

The Poetical Works of O. W. Holmes, Volume 8.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

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Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

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Bunker Hill and Other Poems

This etext was produced by David Widger widger@cecomet.net

BUNKER-HILL BATTLE

AND OTHER POEMS

1874-1877

GRANDMOTHER'S STORY OF BUNKER-HILL BATTLE

AS SHE SAW IT FROM THE BELFRY

'T is like stirring living embers when, at eighty, one remembers
All the achings and the quakings of "the times that tried men's souls";
When I talk of Whig and Tory, when I tell the Rebel story,
To you the words are ashes, but to me they're burning coals.

I had heard the muskets' rattle of the April running battle;
Lord Percy's hunted soldiers, I can see their red-coats still;
But a deadly chill comes o'er me, as the day looms up before me,
When a thousand men lay bleeding on the slopes of Bunker's Hill.

'T was a peaceful summer's morning, when the first thing gave us warning
Was the booming of the cannon from the river and the shore:
"Child," says grandma, "what 's the matter, what is all this noise and clatter?
Have those scalping Indian devils come to murder us once more?"

Poor old soul! my sides were shaking in the midst of all my quaking,
To hear her talk of Indians when the guns began to roar:
She had seen the burning village, and the slaughter and the pillage,
When the Mohawks killed her father with their bullets through his door.

Then I said, "Now, dear old granny, don't you fret and worry any,
For I'll soon come back and tell you whether this is work or play;
There can't be mischief in it, so I won't be gone a minute"—
For a minute then I started. I was gone the live-long day.

No time for bodice-lacing or for looking-glass grimacing;
Down my hair went as I hurried, tumbling half-way to my heels;
God forbid your ever knowing, when there's blood around her flowing,
How the lonely, helpless daughter of a quiet house-hold feels!

In the street I heard a thumping; and I knew it was the stumping
Of the Corporal, our old neighbor, on that wooden leg he wore,
With a knot of women round him,—it was lucky I had found him,
So I followed with the others, and the Corporal marched before.

They were making for the steeple,—the old soldier and his people;
The pigeons circled round us as we climbed the creaking stair.
Just across the narrow river—oh, so close it made me shiver!—
Stood a fortress on the hill—top that but yesterday was bare.

Not slow our eyes to find it; well we knew who stood behind it,
Though the earthwork hid them from us, and the stubborn walls were dumb
Here were sister, wife, and mother, looking wild upon each other,
And their lips were white with terror as they said, THE HOUR HAS COME!

The morning slowly wasted, not a morsel had we tasted,
And our heads were almost splitting with the cannons' deafening thrill,
When a figure tall and stately round the rampart strode sedately;
It was PRESCOTT, one since told me; he commanded on the hill.

Every woman's heart grew bigger when we saw his manly figure,
With the banyan buckled round it, standing up so straight and tall;
Like a gentleman of leisure who is strolling out for pleasure,
Through the storm of shells and cannon—shot he walked around the wall.

At eleven the streets were swarming, for the red—coats' ranks were
forming;
At noon in marching order they were moving to the piers;
How the bayonets gleamed and glistened, as we looked far down, and
listened
To the trampling and the drum—beat of the belted grenadiers!

At length the men have started, with a cheer (it seemed faint—hearted),
In their scarlet regimentals, with their knapsacks on their backs,
And the reddening, rippling water, as after a sea—fight's slaughter,
Round the barges gliding onward blushed like blood along their tracks.

So they crossed to the other border, and again they formed in order;
And the boats came back for soldiers, came for soldiers, soldiers still:
The time seemed everlasting to us women faint and fasting,—
At last they're moving, marching, marching proudly up the hill.

We can see the bright steel glancing all along the lines advancing,—
Now the front rank fires a volley,—they have thrown away their shot;
For behind their earthwork lying, all the balls above them flying,
Our people need not hurry; so they wait and answer not.

Then the Corporal, our old cripple (he would swear sometimes and tipple),
He had heard the bullets whistle (in the old French war) before,—
Calls out in words of jeering, just as if they all were hearing,—
And his wooden leg thumps fiercely on the dusty belfry floor:—

“Oh! fire away, ye villains, and earn King George's shillin's,
But ye 'll waste a ton of powder afore a 'rebel' falls;
You may bang the dirt and welcome, they're as safe as Dan'l Malcolm
Ten foot beneath the gravestone that you've splintered with your balls!”

In the hush of expectation, in the awe and trepidation
Of the dread approaching moment, we are well-nigh breathless all;
Though the rotten bars are failing on the rickety belfry railing,
We are crowding up against them like the waves against a wall.

Just a glimpse (the air is clearer), they are nearer,—nearer,—nearer,
When a flash—a curling smoke-wreath—then a crash—the steeple shakes—
The deadly truce is ended; the tempest's shroud is rended;
Like a morning mist it gathered, like a thunder-cloud it breaks!

Oh the sight our eyes discover as the blue-black smoke blows over!
The red-coats stretched in windrows as a mower rakes his hay;
Here a scarlet heap is lying, there a headlong crowd is flying
Like a billow that has broken and is shivered into spray.

Then we cried, “The troops are routed! they are beat—it can't be

doubted!

God be thanked, the fight is over!"—Ah! the grim old soldier's smile!
"Tell us, tell us why you look so?" (we could hardly speak, we shook so),
"Are they beaten? Are they beaten? ARE they beaten?"—"Wait a while."

Oh the trembling and the terror! for too soon we saw our error:
They are baffled, not defeated; we have driven them back in vain;
And the columns that were scattered, round the colors that were tattered,
Toward the sullen, silent fortress turn their belted breasts again.

All at once, as we are gazing, lo the roofs of Charlestown blazing!
They have fired the harmless village; in an hour it will be down!
The Lord in heaven confound them, rain his fire and brimstone round them,
The robbing, murdering red-coats, that would burn a peaceful town!

They are marching, stern and solemn; we can see each massive column
As they near the naked earth-mound with the slanting walls so steep.
Have our soldiers got faint-hearted, and in noiseless haste departed?
Are they panic-struck and helpless? Are they palsied or asleep?

Now! the walls they're almost under! scarce a rod the foes asunder!
Not a firelock flashed against them! up the earth-work they will swarm!
But the words have scarce been spoken, when the ominous calm is broken,
And a bellowing crash has emptied all the vengeance of the storm!

So again, with murderous slaughter, pelted backwards to the water,
Fly Pigot's running heroes and the frightened braves of Howe;
And we shout, "At last they're done for, it's their barges they have run
for:
They are beaten, beaten, beaten; and the battle 's over now!"

