

The Poetical Works of O. W. Holmes, Volume 5.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

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The Poetical Works of O. W. Holmes, Volume 5.

Poems of the Class of '29 (1851-1889)

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BILL AND JOE

COME, dear old comrade, you and I
Will steal an hour from days gone by,
The shining days when life was new,
And all was bright with morning dew,
The lusty days of long ago,
When you were Bill and I was Joe.

Your name may flaunt a titled trail
Proud as a cockerel's rainbow tail,
And mine as brief appendix wear
As Tam O'Shanter's luckless mare;
To-day, old friend, remember still
That I am Joe and you are Bill.

You've won the great world's envied prize,
And grand you look in people's eyes,
With H O N. and L L. D.
In big brave letters, fair to see,—
Your fist, old fellow! off they go!—
How are you, Bill? How are you, Joe?

You've worn the judge's ermined robe;
You 've taught your name to half the globe;
You've sung mankind a deathless strain;
You've made the dead past live again
The world may call you what it will,
But you and I are Joe and Bill.

The chaffing young folks stare and say
“See those old buffers, bent and gray,—
They talk like fellows in their teens!
Mad, poor old boys! That's what it means,”—
And shake their heads; they little know
The throbbing hearts of Bill and Joe!—

How Bill forgets his hour of pride,
While Joe sits smiling at his side;
How Joe, in spite of time's disguise,
Finds the old schoolmate in his eyes,—
Those calm, stern eyes that melt and fill
As Joe looks fondly up at Bill.

Ah, pensive scholar, what is fame?
A fitful tongue of leaping flame;
A giddy whirlwind's fickle gust,
That lifts a pinch of mortal dust;
A few swift years, and who can show
Which dust was Bill and which was Joe?

The weary idol takes his stand,
Holds out his bruised and aching hand,
While gaping thousands come and go,—
How vain it seems, this empty show!
Till all at once his pulses thrill;—
'T is poor old Joe's "God bless you, Bill!"

And shall we breathe in happier spheres
The names that pleased our mortal ears;
In some sweet lull of harp and song
For earth-born spirits none too long,
Just whispering of the world below
Where this was Bill and that was Joe?

No matter; while our home is here
No sounding name is half so dear;
When fades at length our lingering day,
Who cares what pompous tombstones say?
Read on the hearts that love us still,
Hic jacet Joe. Hic jacet Bill.

A SONG OF "TWENTY-NINE "

1851

THE summer dawn is breaking
On Auburn's tangled bowers,
The golden light is waking
On Harvard's ancient towers;
The sun is in the sky
That must see us do or die,
Ere it shine on the line
Of the CLASS OF '29.

At last the day is ended,
The tutor screws no more,
By doubt and fear attended
Each hovers round the door,
Till the good old Praeses cries,
While the tears stand in his eyes,
"You have passed, and are classed
With the Boys of '29."

Not long are they in making
The college halls their own,
Instead of standing shaking,
Too bashful to be known;
But they kick the Seniors' shins
Ere the second week begins,
When they stray in the way
Of the BOYS OF '29.

If a jolly set is trolling
The last *Der Freischutz* airs,
Or a "cannon bullet" rolling
Comes bouncing down the stairs,
The tutors, looking out,
Sigh, "Alas! there is no doubt,
'T is the noise of the Boys
Of the CLASS OF '29."

Four happy years together,
By storm and sunshine tried,
In changing wind and weather,
They rough it side by side,
Till they hear their Mother cry,
“You are fledged, and you must fly,”
And the bell tolls the knell
Of the days of '29.

Since then, in peace or trouble,
Full many a year has rolled,
And life has counted double
The days that then we told;
Yet we'll end as we've begun,
For though scattered, we are one,
While each year sees us here,
Round the board of '29.

Though fate may throw between us
The mountains or the sea,
No time shall ever wean us,
No distance set us free;
But around the yearly board,
When the flaming pledge is poured,
It shall claim every name
On the roll of '29.

To yonder peaceful ocean
That glows with sunset fires,
Shall reach the warm emotion
This welcome day inspires,
Beyond the ridges cold
Where a brother toils for gold,
Till it shine through the mine
Round the Boy of '29.

If one whom fate has broken
Shall lift a moistened eye,
We'll say, before he 's spoken—
“Old Classmate, don't you cry!

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Here, take the purse I hold,
There 's a tear upon the gold—
It was mine—it is thine—
A'n't we BOYS OF '29?"

As nearer still and nearer
The fatal stars appear,
The living shall be dearer
With each encircling year,
Till a few old men shall say,
"We remember 't is the day—
Let it pass with a glass
For the CLASS OF '29."

As one by one is falling
Beneath the leaves or snows,
Each memory still recalling,
The broken ring shall close,
Till the nightwinds softly pass
O'er the green and growing grass,
Where it waves on the graves
Of the BOYS OF '29!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1852

WHERE, oh where are the visions of morning,
Fresh as the dews of our prime?
Gone, like tenants that quit without warning,
Down the back entry of time.

Where, oh where are life's lilies and roses,
Nursed in the golden dawn's smile?
Dead as the bulrushes round little Moses,
On the old banks of the Nile.

Where are the Marys, and Anns, and Elizas,
Loving and lovely of yore?
Look in the columns of old Advertisers,—
Married and dead by the score.

Where the gray colts and the ten-year-old fillies,
Saturday's triumph and joy?
Gone, like our friend—Greek—Achilles,
Homer's ferocious old boy.

Die-away dreams of ecstatic emotion,
Hopes like young eagles at play,
Vows of unheard-of and endless devotion,
How ye have faded away!

Yet, through the ebbing of Time's mighty river
Leave our young blossoms to die,
Let him roll smooth in his current forever,
Till the last pebble is dry.

AN IMPROMPTU

Not premeditated

1853

THE clock has struck noon; ere it thrice tell the hours
We shall meet round the table that blushes with flowers,
And I shall blush deeper with shame-driven blood
That I came to the banquet and brought not a bud.

Who cares that his verse is a beggar in art
If you see through its rags the full throb of his heart?
Who asks if his comrade is battered and tanned
When he feels his warm soul in the clasp of his hand?

No! be it an epic, or be it a line,
The Boys will all love it because it is mine;
I sung their last song on the morn of the day
That tore from their lives the last blossom of May.

It is not the sunset that glows in the wine,
But the smile that beams over it, makes it divine;
I scatter these drops, and behold, as they fall,
The day-star of memory shines through them all!

And these are the last; they are drops that I stole
From a wine-press that crushes the life from the soul,
But they ran through my heart and they sprang to my brain
Till our twentieth sweet summer was smiling again!

THE OLD MAN DREAMS

1854

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!”

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.

REMEMBER—FORGET

1855

AND what shall be the song to-night,
If song there needs must be?
If every year that brings us here
Must steal an hour from me?
Say, shall it ring a merry peal,
Or heave a mourning sigh
O'er shadows cast, by years long past,
On moments flitting by?

Nay, take the first unbidden line
The idle hour may send,
No studied grace can mend the face
That smiles as friend on friend;
The balsam oozes from the pine,
The sweetness from the rose,
And so, unsought, a kindly thought
Finds language as it flows.

The years rush by in sounding flight,
I hear their ceaseless wings;
Their songs I hear, some far, some near,
And thus the burden rings
"The morn has fled, the noon has past,
The sun will soon be set,
The twilight fade to midnight shade;
Remember—and Forget!"

Remember all that time has brought—
The starry hope on high,
The strength attained, the courage gained,
The love that cannot die.
Forget the bitter, brooding thought,—
The word too harshly said,
The living blame love hates to name,
The frailties of the dead!

REMEMBER—FORGET

We have been younger, so they say,
But let the seasons roll,
He doth not lack an almanac
Whose youth is in his soul.
The snows may clog life's iron track,
But does the axle tire,
While bearing swift through bank and drift
The engine's heart of fire?

I lift a goblet in my hand;
If good old wine it hold,
An ancient skin to keep it in
Is just the thing, we 're told.
We 're grayer than the dusty flask,—
We 're older than our wine;
Our corks reveal the "white top" seal,
The stamp of '29.

Ah, Boys! we clustered in the dawn,
To sever in the dark;
A merry crew, with loud halloo,
We climbed our painted bark;
We sailed her through the four years' cruise,
We 'll sail her to the last,
Our dear old flag, though but a rag,
Still flying on her mast.

So gliding on, each winter's gale
Shall pipe us all on deck,
Till, faint and few, the gathering crew
Creep o'er the parting wreck,
Her sails and streamers spread aloft
To fortune's rain or shine,
Till storm or sun shall all be one,
And down goes TWENTY-NINE!

OUR INDIAN SUMMER

1856

You 'll believe me, dear boys, 't is a pleasure to rise,
With a welcome like this in your darling old eyes;
To meet the same smiles and to hear the same tone
Which have greeted me oft in the years that have flown.

Were I gray as the grayest old rat in the wall,
My locks would turn brown at the sight of you all;
If my heart were as dry as the shell on the sand,
It would fill like the goblet I hold in my hand.

There are noontides of autumn when summer returns.
Though the leaves are all garnered and sealed in their urns,
And the bird on his perch, that was silent so long,
Believes the sweet sunshine and breaks into song.

We have caged the young birds of our beautiful June;
Their plumes are still bright and their voices in tune;
One moment of sunshine from faces like these
And they sing as they sung in the green-growing trees.

The voices of morning! how sweet is their thrill
When the shadows have turned, and the evening grows still!
The text of our lives may get wiser with age,
But the print was so fair on its twentieth page!

Look off from your goblet and up from your plate,
Come, take the last journal, and glance at its date:
Then think what we fellows should say and should do,
If the 6 were a 9 and the 5 were a 2.

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Ah, no! for the shapes that would meet with as here,
From the far land of shadows, are ever too dear!
Though youth flung around us its pride and its charms,
We should see but the comrades we clasped in our arms.

A health to our future—a sigh for our past,
We love, we remember, we hope to the last;
And for all the base lies that the almanacs hold,
While we've youth in our hearts we can never grow old!

MARE RUBRUM

1858

FLASH out a stream of blood–red wine,
For I would drink to other days,
And brighter shall their memory shine,
Seen flaming through its crimson blaze!
The roses die, the summers fade,
But every ghost of boyhood's dream
By nature's magic power is laid
To sleep beneath this blood–red stream!

It filled the purple grapes that lay,
And drank the splendors of the sun,
Where the long summer's cloudless day
Is mirrored in the broad Garonne;
It pictures still the bacchant shapes
That saw their hoarded sunlight shed,—
The maidens dancing on the grapes,—
Their milk–white ankles splashed with red.

