

Look up, my heart, unto the heights! look up
Beyond the frosty hills, through torrent and
wood,

On to the wind-swept highland, with its bed
Of diamond-powdered snow; my good steed cast
The solid snow-seals from his heavy hoofs,
Till all the sparkling plain was struck across
With stained and dingy crescents.

So we toiled;
Now through the clustering groves' white-
cushioned boughs,
And now through openings, and anon between
The tall unbending columns that impale
The architectural forests.

There no lack
Of the imploring cries that startle us—
The jay-bird's shrill alarm, and many notes
Untraceable to any tongue whatever,
Heaven-born and brief.

Sometimes we faintly heard
The wee ground-squirrel's whistle sharp and
clear;
Sometimes the drum of pheasant; or the boom
Of the woodpecker raining rapid blows
Upon his hollow tree.

Anon we sank
Into the awful cañons, where the brook
Hissed between icy fangs that cased the shore,
Slim, lank, and pallid blue.

There we beheld
The flower-like track of the coyóte, near
The fairy tracery where the squirrel skipped
Graceful and shy; yet farther on we saw
The small divided hollows where the doe
Dropped her light foot and lifted it away;
And then the print of some designing fox
Or dog's more honest paw; the solid bowls

That held the swaying oxen's spreading hoof;
And suddenly, in awe, the bear's broad palm
With almost human impress.

Journeying
Under the sky's blue vacancy, I saw
How Nature prints and publishes abroad
Her marvelous gospels.

Here the wind-burnt bark,
Like satin glossed and quilted; scattered twigs
In mystic hieroglyphics; the gaunt shrubs
That seem to point to something wise and
grave;

The leafless stalks that rise so desolate
Out of their slender shafts within the drift;
Under the dripping gables of the fir
The slow drops softly sink their silent wells
Into the passive snow; and over all
Swept the brown needles of the withering
pine.

Thither, my comrade, would I fly with thee,
Out of the maelstrom, the metropolis,
Where the pale sea-mist storms the citadels
With ghastly avalanches.

The hot plains,
Dimmed with a dingy veil of floating dust,
The brazen foot-hills, the perennial heights,
And the green girdle of the spicy wood
We thread with gathering rapture.

Still we climb!
The season and the summit passed alike,
High on the glacial slopes we plant our feet
Beneath the gray crags insurmountable;
Care, like a burden, falling from our hearts;
Joy, like the wings of morning, spiriting
Our souls in ecstasy to outer worlds
Where the moon sails among the silver peaks
On the four winds of Heaven!

Charles Warren Stoddard.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

A DISCUSSION of any art or artist readily enough might begin with a chapter on Fashion. Of this I ask no livelier illustration than the experience of a poet whose time-honored method is just now fresh in favor, as if he were at matins instead of even-song. It is somewhat strange that the Greeks—at least those late Athenians who spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing—should have left vacant the seat in their hemicycle to which their gay inheritors have directed that puissant goddess, La Mode. The dullest know that to her are sacred, as the school-books say, not only dress and manners, but styles of furniture, decora-

tion, and all that caters to the lust of the eye and the pride of life. But the adept perceive that fashion often decides our taste in literature, our bent of study, and even of religious thought; how much it has to do with the spirit, no less than the outcome, of human effort. Progress comes by experiment, and this from ennui—ennui that leads to voyages, wars, revolutions, and plainly to change in the arts of expression; that cries out to the imagination, and is the nurse of the invention whereof we term necessity the mother. The best of modes is not above challenge. No stroke can always hold the trophy. Pretty much the same instinct that makes a woman

accept the later, perhaps the uglier, style of dress, secures a trial, even a vogue, to some new method in art or letters. Few demur longer than Taglioni's sister, who stared at a bonnet, the last new thing from Paris, then laughed outright and said, "How very ridiculous you look, my dear. . . . Can you get me one like it?" In fact, we must have discovery, and that by licensing the fashions of successive times, most of them defective, many retrogressive, a few on the path to higher use and beauty. These few may return again and again; they go out of sight, but on an elliptical orbit. Contemporary judgment is least of all judicial. The young forestall novelty itself. The old mistrust or look backward with a sense of loss. It is hard for either to apply tests that are above each fashion, yet derived from all. I suppose that in vicious, and in barren, periods of our English song, men's faculties were much the same as ever; that a sense of beauty was on the alert. There is an exhortation to critical humility when some despised style of a past century suddenly appears fit and attractive; when, from caprice or wholesome instinct, we pick up the round-bowed spectacles of our forebears and see things as they saw them. Their art, dress, accent, quaintly rebuke us; their dainty spirit lives again, and we adopt, as lightly as we formerly contemned, a fashion which we avow that at last we rightly interpret.

It is wholly natural, then, that a poet like Dr. Holmes should have been in vogue and out of vogue; one who easily can afford to regard either position with tranquillity, but at times, it may be, thought somewhat too antiquated by wits of the new dispensation. At this moment,—the favorite both of Time, to whom thanks for touching him so gently, and of a tide that again bears him forward,—he is warmly appreciated by verse-makers of the latest mode. As a scientific homilist, his popular gauge has been less subject to fluctuations. Science has but one fashion—to lose nothing once gained; and Holmes's pluck and foresight kept him ahead till his neighbors caught up and justified him. His verse, however, puts us on terms with a man of certain tastes and breeding; it is the result of qualities which may or may not be fashionable at a given date. Just now they connect him with the army of occupation,—a veteran, it is true, but, despite his ribbons and crosses, assuredly not "retired."

