

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

EXCERPTS FROM HIS PHILLIPS ACADEMY CENTENNIAL POEM.

My cheek was bare of adolescent down
When first I sought the academic town;
Slow rolls the coach along the dusty road,
Big with its filial and parental load;
The frequent hills, the lonely woods are past,
The schoolboy's chosen home is reached at last.
I see it now, the same unchanging spot,
The swinging gate, the little garden-plot,
The narrow yard, the rock that made its floor,
The flat, pale house, the knocker garnished door,
The small, trim parlour, neat, decorous, chill,
The strange, new faces, kind, but grave and still;
Two, creased with age—or what I then called age—
Life's volume open at its fiftieth page:
One a shy maiden's, pallid, placid, sweet
As the first snow drop which the sunbeams greet;
One the last pursing s; alight she was, and fair,
Her smooth white forehead warmed with auburn hair,
Last came the Virgin Hymen long and spared,
Whose daily cares the grateful household shared,
Strong, patient, humble; her substantial frame
Stretched the chaste draperies I forbear to name.
Brave, but with effort, had the schoolboy come
To the cold comfort of a stranger's home;
How like a dagger to my sinking heart
Came the dry summons "It is time to part."
"Good bye!"—"Goo—ood bye!"—one fond maternal
kiss.....

.....Homosick as death! Was ever pang like this!....
Too young as yet with willing feet to stray
From the tame fireside, glad to get away—
Too old to let my watery grief appear—
And what so bitter as a swallowed tear!

The morning came; I reached the classic hall;
A clock-face eyed me, staring from the wall;
Beneath its hands a printed line I read:
YOUTH IS LIFE'S SEED TIME; so the clock-face said:
Some took its counsel, as the sequel showed—
Sowed—their wild oats, and reaped as they had sowed.
How all comes back! The upward slanting door—
The masters' thrones that flank the central door—
The long, outstretching aisles that divide
The rows of desks that stand on either side—
The staring boys, a face to every desk,
Bright, dull, pale, blooming, common, picturesque,
Grave is the master's look; his forehead wears
Thick rows of wrinkles, prints of worrying cares;
Uneasy lies the heads of all that rule.
His most of all whose kingdom is a school,
Supreme he sits; before the awful frown
That bends his brows the boldest eye goes down;
Not more submissive Israel heard and saw
At Sinai's foot the Giver of the Law.
Less stern he seems, and sits in equal state
On the twin throne and shares the empire's weight;
Around his lips the subtle line that plays
Steals quietly forth in many a jesting phrase;
A lightsome nature, not so hard to shafe,
Pleasant when pleased; rough-handed, not so safe;
Some tingling memories vaguely I recall,
But to forgive him, God forgive us all!

Once more to time's old graveyard I return
And scrape the moss from memory's pictured urn.
Who, in these days when all things go by steam,
Recalls the stage-coach with its four horse team?
Its sturdy driver—who remembers him?