Beneath these waves of crimson lie,
In rosy fetters prisoned fast,
Those flitting shapes that never die,—
The swift–winged visions of the past.
Kiss but the crystal's mystic rim,
Each shadow rends its flowery chain,
Springs in a bubble from its brim,
And walks the chambers of the brain.

Poor beauty! Time and fortune's wrong
No shape nor feature may withstand;
Thy wrecks are scattered all along,
Like emptied sea–shells on the sand;
Yet, sprinkled with this blushing rain,
The dust restores each blooming girl,
As if the sea–shells moved again
Their glistening lips of pink and pearl.

Here lies the home of school-boy life,
With creaking stair and wind-swept hall,
And, scarred by many a truant knife,
Our old initials on the wall;
Here rest, their keen vibrations mute,
The shout of voices known so well,
The ringing laugh, the wailing flute,
The chiding of the sharp-tongued bell.

Here, clad in burning robes, are laid
Life's blossomed joys, untimely shed,
And here those cherished forms have strayed
We miss awhile, and call them dead.
What wizard fills the wondrous glass?
What soil the enchanted clusters grew?
That buried passions wake and pass
In beaded drops of fiery dew?

Nay, take the cup of blood-red wine,—
Our hearts can boast a warmer glow,
Filled from a vintage more divine,
Calmed, but not chilled, by winter's snow!
To-night the palest wave we sip
Rich as the priceless draught shall be
That wet the bride of Cana's lip,—
The wedding wine of Galilee!

THE BOYS

1859

HAS there any old fellow got mixed with the boys?
If there has, take him out, without making a noise.
Hang the Almanac's cheat and the Catalogue's spite!
Old Time is a liar! We're twenty to-night!

We're twenty! We're twenty! Who says we are more?
He's tipsy,—young jackanapes!—show him the door!
“Gray temples at twenty?”—Yes! white if we please;
Where the snow-flakes fall thickest there's nothing can freeze!

Was it snowing I spoke of? Excuse the mistake!
Look close,—you will see not a sign of a flake!
We want some new garlands for those we have shed,—
And these are white roses in place of the red.

We've a trick, we young fellows, you may have been told,
Of talking (in public) as if we were old:—
That boy we call “Doctor,” and this we call “Judge;”
It 's a neat little fiction,—of course it 's all fudge.

That fellow's the “Speaker,”—the one on the right;
“Mr. Mayor,” my young one, how are you to-night?
That's our “Member of Congress,” we say when we chaff;
There's the “Reverend” What's his name?—don't make me laugh.

That boy with the grave mathematical look
Made believe he had written a wonderful book,
And the ROYAL SOCIETY thought it was *true*!
So they chose him right in; a good joke it was, too!

There's a boy, we pretend, with a three-decker brain,
That could harness a team with a logical chain;
When he spoke for our manhood in syllabled fire,
We called him "The Justice," but now he's "The Squire."

And there's a nice youngster of excellent pith,—
Fate tried to conceal him by naming him Smith;
But he shouted a song for the brave and the free,—
Just read on his medal, "My country," "of thee!"

You hear that boy laughing?—You think he's all fun;
But the angels laugh, too, at the good he has done;
The children laugh loud as they troop to his call,
And the poor man that knows him laughs loudest of all!

Yes, we 're boys,—always playing with tongue or with pen,—
And I sometimes have asked,—Shall we ever be men?
Shall we always be youthful, and laughing, and gay,
Till the last dear companion drops smiling away?

Then here's to our boyhood, its gold and its gray!
The stars of its winter, the dews of its May!
And when we have done with our life-lasting toys,
Dear Father, take care of thy children, THE BOYS!

LINES

1860

I'm ashamed,—that 's the fact,—it 's a pitiful case,—
Won't any kind classmate get up in my place?
Just remember how often I've risen before,—
I blush as I straighten my legs on the floor!

There are stories, once pleasing, too many times told,—
There are beauties once charming, too fearfully old,—
There are voices we've heard till we know them so well,
Though they talked for an hour they'd have nothing to tell.

Yet, Classmates! Friends! Brothers! Dear blessed old boys!
Made one by a lifetime of sorrows and joys,
What lips have such sounds as the poorest of these,
Though honeyed, like Plato's, by musical bees?

What voice is so sweet and what greeting so dear
As the simple, warm welcome that waits for us here?
The love of our boyhood still breathes in its tone,
And our hearts throb the answer, "He's one of our own!"

Nay! count not our numbers; some sixty we know,
But these are above, and those under the snow;
And thoughts are still mingled wherever we meet
For those we remember with those that we greet.

We have rolled on life's journey,—how fast and how far!
One round of humanity's many-wheeled car,
But up-hill and down-hill, through rattle and rub,
Old, true Twenty-niners! we've stuck to our hub!

While a brain lives to think, or a bosom to feel,
We will cling to it still like the spokes of a wheel!
And age, as it chills us, shall fasten the tire
That youth fitted round in his circle of fire!

A VOICE OF THE LOYAL NORTH

1861

JANUARY THIRD)

WE sing "Our Country's" song to-night
With saddened voice and eye;
Her banner droops in clouded light
Beneath the wintry sky.
We'll pledge her once in golden wine
Before her stars have set
Though dim one reddening orb may shine,
We have a Country yet.

'T were vain to sigh o'er errors past,
The fault of sires or sons;
Our soldier heard the threatening blast,
And spiked his useless guns;
He saw the star-wreathed ensign fall,
By mad invaders torn;
But saw it from the bastioned wall
That laughed their rage to scorn!

What though their angry cry is flung
Across the howling wave,—
They smite the air with idle tongue

LINES

The gathering storm who brave;
Enough of speech! the trumpet rings;
Be silent, patient, calm,—
God help them if the tempest swings
The pine against the palm!

Our toilsome years have made us tame;
Our strength has slept unfelt;
The furnace—fire is slow to flame
That bids our ploughshares melt;
'T is hard to lose the bread they win
In spite of Nature's frowns,—
To drop the iron threads we spin
That weave our web of towns,

To see the rusting turbines stand
Before the emptied flumes,
To fold the arms that flood the land
With rivers from their looms,—
But harder still for those who learn
The truth forgot so long;
When once their slumbering passions burn,
The peaceful are the strong!

The Lord have mercy on the weak,
And calm their frenzied ire,
And save our brothers ere they shriek,
“We played with Northern fire!”
The eagle hold his mountain height,—
The tiger pace his den
Give all their country, each his right!
God keep us all! Amen!

J. D. R.

1862

THE friends that are, and friends that were,
What shallow waves divide!
I miss the form for many a year
Still seated at my side.

I miss him, yet I feel him still
Amidst our faithful band,
As if not death itself could chill
The warmth of friendship's hand.

His story other lips may tell,—
For me the veil is drawn;
I only knew he loved me well,
He loved me—and is gone!

VOYAGE OF THE GOOD SHIP UNION

1862

'T is midnight: through my troubled dream
Loud wails the tempest's cry;
Before the gale, with tattered sail,
A ship goes plunging by.
What name? Where bound?—The rocks around
Repeat the loud halloo.
—The good ship Union, Southward bound:
God help her and her crew!

And is the old flag flying still
That o'er your fathers flew,
With bands of white and rosy light,
And field of starry blue?
—Ay! look aloft! its folds full oft
Have braved the roaring blast,
And still shall fly when from the sky
This black typhoon has past!

Speak, pilot of the storm-tost bark!
May I thy peril share?
—O landsman, there are fearful seas
The brave alone may dare!
—Nay, ruler of the rebel deep,
What matters wind or wave?
The rocks that wreck your reeling deck
Will leave me naught to save!

O landsman, art thou false or true?
What sign hast thou to show?
—The crimson stains from loyal veins
That hold my heart—blood's flow
—Enough! what more shall honor claim?
I know the sacred sign;
Above thy head our flag shall spread,
Our ocean path be thine!

The bark sails on; the Pilgrim's Cape
Lies low along her lee,
Whose headland crooks its anchor-flukes
To lock the shore and sea.
No treason here! it cost too dear
To win this barren realm
And true and free the hands must be
That hold the whaler's helm!

Still on! Manhattan's narrowing bay
No rebel cruiser scars;
Her waters feel no pirate's keel
That flaunts the fallen stars!
—But watch the light on yonder height,—
Ay, pilot, have a care!
Some lingering cloud in mist may shroud
The capes of Delaware!

Say, pilot, what this fort may be,
Whose sentinels look down
From moated walls that show the sea
Their deep embrasures' frown?
The Rebel host claims all the coast,
But these are friends, we know,
Whose footprints spoil the "sacred soil,"
And this is?—Fort Monroe!

The breakers roar,—how bears the shore?
—The traitorous wreckers' hands
Have quenched the blaze that poured its rays
Along the Hatteras sands.
—Ha! say not so! I see its glow!
Again the shoals display
The beacon light that shines by night,
The Union Stars by day!

The good ship flies to milder skies,
The wave more gently flows,
The softening breeze wafts o'er the seas
The breath of Beaufort's rose.

What fold is this the sweet winds kiss,
Fair-striped and many-starred,
Whose shadow palls these orphaned walls,
The twins of Beaugard?

What! heard you not Port Royal's doom?
How the black war-ships came
And turned the Beaufort roses' bloom
To redder wreaths of flame?
How from Rebellion's broken reed
We saw his emblem fall,
As soon his cursed poison-weed
Shall drop from Sumter's wall?

On! on! Pulaski's iron hail
Falls harmless on Tybee!
The good ship feels the freshening gales,
She strikes the open sea;
She rounds the point, she threads the keys
That guard the Land of Flowers,
And rides at last where firm and fast
Her own Gibraltar towers!

The good ship Union's voyage is o'er,
At anchor safe she swings,
And loud and clear with cheer on cheer
Her joyous welcome rings:
Hurrah! Hurrah! it shakes the wave,
It thunders on the shore,—
One flag, one land, one heart, one hand,
One Nation, evermore!

“CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YE WILL SERVE “

1863

YES, tyrants, you hate us, and fear while you hate
The self-ruling, chain-breaking, throne-shaking State!
The night-birds dread morning,—your instinct is true,—
The day-star of Freedom brings midnight for you!

Why plead with the deaf for the cause of mankind?
The owl hoots at noon that the eagle is blind!
We ask not your reasons,—’t were wasting our time,—
Our life is a menace, our welfare a crime!

We have battles to fight, we have foes to subdue,—
Time waits not for us, and we wait not for you!
The mower mows on, though the adder may writhe
And the copper-head coil round the blade of his
scythe!