The distinction between his poetry and that of the new makers of society-verse is that his is a survival, theirs the attempted revival, of something that has gone before. He wears the seal of "that past Georgian day" by direct inheritance, not from the old

time in England, but from that time in England's lettered colonies, whose inner sections still preserve the hereditary language and customs as they are scarcely to be found elsewhere. His work is as emblematic of the past as are the stairways and hand-carvings in various houses of Cambridge, Portsmouth, and Norwich. Some of our modern verse is a symptom of the present renaissance,—which itself delights in going beyond its models. More spindles, more artifices, more furbelows and elaborate graces. Its originals were an imitation, as we find them in the villas of Pope and Walpole, in Hogarth's toilet-party, in architecture, gardening, costume, furniture, manners. Here were negro pages, gewgaws, silks and porcelain from China (as now from Japan)—a mixture of British, Gallic, and Oriental fashions and decorations. Now we are working in much the same spirit, and even more resolutely, with novelties added from regions then unfamiliar, but reviving in both life and literature the manner of that day. A new liking for the Georgian heroics and octosyllabics is queerly blended with our practice in the latest French forms,—themselves a revival of a far more ancient minstrelsy. Such things when first produced, the genuine expression of their time, may yield a less conscious pleasure, but are of more worth; they have the savor of honest purpose, which their imitation lacks. Among living old-style poets, Dr. Holmes, the least complex and various, seems most nearly to the manner born; his work, as I say, being a survival, and not an experiment. It is freshened, however, by the animation which, haplessly for compilers of provincial literature, was wanting in the good Old Colony days. The maker wears the ancestral garb, and is a poet in spite of it. His verses have the courtesy and wit, without the pedagogy, of the knee-buckle time, and a flavor that is really their own. There are other eighteenth-century survivors, whose sponsors are formality and dullness; but Holmes has the modern vivacity, and adjusts without effort even the most hackneyed measures to a new occasion. Throughout the changes of fifty years he has practiced the method familiar to his youth, thinking it fit and natural, and one to which he would do well to cling. The conservative persistency of his muse is as notable in matter as in manner. On the whole, so far as we can classify him, he is at the head of his class, and in other respects a class by himself.

Though the most direct and obvious of the Cambridge group, the least given to subtleties, he is our typical university poet; the minstrel of the college that bred him, and within

whose liberties he has taught, jested, sung, and toasted, from boyhood to what in common folk would be old age. Alma Mater has been more to him than to Lowell or Longfellow,—has occupied a surprising portion of his range; if we go back to Frere and Canning, even to Gray, for his like, there is no real prototype, and yet, as a university poet, he curiously illustrates his own theories of natural descent. Behind him figure many Harvard rhymesters,—scholars and divines, who, like the Wartons at Oxford, wrote verse whether poets or not, English and Latin *nullo discrimine*, and few indeed were our early verse-makers that were not college men. Holmes would be Holmes, if Norton and Urian Oakes,—to say nothing of their Tenth Muse, Mistress Bradstreet, whose Augustan features, if some Smybert only had preserved them for us, assuredly should distinguish the entrance to the Harvard Annex,—if these worthies, even if Byles and Green, had not flourished before him; but he is the lawful heir to their fervor, wit, and authority, and not until he came into his estate could Harvard boast a natural songster as her laureate. Two centuries of acclimation, and some experience of liberty, probably were needed to germinate the fancy that riots in his measures. Before his day, moreover, the sons of the Puritans hardly were ripe for the doctrine that there is a time to laugh, that humor is quite as helpful a constituent of life as gravity or gloom. Provincial-wise, they at first had to receive this in its cruder form, and relished heartily the broad fun of Holmes's youthful verse. Their mirth-maker soon perceived that both fun and feeling are heightened when combined. The poet of "The Last Leaf" was among the first to teach his countrymen that pathos is an equal part of true humor; that sorrow is lightened by jest, and jest redeemed from coarseness by emotion, under most conditions of this our evanescent human life.

WHAT one does easily is apt to be his forte, though years may pass before he finds this out. Holmes's early pieces, mostly college-verse, were better of their kind than those of a better kind written in youth by some of his contemporaries. The humbler the type, the sooner the development. The young poet had the aid of a suitable habitat; life at Harvard was the precise thing to bring out his talent. There was nothing of the hermit-thrush in him; his temper was not of the withdrawing and reflective kind, nor moodily introspective,—it thrived on fellowship, and he looked to his mates for an audience as readily as they to him for a toast-master. He seems to have escaped the poetic measles

altogether; if not, he hid his disorder with rare good sense, for his verse nowhere shows that he felt himself "among men, but not of them"; on the contrary, he fairly might plume himself on reversing the Childe's boast, and declare "I have loved the world, and the world me." The thing we first note is his elastic, buoyant nature, displayed from youth to age with cheery frankness,—so that we instinctively search through his Dutch and Puritan ancestries to see where came in the strain that made this Yankee Frenchman of so likable a type. Health begets relish, and Holmes has never lacked for zest,—zest that gives one the sensations best worth living for, if happiness be the true aim of life. He relished from the first, as keenly as an actor or orator or a clever woman, appreciation within sight and sound. There is an unwritten Plaudite at the end of every poem, almost of every stanza. He has taken his reward as he went along, even before printing his songs; and if he should fail of the birds in the bush, certainly has held to every one in hand. It is given to few to capture both the present and the future,—to Holmes, perhaps, more nearly than to most of his craft, yet he would be the last to doubt that he stands on lower ground than those to whom poetry, for its own sake, has been a passion and belief. In his early work the mirth so often outweighed the sentiment as to lessen the promise and the self-prediction of his being a poet indeed. Some of one's heart-blood must spill for this, and, while many of his youthful stanzas are serious and eloquent, those which approach the feeling of true poetry are in celebration of companionship and good cheer, so that he seems like a down-east Omar or Hafiz, exemplifying what our gracious Emerson was wont to preach, that there is honest wisdom in song and joy.

