

in Ajaccio. In a letter written immediately after his release in September, 1794, to the Corsican deputy Multedo, he informs his correspondent that his birthplace is the weakest spot on the island, and open to attack. The information was correct. Paoli had made an effort to strengthen it, but without success. "To drive the English," said the writer of the letter, "from a position which makes them masters of the Mediterranean, . . . to emancipate a large number of good patriots still to be found in that department, and to restore to their firesides the

good republicans who have deserved the care of their country by the generous manner in which they have suffered for it, this, my friend, is the expedition which should occupy the attention of the government." Perhaps the old vista of becoming a Corsican hero opened up once again to a sore and disappointed man, but it is not probable: the horizon of his life had expanded too far to be again contracted, and the present task was probably considered but as a bridge to cross once more the waters of bitterness.

(To be continued.)

William M. Sloane.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS AND UNPUBLISHED LETTERS.



DR. HOLMES'S social nature, as expressed in conversation and in his books, drew him into communication with a very large number of people. It cannot be said, however, in this age marked by altruisms, that he was altruistic; on the contrary, he loved himself, and made himself his prime study — but as a member of the human race. He had his own purposes to fulfil, his own self-appointed tasks, and he preferred to take men only on his own terms. He was filled with righteous indignation, in reading Carlyle, to find a passage where, hearing the door-bell ring one morning when he was very busy, he exclaimed that he was afraid it was "the man Emerson!" Yet Dr. Holmes was himself one of the most carefully guarded men, through his years of actual production, who ever lived and wrote. His wife absorbed her life in his, and mounted guard to make sure that interruption was impossible. Nevertheless, he was a lover of men, or he could not have drawn them perpetually to his side. His writings were never aimed too high; his sole wish was to hit the mark, if possible: but if a shot hit the head also, he showed a childlike pride in the achievement.

When the moment came to meet men face to face, what unrivaled gaiety and good cheer possessed him! He was king of the dinner-table during a large part of the century. He loved to talk, but he was eager to be quickened by the conversation of others, and reverence was never absent from his nature. How incomparable his gift of conversation was, it will be difficult, probably impossible, for any one to understand who had never known him. It

was not that he was wiser, or wittier, or more profound, or more radiant with humor, than other men, because the shades of Macaulay, Sydney Smith, De Quincey, and Coleridge rise up before us from the past, and among his contemporaries many men must still recall the sallies of Tom Appleton, the charm of Agassiz and of Cornelius Felton and others of the Saturday Club; but with Dr. Holmes sunshine and gaiety came into the room. It was not a determination to be cheerful or witty or profound; but it was a natural expression, like that of a child, sometimes overclouded and sometimes purely gay, but always as open as a child to the influences around him, and ready for "a good time." His power of self-excitement seemed inexhaustible. Given a dinner-table, with light and color, and somebody occasionally to throw the ball, his spirits would rise and coruscate astonishingly. He was not unaware if men whom he considered his superiors were present; he was sure to make them understand that he meant to sit at their feet and listen to them, even if his own excitement ran away with him. "I've talked too much," he often said, with a feeling of sincere penitence, as he rose from the table. "I wanted to hear what our guest had to say." But the wise guest, seizing the opportunity, usually led Dr. Holmes on until he forgot that he was not listening and replying. It was this sensitiveness, perhaps, which made his greatest charm — a power of sympathy which led him to understand what his companion would say if he should speak, and made it possible for him to talk in a measure for others as well as to express himself.

Nothing, surely, could be more unusual and beautiful than such a gift, nor any more purely

his own. His conversation reminded one of those beautiful *dansesuses* of the South upon whom every eye is fastened, by whom every sense is fascinated, but who dance up to their companions, and lead them out, and make them feel all the exhilaration of the occasion, while the leader alone possesses all the enchantment and all the inspiration. Of course conversation of this kind is an outgrowth of character. His reverence was one source of its inspiration, and a desire to do well everything which he undertook. He was a faithful friend and a keen appreciator, and he disliked to hear depreciation of others. His character was clear-cut and defined, like his small, erect figure; perfect of its kind, and possessed of great innate dignity, which was veiled only by delightful, incomparable gifts and charms.

My acquaintance and friendship with him lasted through many years, beginning with my husband's early association. I think their acquaintance began about the time when the doctor threatened to hang out a sign, "The smallest fevers gratefully received," and when the young publisher's literary enthusiasm led him to make some excuse for asking medical advice.

The very first letter I find in Dr. Holmes's handwriting is the following amusing note accompanying the manuscript copy of "Astræa: The Balance of Illusions." The note possibly alludes to "Astræa" as the poem to be written.

\$100.00.

MY DEAR SIR: The above is an argument of great weight to all those who, like the late John Rogers, are surrounded by a numerous family.

I will incubate this golden egg two days, and present you with the resulting chicken upon the third.

Yours very truly,

O. W. HOLMES.

P. S. You will perceive that the last sentence is figurative, and implies that I shall watch and fast over your proposition for forty-eight hours. But I could not on any account be so sneaky as to get up and recite poor old "Hanover" over again. Oh, no! If anything, it must be of the "paullo majora."

"Silvæ sint consule dignæ." Let us have a brand-new poem or none.

Yours as on the preceding page.

The next letters which I find as having passed between the two friends are dated in the year 1851, and it must have been about this period that their relations began to grow closer. In every succeeding year they became more and more intimate; and when death interrupted their communication, Dr. Holmes's untiring kindness to me continued to the end. Unfor-

tunately for this record, the friendship was not maintained by correspondence. Common interests brought the two men together almost daily long before Dr. Holmes bought a house in Charles street within a few doors of our own, and such contiguity made correspondence to any great extent unnecessary.