And we looked, poor timid creatures, on the rough old soldier's features,
Our lips afraid to question, but he knew what we would ask:
"Not sure," he said; "keep quiet,—once more, I guess, they 'll try it—
Here's damnation to the cut-throats!"—then he handed me his flask,

Saying, "Gal, you're looking shaky; have a drop of old Jamaiky;

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I 'm afeard there 'll be more trouble afore the job is done";
So I took one scorching swallow; dreadful faint I felt and hollow,
Standing there from early morning when the firing was begun.

All through those hours of trial I had watched a calm clock dial,
As the hands kept creeping, creeping,—they were creeping round to four,
When the old man said, "They're forming with their bagonets fixed for
storming:
It 's the death-grip that's a coming,—they will try the works once
more."

With brazen trumpets blaring, the flames behind them glaring,
The deadly wall before them, in close array they come;
Still onward, upward toiling, like a dragon's fold uncoiling,—
Like the rattlesnake's shrill warning the reverberating drum

Over heaps all torn and gory—shall I tell the fearful story,
How they surged above the breastwork, as a sea breaks over a deck;
How, driven, yet scarce defeated, our worn-out men retreated,
With their powder-horns all emptied, like the swimmers from a wreck?

It has all been told and painted; as for me, they say I fainted,
And the wooden-legged old Corporal stumped with me down the stair:
When I woke from dreams affrighted the evening lamps were lighted,—
On the floor a youth was lying; his bleeding breast was bare.

And I heard through all the flurry, "Send for WARREN! hurry! hurry!
Tell him here's a soldier bleeding, and he 'll come and dress his
wound!"
Ah, we knew not till the morrow told its tale of death and sorrow,
How the starlight found him stiffened on the dark and bloody ground.

Who the youth was, what his name was, where the place from which he came
was,
Who had brought him from the battle, and had left him at our door,
He could not speak to tell us; but 't was one of our brave fellows,
As the homespun plainly showed us which the dying soldier wore.

For they all thought he was dying, as they gathered round him crying,—
And they said, “Oh, how they'll miss him!” and, “What will his mother
do?”
Then, his eyelids just unclosing like a child's that has been dozing,
He faintly murmured, “Mother!”—and—I saw his eyes were blue.

“Why, grandma, how you 're winking!” Ah, my child, it sets me thinking
Of a story not like this one. Well, he somehow lived along;
So we came to know each other, and I nursed him like a—mother,
Till at last he stood before me, tall, and rosy-checked, and strong.

And we sometimes walked together in the pleasant summer weather,—
“Please to tell us what his name was?” Just your own, my little dear,—
There's his picture Copley painted: we became so well acquainted,
That—in short, that's why I 'm grandma, and you children all are here!

AT THE "ATLANTIC" DINNER

DECEMBER 15, 1874

I SUPPOSE it's myself that you're making allusion to
And bringing the sense of dismay and confusion to.
Of course some must speak,—they are always selected to,
But pray what's the reason that I am expected to?
I'm not fond of wasting my breath as those fellows do;
That want to be blowing forever as bellows do;
Their legs are uneasy, but why will you jog any
That long to stay quiet beneath the mahogany?

Why, why call me up with your battery of flatteries?
You say "He writes poetry,"—that 's what the matter is
"It costs him no trouble—a pen full of ink or two
And the poem is done in the time of a wink or two;
As for thoughts—never mind—take the ones that lie uppermost,
And the rhymes used by Milton and Byron and Tupper most;
The lines come so easy! at one end he jingles 'em,
At the other with capital letters he shingles 'em,—
Why, the thing writes itself, and before he's half done with it
He hates to stop writing, he has such good fun with it!"

Ah, that is the way in which simple ones go about
And draw a fine picture of things they don't know about!
We all know a kitten, but come to a catamount
The beast is a stranger when grown up to that amount,
(A stranger we rather prefer should n't visit us,
A *_felis_* whose advent is far from felicitous.)
The boy who can boast that his trap has just got a mouse
Must n't draw it and write underneath "hippopotamus";
Or say unvarnishedly, "This is an elephant,"—
Don't think, let me beg, these examples irrelevant,—
What they mean is just this—that a thing to be painted well
Should always be something with which we're acquainted well.

You call on your victim for "things he has plenty of,—
Those copies of verses no doubt at least twenty of;

His desk is crammed full, for he always keeps writing 'em
And reading to friends as his way of delighting 'em!"
I tell you this writing of verses means business,—
It makes the brain whirl in a vortex of dizziness
You think they are scrawled in the languor of laziness—
I tell you they're squeezed by a spasm of craziness,
A fit half as bad as the staggering vertigos
That seize a poor fellow and down in the dirt he goes!

And therefore it chimes with the word's etymology
That the sons of Apollo are great on apology,
For the writing of verse is a struggle mysterious
And the gayest of rhymes is a matter that's serious.
For myself, I'm relied on by friends in extremities,
And I don't mind so much if a comfort to them it is;
'T is a pleasure to please, and the straw that can tickle us
Is a source of enjoyment though slightly ridiculous.

I am up for a—something—and since I 've begun with it,
I must give you a toast now before I have done with it.
Let me pump at my wits as they pumped the Cochituate
That moistened—it may be—the very last bit you ate:
Success to our publishers, authors and editors
To our debtors good luck,—pleasant dreams to our creditors;
May the monthly grow yearly, till all we are groping for
Has reached the fulfilment we're all of us hoping for;
Till the bore through the tunnel—it makes me let off a sigh
To think it may possibly ruin my prophecy—
Has been punned on so often 't will never provoke again
One mild adolescent to make the old joke again;
Till abstinent, all-go-to-meeting society
Has forgotten the sense of the word inebriety;
Till the work that poor Hannah and Bridget and Phillis do
The humanized, civilized female gorillas do;
Till the roughs, as we call them, grown loving and dutiful,
Shall worship the true and the pure and the beautiful,
And, preying no longer as tiger and vulture do,
All read the "Atlantic" as persons of culture do!

“LUCY”

FOR HER GOLDEN WEDDING, OCTOBER 18, 1875

“Lucy.”—The old familiar name
Is now, as always, pleasant,
Its liquid melody the same
Alike in past or present;
Let others call you what they will,
I know you'll let me use it;
To me your name is Lucy still,
I cannot bear to lose it.