If the Rev. Abiel Holmes had serious thoughts of finding his boy so animated by the father's "Life of Dr. Stiles" as to be set upon entering the ministry, they must have faded out as he read the graceless rhymes, the comic and satiric verse, which the vivacious youth furnished to "The Collegian." His metrical escapades also boded ill, as in Lowell's case, for a long allegiance to the law,—which, it seems, he read after graduation. No one can long remain a good lawyer and a fertile man of letters. The medical profession, however, has teemed with poets and scholars; for its practice makes literary effort a delightful change, an avocation, rather than a fatiguing addition to scriptural labor for daily bread. Holmes is a shining instance of one who has done solid work as

a teacher and practitioner, in spite of his success in literature. As a versifier, he started with the advantage of hitting the public by buffo-pieces, and with the disadvantage of being expected to make his after-hits in the same manner,—to write for popular amusement in the major rather than the minor key. His verses, with the measured drum-beat of their natural rhythm, were easily understood; he bothered his audience with no accidental effects, no philandering after the finer lyrical distinctions. It is not hard to surmise what "standard" poets had been found on his father's book-shelves. Eloquence was a feature of his lyrics,—such as broke out in the line, "Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!" and the simple force of "Old Ironsides" is indeed worth noting as it culminates in the last stanza. The making of verse that is seized upon by school-day spokesmen barely outlived the influence of Croly, of Drake and Halleck, of Pierpont with his "Stand! the ground's your own, my braves!" and Holmes himself would scarcely write in this way now. Yet one who sees, looming up by the Portsmouth docks, a fine old hulk to which these lines secured half a century of preservation will find them coming again to mind. "The Meeting of the Dryads," another early poem, is marked by so much grace that it seems as if the youth who wrote its quatrains might in time have added a companion-piece to "The Talking Oak." The things which he turned off with purely comic aim were neatly finished, and the merriment of a new writer, who dared not be "as funny" as he could, did quite as much for him as his poems of a higher class. The fashion of the latter, however, we see returning again. There is the pathetic silhouette of the old man, who so

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

This equals the best recent knee-buckle verse, and excels most of it in simplicity. It taught a lesson to Locker and Saxe, and more than one among younger favorites look up to Holmes affectionately, conscious that the author of "The Last Leaf," "My Aunt," "The Dilemma," and of later trifles still more refined, like "Dorothy Q.," is the Nestor of their light-armed holiday encampment.

A poet so full of zest is wont to live his life, rather than to scorn delights in service of the thankless muse. Dr. Holmes's easy-going method, and a sensible estimate of his own powers, have defined the limits of his zeal. His poetry was and is, like his humor, the overflow of a nervous, original, decidedly

intellectual nature; of a sparkling life, no less, in which he gathered the full worth of hey-day experiences. See that glimpse of Paris, a student's penciled sketch, with Clemence tripping down the Rue de Seine. It is but a bit, yet through its atmosphere we make out a poet who cared as much for the sweets of the poetic life as for the work that was its product. He had through it all a Puritan sense of duty, and the worldly wisdom that goes with a due perception of values, and he never lost sight of his practical career. His profession, after all, was what he took most seriously. Accepting, then, with hearty thanks, his care-dispelling rhyme and reason, pleased often by the fancies which he tenders in lieu of imagination and power,—we go through the collection of his verse, and see that it has amounted to a great deal in the course of a bustling fifty years. These numerous pieces divide themselves, as to form, into two classes,—lyrics and poetic essays in solid couplet-verse; as to purpose, into the lighter songs that may be sung, and the nobler numbers, part lyrical, part the poems, both gay and sober, delivered at frequent intervals during his pleasant career. He is a song-writer of the natural kind, through his taste for the open vowel-sounds, and for measures that set themselves to tune. Lyrics of high grade, whose verbal and rhythmical design is of itself sufficient for the spiritual ear, are not those which are best adapted to the musician's needs. Some of Holmes's ballads are still better than his songs. Lines in "The Pilgrim's Vision" have a native flavor:

"Come hither, God-be-Glorified,
And sit upon my knee;
Behold the dream unfolding
Whereof I spake to thee,
By the winter's hearth in Leyden,
And on the stormy sea."

Even his ballads are raciest when brimmed with the element that most attracts their author, that of festive good-fellowship. He gives us a brave picture of Miles Standish, the little captain, stirring a posset with his sword:

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

Yet if the poet's artistic conscience had been sterner, the last two stanzas of this ballad "On Lending a Punch-bowl" would not have been spared to weaken its proper close.

In his favorite department Holmes always has been an easy winner, gaining in quality

as fast as the standard of such work has advanced. In fact, he has advanced the standard by his own growth in brain-power and wisdom. There was a time when half our public men wrote poems for recitation,—when every set oration was paired with a platform-poem. The Phi Beta Kappa Society was answerable for many labored pentameters of Everett, Winthrop, Sprague, and other versifiers, born or made,—equally so the numberless corporations of the federative Saxon race in our aspiring municipalities. Of all these orators in rhyme, Holmes, by natural selection, survives to our day,—and how aptly he flourishes withal! From his start as class-poet, and his step to the front with "Poetry, a Metrical Essay," the intervals have not been long between his rhymed addresses of the standard platform length: at first named, like the books of Herodotus, after the Muses,—"Urania," "Terpsichore," and so on,—a practice shrewdly abandoned, seeing that the Graces, the Fates, and all the daughters of Nereus hardly would suffice to christen the long succession of the Doctor's metrical disquisitions, greater or less, that ceases not even with our day. In the years that followed his graduation, while practicing in Boston and afterward a lecturer at Dartmouth, he was summoned, nothing loath, whenever a dinner-song or witty ballad was needed at home, and calls from spontaneous and barbaric regions came fast upon him as his popularity grew. Here are some forty printed poems, which cheered that lucky class of '29, and how many others went before and after them we know not. Among college-poets the paragon,—and surely this the ideal civic bard, who at the outset boasted of his town,

"Her threefold hill shall be
The home of art, the nurse of liberty,"

and who has celebrated her every effort, in peace or war, to make good the boast. He is an essential part of Boston, like the crier who becomes so identified with a court that it seems as if Justice must change her quarters when he is gone. The Boston of Holmes, distinct as his own personality, certainly must go with him. Much will become new, when old things pass away with the generation of a wit who made a jest that his State House was the hub of the solar system, and in his heart believed it. The time is ended when we can be so local; this civic faith was born before the age of steam, and cannot outlast, save as a tradition, the advent of electric motors and octuple-sheets. Towns must lose their individuality, even as men,—who yearly differ less from one another. Yet

the provincialism of Boston has been its charm, and its citizens, striving to be cosmopolitan, in time may repent the effacement of their birth-mark.