The removal from Montgomery Place, where he had lived some years, to Charles street, was a matter of great concern. He says in the "Autocrat" that "he had no idea until he pulled up his domestic establishment what an enormous quantity of roots he had been making during the years he had been planted there." Before announcing his intention, he came early one morning, with his friend Lothrop Motley, to inspect our house, which was similar to the one he thought of buying. I did not know his intention at the time, but I was delighted with his enthusiasm for the view over Charles River bay, which in those days was wider and more beautiful than it can ever be again. Nothing would satisfy him but to go to the attic, which he declared, if it were his, he should make his study.

Shortly after, the doctor took possession of his new house, but characteristically made no picturesque study in which to live. He passed many long days and evenings, even in summer, in a lower room opening on the street, which wore the air of the office of a physician, and solaced his love for the picturesque by an occasional afternoon at his early home in Cambridge. Of a visit to this house I find the following description in my note-book: "Drove out in the afternoon and overtook Professor Holmes" (he liked to be called "Professor" then), "with his wife and son, who were all on their way to his old homestead in Cambridge. They asked us to go there with them, as it was only a few steps from where we were. The professor went to the small side door, and knocked with a fine brass knocker which had just been presented to him from the old Hancock house. It was delightful to see his exquisite pleasure in everything about his early home. There hung a portrait of his father, Abiel Holmes, at the age of thirty-one—a beautiful face it was; there also a picture of the reverend doctor's first wife, fair, and perhaps a trifle coquettish, or what the professor called 'a little romantic'; the old chairs from France still there; and no modern knickknacks interfering with the old-fashioned, quiet effect of the whole. He has taken for his writing-room the former parlor looking into the garden. He loves to work there, where he and his wife spend a good deal of time. Washington slept three nights in the old house, and is said to have planned here the battle of Bunker Hill. Dr. Bradshaw stepped from the door to make a prayer for the troops before

their departure to Charlestown. There are fine trees behind the house, where we sat in the shade and talked until the shadows grew long upon the grass." During the very last years of Dr. Holmes's life he used to talk often of the old Cambridge home and the days of his childhood there. "I can remember, when I shut my eyes," he said one day, "just as if it were yesterday, how beautiful it was looking out of the windows of my father's house, how bright and sunshiny the Common was in front, and the figures which came and went of persons familiar to me. One day some one said, 'There go Russell Sturgis and his bride'; and I looked, and saw what appeared to me then two radiant beings! All this came back to me as I read a volume of his reminiscences lately privately printed, not published, by his children."

Dr. Holmes's out-of-door life was not limited, however, to his excursions to Cambridge. Early in the morning, sometimes before sunrise, standing at my bedroom window overlooking the bay, I have seen his tiny skiff moving quickly over the face of the quiet water; or, later, drifting down idly with the tide, as if his hour of exercise was over, and he was now dreamily floating homeward while he drank in the loveliness of the morning. Sometimes the waves were high and rough, and adventures were to be had; then every muscle was given a chance, and he would return to breakfast tired but refreshed. There was little to be learned about a skiff and its management which he did not acquire. He knew how many pounds a boat ought to weigh, and every detail respecting it. In the "Autocrat" he says: "My present fleet on the Charles River consists of three rowboats: 1. A small flat-bottomed skiff of the shape of a flat-iron, kept mainly to lend to boys. 2. A fancy 'dory' for two pairs of sculls, in which I sometimes go out with my young folks. 3. My own particular water-sulky, a 'skeleton' or 'shell' race-boat, twenty-two feet long, with huge outriggers, which boat I pull with ten-foot sculls, alone, of course, as it holds but one, and tips him out if he does not mind what he is about." The description is all delightful, and a little later on there is a reference to such a morning as I have already attempted to recall. "I dare not publicly name the rare joys," he says, "the infinite delights, that intoxicate me on some sweet June morning when the river and bay are smooth as a sheet of beryl-green silk, and I run along ripping it up with my knife-edged shell of a boat, the rent closing after me, like those wounds of angels which Milton tells of, but the seam still shining for many a long rood behind me. . . . To take shelter from the sunbeams under one of the thousand-footed bridges, and look down its intermina-

ble colonnades, crusted with green and oozy growths, studded with minute barnacles, and belted with rings of dark muscles, while overhead streams and thunders that other river whose every wave is a human soul flowing to eternity as the river below flows to the ocean,—lying there, moored unseen, in loneliness so profound that the columns of Tadmor in the desert could not seem more remote from life,—the cool breeze on one's forehead,— . . . why should I tell of these things!"

Since the Autocrat has himself told the story of this episode so beautifully, no one else need attempt it. He drank in the very wine of life with the air of those summer mornings.

Returning to some of Dr. Holmes's early letters, written before he moved to Charles street, I find him addressing his correspondent from Pittsfield, where for seven years he enjoyed a country house in summer. "But," he said one day, "a country house, you will remember, has been justly styled by Balzac *une plaie ouverte*. There is no end to the expenses it entails. I was very anxious to have a country retreat, and when my wife had a small legacy of about two thousand dollars a good many years ago, we thought we would put up a perfectly plain shelter with that money on a beautiful piece of ground we owned in Pittsfield. Well, the architect promised to put the house up for that. But it cost just twice as much, to begin with; that was n't much! Then we had to build a barn; then we wanted a horse and carryall and wagon; so one thing led to another, and it was too far away for me to look after it, and at length, after seven years, we sold it. I could n't bear to think of it or to speak of it for a long time. I loved the trees, and while our children were little it was a good place for them; but we had to sell it, and it was better in the end, although I felt lost without it for a great while." Here is a letter from Pittsfield which describes him there upon his arrival one year in the spring:

PITTSFIELD, June 13, 1852.

MY DEAR MR. FIELDS: I have just received your very interesting note, and the proof which accompanied it. I don't know when I ever read anything about myself that struck me so piquantly as that story about the old gentleman. It is almost too good to be true, but you are not in the habit of quizzing. The trait is so nature-like and Dickens-like, no American—no living soul but a peppery, crotchety, good-hearted, mellow old John Bull—could have done such a thing. God bless him! Perhaps the verses are not much, and perhaps he is no great judge whether they are or not: but what a pleasant thing it is to win the hearty liking of any honest creature who is neither your relation nor

compatriot, and who must fancy what pleases him for itself and nothing else!