Time works strange marvels; since I trod the green
And swung the gates, what wonders I have seen!
But come what will—the sky itself may fall—
As things of course the boys accept them all,
The prophet's chariot, drawn by steeds of flame,
For daily use our travelling millions claim;
The face we love, a sunbeam makes our own;
No more the surgeon hears the sufferer's groan.
What unwritten histories wrapped in darkness lay
Till shovelling Schliemann bared them to the day!
Your Richelieu says, and says it well, my lord,
The pen is (sometimes) mightier than the sword;
Great is the goosequill, say we all; Amen!
It knows where Babel's terraced walls were raised,
The slabs that cracked when Nimrod's palace blazed,
Uncle's Mycenae, rediscovered Troy—
Calmly he flatters, that immortal boy.
A new Prometheus tips our wands with fire,
A mightier Orpheus strains the whispering wire,
Whose lightning thrills the lazy winds outrun
And holds the hours as Joshua stayed the sun—
So swift, in truth, we hardly find a place
For those dim fictions known as time and space.
Still a new miracle each year supplies—
See at his work the chemist of the skies,
Who questions Sirius in his tortured rays
And steals the secret of the solar blaze.
Hush! while the window-rattling bugles play
The nation's airs a hundred miles away!
That wicked phonograph! hark! how it swears!
Turn it again and make it say its prayers!
And was it true, then, what the story said
Of Oxford's friar and his brazen dead?
While wondering science stands, herself perplexed,
At each day's miracle, and asks "what next?"
The immortal boy, the coming heir of all,
Springs from his desk to "urge the flying ball,"
Cleave with his heading oar the glassy waves,
With sinewy arm the dashing current braves,
The same bright creature in these haunts of ours,
That Eton shadowed with her "antique towers."
Boy! Where is he! the long-limbed youth inquires,
Whom his rough chin with manly pride inspires:
Ah, when the ruddy cheek no longer glows,
When the bright hair is white as winter snows,
When the dim eye has lost its lambent flame,
Sweet to his ear will be his schoolboy name!
Nor think the difference mighty as it seems
Between life's morning and its evening dreams:
Forescore, like twenty, has its tasks and toys;
In earth's wide schoolhouse all are girls and boys.

DORIS.

A TALE OF OLD BLACKHEATH.

CHAPTER I.

There are many people who can remember the old Green Man standing on the Greenwich edge of Blackheath, but very few know anything about the story which still clings to the spot, although the surroundings have so changed during the last quarter of a century.

Ten years back the old Green Man Inn still existed—a rambling tumble-down old hostelry, with funny little parlours looking out through big bow-windows, some on to the Dover road, some on to a patch of green grass fringed with a blaze of many-tinted flowers. Long before Greenwich and Blackheath had been brought within a twenty minutes' ride of Charing Cross by steam, the Dover coaches used to pull up at the old inn, on the summit of the stilted bit of hill leading on to Blackheath, in order that the

teams might be changed, and that the passengers might stretch their legs and refresh themselves with real Kent ale. Nor did the prosperity of the inn depend solely upon its coach customers. Parties of citizens would come by water from London to Greenwich, rollick away the summer hours amongst the trees and glades of the Royal Park, and then, as the sun went down behind Shooter's Hill, hie them to the Green Man, there to partake of famous eggs and bacon—then of true rustic flavour—gulp huge "dishes" of tea, play at bowls on the clean-cut lawn, or sigh and ogle in the arbours dotted about the garden.

So the Green Man flourished even when coaches had had their day. But a levelling age came on apace, and a very garish gin-palace now marks the site of one of the quaintest bits of old life left in the London suburbs. Perhaps, looking around, the sweeping away of the old inn is not altogether to be regretted; for the irregularly carved and angled, quaintly windowed, many-doored edifice would have looked strangely out of place amidst the clusters of stuccoed semi-detached villas now treading on each other's heels, as near as they can to the sacred precincts of the heath.

There were pretty maids in the old hostelry, and with the hostelry they seem to have disappeared, for in the modern dress-worshipping, tip-hunting Mary Jane there is very little to interest, much less admire. At the time when the events about to be related took place—towards the end of the eighteenth century—Doris was the prettiest maid at the Green Man, and, for that, in the south of London; at least, so said those best of judges, commercial travellers and bagmen. She was a hale, plump, healthy Kentish lass, with lips as red as the cherries of her native county, laughing black eyes, brilliant teeth, and a wealth of the blackest hair ever held within ribbon. She was only a waiting-maid—not a maid-in-waiting, but a hard-working, scrubbing, polishing waiting-maid—but her voice was so gentle, her hands so small and delicately formed, and her manner of speaking so different from that of the other coarse country wenches, that it was believed she had once been something far different. The landlord of the Green Man had found her one cruel winter's morn'g lying on a snow-heap by the side of the Dover road, wrapped in a shawl, out of sheer humanity had taken her in, and she had never for a day quitted the place of her adoption. Of course she had admirers amongst the sturdy young fellows about, and many more amongst the young London gallants who visited the inn; but though she showed her white teeth, blushed, and acted altogether in the most coquettish style possible as she listened to their compliments, she was not known to have a single lover, and it was not even recorded that any one had ever succeeded in wresting a kiss from her. She was the life and soul of the old inn. She sang as she dusted the great black bannisters, as she "made" the catafalques of beds, as she ran here and there, obeying orders from a dozen throats, and the regular bowl-players of the neighbourhood considered it an essential item in their evening's amusements that she should bring them their pipes and ale. For all this she was of course cordially hated by the other maids of the establishment, who would stoop to any device in order to bring her into a scrape; but she cared nothing for this, and lived till she was seventeen a very happy careless life as maid of the Green Man.