I have referred to the standing of Dr. Holmes as a life-long expert in the art of writing those natty lyrics, satires, and *jeux d'esprit*, which it has become the usage to designate as society-verse. Ten years ago, when discussing this "patrician" industry, I scarcely foresaw how actively it soon would be pursued. Its minor devotees certainly have a place in the Parnassian court; but, if content with this petted service, must rank among the squires and pages, and not as lords of high degree. To indulge in a conceit,—and no change of metaphor is too fanciful with respect to the poetry of conceits and graces,—much of our modish verse is only the soufflée and syllabub of a banquet from which strength-giving meats and blooded wine are absent. Taken as the verse which a drawing society affects to patronize, it figures even with the olives and radishes scattered along the meal, wherefrom arrogance and beauty languidly pick trifles while their thoughts are on something else,—or with the comfits at the end, lipped and fingered by sated guests, or taken home as a souvenir and for the nursery. And yet society-verse, meaning that which catches the secret of that day or this, may be—as poets old and new have shown us—picturesque, even dramatic, and rise to a high degree of humor and of sage or tender thought. The consecutive poems of one whose fancy plays about life as he sees it, may be a feast complete and epicurean, having solid dishes and fantastic, all justly savored, cooked with discretion, flanked with honest wine, and whose cates and dainties, even, are not designed to cloy. Taken as a whole, Holmes's poetry has regaled us somewhat after this fashion. His pieces light and wise—"Contentment," the "Epilogue to the Breakfast-table Series," "At the Pantomime," "A Familiar Letter," etc.—are always enjoyable. One or two are exquisite in treatment of the past. "Dorothy Q.," that sprightly capture of a portrait's maiden soul, has given, like "The Last Leaf," lessons to admiring pupils of our time. For sheer humor, "The One-hoss Shay" and "Parson Turell's Legacy" are memorable,—extravagances, but full of character, almost as purely Yankee as "Tam O'Shanter" is purely Scotch. In various whimsicalities, Holmes sets the key for Harte and others to follow. "The First Fan," read at a bric-à-brac festival in 1877, proves him an adept in the latest mode. There is also a conceit of showing the youngsters a trick or two, in

the story "How the Old Horse Won the Bet," told to the class of '71 by the minstrel of the class of '29, and pointed with the moral that "A horse *can* trot, for all he's old."

Good and bright as these things are, some of his graver work excels them. Where most in earnest he is most imaginative; this, of course, is where he is most interested, and this again, in moods the results of his scientific bent and experience. Here he shows himself akin to those who have both lightness and strength. Thackeray's reverential mood, that was so beautiful, is matched by the feeling which Holmes, having the familiarity with Nature that breeds contempt in graver men, exhibits in his thoughts upon "The Living Temple." The stanzas thus named, in measure and reverent effect, are not unworthy to be read with Addison's lofty paraphrase of the Nineteenth Psalm. Humility in presence of recognized law is the spirit of the flings at cant and half-truth in his rhymed essays. There are charity and tenderness in "The Voiceless," "Avis," "Iris," and "The Silent Melody." Another little poem, "Under the Violets," reveals the lover of Collins. But "The Living Temple" and "The Chambered Nautilus" doubtless show us their writer's finest qualities, and are not soon to be forgotten. There is a group of his "Vignettes," in recollection of Wordsworth, Moore, Keats, and Shelley, whose cadence is due to that gift of sympathetic vibration which poets seem to possess. These pieces are as good as any to furnish examples of the sudden fancies peculiar to Holmes's genius, whose glint, if not imagination, is like that of the sparks struck off from it. One from the stanzas on Wordsworth:

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

And this from the Shelley poem, which has an eloquent movement throughout:

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

The things which, after all, sharply distinguish Holmes from other poets, and constitute the bulk of his work, are the lyrics and metrical essays composed for special audiences or occasions. Starting without much creative ambition, and as a bard of mirth and sentiment, it is plain that he was subject to faults which an easy standard entails. His aptitude for writing, with entire correctness, in familiar measures, has been such that nothing but an equal men-

tal aptness could make up for the frequent padding, the inevitably thin passages, of his longer efforts, and for the conceits to which, like Moore and Hood, he has been tempted to sacrifice the spirit of many a graceful poem. To this day there is no telling whither a fancy, once caught and mounted, will bear this lively rider. Poetry at times has seemed his diversion, rather than a high endeavor; yet perhaps this very seeming is essential to the frolic and careless temper of society-verse. The charm that is instant, the triumph of the passing hour,—these are captured by song that often is transitory as the night which listens to it. In Holmes we have an attractive voice devoted to a secondary order of expression. Yet many of his notes survive, and are worthy of a rehearing. A true faculty is requisite to insure this result, and it is but just to say that with his own growth his brilliant occasional pieces strengthened in thought, wit, and feeling.

With respect to his style, there is no one more free from structural whims and vagaries. He has an ear for the "classical" forms of English verse, the academic measures which still bid fair to hold their own—those confirmed by Pope and Goldsmith, and here in vogue long after German dreams, Italian languors, and the French rataplan had their effect upon the poets of our motherland across the sea. His way of thought, like his style, is straightforward and sententious; both are the reverse of what is called transcendental. When he has sustained work to do, and braces himself for a great occasion, nothing will suit but the rhymed pentameter; his heaviest roadster, sixteen hands high, for a long journey. It has served him well, is his by use and possession, and he sturdily will trust it to the end:

"Friends of the Muse, to you of right belong
The first staid footsteps of my square-toed song;
Full well I know the strong heroic line
Has lost its fashion since I made it mine;
But there are tricks old singers will not learn,
And this grave measure still must serve my turn.

Nor let the rhymester of the hour deride
The straight-backed measure with its stately stride;
It gave the mighty voice of Dryden scope;
It sheathed the steel-bright epigrams of Pope;
In Goldsmith's verse it learned a sweeter strain;
Byron and Campbell wore its clanking chain;
I smile to listen while the critic's scorn
Flouts the proud purple kings have nobly worn;
Bid each new rhymer try his dainty skill
And mould his frozen phrases as he will;
We thank the artist for his neat device,—
The shape is pleasing, though the stuff is ice."