I will not say what pleasure I have received from Miss Mitford's kind words. I am going to sit down, and write her a letter with a good deal of myself in it, which I am quite sure she will read with indulgence, if not with gratification. If you see her, or write to her, be sure to let her know that she must make up her mind to such a letter as she will have to sit down to.

I am afraid I have not much of interest for you. It is a fine thing to see one's trees and things growing, but not so much to tell of. I have been a week in the country now, and am writing at this moment amidst such a scintillation of fireflies and chorus of frogs as a cockney would cross the Atlantic to enjoy. During the past winter I have done nothing but lecture, having delivered between seventy and eighty all round the country from Maine to western New York, and even confronted the critical terrors of the great city that holds half a million and P—— H——. All this spring I have been working on microscopes, so that it is only within a few days I have really got hold of anything to read—to say nothing of writing except for my lyceum audiences. I had a literary rencontre just before I came away, however, in the shape of a dinner at the Revere House with Griswold and Epes Sargent. What a curious creature Griswold is! He seems to me a kind of naturalist whose subjects are authors, whose memory is a perfect fauna of all flying, running, and creeping things that feed on ink. Epes has done mighty well with his red-edged school-book, which is a very creditable-looking volume, to say the least.

It would be hard to tell how much you are missed among us. I really do not know who would make a greater blank if he were abstracted. As for myself, I have been all lost since you have been away in all that relates to literary matters, to say nothing of the almost daily aid, comfort, and refreshment I imbibed from your luminous presence. Do come among us as soon as you can; and having come, stay among your devoted friends, of whom count

O. W. HOLMES.

From this letter also we get a glimpse of the literary world of New England at that time, and an idea of his own occupations.

By degrees, as the intimacy between the two friends and neighbors grew closer, we find the publisher asking his opinion of certain manuscripts. I have no means of knowing who was the author of the poems frankly described in the following note, but one can only wish that writers, especially young writers, could sometimes see themselves in such a glass—not darkly!

8 MONTGOMERY PLACE, July 24, 1857.

MY DEAR MR. FIELDS: I return the three poems you sent me, having read them with much gratification. Each of them has its peculiar merits and defects, as it seems to me, but all show poetical feeling and artistic skill.

"Sleep On!" is the freshest and most individual in its character. You will see my pencil comment at the end of it. "Inkerman" is comparatively slipshod and careless, though not without lyric fire and vivid force of description.

"Raphael Sanzio" would deserve higher praise if it were not so closely imitative.

In truth, all these poems have a genuine sound; they are full of poetical thought, and breathed out in softly modulated words. The music of "Sleep On!" is very sweet, and I have never seen heroic verse in which the rhyme was less obtrusive or the rhythm more diffident. Still it would not be fair to speak in these terms of praise without pointing out the transparent imitativeness which is common to all these poems.

"Inkerman" is a poetical Macaulay stewed. The whole flow of its verse and resonant passion of its narrative are borrowed from the "Lays of Ancient Rome." There are many crashing lines in it, and the story is rather dashingly told; but it is very inferior in polish, and even correctness, to both the other poems. I have marked some of its errata.

"Raphael," good as it is, is nothing more than Browning browned over. Every turn of expression, and the whole animus, so to speak, is taken from those poetical monologues of his. *Call it* an imitation, and it is excellent.

The best of the three poems, then, is "Sleep On!" I see Keats in it, and one or both of the Brownings; but though the form is borrowed, the passion is genuine—the fire has passed along there, and the verse has followed before the ashes were quite cool.

Talent, certainly; taste very fine for the melodies of language; deep, quiet sentiment. Genius? If beardless, yea; if in sable silvered,—and I think this cannot be a very young hand,—why, then . . . we will suspend our opinion.

Faithfully yours,

O. W. HOLMES.

From this period I find several amusing personal letters which are characteristic enough to be preserved. Among them is the following:

21 CHARLES ST., July 6, 8:33 A. M.
Barometer at 30 $\frac{1}{10}$.

MY DEAR FRIEND AND NEIGHBOR: Your most unexpected gift, which is not a mere token of remembrance, but a permanently val-

uable present, is making me happier every moment I look at it. It is so pleasant to be thought of by our friends when they have so much to draw their thoughts away from us; it is so pleasant, too, to find that they have cared enough about us to study our special tastes,—that you can see why your beautiful gift has a growing charm for me. Only Mrs. Holmes thinks it ought to be in the parlor among the things for show, and I think it ought to be in the study, where I can look at it at least once an hour every day of my life.

I have observed some extraordinary movements of the index of the barometer during the discussions that ensued, which you may be interested to see my notes of.

*Barometer.**Mrs. H.*

My dear, we shall of course keep this beautiful barometer in the parlor.

*Fair.**Dr. H.*

Why, no, my dear; the study is the place.

*Dry.**Mrs. H.*

I'm sure it ought to go in the parlor. It's too handsome for your old den.

*Change.**Dr. H.*

I shall keep it in the study.

*Very dry.**Mrs. H.*

I don't think that's fair.

*Rain.**Dr. H.*

I'm sorry. Can't help it.

*Very dry.**Mrs. H.*

It's—too—too—ba-a-ad.

*Much rain.**Dr. H.*

(Music omitted.)

'Mid pleas-ures and paaal-a-a-c-es.

*Set Fair.**Mrs. H.*

I will have it! You horrid—

Stormy.