“No sides in this quarrel,” your statesmen may urge,
Of school-house and wages with slave-pen scourge!—
No sides in the quarrel! proclaim it as well
To the angels that fight with the legions of hell!

They kneel in God's temple, the North and the South,
With blood on each weapon and prayers in each mouth.
Whose cry shall be answered? Ye Heavens, attend
The lords of the lash as their voices ascend!

“O Lord, we are shaped in the image of Thee,—
Smite down the base millions that claim to be free,
And lend thy strong arm to the soft-handed race
Who eat not their bread in the sweat of their face!”

“CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YE WILL SERVE “

So pleads the proud planter. What echoes are these?
The bay of his bloodhound is borne on the breeze,
And, lost in the shriek of his victim's despair,
His voice dies unheard.—Hear the Puritan's prayer!

“O Lord, that didst smother mankind in thy flood,
The sun is as sackcloth, the moon is as blood,
The stars fall to earth as untimely are cast
The figs from the fig-tree that shakes in the blast!

“All nations, all tribes in whose nostrils is breath
Stand gazing at Sin as she travails with Death!
Lord, strangle the monster that struggles to birth,
Or mock us no more with thy 'Kingdom on Earth!'

“If Ammon and Moab must reign in the land
Thou gavest thine Israel, fresh from thy hand,
Call Baal and Ashtaroth out of their graves
To be the new gods for the empire of slaves!”

Whose God will ye serve, O ye rulers of men?
Will ye build you new shrines in the slave-breeder's den?
Or bow with the children of light, as they call
On the Judge of the Earth and the Father of All?

Choose wisely, choose quickly, for time moves apace,—
Each day is an age in the life of our race!
Lord, lead them in love, ere they hasten in fear
From the fast-rising flood that shall girdle the sphere!

F. W. C.

1864

FAST as the rolling seasons bring
The hour of fate to those we love,
Each pearl that leaves the broken string
Is set in Friendship's crown above.
As narrower grows the earthly chain,
The circle widens in the sky;
These are our treasures that remain,
But those are stars that beam on high.

We miss—oh, how we miss!—his face,—
With trembling accents speak his name.
Earth cannot fill his shadowed place
From all her rolls of pride and fame;
Our song has lost the silvery thread
That carolled through his jocund lips;
Our laugh is mute, our smile is fled,
And all our sunshine in eclipse.

And what and whence the wondrous charm
That kept his manhood boylike still,—
That life's hard censors could disarm
And lead them captive at his will?
His heart was shaped of rosier clay,—
His veins were filled with ruddier fire,—
Time could not chill him, fortune sway,
Nor toil with all its burdens tire.

His speech burst throbbing from its fount
And set our colder thoughts aglow,
As the hot leaping geysers mount
And falling melt the Iceland snow.
Some word, perchance, we counted rash,—
Some phrase our calmness might disclaim,
Yet 't was the sunset's lightning's flash,

No angry bolt, but harmless flame.

Man judges all, God knoweth each;
We read the rule, He sees the law;
How oft his laughing children teach
The truths his prophets never saw
O friend, whose wisdom flowered in mirth,
Our hearts are sad, our eyes are dim;
He gave thy smiles to brighten earth,—
We trust thy joyous soul to Him!

Alas!—our weakness Heaven forgive!
We murmur, even while we trust,
“How long earth's breathing burdens live,
Whose hearts, before they die, are dust!”
But thou!—through grief's untimely tears
We ask with half-reproachful sigh—
“Couldst thou not watch a few brief years
Till Friendship faltered, 'Thou mayst die'?”

Who loved our boyish years so well?
Who knew so well their pleasant tales,
And all those livelier freaks could tell
Whose oft-told story never fails?
In vain we turn our aching eyes,—
In vain we stretch our eager hands,—
Cold in his wintry shroud he lies
Beneath the dreary drifting sands!

Ah, speak not thus! _He_ lies not there!
We see him, hear him as of old!
He comes! He claims his wonted chair;
His beaming face we still behold!
His voice rings clear in all our songs,
And loud his mirthful accents rise;
To us our brother's life belongs,—
Dear friends, a classmate never dies!

THE LAST CHARGE

1864

Now, men of the North! will you join in the strife
For country, for freedom, for honor, for life?
The giant grows blind in his fury and spite,—
One blow on his forehead will settle the fight!

Flash full in his eyes the blue lightning of steel,
And stun him with cannon-bolts, peal upon peal!
Mount, troopers, and follow your game to its lair,
As the hound tracks the wolf and the beagle the hare!

Blow, trumpets, your summons, till sluggards awake!
Beat, drums, till the roofs of the faint-hearted shake!
Yet, yet, ere the signet is stamped on the scroll,
Their names may be traced on the blood-sprinkled roll!

Trust not the false herald that painted your shield
True honor to-day must be sought on the field!
Her scutcheon shows white with a blazon of red,—
The life-drops of crimson for liberty shed

The hour is at hand, and the moment draws nigh;
The dog-star of treason grows dim in the sky;
Shine forth from the battle-cloud, light of the morn,
Call back the bright hour when the Nation was born!

The rivers of peace through our valleys shall run,
As the glaciers of tyranny melt in the sun;
Smite, smite the proud parricide down from his throne,—
His sceptre once broken, the world is our own!

OUR OLDEST FRIEND

1865

I GIVE you the health of the oldest friend
That, short of eternity, earth can lend,—
A friend so faithful and tried and true
That nothing can wean him from me and you.

When first we screeched in the sudden blaze
Of the daylight's blinding and blasting rays,
And gulped at the gaseous, groggy air,
This old, old friend stood waiting there.

And when, with a kind of mortal strife,
We had gasped and choked into breathing life,
He watched by the cradle, day and night,
And held our hands till we stood upright.

From gristle and pulp our frames have grown
To stringy muscle and solid bone;
While we were changing, he altered not;
We might forget, but he never forgot.

He came with us to the college class,—
Little cared he for the steward's pass!
All the rest must pay their fee,
Put the grim old dead-head entered free.

He stayed with us while we counted o'er
Four times each of the seasons four;
And with every season, from year to year,
The dear name Classmate he made more dear.

He never leaves us,—he never will,
Till our hands are cold and our hearts are still;
On birthdays, and Christmas, and New-Year's too,
He always remembers both me and you.

Every year this faithful friend
His little present is sure to send;
Every year, wheresoe'er we be,
He wants a keepsake from you and me.

How he loves us! he pats our heads,
And, lo! they are gleaming with silver threads;
And he 's always begging one lock of hair,
Till our shining crowns have nothing to wear.

At length he will tell us, one by one,
“My child, your labor on earth is done;
And now you must journey afar to see
My elder brother,—Eternity!”

And so, when long, long years have passed,
Some dear old fellow will be the last,—
Never a boy alive but he
Of all our goodly company!

When he lies down, but not till then,
Our kind Class-Angel will drop the pen
That writes in the day-book kept above
Our lifelong record of faith and love.

So here's a health in homely rhyme
To our oldest classmate, Father Time!
May our last survivor live to be
As bald and as wise and as tough as he!

SHERMAN 'S IN SAVANNAH

A HALF-RHYMED IMPROMPTU

1865

LIKE the tribes of Israel,
Fed on quails and manna,
Sherman and his glorious band
Journeyed through the rebel land,
Fed from Heaven's all-bounteous hand,
Marching on Savannah!

As the moving pillar shone,
Streamed the starry banner
All day long in rosy light,
Flaming splendor all the night,
Till it swooped in eagle flight
Down on doomed Savannah!

Glory be to God on high!
Shout the loud Hosanna!
Treason's wilderness is past,
Canaan's shore is won at last,
Peal a nation's trumpet-blast,—
Sherman 's in Savannah!

Soon shall Richmond's tough old hide
Find a tough old tanner!
Soon from every rebel wall
Shall the rag of treason fall,
Till our banner flaps o'er all
As it crowns Savannah!

MY ANNUAL

1866

How long will this harp which you once loved to hear
Cheat your lips of a smile or your eyes of a tear?
How long stir the echoes it wakened of old,
While its strings were unbroken, untarnished its gold?

Dear friends of my boyhood, my words do you wrong;
The heart, the heart only, shall throb in my song;
It reads the kind answer that looks from your eyes,—
“We will bid our old harper play on till he dies.”

Though Youth, the fair angel that looked o'er the strings,
Has lost the bright glory that gleamed on his wings,
Though the freshness of morning has passed from its tone
It is still the old harp that was always your own.

I claim not its music,—each note it affords
I strike from your heart—strings, that lend me its chords;
I know you will listen and love to the last,
For it trembles and thrills with the voice of your past.

Ah, brothers! dear brothers! the harp that I hold
No craftsman could string and no artisan mould;
He shaped it, He strung it, who fashioned the lyres
That ring with the hymns of the seraphim choirs.

Not mine are the visions of beauty it brings,
Not mine the faint fragrance around it that clings;
Those shapes are the phantoms of years that are fled,
Those sweets breathe from roses your summers have shed.

Each hour of the past lends its tribute to this,
Till it blooms like a bower in the Garden of Bliss;
The thorn and the thistle may grow as they will,
Where Friendship unfolds there is Paradise still.

The bird wanders careless while summer is green,
The leaf-hidden cradle that rocked him unseen;
When Autumn's rude fingers the woods have undressed,
The boughs may look bare, but they show him his nest.

Too precious these moments! the lustre they fling
Is the light of our year, is the gem of its ring,
So brimming with sunshine, we almost forget
The rays it has lost, and its border of jet.

While round us the many-hued halo is shed,
How dear are the living, how near are the dead!
One circle, scarce broken, these waiting below,
Those walking the shores where the asphodels blow!

Not life shall enlarge it nor death shall divide,—
No brother new-born finds his place at my side;
No titles shall freeze us, no grandeurs infest, .
His Honor, His Worship, are boys like the rest.

Some won the world's homage, their names we hold dear,—
But Friendship, not Fame, is the countersign here;
Make room by the conqueror crowned in the strife
For the comrade that limps from the battle of life!

What tongue talks of battle? Too long we have heard
In sorrow, in anguish, that terrible word;
It reddened the sunshine, it crimsoned the wave,
It sprinkled our doors with the blood of our brave.

Peace, Peace comes at last, with her garland of white;

Peace broods in all hearts as we gather to-night;
The blazon of Union spreads full in the sun;
We echo its words,—We are one! We are one!

ALL HERE

1867

IT is not what we say or sing,
That keeps our charm so long unbroken,
Though every lightest leaf we bring
May touch the heart as friendship's token;
Not what we sing or what we say
Can make us dearer to each other;
We love the singer and his lay,
But love as well the silent brother.