What visions of the past return
With Lucy's image blended!
What memories from the silent urn
Of gentle lives long ended!
What dreams of childhood's fleeting morn,
What starry aspirations,
That filled the misty days unborn
With fancy's coruscations!

Ah, Lucy, life has swiftly sped
From April to November;
The summer blossoms all are shed
That you and I remember;
But while the vanished years we share
With mingling recollections,
How all their shadowy features wear
The hue of old affections!

Love called you. He who stole your heart
Of sunshine half bereft us;
Our household's garland fell apart
The morning that you left us;
The tears of tender girlhood streamed
Through sorrow's opening sluices;
Less sweet our garden's roses seemed,
Less blue its flower—de—lucis.

“LUCY”

That old regret is turned to smiles,
That parting sigh to greeting;
I send my heart-throb fifty miles
Through every line 't is beating;
God grant you many and happy years,
Till when the last has crowned you
The dawn of endless day appears,
And heaven is shining round you!

October 11, 1875.

HYMN

FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE STATUE OF GOVERNOR
ANDREW, HINGHAM, OCTOBER 7, 1875

BEHOLD the shape our eyes have known!
It lives once more in changeless stone;
So looked in mortal face and form
Our guide through peril's deadly storm.

But hushed the beating heart we knew,
That heart so tender, brave, and true,
Firm as the rooted mountain rock,
Pure as the quarry's whitest block!

Not his beneath the blood-red star
To win the soldier's envied sear;
Unarmed he battled for the right,
In Duty's never-ending fight.

Unconquered will, unslumbering eye,
Faith such as bids the martyr die,
The prophet's glance, the master's hand
To mould the work his foresight planned,

These were his gifts; what Heaven had lent
For justice, mercy, truth, he spent,
First to avenge the traitorous blow,
And first to lift the vanquished foe.

Lo, thus he stood; in danger's strait
The pilot of the Pilgrim State!
Too large his fame for her alone,—
A nation claims him as her own!

A MEMORIAL TRIBUTE

READ AT THE MEETING HELD AT MUSIC HALL,
FEBRUARY 8, 1876, IN MEMORY OF DR. SAMUEL G. HOWE

I.

LEADER of armies, Israel's God,
Thy soldier's fight is won!
Master, whose lowly path he trod,
Thy servant's work is done!

No voice is heard from Sinai's steep
Our wandering feet to guide;
From Horeb's rock no waters leap;
No Jordan's waves divide;

No prophet cleaves our western sky
On wheels of whirling fire;
No shepherds hear the song on high
Of heaven's angelic choir

Yet here as to the patriarch's tent
God's angel comes a guest;
He comes on heaven's high errand sent,
In earth's poor raiment drest.

We see no halo round his brow
Till love its own recalls,
And, like a leaf that quits the bough,
The mortal vesture falls.

In autumn's chill declining day,
Ere winter's killing frost,
The message came; so passed away
The friend our earth has lost.

Still, Father, in thy love we trust;
Forgive us if we mourn
The saddening hour that laid in dust
His robe of flesh outworn.

II.

How long the wreck-strewn journey seems
To reach the far-off past
That woke his youth from peaceful dreams
With Freedom's trumpet-blast

Along her classic hillsides rung
The Paynim's battle-cry,
And like a red-cross knight he sprung
For her to live or die.

No trustier service claimed the wreath
For Sparta's bravest son;
No truer soldier sleeps beneath
The mound of Marathon;

Yet not for him the warrior's grave
In front of angry foes;
To lift, to shield, to help, to save,
The holier task he chose.

He touched the eyelids of the blind,
And lo! the veil withdrawn,
As o'er the midnight of the mind
He led the light of dawn.

He asked not whence the fountains roll
No traveller's foot has found,
But mapped the desert of the soul
Untracked by sight or sound.

What prayers have reached the sapphire throne,
By silent fingers spelt,
For him who first through depths unknown
His doubtful pathway felt,

Who sought the slumbering sense that lay
Close shut with bolt and bar,
And showed awakening thought the ray
Of reason's morning star

Where'er he moved, his shadowy form
The sightless orbs would seek,
And smiles of welcome light and warm
The lips that could not speak.

No labored line, no sculptor's art,
Such hallowed memory needs;
His tablet is the human heart,
His record loving deeds.

III.

The rest that earth denied is thine,—
Ah, is it rest? we ask,
Or, traced by knowledge more divine,
Some larger, nobler task?

Had but those boundless fields of blue

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One darkened sphere like this;
But what has heaven for thee to do
In realms of perfect bliss?

No cloud to lift, no mind to clear,
No rugged path to smooth,
No struggling soul to help and cheer,
No mortal grief to soothe!

Enough; is there a world of love,
No more we ask to know;
The hand will guide thy ways above
That shaped thy task below.

JOSEPH WARREN, M. D.

TRAINED in the holy art whose lifted shield
Wards off the darts a never-slumbering foe,
By hearth and wayside lurking, waits to throw,
Oppression taught his helpful arm to wield
The slayer's weapon : on the murderous field
The fiery bolt he challenged laid him low,
Seeking its noblest victim. Even so
The charter of a nation must be sealed!
The healer's brow the hero's honors crowned,
From lowliest duty called to loftiest deed.
Living, the oak-leaf wreath his temples bound;
Dying, the conqueror's laurel was his meed,
Last on the broken ramparts' turf to bleed
Where Freedom's victory in defeat was found.

June 11, 1875.

OLD CAMBRIDGE

JULY 3, 1875

AND can it be you've found a place
Within this consecrated space,
That makes so fine a show,
For one of Rip Van Winkle's race?
And is it really so?
Who wants an old receipted bill?
Who fishes in the Frog-pond still?
Who digs last year's potato hill?—
That's what he'd like to know!

And were it any spot on earth
Save this dear home that gave him birth
Some scores of years ago,
He had not come to spoil your mirth
And chill your festive glow;
But round his baby-nest he strays,
With tearful eye the scene surveys,
His heart unchanged by changing days,
That's what he'd have you know.

Can you whose eyes not yet are dim
Live o'er the buried past with him,
And see the roses blow
When white-haired men were Joe and Jim
Untouched by winter's snow?
Or roll the years back one by one
As Judah's monarch backed the sun,
And see the century just begun?—
That's what he'd like to know!

I come, but as the swallow dips,
Just touching with her feather-tips
The shining wave below,
To sit with pleasure-murmuring lips
And listen to the flow

Of Elmwood's sparkling Hippocrene,
To tread once more my native green,
To sigh unheard, to smile unseen,—
That's what I'd have you know.