You see what a wonderful instrument this is that you have given me. But, my dear Mr. Fields, while I watch its changes it will be a constant memorial of unchanging friendship; and while the dark hand of fate is traversing the whole range of mortal vicissitudes, the golden index of the kind affections shall stand always at SET FAIR. Yours ever,

O. W. HOLMES.

There are many notes also showing how the two friends played into each other's hands. This one is a sample:

21 CHARLES STREET, July 17, 1864.

MY DEAR MR. FIELDS: Can you tell me anything that will get this horrible old woman of the C—California off from my shoulders? Do you know anything about this pestilent manuscript she raves about? This continent is not big enough for me and her together, and

if she does n't jump into the Pacific I shall have to leap into the Atlantic—I mean the original damp spot so called. Yours always,

O. W. HOLMES.

P. S. To avoid the necessity of the latter, I have written to her, cordially recommending suicide as adapted to her case.

Surely there must have been something peculiarly exasperating about this applicant for literary honors, because Dr. Holmes erred, if at all, in the opposite direction. He was far more apt to write and to behave as the following note recommends: "Will you read this young lady's story, and let me know what you propose to do with it? A young woman of tender feelings, I think, and to be treated very kindly." Again: "Will it be too late for a few paragraphs about Forceythe Willson? If not, in what paper? And can you tell me anything? Will you do it yourself?"

The number of those notes is legion, bringing every variety of form and subject and problem to his friend as editor or publisher, or for private advice. In one of them he says, "Please give me your grand-paternal counsel."

I have quoted enough notes upon this head to give an idea of the kind and busy brain not too deeply immersed in its own projects to have a tender regard for those of others.

Meanwhile his own work was continually progressing. Lowell had already made him feel that he was the mainspring of the "Atlantic," which at the time of the war attained the height of its popularity, and achieved a position where it found no peer. The care which Dr. Holmes bestowed upon the finish of his work, the endless labor over its details, are almost inconceivable when we remember that "this power of taking pains," which Carlyle calls one of the attributes of genius, was combined with a gay, mercurial temperament ready to take fire at every-chance spark.

One Sunday afternoon in the sad spring of 1864, during the terrible days of the war, he came in to correct a poem. "I am ashamed," he said, "to be troubled by so slight a thing when battles are raging about us; but I have written

"Where Genoa's deckless caravels were blown.

Now Columbus sailed from Palos, and I must change the verse before it is too late."

This habit of always doing his best is surely one of the fine lessons of his life. It has given his prose a perfection which will carry it far down the shores of time. The letter sent during the last summer of his life to be read at the celebration of Bryant's birthday, was a model of simplicity in the expression of feeling.

It was brief, and at another time would have been written and revised in half a day; but in his enfeebled condition it was with the utmost difficulty that he could satisfy himself. He worked at it patiently day after day, until his labor became a pain; nevertheless, he continued, and won what he deserved—the applause of men practised in his art who were there to listen and appreciate.

Any record of Dr. Holmes's life would be imperfect which contained no mention of the pride and pleasure he felt in the Saturday Club. Throughout the forty years of its prime he was not only the most brilliant talker of that distinguished company, but he was also the most faithful attendant. He was seldom absent from the monthly dinners either in summer or in winter, and he lived to find himself at the head of the table where Agassiz, Longfellow, Emerson, and Lowell had in turn preceded him. Could a shorthand-writer have been secretly present at those dinners, what a delightful book of wise talk and witty sayings would now lie open before us! Fragments of the good things were sometimes brought away, as loving parents bring sugar-plums from a feast to the children at home; but they are only fragments, and bear out but inefficiently the report which has run before them. The following pathetic incident, related on one of those occasions by Dr. Holmes, need not, however, be omitted:

“Just forty years ago,” he said one day, “I was whipped at school for a slight offense—whipped with a ferule right across my hands, so that I went home with a blue mark where the blood had settled, and for a fortnight my hands were stiff and swollen from the blows. The other day an old man called at my house and inquired for me. He was bent, and could just creep along. When he came in he said: ‘How do you do, sir; do you recollect your old teacher Mr. —?’ I did, perfectly! He sat and talked awhile about indifferent subjects, but I saw something rising in his throat, and I knew it was that whipping. After a while he said, ‘I came to ask your forgiveness for whipping you once when I was in anger; perhaps you have forgotten it, but I have not.’ It had weighed upon his mind all these years! He must be rid of it before lying down to sleep peacefully.”

Soon after Dr. Holmes's removal to Charles street began a long series of early morning breakfasts at his publisher's house—feasts of the simplest kind. Many strangers came to Boston in those days, on literary or historical errands—men of tastes which brought them sooner or later to the “Old Corner” where the “Atlantic Monthly” was already a power. Of course one of the first pleasures sought

for was an interview with Dr. Holmes, the fame of whose wit ripened early—long before the days of the “Autocrat.” It came about quite naturally, therefore, that they should gladly respond to any call which gave them the opportunity to listen to his conversation; and the eight-o'clock breakfast-hour was chosen as being the only time the busy guests and host could readily call their own. Occasionally these breakfasts would take place as frequently as two or three times a week. The light of memory has a wondrous gift of heightening most of the pleasures of this life, but the conversation of those early hours was far more stimulating and inspiring than any memory of it can ever be. There were few men, except Poe, famous in American or English literature of that era who did not appear once at least. The unexpectedness of the company was a great charm; for a brief period Boston enjoyed a sense of cosmopolitanism, and found it possible, as it is really possible only in London, to bring together busy guests with full and eager brains who are not too familiar with one another's thought to make conversation an excitement and a source of development.

Of Dr. Holmes's talk on these occasions it is impossible to give any satisfactory record. The simple conditions of his surroundings gave him a sense of perfect ease, and he spoke with the freedom which marked his nature. It was one of the charms by which he drew men to himself that he not only wore a holiday air of finding life full and interesting, but that he believed in freedom of speech for himself, and therefore wished to find it in others. This emancipation in expression did not extend altogether into the practical working of his life. Conventionalities had a strong hold upon him. He loved to avoid the great world when it was inconvenient, and to get a certain freedom outside of it; but once in the current, the manners of the Romans were his own. He reminded one sometimes of Hawthorne's saying that “in these days men are born in their clothes,” although Dr. Holmes's conventions were more easily shuffled off than a casual observer would believe. Nothing could be farther from the ordinary idea of the romantic “man of genius” than was his well-trimmed little figure, and nothing more surprising and delightful than the way in which his childlikeness of nature would break out and assert itself. He declared one morning that he had discovered the happiest animal in creation—“next to a poet, of course, if we may call him an animal; it is the acheron, the parasite of the honey-bee. And why? Because he attaches himself to the wing of the bee, is carried without exertion to the sweetest flowers, where the bee gathers the honey while the acheron eats it; and all the

while the music of the bee attends him as he is borne through the air."