Yet bring whate'er your garden grows,
Thrice welcome to our smiles and praises;
Thanks for the myrtle and the rose,
Thanks for the marigolds and daisies;
One flower erelong we all shall claim,
Alas! unloved of Amaryllis—
Nature's last blossom—need I name
The wreath of threescore's silver lilies?

How many, brothers, meet to-night
Around our boyhood's covered embers?
Go read the treasured names aright
The old triennial list remembers;
Though twenty wear the starry sign
That tells a life has broke its tether,
The fifty-eight of 'twenty-nine—
God bless THE Boys!—are all together!

MY ANNUAL

These come with joyous look and word,
With friendly grasp and cheerful greeting,—
Those smile unseen, and move unheard,
The angel guests of every meeting;
They cast no shadow in the flame
That flushes from the gilded lustre,
But count us—we are still the same;
One earthly band, one heavenly cluster!

Love dies not when he bows his head
To pass beyond the narrow portals,—
The light these glowing moments shed
Wakes from their sleep our lost immortals;
They come as in their joyous prime,
Before their morning days were numbered,—
Death stays the envious hand of Time,—
The eyes have not grown dim that slumbered!

The paths that loving souls have trod
Arch o'er the dust where worldlings grovel
High as the zenith o'er the sod,—
The cross above the sexton's shovel!
We rise beyond the realms of day;
They seem to stoop from spheres of glory
With us one happy hour to stray,
While youth comes back in song and story.

Ah! ours is friendship true as steel
That war has tried in edge and temper;
It writes upon its sacred seal
The priest's *ubique—omnes—semper!*
It lends the sky a fairer sun
That cheers our lives with rays as steady
As if our footsteps had begun
To print the golden streets already!

The tangling years have clinched its knot
Too fast for mortal strength to sunder;
The lightning bolts of noon are shot;
No fear of evening's idle thunder!
Too late! too late!—no graceless hand
Shall stretch its cords in vain endeavor

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To rive the close encircling band
That made and keeps us one forever!

So when upon the fated scroll
The falling stars have all descended,
And, blotted from the breathing roll,
Our little page of life is ended,
We ask but one memorial line
Traced on thy tablet, Gracious Mother
“My children. Boys of '29.
In pace. How they loved each other!”
ONCE MORE

ONCE MORE

1868

“Will I come?” That is pleasant! I beg to inquire
If the gun that I carry has ever missed fire?
And which was the muster-roll-mention but one—
That missed your old comrade who carries the gun?

You see me as always, my hand on the lock,
The cap on the nipple, the hammer full cock;
It is rusty, some tell me; I heed not the scoff;
It is battered and bruised, but it always goes off!

“Is it loaded?” I’ll bet you! What doesn’t it hold?
Rammed full to the muzzle with memories untold;
Why, it scares me to fire, lest the pieces should fly
Like the cannons that burst on the Fourth of July

One charge is a remnant of College-day dreams
(Its wadding is made of forensics and themes);
Ah, visions of fame! what a flash in the pan
As the trigger was pulled by each clever young man!

And love! Bless my stars, what a cartridge is there!
With a wadding of rose-leaves and ribbons and hair,—
All crammed in one verse to go off at a shot!
“Were there ever such sweethearts?” Of course there were not!

And next,—what a load! it will split the old gun,—
Three fingers,—four fingers,—five fingers of fun!
Come tell me, gray sages, for mischief and noise
Was there ever a lot like us fellows, “The Boys”?

Bump I bump! down the staircase the cannon-ball goes,—
Aha, old Professor! Look out for your toes!
Don't think, my poor Tutor, to sleep in your bed,—
Two "Boys"—'twenty-niners—room over your head!

Remember the nights when the tar-barrel blazed!
From red "Massachusetts" the war-cry was raised;
And "Hollis " and "Stoughton " reechoed the call;
Till P——poked his head out of Holworthy Hall!

Old P——, as we called him,—at fifty or so,—
Not exactly a bud, but not quite in full blow;
In ripening manhood, suppose we should say,
Just nearing his prime, as we boys are to-day!

Oh say, can you look through the vista of age
To the time when old Morse drove the regular stage?
When Lyon told tales of the long-vanished years,
And Lenox crept round with the rings in his ears?

And dost thou, my brother, remember indeed
The days of our dealings with Willard and Read?
When "Dolly" was kicking and running away,
And punch came up smoking on Fillebrown's tray?

But where are the Tutors, my brother, oh tell!—
And where the Professors, remembered so well?
The sturdy old Grecian of Holworthy Hall,
And Latin, and Logic, and Hebrew, and all?

"They are dead, the old fellows " (we called them so then,
Though we since have found out they were lusty young men).
They are dead, do you tell me?—but how do you know?
You've filled once too often. I doubt if it's so.

I'm thinking. I'm thinking. Is this 'sixty-eight?

ONCE MORE

It's not quite so clear. It admits of debate.
I may have been dreaming. I rather incline
To think—yes, I'm certain—it is 'twenty-nine!

“By Zhorzhe!—as friend Sales is accustomed to cry,—
You tell me they're dead, but I know it's a lie!
Is Jackson not President?—What was 't you said?
It can't be; you're joking; what,—all of 'em dead?

Jim,—Harry,—Fred,—Isaac,—all gone from our side?
They could n't have left us,—no, not if they tried.
Look,—there 's our old Prises,—he can't find his text;
See,—P———rubs his leg, as he growls out “The next!”

I told you 't was nonsense. Joe, give us a song!
Go harness up “Dolly,” and fetch her along!—
Dead! Dead! You false graybeard, I swear they are not!
Hurrah for Old Hickory!—Oh, I forgot!

Well, one we have with us (how could he contrive
To deal with us youngsters and still to survive?)
Who wore for our guidance authority's robe,—
No wonder he took to the study of Job!

And now, as my load was uncommonly large,
Let me taper it off with a classical charge;
When that has gone off, I shall drop my old gun—
And then stand at ease, for my service is done.

*Bibamus ad Classem vocatam “The Boys”
Et eorum Tutorem cui nomen est “Noyes”;
Et floreat, valeant, vigeant tam,
Non Peircius ipse enumeret quam!*

THE OLD CRUISER

1869

HERE 's the old cruiser, 'Twenty-nine,
Forty times she 's crossed the line;
Same old masts and sails and crew,
Tight and tough and as good as new.

Into the harbor she bravely steers
Just as she 's done for these forty years,
Over her anchor goes, splash and clang!
Down her sails drop, rattle and bang!

Comes a vessel out of the dock
Fresh and spry as a fighting-cock,
Feathered with sails and spurred with steam,
Heading out of the classic stream.

Crew of a hundred all aboard,
Every man as fine as a lord.
Gay they look and proud they feel,
Bowling along on even keel.

On they float with wind and tide,—
Gain at last the old ship's side;
Every man looks down in turn,—
Reads the name that's on her stern.

“Twenty-nine!—Diable you say!
That was in Skipper Kirkland's day!
What was the Flying Dutchman's name?
This old rover must be the same.

“Ho! you Boatswain that walks the deck,
How does it happen you're not a wreck?
One and another have come to grief,
How have you dodged by rock and reef?”

Boatswain, lifting one knowing lid,
Hitches his breeches and shifts his quid
“Hey? What is it? Who 's come to grief
Louder, young swab, I 'm a little deaf.”

“I say, old fellow, what keeps your boat
With all you jolly old boys afloat,
When scores of vessels as good as she
Have swallowed the salt of the bitter sea?”

“Many a crew from many a craft
Goes drifting by on a broken raft
Pieced from a vessel that clove the brine
Taller and prouder than 'Twenty-nine.

“Some capsized in an angry breeze,
Some were lost in the narrow seas,
Some on snags and some on sands
Struck and perished and lost their hands.

“Tell us young ones, you gray old man,
What is your secret, if you can.
We have a ship as good as you,
Show us how to keep our crew.”

So in his ear the youngster cries;
Then the gray Boatswain straight replies:—
“All your crew be sure you know,—
Never let one of your shipmates go.

“If he leaves you, change your tack,

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Follow him close and fetch him back;
When you've hauled him in at last,
Grapple his flipper and hold him fast.

“If you've wronged him, speak him fair,
Say you're sorry and make it square;
If he's wronged you, wink so tight
None of you see what 's plain in sight.

“When the world goes hard and wrong,
Lend a hand to help him along;
When his stockings have holes to darn,
Don't you grudge him your ball of yarn.

“Once in a twelvemonth, come what may,
Anchor your ship in a quiet bay,
Call all hands and read the log,
And give 'em a taste of grub and grog.

“Stick to each other through thick and thin;
All the closer as age leaks in;
Squalls will blow and clouds will frown,
But stay by your ship till you all go down!”

ADDED FOR THE ALUMNI MEETING, JUNE 29,

1869.

So the gray Boatswain of 'Twenty-nine
Piped to "The Boys" as they crossed the line;
Round the cabin sat thirty guests,
Babes of the nurse with a thousand breasts.

There were the judges, grave and grand,
Flanked by the priests on either hand;
There was the lord of wealth untold,
And the dear good fellow in broadcloth old.

Thirty men, from twenty towns,
Sires and grandsires with silvered crowns,—
Thirty school-boys all in a row,—
Bens and Georges and Bill and Joe.

In thirty goblets the wine was poured,
But threescore gathered around the board,—
For lo! at the side of every chair
A shadow hovered—we all were there!

HYMN FOR THE CLASS-MEETING

1869

THOU Gracious Power, whose mercy lends
The light of home, the smile of friends,
Our gathered flock thine arms in fold
As in the peaceful days of old.

Wilt thou not hear us while we raise,
In sweet accord of solemn praise,
The voices that have mingled long
In joyous flow of mirth and song?

For all the blessings life has brought,
For all its sorrowing hours have taught,
For all we mourn, for all we keep,
The hands we clasp, the loved that sleep;

The noontide sunshine of the past,
These brief, bright moments fading fast,
The stars that gild our darkening years,
The twilight ray from holier spheres;

We thank thee, Father! let thy grace
Our narrowing circle still embrace,
Thy mercy shed its heavenly store,
Thy peace be with us evermore!

EVEN-SONG.

1870

IT may be, yes, it must be, Time that brings
An end to mortal things,
That sends the beggar Winter in the train
Of Autumn's burdened wain,—
Time, that is heir of all our earthly state,
And knoweth well to wait
Till sea hath turned to shore and shore to sea,
If so it need must be,
Ere he make good his claim and call his own
Old empires overthrown,—
Time, who can find no heavenly orb too large
To hold its fee in charge,
Nor any motes that fill its beam so small,
But he shall care for all,—
It may be, must be,—yes, he soon shall tire
This hand that holds the lyre.

