flashes in a bracelet's grasp
The diamond, on her wrist.

At length, the round of changes past
The thieving years could bring,
The jewel, glittering to the last,
Still sparkles in a ring.

So, link by link, our friendships part,
So loosen, break, and fall,
A narrowing zone; the loving heart
Lives changeless through them all.

1884.

1884.

TO JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL ²

THIS is your month, the month of 'perfect
days,'
Birds in full song and blossoms all ablaze.

¹ For the class reunion, 1884.² On his return from England.

Nature herself your earliest welcome
breathes,
Spreads every leaflet, every bower in-
wreathes;
Carpets her paths for your returning feet,
Puts forth her best your coming steps to
greet;
And Heaven must surely find the earth in
tune
When Home, sweet Home, exhales the
breath of June.

These blessed days are waning all too fast,
And June's bright visions mingling with
the past;

Lilacs have bloomed and faded, and the rose
Has dropped its petals, but the clover blows,
And fills its slender tubes with honeyed
sweets;

The fields are pearled with milk-white
margarites;

The dandelion, which you sang of old,
Has lost its pride of place, its crown of gold,
But still displays its feathery-mantled
globe,

Which children's breath or wandering
winds unrobe.

These were your humble friends; your
opened eyes

Nature had trained her common gifts to
prize;

Not Cam nor Isis taught you to despise
Charles, with his muddy margin and the
harsh,

Plebeian grasses of the reeking marsh.
New England's home-bred scholar, well
you knew

Her soil, her speech, her people, through
and through,

And loved them ever with the love that
holds

All sweet, fond memories in its fragrant
folds.

Though far and wide your wingèd words
have flown,

Your daily presence kept you all our own,
Till, with a sorrowing sigh, a thrill of
pride,

We heard your summons, and you left our
side

For larger duties and for tasks untried.

How pleased the Spaniards for a while to
claim

This frank Hidalgo with the liquid name,

THE LYRE OF ANACREON ¹

THE minstrel of the classic lay
Of love and wine who sings
Still found the fingers run astray
That touched the rebel strings.

Of Cadmus he would fain have sung,
Of Atreus and his line;
But all the jocund echoes rung
With songs of love and wine.

Ah, brothers! I would fain have caught
Some fresher fancy's gleam;
My truant accents find, unsought,
The old familiar theme.

Love, Love! but not the sportive child
With shaft and twanging bow,
Whose random arrows drove us wild
Some threescore years ago;

Not Eros, with his joyous laugh,
The urchin blind and bare,
But Love, with spectacles and staff,
And scanty, silvered hair.

Our heads with frosted locks are white,
Our roofs are thatched with snow,
But red, in chilling winter's spite,
Our hearts and hearthstones glow.

Our old acquaintance, Time, drops in,
And while the running sands
Their golden thread unheeded spin,
He warms his frozen hands.

Stay, wingèd hours, too swift, too sweet,
And waft this message o'er
To all we miss, from all we meet
On life's fast-crumbling shore:

Say that, to old affection true,
We hug the narrowing chain
That binds our hearts, — alas, how few
The links that yet remain!

The fatal touch awaits them all
That turns the rocks to dust;
From year to year they break and fall, —
They break, but never rust.

Say if one note of happier strain
This worn-out harp afford, —

¹ For the class reunion, 1885.

Who stored their classics on his crowded
shelves
And loved their Calderon as they did
themselves!
Before his eyes what changing pageants
pass!
The bridal feast how near the funeral
mass!
The death-stroke falls, — the Misereres
wail;
The joy-bells ring, — the tear-stained
cheeks unveil,
While, as the playwright shifts his pictured
scene,
The royal mourner crowns his second
queen.

From Spain to Britain is a goodly stride, —
Madrid and London long-stretched leagues
divide.

What if I send him, 'Uncle S., says he,'
To my good cousin whom he calls 'J. B.'?
A nation's servants go where they are
sent, —

He heard his Uncle's orders, and he went.
By what enchantments, what alluring
arts,

Our truthful James led captive British
hearts, —
Whether his shrewdness made their states-
men halt,

Or if his learning found their Dons at fault,
Or if his virtue was a strange surprise,
Or if his wit flung star-dust in their eyes, —
Like honest Yankees we can simply guess;
But that he did it all must needs confess.