He met Hawthorne for the first time, I think, in this informal way. Holmes had been speaking of Renan, whose books interested him.

"A long while ago," he began, "I said Rome or Reason; now I am half inclined to put it, Rome or Renan." Then suddenly turning to Hawthorne, he said, "By the way, I would write a new novel if you were not in the field, Mr. Hawthorne." "I am not," said Hawthorne; "and I wish you would do it." There was a moment's silence. Holmes said quickly, "I wish you would come to the club oftener." "I should like to," said Hawthorne, "but I can't drink." "Neither can I." "Well, but I can't eat." "Nevertheless, we should like to see you." "But I can't talk, either." After which there was a shout of laughter. Then said Holmes, "You can listen, though; and I wish you would come."

On another occasion, when Lowell was present, he was talking of changes in physical conditions. The doctor said, now, at the age of fifty-four, he could eat almost anything set before him, which he could by no means do formerly. Lowell found opportunity somehow at this point to laugh at Holmes for having lately said in print that "Beecher was a man whose thinking marrow was not corrugated by drink or embrowned by meerschäum." Lowell said *he* had no "thinking marrow," and objected to such anatomical terms applied to the best part of a man.

By and by Lowell came out of his critical mood, and said pleasantly, after some talk upon lyric poetry in general, "I like your lyrics, you know, Holmes." "Well," said Holmes, pleased, but speaking earnestly and with a childlike honesty, "but there is something too hopping about them. To tell the truth, nothing has injured my reputation so much as the too great praise which has been bestowed upon my 'windfalls.' After all, the value of a poet to the world is not so much his reputation as a writer of this or that poem, as the fact that the poet is known to be one who is rapt out of himself at times, and carried away into the region of the divine; it is known that the spirit has descended upon him, and taught him what he should speak."

Holmes's admiration of Dickens's genius was very sincere. "He is the greatest of all of them," he loved to say. "Such fertility, such Shaksperian breadth — there is enough of him; you feel as you do when you see the ocean."

Speaking of the difficulty of being a good listener, he said that it was a terrible responsibility for him to listen to a story. He could never be rid of the feeling that he must remember accurately, or all would be lost. There was one

story in particular, told by a friend remarkable as a raconteur, which tried him more than anything he knew in the world — of the kind. He felt like one of the old Greek chorus with strophe and antistrophe, and it was a weight upon his mind lest he should not laugh properly at the end.

I recall one day, when the subject of Walt Whitman's poetry was introduced, Dr. Holmes said he abhorred playing the critic, partly because he was not a good reader — had read too cursorily and carelessly; but he thought the right thing had not been said about Walt Whitman. "His books sell largely, and there is a large audience of friends in Washington who praise and listen. Emerson believes in him; Lowell not at all; Longfellow finds some good in his 'yaup': but the truth is, he is in an amorphous condition."

Longfellow was once speaking of an address he had heard which he considered quite a perfect performance. "Yes — yes," said Dr. Holmes; "I don't doubt it was very good; but the speaker is such an unpleasant person! He is just one of those fungi that always grow upon universities."

One evening the doctor came in after the Phi Beta Kappa dinner at Cambridge. "I can't stop," he said. "I only come to read you my verses which I gave at the dinner to-day: they made such a queer impression! I did n't mean to go, but James Lowell was to preside, and sent me word that I really must be there, so I just wrote these off, and here they are. I don't know that I should have brought them in to read to you, but Hoar declares they are the best I have ever done." After some delay, and in the fading light of sunset reflected from the river, he read the well-known verses "Bill and I." He must have been still warm with the excitement of the first reading, for I can never forget the tenderness with which he recited the lines. They are still pleasant on the printed page, but to those who heard him, divested of the passion of affection with which they were written and read.

Late in life he said to a friend who was speaking of the warm friendships embalmed in his poetry, and which would help to make it endure: "I don't know how that may be; but the writing of spicy poems has been a passionate joy."

The following amusing note gives a picture of Dr. Holmes in his most natural and social mood:

296 BEACON STREET, February 11, 1862.

MY DEAR MR. FIELDS: On Friday evening last I white-cravated myself, took a carriage, and found myself at your door at 8 of the clock P. M.

A cautious female responded to my ring, and opened the chained portal about as far as a clam opens his shell to see what is going on in Cambridge street, where he is waiting for a customer.

Her first glance impressed her with the conviction that I was a burglar. The mild address with which I accosted her removed that impression, and I rose in the moral scale to the comparatively elevated position of what the unfeeling world calls a "sneak-thief."

By dint, however, of soft words, and that look of ingenuous simplicity by which I am so well known to you and all my friends, I coaxed her into the belief that I was nothing worse than a rejected contributor, an autograph collector, an author with a volume of poems to dispose of, or other disagreeable but not dangerous character.

She unfastened the chain, and I stood before her.

I calmed her fears, and she was calm
And told

me how you and Mrs. F. had gone to New York, and how she knew nothing of any literary debauch that was to come off under your roof, but would go and call another unprotected female who knew the past, present, and future, and could tell me why this was thus, that I had been lured from my fireside by the ignis fatuus of a deceptive invitation.

It was my turn to be afraid, alone in the house with two of the stronger sex; and I retired.

On reaching home, I read my note and found it was Friday the 16th, not the 9th, I was invited for.