Then ye who listened in that earlier day
When to my careless lay
I matched its chords and stole their first-born thrill,
With untaught rudest skill
Vexing a treble from the slender strings
Thin as the locust sings
When the shrill-crying child of summer's heat
Pipes from its leafy seat,
The dim pavilion of embowering green
Beneath whose shadowy screen
The small sopranist tries his single note
Against the song-bird's throat,
And all the echoes listen, but in vain;
They hear no answering strain,—
Then ye who listened in that earlier day
Shall sadly turn away,

Saying, "The fire burns low, the hearth is cold
That warmed our blood of old;
Cover its embers and its half-burnt brands,

And let us stretch our hands
Over a brighter and fresh-kindled flame;
Lo, this is not the same,
The joyous singer of our morning time,
Flushed high with lusty rhyme!
Speak kindly, for he bears a human heart,
But whisper him apart,—
Tell him the woods their autumn robes have shed
And all their birds have fled,
And shouting winds unbuild the naked nests
They warmed with patient breasts;
Tell him the sky is dark, the summer o'er,
And bid him sing no more!”

Ah, welladay! if words so cruel-kind
A listening ear might find!
But who that hears the music in his soul
Of rhythmic waves that roll
Crested with gleams of fire, and as they flow
Stir all the deeps below
Till the great pearls no calm might ever reach
Leap glistening on the beach,—
Who that has known the passion and the pain,
The rush through heart and brain,
The joy so like a pang his hand is pressed
Hard on his throbbing breast,
When thou, whose smile is life and bliss and fame
Hast set his pulse aflame,
Muse of the lyre! can say farewell to thee?
Alas! and must it be?

In many a clime, in many a stately tongue,
The mighty bards have sung;
To these the immemorial thrones belong
And purple robes of song;
Yet the slight minstrel loves the slender tone
His lips may call his own,
And finds the measure of the verse more sweet,
Timed by his pulse's beat,
Than all the hymnings of the laurelled throng.
Say not I do him wrong,
For Nature spoils her warblers,—them she feeds
In lotus-growing meads
And pours them subtle draughts from haunted streams
That fill their souls with dreams.

Full well I know the gracious mother's wiles
And dear delusive smiles!
No callow fledgling of her singing brood
But tastes that witching food,
And hearing overhead the eagle's wing,
And how the thrushes sing,
Vents his exiguous chirp, and from his nest
Flaps forth—we know the rest.
I own the weakness of the tuneful kind,—
Are not all harpers blind?
I sang too early, must I sing too late?
The lengthening shadows wait
The first pale stars of twilight,—yet how sweet
The flattering whisper's cheat,—
“Thou hast the fire no evening chill can tame,
Whose coals outlast its flame!”

Farewell, ye carols of the laughing morn,
Of earliest sunshine born!
The sower flings the seed and looks not back
Along his furrowed track;
The reaper leaves the stalks for other hands
To gird with circling bands;
The wind, earth's careless servant, truant-born,
Blows clean the beaten corn
And quits the thresher's floor, and goes his way
To sport with ocean's spray;
The headlong—stumbling rivulet scrambling down
To wash the sea-girt town,
Still babbling of the green and billowy waste
Whose salt he longs to taste,
Ere his warm wave its chilling clasp may feel
Has twirled the miller's wheel.

The song has done its task that makes us bold
With secrets else untold,—
And mine has run its errand; through the dews
I tracked the flying Muse;
The daughter of the morning touched my lips
With roseate finger-tips;
Whether I would or would not, I must sing
With the new choirs of spring;
Now, as I watch the fading autumn day
And trill my softened lay,
I think of all that listened, and of one
For whom a brighter sun

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Dawned at high summer's noon. Ah, comrades dear,
Are not all gathered here?
Our hearts have answered.—Yes! they hear our call:
All gathered here! all! all!

THE SMILING LISTENER

1871

PRECISELY. I see it. You all want to say
That a tear is too sad and a laugh is too gay;
You could stand a faint smile, you could manage a sigh,
But you value your ribs, and you don't want to cry.

And why at our feast of the clasping of hands
Need we turn on the stream of our lachrymal glands?
Though we see the white breakers of age on our bow,
Let us take a good pull in the jolly-boat now!

It's hard if a fellow cannot feel content
When a banquet like this does n't cost him a cent,
When his goblet and plate he may empty at will,
And our kind Class Committee will settle the bill.

And here's your old friend, the identical bard
Who has rhymed and recited you verse by the yard
Since the days of the empire of Andrew the First
Till you 're full to the brim and feel ready to burst.

It's awful to think of,—how year after year
With his piece in his pocket he waits for you here;
No matter who's missing, there always is one
To lug out his manuscript, sure as a gun.

“Why won't he stop writing?” Humanity cries
The answer is briefly, “He can't if he tries;
He has played with his foolish old feather so long,
That the goose-quill in spite of him cackles in song.”

You have watched him with patience from morning to dusk
Since the tassel was bright o'er the green of the husk,

And now—it 's too bad—it 's a pitiful job—
He has shelled the ripe ear till he's come to the cob.

I see one face beaming—it listens so well
There must be some music yet left in my shell—
The wine of my soul is not thick on the lees;
One string is unbroken, one friend I can please!

Dear comrade, the sunshine of seasons gone by
Looks out from your tender and tear-moistened eye,
A pharos of love on an ice-girdled coast,—
Kind soul!—Don't you hear me?—He's deaf as a post!

Can it be one of Nature's benevolent tricks
That you grow hard of hearing as I grow prolix?
And that look of delight which would angels beguile
Is the deaf man's prolonged unintelligent smile?

Ah! the ear may grow dull, and the eye may wax dim,
But they still know a classmate—they can't mistake him;
There is something to tell us, "That's one of our band,"
Though we groped in the dark for a touch of his hand.

Well, Time with his snuffers is prowling about
And his shaky old fingers will soon snuff us out;
There's a hint for us all in each pendulum tick,
For we're low in the tallow and long in the wick.

You remember Rossini—you 've been at the play?
How his overture-endings keep crashing away
Till you think, "It 's all over—it can't but stop now—
That 's the screech and the bang of the final bow-wow."

And you find you 're mistaken; there 's lots more to come,
More banging, more screeching of fiddle and drum,
Till when the last ending is finished and done,
You feel like a horse when the winning-post 's won.

So I, who have sung to you, merry or sad,
Since the days when they called me a promising lad,
Though I 've made you more rhymes than a tutor could scan,
Have a few more still left, like the razor-strop man.

Now pray don't be frightened—I 'm ready to stop
My galloping anapests' clatter and pop—
In fact, if you say so, retire from to-day
To the garret I left, on a poet's half-pay.

And yet—I can't help it—perhaps—who can tell?
You might miss the poor singer you treated so well,
And confess you could stand him five minutes or so,
“It was so like old times we remember, you know.”

'T is not that the music can signify much,
But then there are chords that awake with a touch,—
And our hearts can find echoes of sorrow and joy
To the winch of the minstrel who hails from Savoy.

So this hand-organ tune that I cheerfully grind
May bring the old places and faces to mind,
And seen in the light of the past we recall
The flowers that have faded bloom fairest of all!

OUR SWEET SINGER

J. A.

1872

ONE memory trembles on our lips;
It throbs in every breast;
In tear-dimmed eyes, in mirth's eclipse,
The shadow stands confessed.

O silent voice, that cheered so long
Our manhood's marching day,
Without thy breath of heavenly song,
How weary seems the way!

Vain every pictured phrase to tell
Our sorrowing heart's desire,—
The shattered harp, the broken shell,
The silent unstrung lyre;

For youth was round us while he sang;
It glowed in every tone;
With bridal chimes the echoes rang,
And made the past our own.

Oh blissful dream! Our nursery joys
We know must have an end,
But love and friendship's broken toys
May God's good angels mend!

The cheering smile, the voice of mirth
And laughter's gay surprise

That please the children born of earth.
Why deem that Heaven denies?

Methinks in that refulgent sphere
That knows not sun or moon,
An earth-born saint might long to hear
One verse of "Bonny Doon";

Or walking through the streets of gold
In heaven's unclouded light,
His lips recall the song of old
And hum "The sky is bright."

And can we smile when thou art dead?
Ah, brothers, even so!
The rose of summer will be red,
In spite of winter's snow.

Thou wouldst not leave us all in gloom
Because thy song is still,
Nor blight the banquet-garland's bloom
With grief's untimely chill.

The sighing wintry winds complain,—
The singing bird has flown,—
Hark! heard I not that ringing strain,
That clear celestial tone?

How poor these pallid phrases seem,
How weak this tinkling line,
As warbles through my waking dream
That angel voice of thine!

Thy requiem asks a sweeter lay;
It falters on my tongue;
For all we vainly strive to say,
Thou shouldst thyself have sung!

H. C. M. H. S. J. K. W.

1873

THE dirge is played, the throbbing death-peal rung,
The sad-voiced requiem sung;
On each white urn where memory dwells
The wreath of rustling immortelles
Our loving hands have hung,
And balmiest leaves have strown and tenderest blossoms flung.

The birds that filled the air with songs have flown,
The wintry blasts have blown,
And these for whom the voice of spring
Bade the sweet choirs their carols sing
Sleep in those chambers lone
Where snows untrodden lie, unheard the night-winds moan.

We clasp them all in memory, as the vine
Whose running stems intwine
The marble shaft, and steal around
The lowly stone, the nameless mound;
With sorrowing hearts resign
Our brothers true and tried, and close our broken line.

How fast the lamps of life grow dim and die
Beneath our sunset sky!
Still fading, as along our track
We cast our saddened glances back,
And while we vainly sigh
The shadowy day recedes, the starry night draws nigh.

As when from pier to pier across the tide
With even keel we glide,
The lights we left along the shore
Grow less and less, while more, yet more
New vistas open wide

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Of fair illumined streets and casements golden-eyed.

Each closing circle of our sunlit sphere
Seems to bring heaven more near
Can we not dream that those we love
Are listening in the world above
And smiling as they hear
The voices known so well of friends that still are dear?

Does all that made us human fade away
With this dissolving clay?
Nay, rather deem the blessed isles
Are bright and gay with joyous smiles,
That angels have their play,
And saints that tire of song may claim their holiday.

All else of earth may perish; love alone
Not heaven shall find outgrown!
Are they not here, our spirit guests,
With love still throbbing in their breasts?
Once more let flowers be strown.
Welcome, ye shadowy forms, we count you still our own!