But since the common lot I've shared
(We all are sitting "unprepared,"
Like culprits in a row,
Whose heads are down, whose necks are bared
To wait the headsman's blow),
I'd like to shift my task to you,
By asking just a thing or two
About the good old times I knew,—
Here's what I want to know

The yellow meetin' house—can you tell
Just where it stood before it fell
Prey of the vandal foe,—
Our dear old temple, loved so well,
By ruthless hands laid low?
Where, tell me, was the Deacon's pew?
Whose hair was braided in a queue?
(For there were pig-tails not a few,)—
That's what I'd like to know.

The bell—can you recall its clang?
And how the seats would slam and bang?
The voices high and low?
The basso's trump before he sang?
The viol and its bow?
Where was it old Judge Winthrop sat?
Who wore the last three-cornered hat?
Was Israel Porter lean or fat?—
That's what I'd like to know.

Tell where the market used to be
That stood beside the murdered tree?
Whose dog to church would go?
Old Marcus Reemie, who was he?
Who were the brothers Snow?
Does not your memory slightly fail
About that great September gale?—
Whereof one told a moving tale,

As Cambridge boys should know.

When Cambridge was a simple town,
Say just when Deacon William Brown
(Last door in yonder row),
For honest silver counted down,
His groceries would bestow?—
For those were days when money meant
Something that jingled as you went,—
No hybrid like the nickel cent,
I'd have you all to know,

But quarter, ninepence, pistareen,
And fourpence hapennies in between,
All metal fit to show,
Instead of rags in stagnant green,
The scum of debts we owe;
How sad to think such stuff should be
Our Wendell's cure—all recipe,—
Not Wendell H., but Wendell P.,—
The one you all must know!

I question—but you answer not—
Dear me! and have I quite forgot
How fivescore years ago,
Just on this very blessed spot,
The summer leaves below,
Before his homespun ranks arrayed
In green New England's elmbough shade
The great Virginian drew the blade
King George full soon should know!

O George the Third! you found it true
Our George was more than double you,
For nature made him so.
Not much an empire's crown can do
If brains are scant and slow,—
Ah, not like that his laurel crown
Whose presence gilded with renown
Our brave old Academic town,
As all her children know!

So here we meet with loud acclaim
To tell mankind that here he came,
With hearts that throb and glow;
Ours is a portion of his fame
Our trumpets needs must blow!
On yonder hill the Lion fell,
But here was chipped the eagle's shell,—
That little hatchet did it well,
As all the world shall know!

WELCOME TO THE NATIONS

PHILADELPHIA, JULY 4, 1876

BRIGHT on the banners of lily and rose
Lo! the last sun of our century sets!
Wreath the black cannon that scowled on our foes,
All but her friendships the nation forgets
All but her friends and their welcome forgets!
These are around her; but where are her foes?
Lo, while the sun of her century sets,
Peace with her garlands of lily and rose!

Welcome! a shout like the war trumpet's swell
Wakes the wild echoes that slumber around
Welcome! it quivers from Liberty's bell;
Welcome! the walls of her temple resound!
Hark! the gray walls of her temple resound
Fade the far voices o'er hillside and dell;
Welcome! still whisper the echoes around;
Welcome I still trembles on Liberty's bell!

Thrones of the continents! isles of the sea
Yours are the garlands of peace we entwine;
Welcome, once more, to the land of the free,
Shadowed alike by the palm and the pine;
Softly they murmur, the palm and the pine,
"Hushed is our strife, in the land of the free";
Over your children their branches entwine,
Thrones of the continents! isles of the sea!

A FAMILIAR LETTER

TO SEVERAL CORRESPONDENTS

YES, write, if you want to, there's nothing like trying;
Who knows what a treasure your casket may hold?
I'll show you that rhyming's as easy as lying,
If you'll listen to me while the art I unfold.

Here's a book full of words; one can choose as he fancies,
As a painter his tint, as a workman his tool;
Just think! all the poems and plays and romances
Were drawn out of this, like the fish from a pool!

You can wander at will through its syllabled mazes,
And take all you want,—not a copper they cost,—
What is there to hinder your picking out phrases
For an epic as clever as “Paradise Lost”?

Don't mind if the index of sense is at zero,
Use words that run smoothly, whatever they mean;
Leander and Lilian and Lilibullero
Are much the same thing in the rhyming machine.

There are words so delicious their sweetness will smother
That boarding-school flavor of which we 're afraid,—
There is “lush” is a good one, and “swirl” another,—
Put both in one stanza, its fortune is made.

With musical murmurs and rhythmical closes
You can cheat us of smiles when you've nothing to tell;
You hand us a nosegay of milliner's roses,
And we cry with delight, “Oh, how sweet they do smell!”

Perhaps you will answer all needful conditions
For winning the laurels to which you aspire,
By docking the tails of the two prepositions
I' the style o' the bards you so greatly admire.

As for subjects of verse, they are only too plenty
For ringing the changes on metrical chimes;
A maiden, a moonbeam, a lover of twenty
Have filled that great basket with bushels of rhymes.

Let me show you a picture—'tis far from irrelevant—
By a famous old hand in the arts of design;
'T is only a photographed sketch of an elephant,—
The name of the draughtsman was Rembrandt of Rhine.

How easy! no troublesome colors to lay on,
It can't have fatigued him,—no, not in the least,—
A dash here and there with a hap-hazard crayon,
And there stands the wrinkled-skinned, baggy-limbed beast.

Just so with your verse,—'t is as easy as sketching,—
You—can reel off a song without knitting your brow,
As lightly as Rembrandt a drawing or etching;
It is nothing at all, if you only know how.

Well; imagine you've printed your volume of verses:
Your forehead is wreathed with the garland of fame,
Your poems the eloquent school-boy rehearses,
Her album the school-girl presents for your name;

Each morning the post brings you autograph letters;
You'll answer them promptly,—an hour is n't much
For the honor of sharing a page with your betters,
With magistrates, members of Congress, and such.

Of course you're delighted to serve the committees

The Poetical Works of O. W. Holmes, Volume 8.

That come with requests from the country all round,
You would grace the occasion with poems and ditties
When they've got a new schoolhouse, or poor-house, or pound.

With a hymn for the saints and a song for the sinners,
You go and are welcome wherever you please;
You're a privileged guest at all manner of dinners,
You've a seat on the platform among the grandees.

At length your mere presence becomes a sensation,
Your cup of enjoyment is filled to its brim
With the pleasure Horatian of digimonstration,
As the whisper runs round of "That's he!" or "That Is him!"