Every morning early, as she was dusting one of the great bow-windows looking on the Dover road, there passed a young man in the direction of Greenwich. He seemed to be very poor; for in all weathers he wore the same clinging threadbare suit of black, and no glove or mitten ever protected the thin white hands, which clutched a big heavy bag slung over his shoulder. Nothing kept him away, and by degrees she used to watch for his passing as one of the events of the day, her heart yearning all the while to know who and what he was. Perhaps she pitied him as he painfully struggled by against wind, rain, snow, and tempest; perhaps there was something in his face which interested her—a pale, clearly-cut featured face, with large eyes and thin white cheeks. At any rate, Doris knew to a moment when he would pass, and was up at the big window, with her pretty nose flattened against the panes, and her kind brilliant eyes watching his progress, every morning.

One wild winter's morning, as the wind swept over the great black heath, driving the rain as it were in a solid sheet before it, she spied him hobbling along round the corner with greater difficulty than usual: for the big bag seemed heavier and more unwieldy than ever. He had cleared the corner when the gale caught him, burst the great bag, and scattered its contents—papers of all sizes and shapes—far and wide. Active-limbed Doris was down in a moment, out into the storm, with her coquettishly-ribboned shoes splashing through the puddles and mud, helping the poor bewildered youth to gather together his scattered papers. This done, after much running and jumping about, laughter, and display of neatly-clocked stockings on her part, nothing would satisfy her but that he should come in to the bar and take a something hot to drink, whilst she patched up his old worn bag.

The vision of the pretty girl, come like an angel to help him, was too much for the poor youth, and without a word he allowed her to lead him in. She gave him a bowl of hot steaming milk, and in a few seconds her active fingers were at work on the old bag.

"You are very, very kind to do all this for me," said the young man, as soon as he had re-

covered his surprise and his voice. "If you hadn't helped me to pick up these papers, I don't know what I should have done, I'm sure; for they are of great value."

"Well," replied laughing Doris, "you would have done the same for me, I suppose, had I been out in the rain;" and as she looked at him she saw that the tears were in his eyes, and that he was really overcome by what she deemed a service of most ordinary civility.

"Yes," replied he; "but I am so unaccustomed to be kindly treated or spoken to; and you have done this voluntarily to a stranger whom you probably never saw before."

"Never saw before!" cried Doris, bursting into a regular peal of laughter. "Why, I see you pass here every morning in all weathers at the same hour; but of course you don't see me. I'm up-stairs; and you men, with important business, never look up at inn-maids."

"No," said the young man, "I've never seen you before. I wish I had, and my daily walk would have had at least one little bit of sunshine in it."

"Now tell me," said Doris—"this is all I ask in return for the service, as you call it, that I have done you—what makes you go past here every morning in all weathers with that great big bag, as you do?"

"Well," replied the young man, "if it interests you at all, I tell you, I'm a lawyer."

"A lawyer!" cried Doris; "that's something dreadful, isn't it? I remember when I was, O, such a tiny mite of a child, I used to hear such a lot about lawyers, and I was taught to believe them to be such a dreadful set of men."