England herself without a blush may
claim

Her only conqueror since the Norman
came.

Eight years an exile! What a weary
while

Since first our herald sought the mother
isle!

His snow-white flag no churlish wrong has
soiled, —

He left unchallenged, he returns unspoiled.

Here let us keep him, here he saw the
light, —

His genius, wisdom, wit, are ours by right;
And if we lose him our lament will be

We have 'five hundred' — not 'as good
as he.'

1885.

(1888.)

One throb that trembles, not in vain, —
Their memory lent its chord.

Say that when Fancy closed her wings
And Passion quenched his fire,
Love, Love, still echoed from the strings
As from Anacreon's lyre!

1885.

(1888.)

AFTER THE CURFEW¹

THE Play is over. While the light
Yet lingers in the darkening hall,
I come to say a last Good-night
Before the final *Exeunt all*.

We gathered once, a joyous throng:
The jovial toasts went gayly round;
With jest, and laugh, and shout, and song,
We made the floors and walls resound.

We come with feeble steps and slow,
A little band of four or five,
Left from the wrecks of long ago,
Still pleased to find ourselves alive.

Alive! How living, too, are they
Whose memories it is ours to share!
Spread the long table's full array, —
There sits a ghost in every chair!

One breathing form no more, alas!
Amid our slender group we see;²
With him we still remained 'The Class,' —
Without his presence what are we?²⁰

The hand we ever loved to clasp, —
That tireless hand which knew no rest, —
Loosed from affection's clinging grasp,
Lies nerveless on the peaceful breast.

¹ The last of the poems written for the class of '29. See the letter from Samuel May to F. J. Garrison, quoted in Morse's *Life of Holmes*, vol. i, p. 78: "After the Curfew" was positively the last. "Farewell! I let the curtain fall." The curtain never rose again for "'29." We met once more — a year later — at Parker's. But three were present, Smith, Holmes, and myself. No poem — very quiet — something very like tears. The following meetings — all at Dr. H.'s house — were quiet, social, *talking* meetings — the Doctor of course doing the *live* talking. . . . At one of these meetings four were present, all the survivors but one; and there was more general talk. But never another *Class Poem*.

This poem, and the three following, appeared in *Over the Teacups*.

² The personal reference is to our greatly beloved and honored classmate, James Freeman Clarke. (HOLMES.)

The beaming eye, the cheering voice,
That lent to life a generous glow,
Whose every meaning said 'Rejoice,'
We see, we hear, no more below.

The air seems darkened by his loss,
Earth's shadowed features look less fair,
And heavier weighs the daily cross
His willing shoulders helped us bear.³¹

Why mourn that we, the favored few
Whom grasping Time so long has spared
Life's sweet illusions to pursue,
The common lot of age have shared?

In every pulse of Friendship's heart
There breeds unfelt a throb of pain, —
One hour must rend its links apart,
Though years on years have forged the chain.⁴⁰

So ends 'The Boys,' — a lifelong play.
We too must hear the Prompter's call
To fairer scenes and brighter day:
Farewell! I let the curtain fall.

1889.

1890.

LA MAISON D'OR

(BAR HARBOR)

FROM this fair home behold on either side
The restful mountains or the restless sea:
So the warm sheltering walls of life divide
Time and its tides from still eternity.

Look on the waves: their stormy voices
teach
That not on earth may toil and struggle
cease.

Look on the mountains: better far than
speech

Their silent promise of eternal peace.

1890.

1890.

TOO YOUNG FOR LOVE

Too young for love?
Ah, say not so!
Tell reddening rosebuds not to blow!
Wait not for spring to pass away, —
Love's summer months begin with May!

Too young for love?
Ah, say not so!
Too young? Too young?
Ah, no! no! no!

Too young for love?
Ah, say not so,

While daisies bloom and tulips glow!
June soon will come with lengthened day
To practise all love learned in May.

Too young for love?
Ah, say not so!
Too young? Too young?
Ah, no! no! no!

1890.

1890.

THE BROOMSTICK TRAIN; OR,
THE RETURN OF THE WITCHES¹

LOOK out! Look out, boys! Clear the
track!
The witches are here! They've all come
back!
They hanged them high, — No use! No
use!