But remember, O dealer in phrases sonorous,
So daintily chosen, so tunefully matched,
Though you soar with the wings of the cherubim o'er us,
The ovum was human from which you were hatched.

No will of your own with its puny compulsion
Can summon the spirit that quickens the lyre;
It comes, if at all, like the Sibyl's convulsion
And touches the brain with a finger of fire.

So perhaps, after all, it's as well to be quiet,
If you've nothing you think is worth saying in prose,
As to furnish a meal of their cannibal diet
To the critics, by publishing, as you propose.

But it's all of no use, and I 'm sorry I've written,—
I shall see your thin volume some day on my shelf;
For the rhyming tarantula surely has bitten,
And music must cure you, so pipe it yourself.

UNSATISFIED

“ONLY a housemaid!” She looked from the kitchen,—
Neat was the kitchen and tidy was she;
There at her window a sempstress sat stitching;
“Were I a sempstress, how happy I'd be!”

“Only a Queen!” She looked over the waters,—
Fair was her kingdom and mighty was she;
There sat an Empress, with Queens for her daughters;
Were I an Empress, how happy I'd be!”

Still the old frailty they all of them trip in!
Eve in her daughters is ever the same;
Give her all Eden, she sighs for a pippin;
Give her an Empire, she pines for a name!

May 8, 1876.

HOW THE OLD HORSE WON THE BET

DEDICATED BY A CONTRIBUTOR TO THE COLLEGIAN,
1830, TO THE EDITORS OF THE HARVARD ADVOCATE, 1876.

'T WAS on the famous trotting-ground,
The betting men were gathered round
From far and near; the "cracks" were there
Whose deeds the sporting prints declare
The swift g. m., Old Hiram's nag,
The fleet s. h., Dan Pfeiffer's brag,
With these a third—and who is he
That stands beside his fast b. g.?
Budd Doble, whose catarrhal name
So fills the nasal trump of fame.
There too stood many a noted steed
Of Messenger and Morgan breed;
Green horses also, not a few;
Unknown as yet what they could do;
And all the hacks that know so well
The scourgings of the Sunday swell.

Blue are the skies of opening day;
The bordering turf is green with May;
The sunshine's golden gleam is thrown
On sorrel, chestnut, bay, and roan;
The horses paw and prance and neigh,
Fillies and colts like kittens play,
And dance and toss their rippled manes
Shining and soft as silken skeins;
Wagons and gigs are ranged about,
And fashion flaunts her gay turn-out;
Here stands—each youthful Jehu's dream
The jointed tandem, ticklish team!
And there in ampler breadth expand
The splendors of the four-in-hand;
On faultless ties and glossy tiles
The lovely bonnets beam their smiles;
(The style's the man, so books avow;
The style's the woman, anyhow);
From flounces frothed with creamy lace
Peeps out the pug-dog's smutty face,
Or spaniel rolls his liquid eye,

Or stares the wiry pet of Skye,—
O woman, in your hours of ease
So shy with us, so free with these!

“Come on! I'll bet you two to one
I'll make him do it!” “Will you? Done!”

What was it who was bound to do?
I did not hear and can't tell you,—
Pray listen till my story's through.

Scarce noticed, back behind the rest,
By cart and wagon rudely prest,
The parson's lean and bony bay
Stood harnessed in his one-horse shay—
Lent to his sexton for the day;
(A funeral—so the sexton said;
His mother's uncle's wife was dead.)

Like Lazarus bid to Dives' feast,
So looked the poor forlorn old beast;
His coat was rough, his tail was bare,
The gray was sprinkled in his hair;
Sportsmen and jockeys knew him not,
And yet they say he once could trot
Among the fleetest of the town,
Till something cracked and broke him down,—
The steed's, the statesman's, common lot!
“And are we then so soon forgot?”
Ah me! I doubt if one of you
Has ever heard the name “Old Blue,”
Whose fame through all this region rung
In those old days when I was young!

“Bring forth the horse!” Alas! he showed
Not like the one Mazeppa rode;
Scant-maned, sharp-backed, and shaky-kneed,
The wreck of what was once a steed,
Lips thin, eyes hollow, stiff in joints;
Yet not without his knowing points.
The sexton laughing in his sleeve,

As if 't were all a make-believe,
Led forth the horse, and as he laughed
Unhitched the breeching from a shaft,
Unclasped the rusty belt beneath,
Drew forth the snaffle from his teeth,
Slipped off his head-stall, set him free
From strap and rein,—a sight to see!

So worn, so lean in every limb,
It can't be they are saddling him!
It is! his back the pig-skin strides
And flaps his lank, rheumatic sides;
With look of mingled scorn and mirth
They buckle round the saddle-girth;
With horsey wink and saucy toss
A youngster throws his leg across,
And so, his rider on his back,
They lead him, limping, to the track,
Far up behind the starting-point,
To limber out each stiffened joint.

As through the jeering crowd he past,
One pitying look Old Hiram cast;
“Go it, ye cripple, while ye can!”
Cried out unsentimental Dan;
“A Fast-Day dinner for the crows!”
Budd Doble's scoffing shout arose.

Slowly, as when the walking-beam
First feels the gathering head of steam,
With warning cough and threatening wheeze
The stiff old charger crooks his knees;
At first with cautious step sedate,
As if he dragged a coach of state
He's not a colt; he knows full well
That time is weight and sure to tell;
No horse so sturdy but he fears
The handicap of twenty years.

As through the throng on either hand
The old horse nears the judges' stand,
Beneath his jockey's feather-weight
He warms a little to his gait,

And now and then a step is tried
That hints of something like a stride.

“Go!”—Through his ear the summons stung
As if a battle-trump had rung;
The slumbering instincts long unstirred
Start at the old familiar word;
It thrills like flame through every limb,—
What mean his twenty years to him?
The savage blow his rider dealt
Fell on his hollow flanks unfelt;
The spur that pricked his staring hide
Unheeded tore his bleeding side;
Alike to him are spur and rein,—
He steps a five-year-old again!