"Well," said the traveller, "when I say I'm a lawyer, I mean to say that I'm in the office of a lawyer. I copy their letters and things—in fact, I'm a lawyer's clerk. Our place is in Greenwich, and my people are very particular, and insist on my being at the office every morning at eight o'clock; and you see I'm obliged to do it, because I was taken in as a favour; and—and—I shall really be late; so if you'll kindly give me my bag, I'll be off. I don't know how to thank you for what you have done. And—my name's Archer—Tom Archer. And, please, how much have I to pay you?"

"Pay?" said Doris, almost peevishly. "O Mr. Archer, do you think I ask payment for doing an ordinary service? Here's your bag—quite waterproof, I think, now. And, Mr. Archer, when you pass here of a morning, you'll look up and say, 'Good-morning, Doris!' then I shall know you are all right. Go home."

Poor Tom tried to say goodbye, but he could only wring her white plump hand with his thin bony fingers, and hurried off, murmuring, "Doris, Doris! What a pretty name, and what a good girl!"

Doris, after she had watched him out of sight, returned to her dusting, and thought, "Well, I'm sure he's a good fellow, though he is so poor and sad."

Poor Tom! His was truly a sunless life. He was an orphan, and had no one in the world to look to for advice and comfort but an old uncle, reputed of great wealth, who lived in a dingy old house very near the spot where Blackheath Station now stands, and who just gave Tom lodging and board, and cared no farther about his employment or prospects in life. Tom was, as he told Doris, copying clerk in a lawyer's office in Greenwich. His employers were hard grasping men, who looked upon clerks as machines to be used till worthless, and not as soul, flesh, and blood like themselves. In return for his long hard day of toil they gave him a miserable salary, at which many an office-boy in these days would turn up his nose, with which he managed to pay his uncle for his board and lodging and provide his own scanty wardrobe. And day after day he toiled from the grim house in Blackheath Vale, over the great wild heath, past the Green Man, down the hill to Greenwich. No wonder years had written on his young face the lines and wrinkles of an old man.

Just at this time work was much harder at the lawyer's office. A difficult case had been put into their hands, and there was endless copying of correspondence to be done concerning a certain estate in Kent, which was said to be in the wrong hands, although the real owner was known to be living. Proofs, however, were wanting to show that the actual possessor was not entitled to the property, as the title-deeds were in apparent order. So Tom had to work late at night; but as he passed the Green Man, with its cosy-lighted and curtained rooms, he thought of Doris, and the thoughts helped him to face the wind and rain which dashed over the dark heath. Every morning, too, he saw her pretty face at the bow-window, and heard her cheery laughing reply to his salute, and that helped him through the drudgery of the day.

Doris began to know Tom, as on fine evenings he would stop and chat to her at the inn-door, much to the disgust of the travellers and habitués assembled in the bar and parlour; and she found him, although the most artless and simple of creatures in the ways of the world, informed on a thousand matters about which she had no idea, and full of strange out-of-the-way knowledge, which to her appeared simply marvellous.

Time went on; Tom and Doris became more and more intimate, and at last were betrothed.

"Doris," said Tom, "I don't know what right I have to ask you to be my wife; for I have nothing in the world but what I earn, and that is barely sufficient to keep myself, much less to maintain you. Besides, you're not made for a quiet-going old-fashioned fellow like me. You like—"

"No, I don't," interposed Doris, putting her red lips so near Tom's face that he was obliged to meet them with his. "I don't like anything or anybody but you."

"But you might pick up such a splendid husband amongst these gallants who are always praising your ankles and eyes," urged Tom. "They talk as I shall never be able to; and look at their money and fine dress."

"Fine fiddlesticks, Tom!" said Doris. "Do you think I care a straw for their oglings and fine speeches? Not I. I know their value and I know yours, and I put the two values side by side, and I think, Tom, I like you best."