What cares a witch for a hangman's noose?
They buried them deep, but they would n't
lie still,

For cats and witches are hard to kill;
They swore they should n't and would n't
die, —
Books said they did, but they lie! they lie!

A couple of hundred years, or so,
They had knocked about in the world
below,¹⁰
When an Essex Deacon dropped in to call,
And a homesick feeling seized them all;

¹ Look here! There are crowds of people whirled through our streets on these new-fashioned cars, with their witch-broomsticks overhead, — if they don't come from Salem, they ought to, — and not more than one in a dozen of these fish-eyed bipeds thinks or cares a nickel's worth about the miracle which is wrought for their convenience. They know that without hands or feet, without horses, without steam, so far as they can see, they are transported from place to place, and that there is nothing to account for it except the witch-broomstick and the iron or copper cobweb which they see stretched above them. What do they know or care about this last revelation of the omnipresent spirit of the material universe? We ought to go down on our knees when one of these mighty caravans, car after car, spins by us, under the mystic impulse which seems to know not whether its train is loaded or empty. (HOLMES, in *Over the Teacups*.) The first electric trolley-cars had just been introduced when this poem was written, in 1890.

For he came from a place they knew full
well,
And many a tale he had to tell.
They longed to visit the haunts of men,
To see the old dwellings they knew again,
And ride on their broomsticks all around
Their wide domain of unhallowed ground.

In Essex county there's many a roof
Well known to him of the cloven hoof;²⁰
The small square windows are full in view
Which the midnight hags went sailing
through,
On their well-trained broomsticks mounted
high,

Seen like shadows against the sky;
Crossing the track of owls and bats,
Hugging before them their coal-black cats.

Well did they know, those gray old wives,
The sights we see in our daily drives:
Shimmer of lake and shine of sea,
Browne's bare hill with its lonely tree,³⁰
(It was n't then as we see it now,
With one scant scalp-lock to shade its
brow;)

Dusky nooks in the Essex woods,
Dark, dim, Dante-like solitudes,
Where the tree-toad watches the sinuous
snake

Glide through his forests of fern and
brake;

Ipswich River; its old stone bridge;
Far off Andover's Indian Ridge,
And many a scene where history tells
Some shadow of bygone terror dwells, —⁴⁰
Of 'Norman's Woe' with its tale of dread,
Of the Screeching Woman of Marblehead,
(The fearful story that turns men pale:
Don't bid me tell it, — my speech would
fail.)

Who would not, will not, if he can,
Bathe in the breezes of fair Cape Ann, —
Rest in the bowers her bays unfold,
Loved by the sachems and squaws of old?
Home where the white magnolias bloom,
Sweet with the bayberry's chaste perfume,
Hugged by the woods and kissed by the
sea!⁵¹

Where is the Eden like to thee?
For that 'couple of hundred years, or so,'
There had been no peace in the world below;
The witches still grumbling, 'It is n't fair;
Come, give us a taste of the upper air!

We've had enough of your sulphur springs,
And the evil odor that round them clings;
We long for a drink that is cool and
nice,—
Great buckets of water with Wenham ice;
We've served you well up-stairs, you
know;
You're a good old — fellow — come, let us
go!

I don't feel sure of his being good,
But he happened to be in a pleasant
mood,—
As fiends with their skins full sometimes
are
(He'd been drinking with 'roughs' at a
Boston bar).
So what does he do but up and shout
To a graybeard turnkey, 'Let 'em out!'

To mind his orders was all he knew;
The gates swung open, and out they flew. ⁷⁰
'Where are our broomsticks?' the beldams
cried.

'Here are your broomsticks,' an imp re-
plied.
'They've been in — the place you know —
so long
They smell of brimstone uncommon strong;
But they've gained by being left alone,—
Just look, and you'll see how tall they've
grown.'

