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Lines
by
Oliver Wendell Holmes

on the presentation
of his portrait to the

Philadelphia College of
Physicians

Saturday, April 30th
1892

“How came I here?” The portrait thus might speak,
The crimson mantling in its canvas cheek,
“Here in this concourse of the wise and grave
Who look upon me with inquiring eyes,
As on some homeless wanderer, caught astray?
An *error loci*, Boerhaave would say.
Is this great hive of industry my home?
Where is the Common? Where my gilded dome?
Where the Old South? The frog pond? Most of all,
My sacred temple, Freedom’s Faneuil Hall?”

No answer comes; no trick of human art
Can force those fixed, unmoving lips apart.
He whom the picture shadows must explain
This lawless inroad on a strange domain.
Were it *my* votive offering, meant to show
My grateful sense of all the debts I owe
To your fair city, its unlooked for face
Might find no caviler to dispute its place.
Yet though the friendly offering is not mine
It bears my benediction to the shrine
Where, if it meets a welcome, longer yet
Will stretch the column which displays my debt.

Friends of my earlier manhood, ever dear,
Whose lives, whose labors all were centred here
How bright each figure stands before me now
With eyes undimmed and fair unwrinkled brow,
As when, with life before us yet untried,
We walked the “Latin Quarter” side by side
Through halls of death, through palaces of pain
That cast their shadows on the turbid Seine.

When o’er our coffee, at the old “Procope,”
Smiling, we cast each other’s horoscope,
Daring the future’s dubious path to scan,
Gerhard, your *Gerhard* was the coming man.
Strong-brained, strong-willed, inquiring, patient, wise,
He looked on truth through achromatic eyes;
Sure to succeed, for Nature, like a maid,
Loves best the lovers who are not afraid,

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Lends them her hand to lead them where they please,
And trusts them boldly with her master-keys.
Behold, unfading on the rolls of fame
Typhus and *Typhoid* stamped with Gerhard's name.

Look on the stately form at Gerhard's side
He too shall live to be his city's pride.
Tall, manly, quiet, grave, but not austere.
Not slow of wit, a little dull of ear,
Him we predestined to the place he won,—
Norris, the Quaker City's noble son.
Armed with the skill that science renders sure
His look, his touch, were half his patients' cure ;
What need his merits I should further tell ?
His record stands ; your pages know it well.

Still wandering, lonely, mid the funeral urns
To one loved name my saddening thought returns
Less to the many known, but to the few
A precious memory,—*Stewardson*, to you.
Through many a league we two together fared,
The traveller's comforts and discomforts shared,
When hills and valleys parted distant towns,
Long ere the railway smoothed their ups and downs.
In all the trials wearing days could bring
No fretful utterance ever left its sting
Pity it was that, chased by pallid fears,
He walked in shadow through his morning years,
Talked of his early doom, and then, and then
Lived on, and on, past threescore years and ten.
Too shy, perhaps too timid, for success
He fought life's battle bravely not the less,
Others left prouder memories, none more dear,
For those a sigh, for *Stewardson* a tear !

Well, years rolled on, we went our several ways
Not unrewarded with our need of praise ;
Time took the weight and measure of our brains
Set us our tasks and paid us for our pains
At length (our side-locks fast were turning gray)
He brought our art that all-important day

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When here our Æsculapian Congress met
(Its second gathering, you will not forget).
I with the crowd your far-famed city sought,
Pleased to behold the schools where Rush had taught,
Where Wistar labored and where Horner led
His thirsting flock to Surgery's fountain-head.

What kindly welcome with the rest I shared ;
A little pleased—perhaps a little scared,
When *Chapman* hugged me in his huge embrace
With praise that lit a bonfire in my face—
When *Francis*, guest at *Mitchell's* generous board,
My humble name across the table roared,
Coupled with one which figures on the roll
Of England's poets—bless his worthy soul!
Garth—good Sir Samuel, whose poetic spark
Scarce seen by day, still glimmers in the dark.
These flitting phantoms of the past survive,
While grateful Memory keeps her fires alive.
Friends of the days that fear and anguish knew,
My heart records a deeper debt to you.

To this kind refuge, hallowed evermore,
Her shattered sufferers fond affection bore.
Full many a father tracked his bleeding son
Fresh from the murderous conflict, lost or won,
Strayed through some quiet ward, and looking round,
In pity's sheltering arms the lost was found.

Enough! Enough! these eyes will overflow
In sweet remembrance of the debt I owe—
A debt 'twould bankrupt gratitude to pay—
But Heaven perhaps will hear me when I pray:
Peace to your borders! Long may Science reign
Supreme, unchallenged o'er her old domain!
While sons as worthy as their sires of old
Her borrowed sceptre still unbroken hold
Till a new RUSH arise who dares to think—
An unborn LEIDY finds the missing link.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

BOSTON, April 28, 1892.

Lines by Oliver Wendell Holmes
on the presentation of his
portrait to the Philadelphia
College of Physicians.

LINES
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OLIVER WENDALL HOLMES

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of his portrait to the
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