WHAT I HAVE COME FOR

1873

I HAVE come with my verses—I think I may claim
It is not the first time I have tried on the same.
They were puckered in rhyme, they were wrinkled in wit;
But your hearts were so large that they made them a fit.

I have come—not to tease you with more of my rhyme,
But to feel as I did in the blessed old time;
I want to hear him with the Brobdingnag laugh—
We count him at least as three men and a half.

I have come to meet judges so wise and so grand
That I shake in my shoes while they're shaking my hand;
And the prince among merchants who put back the crown
When they tried to enthrone him the King of the Town.

I have come to see George—Yes, I think there are four,
If they all were like these I could wish there were more.
I have come to see one whom we used to call “Jim,”
I want to see—oh, don't I want to see him?

I have come to grow young—on my word I declare
I have thought I detected a change in my hair!
One hour with “The Boys ” will restore it to brown—
And a wrinkle or two I expect to rub down.

Yes, that's what I've come for, as all of us come;
When I meet the dear Boys I could wish I were dumb.
You asked me, you know, but it's spoiling the fun;
I have told what I came for; my ditty is done.

OUR BANKER

1874

OLD TIME, in whose bank we deposit our notes,
Is a miser who always wants guineas for groats;
He keeps all his customers still in arrears
By lending them minutes and charging them years.

The twelvemonth rolls round and we never forget
On the counter before us to pay him our debt.
We reckon the marks he has chalked on the door,
Pay up and shake hands and begin a new score.

How long he will lend us, how much we may owe,
No angel will tell us, no mortal may know.
At fivescore, at fourscore, at threescore and ten,
He may close the account with a stroke of his pen.

This only we know,—amid sorrows and joys
Old Time has been easy and kind with “The Boys.”
Though he must have and will have and does have his pay,
We have found him good-natured enough in his way.

He never forgets us, as others will do,—
I am sure he knows me, and I think he knows you,
For I see on your foreheads a mark that he lends
As a sign he remembers to visit his friends.

In the shape of a classmate (a wig on his crown,—
His day-book and ledger laid carefully down)
He has welcomed us yearly, a glass in his hand,
And pledged the good health of our brotherly band.

WHAT I HAVE COME FOR

He 's a thief, we must own, but how many there be
That rob us less gently and fairly than he
He has stripped the green leaves that were over us all,
But they let in the sunshine as fast as they fall.

Young beauties may ravish the world with a glance
As they languish in song, as they float in the dance,—
They are grandmothers now we remember as girls,
And the comely white cap takes the place of the curls.

But the sighing and moaning and groaning are o'er,
We are pining and moping and sleepless no more,
And the hearts that were thumping like ships on the rocks
Beat as quiet and steady as meeting-house clocks.

The trump of ambition, loud sounding and shrill,
May blow its long blast, but the echoes are still,
The spring-tides are past, but no billow may reach
The spoils they have landed far up on the beach.

We see that Time robs us, we know that he cheats,
But we still find a charm in his pleasant deceits,
While he leaves the remembrance of all that was best,
Love, friendship, and hope, and the promise of rest.

Sweet shadows of twilight! how calm their repose,
While the dewdrops fall soft in the breast of the rose!
How blest to the toiler his hour of release
When the vesper is heard with its whisper of peace!

Then here's to the wrinkled old miser, our friend;
May he send us his bills to the century's end,
And lend us the moments no sorrow alloys,
Till he squares his account with the last of "The Boys."

FOR CLASS MEETING

1875

IT is a pity and a shame—alas! alas! I know it is,
To tread the trodden grapes again, but so it has been,
so it is;
The purple vintage long is past, with ripened
clusters bursting so
They filled the wine-vats to the brim,—'t is strange
you will be thirsting so!

Too well our faithful memory tells what might be
rhymed or sung about,
For all have sighed and some have wept since last
year's snows were flung about;
The beacon flame that fired the sky, the modest
ray that gladdened us,
A little breath has quenched their light, and deep-
ening shades have saddened us.

No more our brother's life is ours for cheering or
for grieving us,
One only sadness they bequeathed, the sorrow of
their leaving us;
Farewell! Farewell!—I turn the leaf I read my
chiming measure in;
Who knows but something still is there a friend
may find a pleasure in?
For who can tell by what he likes what other
people's fancies are?
How all men think the best of wives their own
particular Nancies are?
If what I sing you brings a smile, you will not stop
to catechise,
Nor read Bceotia's lumbering line with nicely scan-
ning Attic eyes.

Perhaps the alabaster box that Mary broke so

lovingly,
While Judas looked so sternly on, the Master so
approvingly,
Was not so fairly wrought as those that Pilate's
wife and daughters had,
Or many a dame of Judah's line that drank of
Jordan's waters had.

Perhaps the balm that cost so dear, as some
remarked officiously,
The precious nard that filled the room with
fragrance so deliciously,
So oft recalled in storied page and sung in verse
melodious,
The dancing girl had thought too cheap,—that
daughter of Herodias.

Where now are all the mighty deeds that Herod
boasted loudest of?
Where now the flashing jewelry the tetrarch's wife
was proudest of?
Yet still to hear how Mary loved, all tribes of men
are listening,
And still the sinful woman's tears like stars
heaven are glistening.

'T is not the gift our hands have brought, the love
it is we bring with it,—
The minstrel's lips may shape the song, his heart
in tune must sing with it;
And so we love the simple lays, and wish we might
have more of them,
Our poet brothers sing for us,—there must be half
a score of them.

It may be that of fame and name our voices once
were emulous,—
With deeper thoughts, with tenderer throbs their
softening tones are tremulous;
The dead seem listening as of old, ere friendship
was bereft of them;
The living wear a kinder smile, the remnant that
is left of them.

Though on the once unfurrowed brows the harrow-
teeth of Time may show,
Though all the strain of crippling years the halting
feet of rhyme may show,
We look and hear with melting hearts, for what
we all remember is
The morn of Spring, nor heed how chill the sky of
gray November is.

Thanks to the gracious powers above from all mankind
that singled us,
And dropped the pearl of friendship in the cup they
kindly mingled us,
And bound us in a wreath of flowers with hoops of
steel knit under it;—
Nor time, nor space, nor chance, nor change, nor
death himself shall sunder it!

“AD AMICOS”

1876

“Dumque virent genua
Et decet, obducta solvatur fonte senectus.”

THE muse of boyhood's fervid hour
Grows tame as skies get chill and hazy;
Where once she sought a passion-flower,
She only hopes to find a daisy.
Well, who the changing world bewails?
Who asks to have it stay unaltered?
Shall grown-up kittens chase their tails?
Shall colts be never shod or haltered?

Are we “The Boys” that used to make
The tables ring with noisy follies?
Whose deep-lunged laughter oft would shake
The ceiling with its thunder-volleys?
Are we the youths with lips unshorn,
At beauty's feet unwrinkled suitors,
Whose memories reach tradition's morn,—
The days of prehistoric tutors?

“The Boys ” we knew,—but who are these
Whose heads might serve for Plutarch's sages,
Or Fox's martyrs, if you please,
Or hermits of the dismal ages?
“The Boys” we knew—can these be those?
Their cheeks with morning's blush were painted;—
Where are the Harrys, Jims, and Joes
With whom we once were well acquainted?

If we are they, we're not the same;
If they are we, why then they're masking;
Do tell us, neighbor What 's—your—name,

Who are you?—What's the use of asking?
You once were George, or Bill, or Ben;
There's you, yourself—there 's you, that other—
I know you now—I knew you then—
You used to be your younger brother!

You both are all our own to-day,—
But ah! I hear a warning whisper;
Yon roseate hour that flits away
Repeats the Roman's sad *paulisper*.
Come back! come back! we've need of you
To pay you for your word of warning;
We'll bathe your wings in brighter dew
Than ever wet the lids of morning!

Behold this cup; its mystic wine
No alien's lip has ever tasted;
The blood of friendship's clinging vine,
Still flowing, flowing, yet unwasted
Old Time forgot his running sand
And laid his hour-glass down to fill it,
And Death himself with gentle hand
Has touched the chalice, not to spill it.

Each bubble rounding at the brim
Is rainbowed with its magic story;
The shining days with age grown dim
Are dressed again in robes of glory;
In all its freshness spring returns
With song of birds and blossoms tender;
Once more the torch of passion burns,
And youth is here in all its splendor!

Hope swings her anchor like a toy,
Love laughs and shows the silver arrow
We knew so well as man and boy,—
The shaft that stings through bone and marrow;
Again our kindling pulses beat,
With tangled curls our fingers dally,
And bygone beauties smile as sweet
As fresh-blown lilies of the valley.

O blessed hour! we may forget
Its wreaths, its rhymes, its songs, its laughter,
But not the loving eyes we met,
Whose light shall gild the dim hereafter.
How every heart to each grows warm!
Is one in sunshine's ray? We share it.
Is one in sorrow's blinding storm?
A look, a word, shall help him bear it.

“The Boys” we were, “The Boys” we 'll be
As long as three, as two, are creeping;
Then here 's to him—ah! which is he?—
Who lives till all the rest are sleeping;
A life with tranquil comfort blest,
The young man's health, the rich man's plenty,
All earth can give that earth has best,
And heaven at fourscore years and twenty.

HOW NOT TO SETTLE IT

1877

I LIKE, at times, to hear the steeples' chimes
With sober thoughts impressively that mingle;
But sometimes, too, I rather like—don't you?—
To hear the music of the sleigh bells' jingle.

I like full well the deep resounding swell
Of mighty symphonies with chords inwoven;
But sometimes, too, a song of Burns—don't you?
After a solemn storm—blast of Beethoven.

Good to the heels the well-worn slipper feels
When the tired player shuffles off the buskin;
A page of Hood may do a fellow good
After a scolding from Carlyle or Ruskin.

Some works I find,—say Watts upon the Mind,—
No matter though at first they seemed amusing,
Not quite the same, but just a little tame
After some five or six times' reperusing.

So, too, at times when melancholy rhymes
Or solemn speeches sober down a dinner,
I've seen it 's true, quite often,—have n't you?—
The best-fed guests perceptibly grow thinner.

Better some jest (in proper terms expressed)
Or story (strictly moral) even if musty,
Or song we sung when these old throats were young,—
Something to keep our souls from getting rusty.

The poorest scrap from memory's ragged lap
Comes like an heirloom from a dear dead mother—
Hush! there's a tear that has no business here,
A half-formed sigh that ere its birth we smother.

We cry, we laugh; ah, life is half and half,
Now bright and joyous as a song of Herrick's,
Then chill and bare as funeral-minded Blair;
As fickle as a female in hysterics.