'And where is my cat?' a vixen squalled.
'Yes, where are our cats?' the witches
bawled,

And began to call them all by name:
As fast as they called the cats, they came:
There was bob-tailed Tommy and long-
tailed Tim, ⁸¹

And wall-eyed Jacky and green-eyed Jim,
And splay-foot Benny and slim-legged
Beau,

And Skinny and Squally, and Jerry and
Joe,

And many another that came at call, —
It would take too long to count them all.
All black, — one could hardly tell which
was which,

But every cat knew his own old witch;
And she knew hers as hers knew her, —
Ah, did n't they curl their tails and purr! ⁹⁰

No sooner the withered hags were free
Than out they swarmed for a midnight
spree;

I could n't tell all they did in rhymes,
But the Essex people had dreadful times.
The Swampscott fishermen still relate
How a strange sea-monster stole their bait;
How their nets were tangled in loops and
knots,

And they found dead crabs in their lobster-
pots.

Poor Danvers grieved for her blasted crops,
And Wilmington mourned over mildewed
hops.

A blight played havoc with Beverly ¹⁰⁰
beans,—

It was all the work of those hateful queans!
A dreadful panic began at 'Pride's,'
Where the witches stopped in their mid-
night rides,

And there rose strange rumors and vague
alarms

'Mid the peaceful dwellers at Beverly
Farms.

Now when the Boss of the Beldams found
That without his leave they were ramping
round,

He called, — they could hear him twenty
miles, ¹⁰⁹

From Chelsea beach to the Misery Isles;
The deafest old granny knew his tone
Without the trick of the telephone.

'Come here, you witches! Come here!' ¹¹⁰
says he,—

'At your games of old, without asking me!
I'll give you a little job to do
That will keep you stirring, you godless
crew!'

They came, of course, at their master's call,
The witches, the broomsticks, the cats, and
all;

He led the hags to a railway train
The horses were trying to drag in vain. ¹²⁰

'Now, then,' says he, 'you've had your
fun,

And here are the cars you've got to run.
The driver may just unhitch his team,
We don't want horses, we don't want
steam;

You may keep your old black cats to hug,
But the loaded train you've got to lug.'

Since then on many a car you'll see
A broomstick plain as plain can be;
On every stick there's a witch astride,—
The string you see to her leg is tied. ¹³⁰

She will do a mischief if she can,
But the string is held by a careful man,
And whenever the evil-minded witch
Would cut some caper, he gives a twitch.
As for the hag, you can't see her,
But hark! you can hear her black cat's
purr,
And now and then, as a car goes by,
You may catch a gleam from her wicked
eye.

Often you've looked on a rushing train,
But just what moved it was not so plain.
It could n't be those wires above, ¹⁴¹
For they could neither pull nor shove;
Where was the motor that made it go
You could n't guess, but now you know.

Remember my rhymes when you ride again
On the rattling rail by the broomstick
train!

1890.

1890.

INVITA MINERVA ¹

VEX not the Muse with idle prayers, —
She will not hear thy call;
She steals upon thee unawares,
Or seeks thee not at all.

Soft as the moonbeams when they sought
Endymion's fragrant bower,
She parts the whispering leaves of thought
To show her full-blown flower.

For thee her wooing hour has passed,
The singing birds have flown,
And winter comes with icy blast
To chill thy buds unblown.

Yet, though the woods no longer thrill
As once their arches rung,

¹ I find the burden and restrictions of rhyme more and more troublesome as I grow older. There are times when it seems natural enough to employ that form of expression, but it is only occasionally; and the use of it as a vehicle of the commonplace is so prevalent that one is not much tempted to select it as the medium for his thoughts and emotions. The art of rhyming has almost become a part of a high-school education, and its practice is far from being an evidence of intellectual distinction. Mediocrity is as much forbidden to the poet in our days as it was in those of Horace, and the immense majority of the verses written are stamped with hopeless mediocrity.

When one of the ancient poets found he was trying to grind out verses which came unwillingly, he said he was writing *Invita Minerva*. (HOLMES, in *Over the Tea-Cups*, introducing the poem.)

Sweet echoes hover round thee still
Of songs thy summer sung.

Live in thy past; await no more
The rush of heaven-sent wings;
Earth still has music left in store
While Memory sighs and sings.

1890.

1890.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

1819-1891

THOU shouldst have sung the swan-song
for the choir
That filled our groves with music till the
day
Lit the last hilltop with its reddening fire,
And evening listened for thy lingering
lay.