Dear Mr. Fields, I shall be very happy to come to your home on Friday evening, the 16th February, at 8 o'clock, to meet yourself and Mrs. Fields and hear Mr. James read his paper on Emerson. Always truly yours,

O. W. HOLMES.

On occasions of social dignity few men have ever surpassed Dr. Holmes in grace of compliment and perfection of easy ceremony. It was an acquired gift; perhaps it always must be. But as soon as human nature was given a chance to show itself, he was always eager, bringing an unsated store of intellectual curiosity to bear upon every new person or condition. He was generous to a fault in showing his own hand, moving with "infinite jest" over the current of his experiences until he could tempt his interlocutor out upon the same dangerous waters. If others were slow to embark, he nevertheless interested them in the history of his own voyage of life.

Dr. Holmes had never known any very difficult hand-to-hand struggle with life, but he

was quite satisfied with its lesser difficulties. He could laugh at his own want of courage, as he called a certain lack of love for adventure, and he could admire the daring of others. He was happy in the circle of his home affections, and never cared to stray far away. He had a golden sense of comfort in his home life, an entire satisfaction, which made his rare absences a penance. Added to this was his tendency to asthma, from which he suffered often very severely. In a letter written from Montreal in 1867, whither he had gone to obtain a copyright of one of his books, we can see how his domestic habits as well as his asthma made any long absence intolerable to him.

MONTREAL, October 23, 1867.

DEAR MR. FIELDS: . . . I am as comfortable here as I can be, but I have earned my money, for I have had a full share of my old trouble.

Last night was better, and to-day I am going about the town. Miss Frothingham sent me a basket of black Hamburg grapes to-day, which were very grateful after the hotel tea and coffee and other 'pothecary's stuff.

Don't talk to me about taverns! There is just one genuine, clean, decent, palatable thing occasionally to be had in them—namely, a boiled egg. The soups *taste* pretty good sometimes, but their sources are involved in a darker mystery than that of the Nile. Omelettes taste as if they had been carried in the waiter's hat, or fried in an old boot. I ordered scrambled eggs one day. It must be that they had been scrambled for by *somebody*, but who—who in the possession of a sound reason *could* have scrambled for what I had set before me under that name? Butter! I am thinking just now of those exquisite little pellets I have so often seen at your table, and wondering why the taverns *always* keep it until it is old. Fool that I am! As if the taverns did not know that if it was good it would be eaten, which is not what they want. Then the waiters, with their napkins—what don't they do with those napkins! Mention any one thing of which you think you can say with truth, "*That* they do not do." . . .

I have a really fine parlor, but every time I enter it I perceive that

Still, sad "odor" of humanity

which clings to it from my predecessor. Mr. Hogan got home yesterday, I believe. I saw him for the first time to-day. He was civil—they all are civil. I have no fault to find except with taverns here and pretty much everywhere.

Every six months a tavern should burn to

the ground, with all its traps, its "properties," its beds and pots and kettles, and start afresh from its ashes like John Phoenix-Squibob!

No; give me home, or a home like mine, where all is clean and sweet, where coffee has preëxisted in the berry, and tea has still faint recollections of the pigtails that dangled about the plant from which it was picked, where butter has not the prevailing character which Pope assigned to Denham, where soup could look you in the face if it had "eyes" (which it has not), and where the comely Anne or the gracious Margaret takes the place of these napkin-bearing animals.

Enough! But I have been forlorn and ailing and fastidious—but I am feeling a little better, and can talk about it. I had some ugly nights, I tell you; but I am writing in good spirits, as you see. I have written once before to Low, as I think I told you, and on the 25th mean to go to a notary with Mr. Dawson, as he tells me it is the right thing to do.

Yours always, O. W. H.

P. S. Made a pretty good dinner, after all; but better a hash at home than a roast with strangers.

With much the same experience of asthma as a result, he visited Princeton three or four years later, and wrote after his return:

296 BEACON STREET, August 24, 1871.

MY DEAR FIELDS: . . . I only sat up one whole night, it is true, which was a great improvement on Montreal; but I do not feel right yet, and it is quite uncertain whether I shall be in a condition to enjoy the club by Saturday. So if I come, all the better for me; and if I don't come, you can say that you have in your realm at Parker's not "five hundred as good as he," but a score or so that will serve your turn.

I cut the first leaves I wanted to meddle with in the last "Atlantic" for No. IX of the "Whispering Gallery," and took it all down like an oyster in the height of the season. It is captivating, like all the rest. Why don't you make a book as big as Allibone's out of your store of unparalleled personal recollections? It seems too bad to keep them for posterity. When I think of your bequeathing them for the sole benefit of people that are unborn, I want to cry out with Horace:

Eheu — *Postume, Postume!*

Always yours, O. W. HOLMES.

Again, three years later, he writes: "I hope you are reasonably careful of yourself during this cold weather. Look out! A hot lecture-room, a cold ride, the best-chamber sheets

like slices of cucumber, and one gives one's friends the trouble of writing an obituary, when he might just as well have lived and written theirs. We had a grand club last Saturday. Longfellow, Emerson, Lowell, Adams, and Tom Appleton (just home a few weeks ago), Norton (who has been sick a good while) were there, and lots of others, and Lord Houghton as a guest. You ought to have been there; it was the best club for a long time."

The following note, written in 1873, shows how closely Dr. Holmes kept the growth of the club in mind, and his eagerness to bring into it the distinguished intellectual life of Boston.

296 BEACON STREET, February 21, 1873.

MY DEAR MR. FIELDS: I doubt whether I shall feel well enough to go to the club to-morrow, as I am somewhat feverish and sore-throaty to-day, though I must crawl out to my lecture.

Mr. Parkman and Professor Wolcott Gibbs are to be voted for, you know.

President Eliot, who nominated Professor Gibbs, will, I suppose, urge his claims if he thinks it necessary, or see that some one does it.

As for Mr. Francis Parkman, proposed by myself, I suppose his reputation is too solidly fixed as a scholar and a writer to need any words from me or others of his friends who may be present.