Before the quarter pole was past,
Old Hiram said, “He's going fast.”
Long ere the quarter was a half,
The chuckling crowd had ceased to laugh;
Tighter his frightened jockey clung
As in a mighty stride he swung,
The gravel flying in his track,
His neck stretched out, his ears laid back,
His tail extended all the while
Behind him like a rat-tail file!
Off went a shoe,—away it spun,
Shot like a bullet from a gun;

The quaking jockey shapes a prayer
From scraps of oaths he used to swear;
He drops his whip, he drops his rein,
He clutches fiercely for a mane;
He'll lose his hold—he sways and reels—
He'll slide beneath those trampling heels!
The knees of many a horseman quake,
The flowers on many a bonnet shake,
And shouts arise from left and right,
“Stick on! Stick on!” “Hould tight! Hould tight!”
“Cling round his neck and don't let go—
“That pace can't hold—there! steady! whoa!”
But like the sable steed that bore
The spectral lover of Lenore,
His nostrils snorting foam and fire,
No stretch his bony limbs can tire;

And now the stand he rushes by,
And "Stop him!—stop him!" is the cry.
Stand back! he 's only just begun—
He's having out three heats in one!

"Don't rush in front! he'll smash your brains;
But follow up and grab the reins!"
Old Hiram spoke. Dan Pfeiffer heard,
And sprang impatient at the word;
Budd Doble started on his bay,
Old Hiram followed on his gray,
And off they spring, and round they go,
The fast ones doing "all they know."
Look! twice they follow at his heels,
As round the circling course he wheels,
And whirls with him that clinging boy
Like Hector round the walls of Troy;
Still on, and on, the third time round
They're tailing off! they're losing ground!
Budd Doble's nag begins to fail!
Dan Pfeiffer's sorrel whisks his tail!
And see! in spite of whip and shout,
Old Hiram's mare is giving out!
Now for the finish! at the turn,
The old horse—all the rest astern—
Comes swinging in, with easy trot;
By Jove! he's distanced all the lot!

That trot no mortal could explain;
Some said, "Old Dutchman come again!"
Some took his time,—at least they tried,
But what it was could none decide;
One said he couldn't understand
What happened to his second hand;
One said 2.10; that could n't be—
More like two twenty—two or three;
Old Hiram settled it at last;
"The time was two—too dee—vel—ish fast!"

The parson's horse had won the bet;
It cost him something of a sweat;
Back in the one—horse shay he went;
The parson wondered what it meant,
And murmured, with a mild surprise
And pleasant twinkle of the eyes,

That funeral must have been a trick,
Or corpses drive at double-quick;
I should n't wonder, I declare,
If brother—Jehu—made the prayer!

And this is all I have to say
About that tough old trotting bay,
Huddup! Huddup! G'lang! Good day!
Moral for which this tale is told
A horse can trot, for all he 's old.

AN APPEAL FOR "THE OLD SOUTH"

"While stands the Coliseum, Rome shall stand;
When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall."

FULL sevenscore years our city's pride—
The comely Southern spire—
Has cast its shadow, and defied
The storm, the foe, the fire;
Sad is the sight our eyes behold;
Woe to the three-hilled town,
When through the land the tale is told—
"The brave 'Old South' is down!"

Let darkness blot the starless dawn
That hears our children tell,
"Here rose the walls, now wrecked and gone,
Our fathers loved so well;
Here, while his brethren stood aloof,
The herald's blast was blown
That shook St. Stephen's pillared roof
And rocked King George's throne!

"The home-bound wanderer of the main
Looked from his deck afar,
To where the gilded, glittering vane
Shone like the evening star,
And pilgrim feet from every clime
The floor with reverence trod,
Where holy memories made sublime
The shrine of Freedom's God!"

The darkened skies, alas! have seen
Our monarch tree laid low,
And spread in ruins o'er the green,
But Nature struck the blow;
No scheming thrift its downfall planned,
It felt no edge of steel,
No soulless hireling raised his hand

The deadly stroke to deal.

In bridal garlands, pale and mute,
Still pleads the storied tower;
These are the blossoms, but the fruit
Awaits the golden shower;
The spire still greets the morning sun,—
Say, shall it stand or fall?
Help, ere the spoiler has begun!
Help, each, and God help all!

THE FIRST FAN

READ AT A MEETING OF THE BOSTON BRIC-A-BRAC
CLUB, FEBRUARY 21, 1877

WHEN rose the cry "Great Pan is dead!"
And Jove's high palace closed its portal,
The fallen gods, before they fled,
Sold out their frippery to a mortal.

"To whom?" you ask. I ask of you.
The answer hardly needs suggestion;
Of course it was the Wandering Jew,—
How could you put me such a question?

A purple robe, a little worn,
The Thunderer deigned himself to offer;
The bearded wanderer laughed in scorn,—
You know he always was a scoffer.

"Vife shillins! 't is a monstrous price;
Say two and six and further talk shun."
"Take it," cried Jove; "we can't be nice,—
'T would fetch twice that at Leonard's auction."

The ice was broken; up they came,
All sharp for bargains, god and goddess,
Each ready with the price to name
For robe or head-dress, scarf or bodice.

First Juno, out of temper, too,—
Her queenly forehead somewhat cloudy;
Then Pallas in her stockings blue,
Imposing, but a little dowdy.

The scowling queen of heaven unrolled
Before the Jew a threadbare turban
“Three shillings.” “One. 'T will suit some old
Terrific feminine suburban.”

But as for Pallas,—how to tell
In seemly phrase a fact so shocking?
She pointed,—pray excuse me,—well,
She pointed to her azure stocking.

And if the honest truth were told,
Its heel confessed the need of darning;
“Gods!” low-bred Vulcan cried, “behold!
There! that's what comes of too much larning!”

Pale Proserpine came groping round,
Her pupils dreadfully dilated
With too much living underground,—
A residence quite overrated;

This kerchief's what you want, I know,—
Don't cheat poor Venus of her cestus,—
You'll find it handy when you go
To—you know where; it's pure asbestus.

Then Phoebus of the silver bow,
And Hebe, dimpled as a baby,
And Dian with the breast of snow,
Chaser and chased—and caught, it may be:

One took the quiver from her back,
One held the cap he spent the night in,
And one a bit of bric-a-brac,
Such as the gods themselves delight in.

Then Mars, the foe of human kind,
Strode up and showed his suit of armor;
So none at last was left behind
Save Venus, the celestial charmer.

Poor Venus! What had she to sell?
For all she looked so fresh and jaunty,
Her wardrobe, as I blush' to tell,
Already seemed but quite too scanty.

Her gems were sold, her sandals gone,—
She always would be rash and flighty,—
Her winter garments all in pawn,
Alas for charming Aphrodite

The lady of a thousand loves,
The darling of the old religion,
Had only left of all the doves
That drew her car one fan-tailed pigeon.

How oft upon her finger-tips
He perched, afraid of Cupid's arrow,
Or kissed her on the rosebud lips,
Like Roman Lesbia's loving sparrow!