If I could make you cry I would n't try;
If you have hidden smiles I'd like to find them,
And that although, as well I ought to know,
The lips of laughter have a skull behind them.

Yet when I think we may be on the brink
Of having Freedom's banner to dispose of,
All crimson-hued, because the Nation would
Insist on cutting its own precious nose off,

I feel indeed as if we rather need
A sermon such as preachers tie a text on.
If Freedom dies because a ballot lies,
She earns her grave; 't is time to call the sexton!

But if a fight can make the matter right,
Here are we, classmates, thirty men of mettle;
We're strong and tough, we've lived nigh long enough,—
What if the Nation gave it us to settle?

The tale would read like that illustrious deed
When Curtius took the leap the gap that filled in,
Thus: "Fivescore years, good friends, as it appears,
At last this people split on Hayes and Tilden.

“One half cried, 'See! the choice is S. J. T.!'
And one half swore as stoutly it was t' other;
Both drew the knife to save the Nation's life
By wholesale vivisection of each other.

“Then rose in mass that monumental Class,—
'Hold! hold!' they cried, 'give us, give us the daggers!'
'Content! content!' exclaimed with one consent
The gaunt ex-rebels and the carpet-baggers.

“Fifteen each side, the combatants divide,
So nicely balanced are their predilections;
And first of all a tear-drop each lets fall,
A tribute to their obsolete affections.

“Man facing man, the sanguine strife began,
Jack, Jim and Joe against Tom, Dick and Harry,
Each several pair its own account to square,
Till both were down or one stood solitary.

“And the great fight raged furious all the night
Till every integer was made a fraction;
Reader, wouldst know what history has to show
As net result of the above transaction?

“Whole coat-tails, four; stray fragments, several score;
A heap of spectacles; a deaf man's trumpet;
Six lawyers' briefs; seven pocket-handkerchiefs;
Twelve canes wherewith the owners used to stump it;

“Odd rubber-shoes; old gloves of different hues;
Tax-bills,—unpaid,—and several empty purses;
And, saved from harm by some protecting charm,
A printed page with Smith's immortal verses;

“Trifles that claim no very special name,—

Some useful, others chiefly ornamental;
Pins, buttons, rings, and other trivial things,
With various wrecks, capillary and dental.

“Also, one flag,—’t was nothing but a rag,
And what device it bore it little matters;
Red, white, and blue, but rent all through and through,
‘Union forever’ torn to shreds and tatters.

“They fought so well not one was left to tell
Which got the largest share of cuts and slashes;
When heroes meet, both sides are bound to beat;
They telescoped like cars in railroad smashes.

“So the great split that baffled human wit
And might have cost the lives of twenty millions,
As all may see that know the rule of three,
Was settled just as well by these civilians.

“As well. Just so. Not worse, not better. No,
Next morning found the Nation still divided;
Since all were slain, the inference is plain
They left the point they fought for undecided.”

If not quite true, as I have told it you,
This tale of mutual extermination,
To minds perplexed with threats of what comes next,
Perhaps may furnish food for contemplation.

To cut men's throats to help them count their votes
Is asinine—nay, worse—ascidian folly;
Blindness like that would scare the mole and bat,
And make the liveliest monkey melancholy.

I say once more, as I have said before,

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If voting for our Tildens and our Hayeses
Means only fight, then, Liberty, good night!
Pack up your ballot-box and go to blazes

Unfurl your blood-red flags, you murderous hags,
You petroleuses of Paris, fierce and foamy;
We'll sell our stock in Plymouth's blasted rock,
Pull up our stakes and migrate to Dahomey!

THE LAST SURVIVOR

1878

YES! the vacant chairs tell sadly we are going, going fast,
And the thought comes strangely o'er me, who will live to be the last?
When the twentieth century's sunbeams climb the far-off eastern hill,
With his ninety winters burdened, will he greet the morning still?

Will he stand with Harvard's nurslings when they hear their mother's call
And the old and young are gathered in the many alcoved hall?
Will he answer to the summons when they range themselves in line
And the young mustachioed marshal calls out "Class of '29"?

Methinks I see the column as its lengthened ranks appear
In the sunshine of the morrow of the nineteen hundredth year;
Through the yard 't is creeping, winding, by the walls of dusky red,—
What shape is that which totters at the long procession's head?

Who knows this ancient graduate of fourscore years and ten,—
What place he held, what name he bore among the sons of men?
So speeds the curious question; its answer travels slow;
"T is the last of sixty classmates of seventy years ago."

His figure shows but dimly, his face I scarce can see,—
There's something that reminds me,—it looks like—is it he?
He? Who? No voice may whisper what wrinkled brow shall claim
The wreath of stars that circles our last survivor's name.

Will he be some veteran minstrel, left to pipe in feeble rhyme
All the stories and the glories of our gay and golden time?
Or some quiet, voiceless brother in whose lonely, loving breast
Fond memory broods in silence, like a dove upon her nest?

Will it be some old Emeritus, who taught so long ago
The boys that heard him lecture have heads as white as snow?
Or a pious, painful preacher, holding forth from year to year
Till his colleague got a colleague whom the young folks flocked to hear?

Will it be a rich old merchant in a square-tied white cravat,
Or select-man of a village in a pre-historic hat?
Will his dwelling be a mansion in a marble-fronted row,
Or a homestead by a hillside where the huckleberries grow?

I can see our one survivor, sitting lonely by himself,—
All his college text-books round him, ranged in order on their shelf;
There are classic "interliners" filled with learning's choicest pith,
Each *cum notis variorum, quas recensuit doctus Smith*;

Physics, metaphysics, logic, mathematics—all the lot
Every wisdom—crammed octavo he has mastered and forgot,
With the ghosts of dead professors standing guard beside them all;
And the room is fall of shadows which their lettered backs recall.

How the past spreads out in vision with its far receding train,
Like a long embroidered arras in the chambers of the brain,
From opening manhood's morning when first we learned to grieve
To the fond regretful moments of our sorrow-saddened eve!

What early shadows darkened our idle summer's joy
When death snatched roughly from us that lovely bright-eyed boy!
The years move swiftly onwards; the deadly shafts fall fast,—
Till all have dropped around him—lo, there he stands,—the last!

Their faces flit before him, some rosy-hued and fair,
Some strong in iron manhood, some worn with toil and care;
Their smiles no more shall greet him on cheeks with pleasure flushed!
The friendly hands are folded, the pleasant voices hushed!

My picture sets me dreaming; alas! and can it be

The Poetical Works of O. W. Holmes, Volume 5.

Those two familiar faces we never more may see?
In every entering footfall I think them drawing near,
With every door that opens I say, "At last they 're here!"

The willow bends unbroken when angry tempests blow,
The stately oak is levelled and all its strength laid low;
So fell that tower of manhood, undaunted, patient, strong,
White with the gathering snowflakes, who faced the storm so long.

And he,—what subtle phrases their varying light must blend
To paint as each remembers our many-featured friend!
His wit a flash auroral that laughed in every look,
His talk a sunbeam broken on the ripples of a brook,

Or, fed from thousand sources, a fountain's glittering jet,
Or careless handfuls scattered of diamond sparks unset;
Ah, sketch him, paint him, mould him in every shape you will,
He was himself—the only—the one unpictured still!

Farewell! our skies are darkened and—yet the stars will shine,
We 'll close our ranks together and still fall into line
Till one is left, one only, to mourn for all the rest;
And Heaven bequeath their memories to him who loves us best!

THE ARCHBISHOP AND GIL BLAS

A MODERNIZED VERSION

1879

I DON'T think I feel much older; I'm aware I'm rather gray,
But so are many young folks; I meet 'em every day.
I confess I 'm more particular in what I eat and drink,
But one's taste improves with culture; that is all it means, I think.

Can you read as once you used to? Well, the printing is so bad,
No young folks' eyes can read it like the books that once we had.
Are you quite as quick of hearing? Please to say that once again.
Don't I use plain words, your Reverence? Yes, I often use a cane,

But it's not because I need it,—no, I always liked a stick;
And as one might lean upon it, 't is as well it should be thick.
Oh, I'm smart, I'm spry, I'm lively,—I can walk, yes, that I can,
On the days I feel like walking, just as well as you, young man!

Don't you get a little sleepy after dinner every day?
Well, I doze a little, sometimes, but that always was my way.
Don't you cry a little easier than some twenty years ago?
Well, my heart is very tender, but I think 't was always so.

Don't you find it sometimes happens that you can't recall a name?
Yes, I know such lots of people,—but my memory 's not to blame.
What! You think my memory's failing! Why, it's just as bright and clear,
I remember my great-grandma! She's been dead these sixty year!

Is your voice a little trembly? Well, it may be, now and then,
But I write as well as ever with a good old-fashioned pen;

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It 's the Gillotts make the trouble,—not at all my finger—ends,—
That is why my hand looks shaky when I sign for dividends.

Don't you stoop a little, walking? It 's a way I 've always had,
I have always been round—shouldered, ever since I was a lad.
Don't you hate to tie your shoe—strings? Yes, I own it—that is true.
Don't you tell old stories over? I am not aware I do.

Don't you stay at home of evenings ? Don't you love a cushioned seat
In a corner, by the fireside, with your slippers on your feet?
Don't you wear warm fleecy flannels ? Don't you muffle up your throat
Don't you like to have one help you when you're putting on your coat?

Don't you like old books you've dogs—eared, you can't remember when?
Don't you call it late at nine o'clock and go to bed at ten?
How many cronies can you count of all you used to know
Who called you by your Christian name some fifty years ago?

How look the prizes to you that used to fire your brain?
You've reared your mound—how high is it above the level plain?
You 've drained the brimming golden cup that made your fancy reel,
You've slept the giddy potion off,—now tell us how you feel!

You've watched the harvest ripening till every stem was cropped,
You 've seen the rose of beauty fade till every petal dropped,
_You've told your thought, you 've done your task, you've tracked your
dial round,_
—I backing down! Thank Heaven, not yet! I'm hale and brisk and sound,

And good for many a tussle, as you shall live to see;
My shoes are not quite ready yet,—don't think you're rid of me!
Old Parr was in his lusty prime when he was older far,
And where will you be if I live to beat old Thomas Parr?

_Ah well,—I know,—at every age life has a certain charm,—
You're going? Come, permit me, please, I beg you'll take my arm.
I take your arm! Why take your arm? I 'd thank you to be told

I 'm old enough to walk alone, but not so _very_ old!

THE SHADOWS

1880

“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 merriment'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 alcoves were piled.

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 flitted the years; there were thirty that came;
“The Boys” they were still, and they answered 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 gathered 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 crossing the stream—
Lo! the Shadows! the Shadows! room—room for them all!