He has been a great sufferer from infirmities which do not prevent him from being very good company, and which I have thought the good company he would find at the Saturday Club would perhaps enable him to forget for a while more readily. It has seemed to me so clear that he ought to belong to the club, if he were inclined to join it, that I should have nominated him long ago had I not labored under the impression that he must have been previously proposed. . . .

Yours very truly, O. W. HOLMES.

For many years it seemed that time stood still with the Autocrat. His happy home and his cheerful temper appeared to stay the hand of the destroyer. At last a long illness fell upon his wife; and after her death, when his only daughter, who had gone to keep her father's house, was suddenly taken from his side, the shadows of age gathered about him; then we learned that he was indeed an old man.

For the few years that remained to him before his summons came he accepted the lot of age with extraordinary good cheer. His hearing became very imperfect. "I remind myself sometimes," he said, "of those verses I wrote some years ago. I wonder if you would remember them! I called the poem 'The Arch-

bishop and Gil Blas: A Modernized Version.' He then repeated with great humor and pathos a few of the lines:

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

"As to my sight," he continued, "I have known for some years that I have cataracts slowly coming over my eyes; but they increase so very slowly that I often wonder which will win the race first — the cataracts or death."

He was most carefully watched over during the succeeding years of disability by his distinguished son and his daughter-in-law, of whose talent he was sincerely proud. Nevertheless, he suffered of necessity many lonely hours, in spite of all that devotion could do for him. Such a wife and such a loving daughter could not pass from his side and find their places filled. But he did not "mope," as he wrote me one day; "I am too busy for that"; or, he might have said truthfully, too well sustained. His habit of carrying himself with an air of kindliness toward all, and of enjoyment in the opportunities still left him, was very beautiful and unusual. "If the Lord thinks it best for me to stay until I tumble to pieces, I'm willing — I'm willing," he said. He was always capable of amusing his friends on the subject, as in the former days when Old Age came and offered him "a cane, an eye-glass, a tippet, and a pair of overshoes. 'No; much obliged to you,' said I. . . . So I dressed myself up in a jaunty way, and walked out alone; got a fall, caught a cold, was laid up with lumbago, and had time to think over the whole matter."

Who that heard him can ever forget the exquisite reading of "The Last Leaf" at the Longfellow memorial meeting. The pathos of it was then understood for the first time. The poem had become an expression of his late self, and it was given with a personal significance which touched the hearts of all his hearers.

His wit has left the world sparkling with the shafts it has let fly on every side. They are taken up continually and sent out again both by those who heard him utter them and by those who repeat them, unmindful of their origin.

His attention was turned on some occasion to a young aspirant for artistic fame. He referred to the youthful person later as "one who performed a little on the lead-pencil." He said to me one day, "I've sometimes made new words. In Elsie Venner I made the word 'chrysocracy,' thinking it would take its place;

but it did n't: 'plutocracy,' meaning the same thing, was adopted instead. Oddly enough, I had a letter from a man to-day, asking if I did not make the word 'anæsthesia,' which I certainly did."

In the sick-room he was always a welcome guest. A careful maid once asked if he minded climbing two flights of stairs to see his friend. "I laughed when she asked me," he said; "for I shall have to climb a good many more than that before I see the angels."

"I gave two dinners to two parties of old gentlemen just before I left town," he said, the year before his death; and then added, "our baby was seventy-three!"

His letters in the later years were full of feeling. He says in one of them, written on a Christmas day, speaking of an old friend: "How many delightful hours the photographs bring back to me! . . . Under his roof I have met more visitors to be remembered than under any other. But for his hospitality I should never have had the privilege of personal acquaintance with famous writers and artists whom I can now recall as I saw them, talked with them, heard them, in that pleasant library, that most lively and agreeable dining-room. How could it be otherwise, with such guests as he entertained, and with his own unflagging vivacity and his admirable social gifts? Let me live in happy recollections to-day."

Only two years before Dr. Holmes's death he said in a letter received by me in Italy: "But for this troublesome cold, which has so much better come out than I feared, I have been doing well enough — kept busy with letters and dictation of my uneventful history. It is strange how forgotten events and persons start out of the blank oblivion in which they seem to have been engulfed, as I fix my memory steadily on the past. I find it very easy, even fascinating, to call up the incidents, trivial oftentimes, but having for me a significance of their own, which lie in my past track like the broken toys of childhood. It seems as if the past was for each of us a great collection of negatives laid away, from which we can take positive pictures when we will — from many of them, that is; for only the Recording Angel can reproduce the pictures of every instant of our lives from these same negatives, of which he must have an infinite collection, with which sooner or later we are liable to be confronted."

In another letter from Beverly Farms, when he was eighty-three, he says:

Where this will find you, in a geographical point of view, I do not know; but I know your heart will be in its right place, and accept kindly the few barren words this sheet holds for you. Yes; barren of incident, of news of all sorts,

but yet having a certain flavor of Boston, of Cape Ann, and, above all, of dear old remembrances, the suggestion of any one of which is as good as a page of any common letter. So, whatever I write will carry the fragrance of home with it, and pay you for the three minutes it costs you to read it. . . . I find great delight in talking over cathedrals and pictures and English scenery, and all the sights my traveling friends have been looking at, with Mrs. Bell. It seems to me that she knew them all beforehand, so that she was journeying all the time among reminiscences which were hardly distinguishable from realities.

My recollections are to those of other people around me who call themselves old,—the sexagenarians, for instance,—something like what a cellar is to the ground-floor of a house. The young people in the upper stories (American spelling, *story*) go down to the basement in their inquiries, and think they have got to the bottom; but I go down another flight of steps, and find myself below the surface of the earth, as are the bodies of most of my contemporaries. As to health, I am doing tolerably well. I have just come in from a moderate walk in which I acquitted myself creditably. I take two-hour drives in the afternoon, in the open or close carriage, according to the weather; but I do not pretend to do much visiting, and I avoid all excursions when people go to have what they call a "good time."