He compares it, as contrasted with later modes, to "the slashed doublet of the cava-

lier,"—the costume that would be chosen by Velasquez or Van Dyke. Now, the heroic measure is stately, but if picturesqueness is to be the test, few will back his opinion that in this measure, as written by Pope's adherents, "Unfading still the better type endures." In the course of English song, the rhymed pentameter has included more distinct styles than even blank-verse, and quite as plainly takes on the stamp of its mold. For the man, after all, makes or mars it; it lends itself with fatal readiness to merely didactic uses, and hence has been the patient slave of dullards. As written by Chaucer, it *was* picturesque, full of music and color,—the interfluent, luxurious pentameter couplet, revived by Hunt and Keats, and variously utilized for metrical narrative by successive nineteenth-century poets. Still, the "straight-backed," heroic measure of Queen Anne's time, say what we will, must be a natural and generic English form, that could so maintain itself to our own day. Recall Pope's measure in "The Dunciad," and again, in "The Rape of the Lock,"—that elegant mock-epic which yet stands at the head of all poetry a-la-mode. How it delights a class that still read Byron and Campbell and Scott, the learned body of jurists and other professional men, sensible and humane, who care little for the poetry of beauty alone. I observe that lawyers, veteran judges, merry and discreet, enjoy the verse of Holmes. It was asked concerning Landor, "Shall not the wise have their poets as well as the witless?" and shall we begrudge the wigged and gowned their rations of wit and epigram and lettered jest? Not the form, but the informing spirit, is the essential thing, and this many, who are on the watch for American originality, fail to comprehend. An apt taster knows which wine has the novel flavor, though the vintages look alike to the eyes.

The mechanism of Holmes's briefer occasional poems is fully as trite and simple. Whether this may be from choice or limitation, he has accumulated a unique series of pieces, vivacious as those of Tom Moore, but with the brain of New England in them, and notions and instances without end. How sure their author's sense of the fitness of things, his gift of adaptability to the occasion,—to how many occasions, and what different things! He out-rivals Kossuth, the adroit orator who landed in a new world, master of its language, and had forensic arguments for the bar, grace and poetry for women, statistics for merchants, and an assortment of local allusions for the respective towns and villages in which he pleaded his cause. A phantasmagory of the songs, odes, and rhymed addresses, of so many years; collegiate and civic glories;

tributes to princes, embassies, generals, heroes; welcomes to novelists and^h poets; eulogies of the dead; verse inaugural and dedicatory; stanzas read at literary breakfasts, New England dinners, municipal and bucolic feasts; odes natal, nuptial, and mortuary; metrical delectations offered to his brothers of the medical craft—to which he is so loyal—bristling with scorn of quackery and challenge to opposing systems,—not only equal to all occasions, but growing better with their increase. The half of his early collections is made up from efforts of this sort, and they constitute nine-tenths of his verse during the last thirty years. Now, what has carried Holmes so bravely through all this, if not a kind of special masterhood, an individuality, humor, touch, that we shall not see again? Thus we come, in fine, to be sensible of the distinctive gift of this poet. The achievement for which he must be noted is, that in a field the most arduous and least attractive he should bear himself with such zest and fitness as to be numbered among poets, and should do honor to an office which they chiefly dread or mistrust, and which is little calculated to excite their inspiration.

HAVING in mind the case of our Autocrat, one is moved to traverse the ancient maxim, and exclaim, "Count no man unhappy till his dying day." There are few instances where a writer, suddenly, and after the age when fame is won "or never," compels the public to readjust its estimate of his powers. Holmes was not idle as a rhymester from 1836 to 1857; but his chief labor was given to medical practice and instruction, and it was fair to suppose that his literary capacity had been gauged. Possibly his near friends had no just idea of his versatile talent until he put forth the most taking serial in prose that ever established the prestige of a new magazine. At forty-eight he began a new career, as if it were granted him to live life over, with the wisdom of middle-age in his favor at the start. Coming, in a sense, like an author's first book, "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-table" naturally was twice as clever as any "first book" of the period. It appears that this work was planned in his youth; but we owe to his maturity the experience, drollery, proverbial humor, and suggestion that flow at ease through its pages. Little is too high or too low for the comment of this down-east philosopher. A kind of attenuated Franklin, he views things and folks with the less robustness, but with keener distinction and insight. His pertinent maxims are so frequent that it seems, as was said of Emerson, as if he had jotted them down

from time to time and here first brought them to application; they are apothegms of common life and action, often of mental experience, strung together by a device so original as to make the work quite a novelty in literature. The Autocrat holds an intellectual tourney at a boarding-house table; there jousts against humbug and stupidity, gives light touches of knowledge, sentiment, illustration, coins here and there a phrase destined to be long current, nor forgets the poetic duty of providing a little idyl of human love and interest. Here, also, we find his best lyrical pieces,—on the side of beauty, “The Chambered Nautilus” and “The Living Temple”; on that of mirth, “The One-Hoss Shay” and its companion-piece. How alert his fancy! A tree blows down in his woods; he counts the rings—there are hundreds of them. “This is Shakspeare’s. The tree was seven inches in diameter when he was born, ten inches when he died. A little less than ten inches when Milton was born; seventeen when he died. . . . Here is the span of Napoleon’s career. . . . I have seen many wooden preachers, never one like this.” Again, of letters from callow aspirants: “I have two letters on file; one is a pattern of adulation, the other of impertinence. My reply to the first, containing the best advice I could give, conveyed in courteous language, had brought out the second. There was some sport in this, but Dullness is not commonly a game fish, and only sulks after he is struck.” In fine, the Autocrat, if not profound, is always acute,—the liveliest of monologists, and altogether too good to be taken at a disadvantage within his own territory.