“My bird, I want your train,” she cried;
“Come, don't let's have a fuss about it;
I'll make it beauty's pet and pride,
And you'll be better off without it.

“So vulgar! Have you noticed, pray,
An earthly belle or dashing bride walk,
And how her flounces track her way,
Like slimy serpents on the sidewalk?”

“A lover's heart it quickly cools;
In mine it kindles up enough rage

To wring their necks. How can such fools
Ask men to vote for woman suffrage?"

The goddess spoke, and gently stripped
Her bird of every caudal feather;
A strand of gold-bright hair she clipped,
And bound the glossy plumes together,

And lo, the Fan! for beauty's hand,
The lovely queen of beauty made it;
The price she named was hard to stand,
But Venus smiled: the Hebrew paid it.

Jove, Juno, Venus, where are you?
Mars, Mercury, Phoebus, Neptune, Saturn?
But o'er the world the Wandering Jew
Has borne the Fan's celestial pattern.

So everywhere we find the Fan,—
In lonely isles of the Pacific,
In farthest China and Japan,—
Wherever suns are sudorific.

Nay, even the oily Esquimaux
In summer court its cooling breezes,—
In fact, in every clime 't is so,
No matter if it fries or freezes.

And since from Aphrodite's dove
The pattern of the fan was given,
No wonder that it breathes of love
And wafts the perfumed gales of heaven!

Before this new Pandora's gift
In slavery woman's tyrant kept her,
But now he kneels her glove to lift,—
The fan is mightier than the sceptre.

The tap it gives how arch and sly!
The breath it wakes how fresh and grateful!
Behind its shield how soft the sigh!
The whispered tale of shame how fateful!

Its empire shadows every throne
And every shore that man is tost on;
It rules the lords of every zone,
Nay, even the bluest blood of Boston!

But every one that swings to-night,
Of fairest shape, from farthest region,
May trace its pedigree aright
To Aphrodite's fan-tailed pigeon.

TO R. B. H.

AT THE DINNER TO THE PRESIDENT,
BOSTON, JUNE 26, 1877

How to address him? awkward, it is true
Call him "Great Father," as the Red Men do?
Borrow some title? this is not the place
That christens men Your Highness and Your Grace;
We tried such names as these awhile, you know,
But left them off a century ago.

His Majesty? We've had enough of that
Besides, that needs a crown; he wears a hat.
What if, to make the nicer ears content,
We say His Honesty, the President?

THE FIRST FAN

Sir, we believed you honest, truthful, brave,
When to your hands their precious trust we gave,
And we have found you better than we knew,
Braver, and not less honest, not less true!
So every heart has opened, every hand
Tingles with welcome, and through all the land
All voices greet you in one broad acclaim,
Healer of strife! Has earth a nobler name?

What phrases mean you do not need to learn;
We must be civil, and they serve our turn
“Your most obedient humble” means—means what?
Something the well-bred signer just is not.

Yet there are tokens, sir, you must believe;
There is one language never can deceive
The lover knew it when the maiden smiled;
The mother knows it when she clasps her child;
Voices may falter, trembling lips turn pale,
Words grope and stumble; this will tell their tale
Shorn of all rhetoric, bare of all pretence,
But radiant, warm, with Nature's eloquence.
Look in our eyes! Your welcome waits you there,—
North, South, East, West, from all and everywhere!

THE SHIP OF STATE

A SENTIMENT

This "sentiment" was read on the same occasion as the "Family Record," which immediately follows it. The latter poem is the dutiful tribute of a son to his father and his father's ancestors, residents of Woodstock from its first settlement.

THE Ship of State! above her skies are blue,
But still she rocks a little, it is true,
And there are passengers whose faces white
Show they don't feel as happy as they might;
Yet on the whole her crew are quite content,
Since its wild fury the typhoon has spent,
And willing, if her pilot thinks it best,
To head a little nearer south by west.
And this they feel: the ship came too near wreck,
In the long quarrel for the quarter-deck,
Now when she glides serenely on her way,—
The shallows past where dread explosives lay,—
The stiff obstructive's churlish game to try
Let sleeping dogs and still torpedoes lie!
And so I give you all the Ship of State;
Freedom's last venture is her priceless freight;
God speed her, keep her, bless her, while she steers
Amid the breakers of unsounded years;
Lead her through danger's paths with even keel,
And guide the honest hand that holds her wheel!

WOODSTOCK, CONN., July 4, 1877.

A FAMILY RECORD

WOODSTOCK, CONN., JULY 4, 1877

NOT to myself this breath of vesper song,
Not to these patient friends, this kindly throng,
Not to this hallowed morning, though it be
Our summer Christmas, Freedom's jubilee,
When every summit, topmast, steeple, tower,
That owns her empire spreads her starry flower,
Its blood-streaked leaves in heaven's benignant dew
Washed clean from every crimson stain they knew,—
No, not to these the passing thrills belong
That steal my breath to hush themselves with song.
These moments all are memory's; I have come
To speak with lips that rather should be dumb;
For what are words? At every step I tread
The dust that wore the footprints of the dead
But for whose life my life had never known
This faded vesture which it calls its own.
Here sleeps my father's sire, and they who gave
That earlier life here found their peaceful grave.
In days gone by I sought the hallowed ground;
Climbed yon long slope; the sacred spot I found
Where all unsullied lies the winter snow,
Where all ungathered spring's pale violets blow,
And tracked from stone to stone the Saxon name
That marks the blood I need not blush to claim,
Blood such as warmed the Pilgrim sons of toil,
Who held from God the charter of the soil.
I come an alien to your hills and plains,
Yet feel your birthright tingling in my veins;
Mine are this changing prospect's sun and shade,
In full-blown summer's bridal pomp arrayed;
Mine these fair hillsides and the vales between;
Mine the sweet streams that lend their brightening green;
I breathed your air—the sunlit landscape smiled;
I touch your soil—it knows its children's child;
Throned in my heart your heritage is mine;
I claim it all by memory's right divine
Waking, I dream. Before my vacant eyes
In long procession shadowy forms arise;
Far through the vista of the silent years
I see a venturesome band; the pioneers,
Who let the sunlight through the forest's gloom,

Who bade the harvest wave, the garden bloom.
Hark! loud resounds the bare-armed settler's axe,
See where the stealthy panther left his tracks!
As fierce, as stealthy creeps the skulking foe
With stone-tipped shaft and sinew-corded bow;
Soon shall he vanish from his ancient reign,
Leave his last cornfield to the coming train,
Quit the green margin of the wave he drinks,
For haunts that hide the wild-cat and the lynx.