I am reading right and left—whatever turns up, but especially re-reading old books. Two new volumes of Dr. Johnson's letters have furnished me part of my reading. As for writing, when my secretary—Miss Gaudelet—comes back, I shall resume my dictation. No literary work ever seemed to me easier or more agreeable than living over my past life, and putting it on record as well as I could. If anybody should ever care to write a sketch or memoir of my life, these notes would help him mightily. My friends too might enjoy them—if I do not have the misfortune to outlive them all. With affectionate regards and all sweet messages to Miss Jewett. Always your friend,

O. W. HOLMES.

This letter gives a very good picture of his life to the end. Few incidents occurred to break the even current of the order he describes. He still dined out occasionally, and I find a few reminiscences of his delightful talk which linger with me.

"I've several things bothering me," he confessed one day. "First, I am anxious to find a suitable inscription for a child's porringer. I never wrote a poem to a child, I believe. I love children dearly; I always want to stop them on the street: but I have never written about them; nor have I ever written much about

women. I don't know why, but I *care* too much to do the Tom Moore style of thing."

He was eager to frame a letter to President Eliot, and also one to President Cleveland, in order to advance some one in need of help; but the grasshopper had become a burden. "I feel such things now when I have to do them," he said; "nevertheless, when young men and maidens come skipping in with an air of saying, 'Please give me your autograph, and be quick about it; there may not be much time left,' I want to say, 'Take care, young folks; I may be dancing over your graves yet!'"

There was a clock which stood upon his table, the bequest of Dr. Henry J. Bigelow. This remembrance from his dying friend was one of his most valued possessions. He loved to talk of Dr. Bigelow, and in a published discourse he has said of him: "He read men and women as great scholars read books. He took life at first hand, and not filtered through alphabets. . . . He would get what he wanted out of a book as dexterously as a rodent will get the meat of a nut out of its shell. . . . He handled his rapidly acquired knowledge so like an adept in book-lore that one might have thought he was born in an alcove and cradled on a book-shelf." Dr. Bigelow was so frequently in Dr. Holmes's thought in the latter days that one can hardly give a picture of his later life without rehearsing something of his expression with regard to him. He says further: "Dr. Bigelow was unquestionably a man of true genius. . . . Inexorable determination to have the truth, if nature could be forced to yield it, characterized his powerful intelligence."

The doctor would often look up when the little clock was striking musically on his writing-table, and say, "It always reminds me tenderly of my dead friend."

When the time came that writing was a burden, and indeed, except for limited periods, impossible, Dr. Holmes lived more and more in his affections. Often, as I entered his room on a dull afternoon, he would say, "Ah, now let's sit up by the fire and talk of all our friends." Then would begin a series of opinions, witty and tender by turns, and interspersed with tears and smiles. On one such occasion he said: "There are very few modern hymns which have the old ring of saintliness in them. Sometimes when I am disinclined to listen to the preacher at church, I turn to the hymn-book, and when one strikes my eye I cover the name at the bottom, and guess. It is almost invariably Watts or Wesley; after those, there are very few which are good for much.

"Calm on the listening ear of night is a fine hymn, but even that lacks the virility of the old saints."

Our minds that day were full of one thought,—the death of Phillips Brooks,—and when, a moment later, he said:

“Sweet fields beyond the swelling floods—

“there is nothing like that,” it seemed quite natural that his voice should break and the tears come as he added, without mentioning the bishop’s name, “How hard it is to think he is gone! I don’t like to feel that I must live without him.”

His days grew gradually shorter, as the days of late October dwindle into golden noons. During the few hours when he was at his best he was wonderfully active, driving to his publisher’s or to make an occasional visit, besides a daily walk. If to those who saw him continually the circle of his subjects of conversation began to appear somewhat circumscribed, upon those who met him only occasionally the old fascination still exerted itself. He set his door wide open when he made up his mind to receive and converse with any human being. There is nothing left to say of him which he did not cheerfully and truthfully say of himself. “I am intensely interested in my own personality,” he began one day; “but we are all interesting to ourselves, or ought to be. I *know* I am, and I see why. We take, as it were, a mold of our own thought. Now let us compare it with the mold of another man on the same subject. His mold is either too large or too small, or the veins and reticulations are altogether different. No one mold fits another man’s thought. It is our own, and as such has especial interest and value.”

It was really amazing to see his intellectual vigor in society even at this late period. When the conditions were satisfactory, at a small luncheon for instance, he would soon grow warm with excitement, his eyes would glow, and he would talk with his accustomed fire.

He was like an old war-horse hearing the trumpet that called to battle. His activity and versatility of mind could still distance many a clever men in the prime of life.

He responded in the most generous way to the expectations of strangers and foreigners who came to visit him as if on pilgrimage. He always found some entertainment for them. Sometimes he would read them one of his poems; sometimes he would have a pretty scientific toy for their amusement; or again he would write his autograph in a volume of his works for them to carry away in remembrance. Such guests could not help feeling that they had seen more than the Dr. Holmes of their imagination. He entered into their curiosity regarding himself with such charming sympathy that they came away thinking the half-hour they had passed in his study was one always to be remembered.

As I think of those latest days I cannot help recalling what he himself wrote once, long ago, about old age: “One that remains waking,” he says, “while others have dropped asleep, and keeps a little night-lamp flame of life burning year after year, if the lamp is not upset and there is only a careful hand held round it to prevent the puffs of wind from blowing the flame out. That’s what I call an old man.”

“Now,” said the professor, “you don’t mean to tell me that I have got to that yet? Why, bless you, I am several years short of the time!”

Dr. Holmes left this world, which he had found pleasant and had filled with pleasantness for others, after an illness that was happily brief. He passed, in the words of that great physician Sir Thomas Browne, “in drowsy approaches of sleep; . . . believing with those resolved Christians who, looking on the death of this world but as a nativity of another, do contentedly submit unto the common necessity, and envy not Enoch or Elias.”

Annie Fields.