BENJAMIN PEIRCE

ASTRONOMER, MATHEMATICIAN. 1809–1890

1881

FOR him the Architect of all
Unroofed our planet's starlit hall;
Through voids unknown to worlds unseen
His clearer vision rose serene.

With us on earth he walked by day,
His midnight path how far away!
We knew him not so well who knew
The patient eyes his soul looked through;

For who his untrod realm could share
Of us that breathe this mortal air,
Or camp in that celestial tent
Whose fringes gild our firmament?

How vast the workroom where he brought
The viewless implements of thought!
The wit how subtle, how profound,
That Nature's tangled webs unwound;

That through the clouded matrix saw
The crystal planes of shaping law,
Through these the sovereign skill that planned,—
The Father's care, the Master's hand!

To him the wandering stars revealed
The secrets in their cradle sealed

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The far-off, frozen sphere that swings
Through ether, zoned with lucid rings;

The orb that rolls in dim eclipse
Wide wheeling round its long ellipse,—
His name Urania writes with these
And stamps it on her Pleiades.

We knew him not? Ah, well we knew
The manly soul, so brave, so true,
The cheerful heart that conquered age,
The childlike silver-bearded sage.

No more his tireless thought explores
The azure sea with golden shores;
Rest, wearied frame I the stars shall keep
A loving watch where thou shalt sleep.

Farewell! the spirit needs must rise,
So long a tenant of the skies,—
Rise to that home all worlds above
Whose sun is God, whose light is love.

IN THE TWILIGHT

1882

NOT bed-time yet! The night-winds blow,
The stars are out,—full well we know
The nurse is on the stair,
With hand of ice and cheek of snow,
And frozen lips that whisper low,
“Come, children, it is time to go
My peaceful couch to share.”

No years a wakeful heart can tire;
Not bed-time yet! Come, stir the fire
And warm your dear old hands;
Kind Mother Earth we love so well
Has pleasant stories yet to tell
Before we hear the curfew bell;
Still glow the burning brands.

Not bed-time yet! We long to know
What wonders time has yet to show,
What unborn years shall bring;
What ship the Arctic pole shall reach,
What lessons Science waits to teach,
What sermons there are left to preach.
What poems yet to sing.

What next? we ask; and is it true
The sunshine falls on nothing new,
As Israel's king declared?
Was ocean ploughed with harnessed fire?
Were nations coupled with a wire?
Did Tarshish telegraph to Tyre?
How Hiram would have stared!

And what if Sheba's curious queen,

Who came to see,—and to be seen,—
Or something new to seek,
And swooned, as ladies sometimes do,
At sights that thrilled her through and through,
Had heard, as she was “coming to,”
A locomotive's shriek,

And seen a rushing railway train
As she looked out along the plain
From David's lofty tower,—
A mile of smoke that blots the sky
And blinds the eagles as they fly
Behind the cars that thunder by
A score of leagues an hour!

See to my *fiat lux* respond
This little slumbering fire-tipped wand,—
One touch,—it bursts in flame!
Steal me a portrait from the sun,—
One look,—and to! the picture done!
Are these old tricks, King Solomon,
We lying moderns claim?

Could you have spectroscoped a star?
If both those mothers at your bar,
The cruel and the mild,
The young and tender, old and tough,
Had said, “Divide,—you're right, though rough,”—
Did old Judea know enough
To etherize the child?

These births of time our eyes have seen,
With but a few brief years between;
What wonder if the text,
For other ages doubtless true,
For coming years will never do,—
Whereof we all should like a few,
If but to see what next.

If such things have been, such may be;
Who would not like to live and see—

If Heaven may so ordain—
What waifs undreamed of, yet in store,
The waves that roll forevermore
On life's long beach may east ashore
From out the mist-clad main?

Will Earth to pagan dreams return
To find from misery's painted urn
That all save hope has flown,—
Of Book and Church and Priest bereft,
The Rock of Ages vainly cleft,
Life's compass gone, its anchor left,
Left,—lost,—in depths unknown?

Shall Faith the trodden path pursue
The *crux ansata* wearers knew
Who sleep with folded hands,
Where, like a naked, lidless eye,
The staring Nile rolls wandering by
Those mountain slopes that climb the sky
Above the drifting sands?

Or shall a nobler Faith return,
Its fanes a purer gospel learn,
With holier anthems ring,
And teach us that our transient creeds
Were but the perishable seeds
Of harvests sown for larger needs,
That ripening years shall bring?

Well, let the present do its best,
We trust our Maker for the rest,
As on our way we plod;
Our souls, full dressed in fleshly suits,
Love air and sunshine, flowers and fruits,
The daisies better than their roots
Beneath the grassy sod.

Not bed-time yet! The full-blown flower
Of all the year—this evening hour—
With friendship's flame is bright;

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Life still is sweet, the heavens are fair,
Though fields are brown and woods are bare,
And many a joy is left to share
Before we say Good-night!

And when, our cheerful evening past,
The nurse, long waiting, comes at last,
Ere on her lap we lie
In wearied nature's sweet repose,
At peace with all her waking foes,
Our lips shall murmur, ere they close,
Good-night! and not Good-by!

A LOVING-CUP SONG

1883

COME, heap the fagots! Ere we go
Again the cheerful hearth shall glow;
We 'll have another blaze, my boys!
When clouds are black and snows are white,
Then Christmas logs lend ruddy light
They stole from summer days, my boys,
They stole from summer days.

And let the Loving-Cup go round,
The Cup with blessed memories crowned,
That flows whene'er we meet, my boys;
No draught will hold a drop of sin
If love is only well stirred in
To keep it sound and sweet, my boys,
To keep it sound and sweet.

Give me, to pin upon my breast,
The blossoms twain I love the best,
A rosebud and a pink, my boys;
Their leaves shall nestle next my heart,
Their perfumed breath shall own its part
In every health we drink, my boys,
In every health we drink.

The breathing blossoms stir my blood,
Methinks I see the lilacs bud
And hear the bluebirds sing, my boys;
Why not? Yon lusty oak has seen
Full tenscore years, yet leaflets green
Peep out with every spring, my boys,
Peep out with every spring.

Old Time his rusty scythe may whet,

The unmowed grass is glowing yet
Beneath the sheltering snow, my boys;
And if the crazy dotard ask,
Is love worn out? Is life a task?
We'll bravely answer No! my boys,
We 'll bravely answer No!

For life's bright taper is the same
Love tipped of old with rosy flame
That heaven's own altar lent, my boys,
To glow in every cup we fill
Till lips are mute and hearts are still,
Till life and love are spent, my boys,
Till life and love are spent.

THE GIRDLE OF FRIENDSHIP

1884

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.

THE LYRE OF ANACREON

1885

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, winged 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,—
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!

THE OLD TUNE

THIRTY-SIXTH VARIATION

1886

THIS shred of song you bid me bring
Is snatched from fancy's embers;
Ah, when the lips forget to sing,
The faithful heart remembers!

Too swift the wings of envious Time
To wait for dallying phrases,
Or woven strands of labored rhyme
To thread their cunning mazes.

A word, a sigh, and lo, how plain
Its magic breath discloses
Our life's long vista through a lane
Of threescore summers' roses!

One language years alone can teach
Its roots are young affections
That feel their way to simplest speech
Through silent recollections.

That tongue is ours. How few the words
We need to know a brother!
As simple are the notes of birds,
Yet well they know each other.

This freezing month of ice and snow
That brings our lives together

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Lends to our year a living glow
That warms its wintry weather.

So let us meet as eve draws nigh,
And life matures and mellows,
Till Nature whispers with a sigh,
“Good–night, my dear old fellows!”

THE BROKEN CIRCLE

1887

I STOOD On Sarum's treeless plain,
The waste that careless Nature owns;
Lone tenants of her bleak domain,
Loomed huge and gray the Druid stones.

Upheaved in many a billowy mound
The sea-like, naked turf arose,
Where wandering flocks went nibbling round
The mingled graves of friends and foes.

The Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane,
This windy desert roamed in turn;
Unmoved these mighty blocks remain
Whose story none that lives may learn.

Erect, half buried, slant or prone,
These awful listeners, blind and dumb,
Hear the strange tongues of tribes unknown,
As wave on wave they go and come.

“Who are you, giants, whence and why?”
I stand and ask in blank amaze;
My soul accepts their mute reply
“A mystery, as are you that gaze.

“A silent Orpheus wrought the charm
From riven rocks their spoils to bring;
A nameless Titan lent his arm
To range us in our magic ring.

“But Time with still and stealthy stride,
That climbs and treads and levels all,
That bids the loosening keystone slide,
And topples down the crumbling wall,—

“Time, that unbuilds the quarried past,
Leans on these wrecks that press the sod;
They slant, they stoop, they fall at last,
And strew the turf their priests have trod.

“No more our altar's wreath of smoke
Floats up with morning's fragrant dew;
The fires are dead, the ring is broke,
Where stood the many stand the few.”

My thoughts had wandered far away,
Borne off on Memory's outspread wing,
To where in deepening twilight lay
The wrecks of friendship's broken ring.

Ah me! of all our goodly train
How few will find our banquet hall!
Yet why with coward lips complain
That this must lean, and that must fall?

Cold is the Druid's altar—stone,
Its vanished flame no more returns;
But ours no chilling damp has known,—
Unchanged, unchanging, still it burns.

So let our broken circle stand
A wreck, a remnant, yet the same,
While one last, loving, faithful hand
Still lives to feed its altar—flame!

THE ANGEL-THIEF

1888

TIME is a thief who leaves his tools behind him;
He comes by night, he vanishes at dawn;
We track his footsteps, but we never find him
Strong locks are broken, massive bolts are drawn,

And all around are left the bars and borers,
The splitting wedges and the prying keys,
Such aids as serve the soft-shod vault-explorers
To crack, wrench open, rifle as they please.

Ah, these are tools which Heaven in mercy lends us
When gathering rust has clenched our shackles fast,
Time is the angel-thief that Nature sends us
To break the cramping fetters of our past.

Mourn as we may for treasures he has taken,
Poor as we feel of hoarded wealth bereft,
More precious are those implements forsaken,
Found in the wreck his ruthless hands have left.

Some lever that a casket's hinge has broken
Pries off a bolt, and lo! our souls are free;
Each year some Open Sesame is spoken,
And every decade drops its master-key.

So as from year to year we count our treasure,
Our loss seems less, and larger look our gains;
Time's wrongs repaid in more than even measure,—
We lose our jewels, but we break our chains.

AFTER THE CURFEW

1889

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;
With him we still remained "The Class,"—
Without his presence what are we?

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.

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.

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.

.....

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.