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ESTAB. 1867
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STORY OF "OLD IRONSIDES."

"Old Ironsides," Dr. Holmes' most stirring lyric and the one which brought him recognition as a poet, was first printed in the Boston Advertiser. In 1830 the frigate Constitution, the conquering hero of many a sea fight, lay at Charlestown navy yard, condemned by an unsentimental department, to be destroyed as no longer seaworthy. Dr. Holmes was then a youth of 21. He had been graduated from Harvard the year before and had spent some time in the study of law. At that moment, however, his legal studies had been abandoned and he was living quietly at home, uncertain of his future occupation. It was in the interval between his desertion of the law and his resolve to study medicine that "Old Ironsides" was written. The young man's mind was filled with enthusiasm for the achievements of our navy, and that its most famous vessel should be chopped up like any unhallowed wood naturally provoked and galled him. The feelings which the action of the department aroused in him found spontaneous expression in the poem. There was nothing deliberate about its composition, according to the Boston Post; it was wholly impromptu. To the best of his recollection, he says, he wrote it on a scrap of paper with a lead pencil while standing one day before the fireplace in the old house at Cambridge. And then, without dreaming of the great popularity it would win, or of how effectual its protest would be, he sent it off to the Advertiser, where it appeared in the issue of Thursday, Sept. 16. As it gave eloquent voice to the sentiment of the whole country, its success was both sudden and universal. The poem was copied with applause from paper to paper, while in Washington it was struck off on handbills and distributed through the city. The grand result was preservation with honor for the Constitution.

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