So Tom was made happy, and he didn't care for the daily walks to and from the office, or for the drudgery when he was there. But he could not help thinking that he was acting unfairly to Doris; for he had no expectations in this world, and with what little knowledge he had of it he came to the conclusion that, notwithstanding their dreams of love in a cottage, it would be impossible for them to exist upon air.

CHAPTER II.

Tom's evening visits to Doris at the Green Man now became a regular part of his daily life, and the happiest part without doubt, especially when the weather was bad and there was every excuse for dallying longer than usual. As a rule he used to wait in the public parlour until she was disengaged, which was often some time, as the up Dover coach arrived just as he got to the Green Man, and the passengers, generally hungry and thirsty, often in a very bad mood, especially in bad weather, exacted the attendance of the whole available staff.

One very bitter night in January, Tom was blown into the Green Man doorway, and from thence into the parlour. He was later than usual, for a new phase had sprung up in the Kentish property case, and the copying work at the office was doubled; but late as he was, the up mail was later still, and there was some excitement as to the reasons of its non-arrival. Footpads and gentlemen of the highest order were then common on Blackheath, as on every wild open space near London; but the coaches were now so well armed, that it rarely was worth the while of highwaymen to make an attack. Besides, the scouts which had been sent out would have heard or seen something of an attack on the heath itself. So as the wisacres and horse-boys looked out into the black night, and saw the snow-drifts gradually deepening, they put the delay down to weather. Of course Doris was there, but when she saw Tom she left the chattering groups, and running up to him gave him a sounding kiss.

"Well, Tom dear," said she, perching herself on the edge of the table, carefully displaying a neat ankle and a natty red-ribboned shoe. "Never mind the coach, they always turn up; how are you?"

"Well, Doris, thank God," replied Tom, who had removed Doris from the table to his knees, "that so tired. We've discovered only of course you won't tell any one—that the real owner of the estate lives somewhere between here and Rochester; that she—it's a woman of course, Doris; women must be at the bottom of everything—is a Devonshire woman; that her name is Coombe."

"Why," interrupted Doris, "I'm a Devonshire woman; but my name isn't Coombe, though, is it?"

"And," continued Tom, speaking measuredly and beating time to every word on the round knuckles of Doris, "that her parents have been long dead—"

"Mine have been long dead," again put in Doris. "Fancy, Tom, if you were to discover me to be an heiress!"

"And," continued Tom again, "that she is supposed to be living under a different name."

"Well," said Doris, "if I claim the estate, will you back me up, Tom? Circumstances aren't very much against me, and funnier things have been known than the heiress to an estate turning up in an inn."

"Of course, of course I will, my dear Doris," stammered Tom; "but I think it would be a little rash, wouldn't it, until we have got some more evidence?"

"Of course," laughed Doris. "you don't think I'm in earnest, do you, you poor, dear, old, silly Tom?"

At this moment there was a hullabaloo outside, and the Dover mail dashed up, three-quarters of an hour behind time. Doris ran out to attend to the wants of the passengers. Tom was left alone in the parlour.

"There is many a true word spoken in jest," thought he. "The rightful possessor of the Rumley estates near Maidstone is a woman—that we know; her name was Coombe—that we know; she lives between Greenwich and Rochester—that we know; her parents are dead—that we know; she comes from Devonshire—that we know. Doris is a woman—that I know; she comes from Devonshire, she lives here, and her parents are dead—all that I know. Was her name ever Coombe? That I don't know; but I'll think over it;" and Tom sought his big armchair near the window, away from the fire, for he dared not usurp the rights of mail passengers, and fell at thinking.

In a few moments the door was thrown open, and two men, evidently, from their snow-covered cloaks and generally chilly appearance, passengers by the mail, entered. One was a big, burly, swaggering fellow, with a fierce moustache and a loud voice, evidently a soldier; the other a young fashionably-dressed gallant, with