But who the Youth his glistening axe that swings
To smite the pine that shows a hundred rings?
His features?—something in his look I find
That calls the semblance of my race to mind.
His name?—my own; and that which goes before
The same that once the loved disciple bore.
Young, brave, discreet, the father of a line
Whose voiceless lives have found a voice in mine;
Thinned by unnumbered currents though they be,
Thanks for the ruddy drops I claim from thee!

The seasons pass; the roses come and go;
Snows fall and melt; the waters freeze and flow;
The boys are men; the girls, grown tall and fair,
Have found their mates; a gravestone here and there
Tells where the fathers lie; the silvered hair
Of some bent patriarch yet recalls the time
That saw his feet the northern hillside climb,
A pilgrim from the pilgrims far away,
The godly men, the dwellers by the bay.
On many a hearthstone burns the cheerful fire;
The schoolhouse porch, the heavenward pointing spire
Proclaim in letters every eye can read,
Knowledge and Faith, the new world's simple creed.
Hush! 't is the Sabbath's silence—stricken morn
No feet must wander through the tasselled corn;
No merry children laugh around the door,
No idle playthings strew the sanded floor;
The law of Moses lays its awful ban
On all that stirs; here comes the tithing—man
At last the solemn hour of worship calls;
Slowly they gather in the sacred walls;
Man in his strength and age with knotted staff,
And boyhood aching for its week-day laugh,
The toil-worn mother with the child she leads,
The maiden, lovely in her golden beads,—
The popish symbols round her neck she wears,

But on them counts her lovers, not her prayers,—
Those youths in homespun suits and ribboned queues,
Whose hearts are beating in the high-backed pews.
The pastor rises; looks along the seats
With searching eye; each wonted face he meets;
Asks heavenly guidance; finds the chapter's place
That tells some tale of Israel's stubborn race;
Gives out the sacred song; all voices join,
For no quartette extorts their scanty coin;
Then while both hands their black-gloved palms display,
Lifts his gray head, and murmurs, "Let us pray!"
And pray he does! as one that never fears
To plead unanswered by the God that hears;
What if he dwells on many a fact as though
Some things Heaven knew not which it ought to know,—
Thanks God for all his favors past, and yet,
Tells Him there's something He must not forget;
Such are the prayers his people love to hear,—
See how the Deacon slants his listening ear!
What! look once more! Nay, surely there I trace
The hinted outlines of a well-known face!
Not those the lips for laughter to beguile,
Yet round their corners lurks an embryo smile,
The same on other lips my childhood knew
That scarce the Sabbath's mastery could subdue.
Him too my lineage gives me leave to claim,—
The good, grave man that bears the Psalmist's name.

And still in ceaseless round the seasons passed;
Spring piped her carol; Autumn blew his blast;
Babes waxed to manhood; manhood shrunk to age;
Life's worn-out players tottered off the stage;
The few are many; boys have grown to men
Since Putnam dragged the wolf from Pomfret's den;
Our new-old Woodstock is a thriving town;
Brave are her children; faithful to the crown;
Her soldiers' steel the savage redskin knows;
Their blood has crimsoned his Canadian snows.
And now once more along the quiet vale
Rings the dread call that turns the mothers pale;
Full well they know the valorous heat that runs
In every pulse-beat of their loyal sons;
Who would not bleed in good King George's cause
When England's lion shows his teeth and claws?
With glittering firelocks on the village green
In proud array a martial band is seen;
You know what names those ancient rosters hold,—
Whose belts were buckled when the drum-beat rolled,—
But mark their Captain! tell us, who is he?

On his brown face that same old look I see
Yes! from the homestead's still retreat he came,
Whose peaceful owner bore the Psalmist's name;
The same his own. Well, Israel's glorious king
Who struck the harp could also whirl the sling,—
Breathe in his song a penitential sigh
And smite the sons of Amalek hip and thigh:
These shared their task; one deaconed out the psalm,
One slashed the scalping hell-hounds of calm;
The praying father's pious work is done,
Now sword in hand steps forth the fighting son.
On many a field he fought in wilds afar;
See on his swarthy cheek the bullet's scar!
There hangs a murderous tomahawk; beneath,
Without its blade, a knife's embroidered sheath;
Save for the stroke his trusty weapon dealt
His scalp had dangled at their owner's belt;
But not for him such fate; he lived to see
The bloodier strife that made our nation free,
To serve with willing toil, with skilful hand,
The war-worn saviors of the bleeding land.
His wasting life to others' needs he gave,—
Sought rest in home and found it in the grave.
See where the stones life's brief memorials keep,
The tablet telling where he "fell on sleep,"—
Watched by a winged cherub's rayless eye,—
A scroll above that says we all must die,—
Those saddening lines beneath, the "Night-Thoughts" lent:
So stands the Soldier's, Surgeon's monument.
Ah! at a glance my filial eye divines
The scholar son in those remembered lines.

The Scholar Son. His hand my footsteps led.
No more the dim unreal past I tread.
O thou whose breathing form was once so dear,
Whose cheering voice was music to my ear,
Art thou not with me as my feet pursue
The village paths so well thy boyhood knew,
Along the tangled margin of the stream
Whose murmurs blended with thine infant dream,
Or climb the hill, or thread the wooded vale,
Or seek the wave where gleams yon distant sail,
Or the old homestead's narrowed bounds explore,
Where sloped the roof that sheds the rains no more,
Where one last relic still remains to tell
Here stood thy home,—the memory-haunted well,
Whose waters quench a deeper thirst than thine,
Changed at my lips to sacramental wine,—
Art thou not with me, as I fondly trace

The scanty records of thine honored race,
Call up the forms that earlier years have known,
And spell the legend of each slanted stone?
With thoughts of thee my loving verse began,
Not for the critic's curious eye to scan,
Not for the many listeners, but the few
Whose fathers trod the paths my fathers knew;
Still in my heart thy loved remembrance burns;
Still to my lips thy cherished name returns;
Could I but feel thy gracious presence near
Amid the groves that once to thee were dear
Could but my trembling lips with mortal speech
Thy listening ear for one brief moment reach!
How vain the dream! The pallid voyager's track
No sign betrays; he sends no message back.
No word from thee since evening's shadow fell
On thy cold forehead with my long farewell,—
Now from the margin of the silent sea,
Take my last offering ere I cross to thee!