Two later books, completing the Autocrat series, follow in a similar vein, their scene the same boarding-house, their slight plots varied by new personages and by-play, the conductor of the Yankee symposia the same Autocrat, through the aid of a Professor and a Poet successively. The best comment on these works is made by their sagacious author, who likens them to the wine of grapes that are squeezed in the press after the first juice that runs of itself from the heart of the fruit has been drawn off. In this lies a recognition of the effect of a market that comes to an author somewhat late in his life. It is too much to expect that one who makes a wonderfully fresh start at fifty should run better and better, as if in the progressive and not the decadent course of life, which latter our author himself reckons from a much earlier stage. And a paying American market for purely literary work began with the foundation of the “Atlantic.” Poe’s will had been too weak to wait for it; Hawthorne had striven for years; others had struggled and

gone down. A lucrative demand for Holmes’s prose was too grateful not to be utilized; besides, the income of the magazine required his efforts. I have laid stress upon the need of a market to promote literary activity, but it is worth while to note how far. At certain times and in special cases, too ready a sale tends to lower the grade of ideal work. This may even now be observed. On the one hand, new writers certainly are brought out by the competition between our thriving publishers of books and periodicals; on the other, those who prove themselves capable, and are found available by the caterers, are drawn into a system of over-methodical production at stated intervals. The stint is furnished regularly; each year or half-year the new novel is thrown off, cleverly adapted to the popular taste. Ideal effort is deadened; the natural bent of a poetic mind is subordinated to labor that is best paid. The hope, patience, aspiration that should produce a masterpiece are cast aside. If there be a general advance it is monotonous, and at the expense of individual genius. My deduction is that matter supplied regularly for a persistent market, though of a high order of journey-work, is not improperly designated by that name.

“The Professor” is written somewhat in the manner of Sterne, yet without much artifice. The story of Iris is an interwoven thread of gold. The poems in this book are inferior to those of the Autocrat, but its author here and there shows a gift of drawing real characters; the episode of the Little Gentleman is itself a poem,—its close very touching, though imitated from the death-scene in *Tristram Shandy*. “The Poet at the Breakfast-table,” written some years after, is of a more serious cast than its predecessors, chiefly devoted to Holmes’s peculiar mental speculations and his fluent gossip on books and learning. He makes his rare old pundit a liberal thinker, clearly of the notion that a high scholarship leads to broader views. I do not think he would banish Greek from a college curriculum; but if he should, the Old Master would cry out upon him. Between the second and third works of this series, his two novels had appeared,—curious examples of what a clever observer can do by way of fiction in the afternoon of life. As conceptions, these were definite and original, as much so as Hawthorne’s; but that great romancer would have presented in a far more dramatic and imaginative fashion an Elsie Venner, tainted with the ophidian madness that so vexed her human soul,—a Myrtle Hazard, inheriting the trace of Indian savagery at war with her higher organization. The somewhat crude handling of these tales betrays the fact that the author was not trained

by practice in the novelist's art. But they have the merit of coming down to fact with an exhibition of common, often vulgar, everyday life in the country towns of Massachusetts. This, and realistic drawings of sundry provincial types, Holmes produces in a manner directly on the way to the subsequent evolution of more finished works, like Howells's "A Modern Instance" and "The Undiscovered Country." Meanwhile he verifies his birthright by adapting these narratives to the debate on inherited tendency, limited responsibility, and freedom of the will. On the whole, the novels and the Autocrat volumes were indigenous works, in plot and style behind the deft creations of our day, but with their writer's acumen everywhere conspicuous. If their science and suggestion now seem trite, it must be owned that the case was opposite when they were written, and that ideas now familiar were set afloat in this way. Little of our recent literature is so fresh, relatively to our period, as these books were in consideration of their own. As Holmes's humor had relaxed the grimness of a Puritan constituency, so his prose satire did much to liberalize their clerical system. This was not without some wrath and oburgation on the part of the more rigid clergy and laity alike, and at times worked to the disadvantage of the satirist and his publishers. The situation now seems far away and amusing: equally so, the queer audacity of his off-hand pronouncements upon the gravest themes. He was responsible, I fear, for a very airy settlement of distracting social problems, to his own satisfaction and that of a generation of half-informed readers; for getting ready sanction to his postulate of a Brahmin caste, and leading many a Gifted Hopkins to set up for its representative. Yet his dialogues and stories are in every way the expression of a stimulating personage, their author,—a frank display of the Autocrat himself. If one would learn how to be his own Boswell, these five books are naïve examples of a successful American method.

Holmes's mental fiber, sturdier with use, shows to advantage in a few poems, speeches, and prose essays of his later years. These illustrate the benefits to an author of having, in Quaker diction, a concern upon him; each, like the speech "On the Inevitable Crisis," is the outflow of personal conviction, or, like "Homeopathy *vs.* Allopathy," "The Physiology of Versification," etc., the discussion of a topic in which he takes a special interest. Jonathan Edwards he had epitomized in verse:

"The salamander of divines.

A deep, strong nature, pure and undefiled;
Faith, strong as his who stabbed his sleeping child."

The notable prose essay on Edwards excites a wish that he oftener had found occasion to indulge his talent for analytic characterization. He has few superiors in discernment of a man's individuality, however distinct that individuality may be from his own. Emerson, for example, was a thinker and poet whose chartered disciples scarcely would have selected Holmes as likely to proffer a sympathetic or even objective transcript of him. Yet, when the time came, Holmes was equal to the effort. He presented with singular clearness, and with an epigrammatic genius at white heat, if not the esoteric view of the Concord Plotinus, at least what could enable an audience to get at the mold of that serene teacher and make some fortunate surmise of the spirit that ennobled it. I do not recall a more faithful and graphic *outside* portrait. True, it was done by an artist who applies the actual eye, used for corporal vision, to the elusive side of things, and who thinks little too immaterial for the test of reason and science,—who looks, we might say, at unexplored tracts by sunlight rather than starlight. But it sets Emerson before us in both his noonday and sundown moods; in his character as a town-dweller, and also as when "he looked upon this earth very much as a visitor from another planet would look on it." With no waste words, the poet's walk, talk, bearing, and intellect, are illustrated by a series of images, and in a style so vehicular as to deserve unusual praise. Writing before the appearance of Dr. Holmes's full treatise on the theme, we read this Boston address and suspect that in understanding of the Emersonian cult he is not behind its votaries. His acceptance of it may be another thing, depending, like his religion, upon the cast of his own nature.