But thou hast found thy voice in realms
afar
Where strains celestial blend their notes
with thine;
Some cloudless sphere beneath a happier
star
Welcomes the bright-winged spirit we
resign.

How Nature mourns thee in the still re-
treat
Where passed in peace thy love-enchanted
hours!
Where shall she find an eye like thine to
greet ¹⁰
Spring's earliest footprints on her open-
ing flowers?

Have the pale wayside weeds no fond re-
gret
For him who read the secrets they en-
fold?
Shall the proud spangles of the field forget
The verse that lent new glory to their
gold?

And ye whose carols wooed his infant
ear,
Whose chants with answering woodnotes
he repaid,
Have ye no song his spirit still may hear
From Elmwood's vaults of overarching
shade? ²⁰

Friends of his studious hours, who thronged
to teach
The deep-read scholar all your varied
lore,
Shall he no longer seek your shelves to
reach
The treasure missing from his world-
wide store?

This singer whom we long have held so dear
Was Nature's darling, shapely, strong,
and fair;
Of keenest wit, of judgment crystal-clear,
Easy of converse, courteous, debonair,

Fit for the loftiest or the lowliest lot,
Self-poised, imperial, yet of simplest
ways;
At home alike in castle or in cot,
True to his aim, let others blame or
praise.

Freedom he found an heirloom from his
sires;
Song, letters, statecraft, shared his years
in turn;

All went to feed the nation's altar-fires
Whose mourning children wreath his
funeral urn.

He loved New England, — people, lan-
guage, soil,
Unweaned by exile from her arid breast.
Farewell awhile, white-handed son of toil,
Go with her brown-armed laborers to thy
rest.

Peace to thy slumber in the forest shade!
Poet and patriot, every gift was thine;
Thy name shall live while summers bloom
and fade,
And grateful Memory guard thy leafy
shrine!

1891.

1891.

IN MEMORY OF JOHN GREEN-
LEAF WHITTIER

DECEMBER 17, 1807—SEPTEMBER 7, 1892

THOU, too, hast left us. While with heads
bowed low,
And sorrowing hearts, we mourned our
summer's dead,

The flying season bent its Parthian bow,
And yet again our mingling tears were
shed.

Was Heaven impatient that it could not
wait
The blasts of winter for earth's fruits to
fall?

Were angels crowding round the open gate
To greet the spirits coming at their call?

Nay, let not fancies, born of old be-
liefs,
Play with the heart-beats that are throbb-
ing still,
And waste their outworn phrases on the
griefs,
The silent griefs that words can only
chill.

For thee, dear friend, there needs no high-
wrought lay,
To shed its aureole round thy cherished
name, —

Thou whose plain, home-born speech of
Yea and Nay
Thy truthful nature ever best became.

Death reaches not a spirit such as thine, —
It can but steal the robe that hid thy
wings;

Though thy warm breathing presence we
resign,
Still in our hearts its loving semblance
clings.

Peaceful thy message, yet for struggling
right, —

When Slavery's gauntlet in our face was
flung, —

While timid weaklings watched the dubi-
ous fight
No herald's challenge more defiant rung.

Yet was thy spirit tuned to gentle themes
Sought in the haunts thy humble youth
had known.

Our stern New England's hills and vales
and streams, —
Thy tuneful idyls made them all their own.

The wild flowers springing from thy native
sod

Lent all their charms thy new-world
song to fill, —

30

Gave thee the mayflower and the golden-
rod
To match the daisy and the daffodil.

In the brave records of our earlier time
A hero's deed thy generous soul inspired,
And many a legend, told in ringing rhyme,
The youthful soul with high resolve has
fired.

Not thine to lean on priesthood's broken
reed;
No barriers caged thee in a bigot's fold;
Did zealots ask to syllable thy creed,
Thou saidst 'Our Father,' and thy creed
was told.

Best loved and saintliest of our singing
train,
Earth's noblest tributes to thy name be-
long.
A lifelong record closed without a stain,
A blameless memory shrined in deathless
song.

Lift from its quarried ledge a flawless
stone;
Smooth the green turf and bid the tablet
rise,
And on its snow-white surface carve alone
These words, — he needs no more, —
HERE WHITTIER LIES.

1892.

1892.