Many were surprised to find Mr. Arnold rating Emerson, as a writer, below Montaigne. The latter, however rare and various, depended largely in his essays on citations from the ancients,—in fact, from writers of every grade and period; while of Emerson's infrequent borrowing it may be said that his paraphrase often is worth more than the original, and that otherwise each of his fruitful sentences contains some epigram, or striking thought, illuminated by a flash of insight and power. Holmes, among our poets, is another original writer, but his prose is a setting for brilliants of a different kind; his shrewd sayings are bright with native metaphor; he is a proverb-maker, some of whose words are not without wings. When he ranges along the line of his tastes and studies, we find him honestly bred. Plato and the Stagirite, the Elzevir classics, the English essayists, the

fathers' of the healing art, must be in sight on his shelves, even though

"The damp offspring of the modern press
Flaunts on his table with its pictured dress."

But his proper study is man, the regard of people and movements close at hand. Somewhat distrustful of the "inner light," he stands squarely upon observation, experience, induction; yet at times is so volatile a theorist that one asks how much of his saying is conviction, and how much mirth or whim. His profession has put him on the alert for natural tendency, in the belief that fortune goes by inheritance. Crime and virtue are physically foreordained. He takes unkindly to sentimental attempts at reform. His temper and training so largely affect his writings that the latter scarcely can be criticised from the merely literary point of view. Holmes's conservatism, then, goes well enough with a poet of the old régime, and with the maker of light satires and well-bred verse. In these the utterance of a radical would be as out of keeping as Brown of Osawatomie in a court-suit. There is no call for diatribes on his lack of sympathy with the Abolitionists, with the transcendentalists, with new schools of medicine and art. What has this to do with the service of our gallant and amiable *jongleur*? He sticks to his own like the wearer of "The Entailed Hat." Innovation savors ill to his nostril; yet we feel that if brought face to face with a case of wrong or suffering, his action would be prompted by a warm heart and as swift as any enthusiast could desire. When the Civil War broke out, this conservative poet, who had taken little part in the agitation that preceded it, shared in every way the spirit and duties of the time. None of our poets wrote more stirring war lyrics during the conflict, none has been more national so far as loyalty, in the Websterian sense, to our country and her emblems is concerned. He always has displayed the simple instinctive patriotism of the American minuteman. He may or may not side with his neighbors, but he is for the nation; purely republican, if scarcely democratic. His pride is not of English, but of long American descent. The roundheads of the old country were the cavaliers of the new,—a band of untitled worthies moving off to found clans of their own. "Other things being equal," the doctor does prefer "a man of family." He goes "for the man with a gallery of family portraits against the one with a twenty-five cent daguerreotype," unless he finds "that the latter is the better of the two." Better, he thinks, accept asphyxia than a *mésalliance*, that lasts fifty years to begin with, and then passes down the

line of descent. Even our "chryso-aristocracy" he thinks is bettered by the process which secures to those "who can afford the extreme luxury of beauty" the finest specimens of "the young females of each successive season." Thus far our sacerdotal celebrant of genealogies and family-trees. It is likely that he takes more interest than his compeers in the *Proc. Mass. Hist. Soc.* But he represents his section within these limits as strictly as the poet of the library, the poet of the new and radical upper class, the fervent poet of liberty and exaltation,—or even as Emerson, that provincial citizen of the world at large. Our Eastern group of poets is unique; we shall have no other of one caste and section so distinct in its separate personages. The Puritan strain in Holmes's blood was kept pure in the secluded province of Connecticut, where the stern Calvinism of the migration yet holds sway. He stands for the ancestral feeling as squarely as he refutes the old belief; and it is well enough that such a poet should be the minstrel of established feasts, and loyal to his class, rather than the avatar of new classes and conditions. He is of Cambridge and Beacon Hill, and in point of style, usage, social life, will maintain his ground with rhyme and banter,—small swords allowed the Ruperts of to-day. Otherwise he gives his judgment free scope, and no superstition trammels the logic of his inquisitive mind. It has required some independence for a man of letters, the friend of Lowell and Emerson, to be a Tory, and for a trimontane poet to be a progressive and speculative thinker.

There is an unconscious sense of the artistic in the self-differentiation of social life. It organizes a stage performance; each one makes himself auxiliary to the whole by some dramatic instinct that loyally accepts the part allotted. Holmes has filled that of hereditary chamberlain, the staff never leaving his hand, and has performed its functions with uncommon ardor and distinction. It would not be strange if those who often have seen at their ceremonies this "fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy," appreciate less than others the strength of his ripest years. The younger men who gathered to pay him their tributes on his seventieth birthday felt that if he did not sing at his own fête his thought might well be:

—"You are kind; may your tribe be increased,
But at this I can give you such odds if I will!"

He did sing, and the mingled gayety and tenderness of the song made it, as was fitting, one of his sweetest. The occasion itself mel-

lowed his voice, and a mere fancy has not often played more lightly around the edge of feeling than when he said:

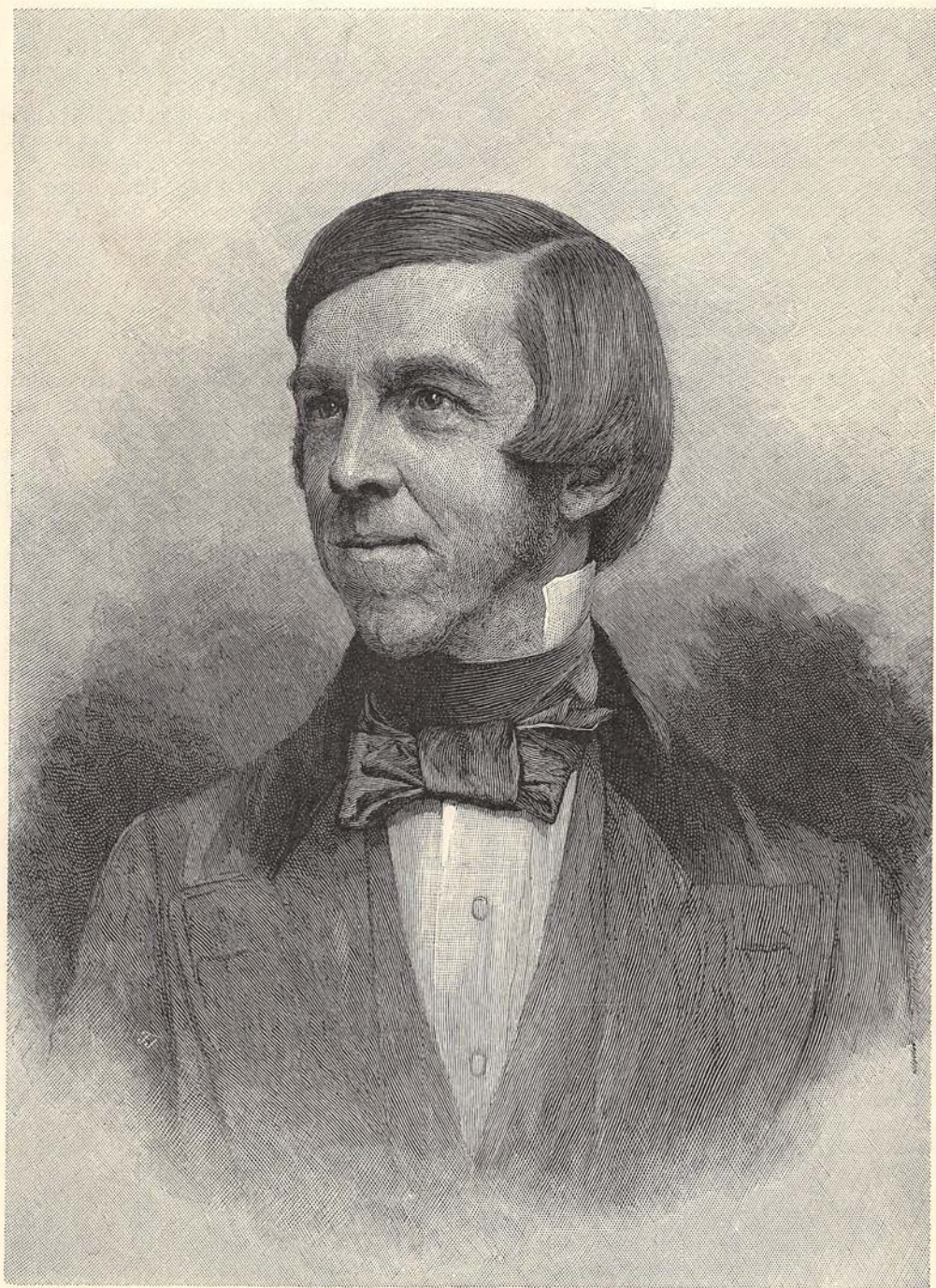
"As on the gauzy wings of fancy flying
From some far orb I track our watery sphere,
Home of the struggling, suffering, doubting, dying,
The silvered globule seems a glistening tear."

Five more years have been added to the youth of his old age, and in them, if not so prolific as once, he has given us some of his neatest work in verse and prose. These efforts have not died with the occasions that called them out. Their beauty, it is true, took on increase by the manner in which the author suited his action to his word. The youth, who has heard this last of the recitationists deliver one of his poems, will recall in future years the fire and spirit of a veteran whose heart was in his work, who reads a stanza with the poetic inflection that no elocutionist can equal, who with it gives you so much of himself—the sparkling eye, the twinkling by-play of the mouth, the nervous frame on tip-toe in chase of imagery unleased and coursing. Such a poet lifts the glow and fancy of the moment into the region of art, but of the art which must be enacted to bring out its full effect, and in which no actor save the artist himself can satisfactorily essay the single rôle.

If the question is asked, Would the verse of Doctor Holmes be held in so much favor if he had not confirmed his reputation by prose replete with poetic humor and analogy? the fairest answer may be in the negative. Together, his writings surely owe their main success to an approximate exhibition of the author himself. Where the man is even more lively than his work, the public takes kindly to the one and the other. The jester is privileged even in the court of art and letters; yet if one could apply to Holmes—the jester, homilist, and man of feeling—his own process, we should have analysis indeed. Were the theme assigned to himself, we should have an inimitably honest setting forth of his merits and foibles, from this keen anatomist of mind and body, this smile-begetter, this purveyor to so many feasts. As a New Englander he long ago was awarded the highest sectional

praise,—that of being, among all his tribe, the cutest. His cleverness and versatility bewilder outside judges. Is he a genius? By all means. And in what degree? His prose, for the most part, is peculiarly original. His serious poetry scarcely has been the serious work of his life; but in his specialty, verse suited to the frolic or pathos of occasions, he has given us much of the best-delivered in his own time, and has excelled all others in delivery. Both his strength and weakness lie in his genial temper and his brisk, speculative habit of mind. For, though almost the only modern poet who has infused enough spirit into table and rostrum verse to make it worth recording, his poetry has appealed to the present rather than the future; and, again, he has too curious and analytic a brain for purely artistic work. Of Holmes as a satirist, which it is not unusual to call him, I have said but little. His metrical satires are of the amiable sort that debars him from kinsmanship with the Juvenals of old, or the Popes and Churchills of more recent times. There is more real satire in one of Hosea Biglow's lyrics than in all our laughing philosopher's irony, rhymed and unrhymed. Yet he is a keen observer of the follies and chances which satire makes its food. Give him personages, reminiscences, manners, to touch upon, and he is quite at home. He may not reproduce these imaginatively, in their stronger combinations; but the Autocrat makes no unseemly boast when he says: "It was in teaching of Life that we came together. I thought I knew something about that, that I could speak or write about it to some purpose." Let us consider, then, that if Holmes had died young, we should have missed a choice example of the New England fiber which strengthens while it lasts; that he has lived to round a personality that will be traditional for at least the time granted to one or two less characteristic worthies of revolutionary days; that—" 'twas all he wished"—a few of his lyrics already belong to our select anthology, and one or two of his books must be counted as factors in what twentieth-century chroniclers will term (and here is matter for reflection) the development of "early" American literature.

Edmund C. Stedman.



Oliver Wendell Holmes.