

Oliver Wendell Holmes—His Life and Works

FOLLOWING is the full text of an interesting paper on Oliver Wendell Holmes read before a literary meeting of the Young People's Society of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, by Miss Lilian M. Mowat:

I am to talk to you, or read to you, for a little while tonight about our friend, Dr. Holmes. I have said "our friend, Dr. Holmes," for ever since I first read his books I have felt that he is my friend; a feeling which I am sure is shared by those of you who have read him with any attention. I remember once hearing a lecturer say that there are some writers who make their impression on the world not so much by their work as by their personalities. Sir Philip Sidney was one example, Robert L. Stevenson another. When Sidney is named, it is not of his "Astrophel and Stella" that we think, nor of the "Arcadia," but of the man himself, gallant courtier and hero of Zutphen; and Stevenson means to us not "Treasure Island," nor "The Child's Garden of Verse," but the heroic figure of the man who found gaiety and humor in life even while he fought disease. Perhaps I could not add Holmes to the list as truly, yet his personality it is which does most impress us, his personality as he discloses it to us in his roles of poet, professor and autocrat. In his case, his work is his personality. There are those who consider this subjective quality a sign of narrowness and limitation—and we hear a great deal about the objective universality of Shakespeare—but I ask you if to these limited minds of ours the individual is not more forceful than the general. Which do we love best, leaving reverence out of the question, the writer who utterly hides himself behind the creations of his mind, or the one who makes himself a living person to us? Therefore, when a man has the power of laying before us his own character, and it is a character so sweet, so strong, so sane, so wholly lovable as Holmes' was, shall we not call it not limitation but a glimpse of the infinity of genius.

Oliver Wendell Holmes was born in 1809, in Cambridge, Mass. To say Cambridge is as much as to say Boston, for there is only the narrow boundary of the Charles river between the two places; near Boston, then, Holmes was born, and in Boston he lived, loved, wrote and died. Oliver's father was Abell Holmes, a Calvinist clergyman, his mother, Sarah Wendell, of a prominent and well-born New York family. From his father, who was a capable historian and a profuse writer of dull poetry, probably he inherited some literary talent and inclination. From his mother he had, as a

greater gift, his humor, and his cheerfulness and vivacity of nature. In 1829 Oliver entered Harvard, studied law for a year, and amused himself with literature, chiefly in the form of lyrical poetry. One poem he wrote to save the hulk of the famous old battleship Constitution from destruction—a completely successful effort. His stirring lyric roused the people, and through them the naval department, and the old ship was saved from demolition. From law he turned to medicine, finding therein what seemed to be his vocation. In 1833 he went to Paris and studied hard for the next two years. In his holidays he visited Great Britain, the law countries and Italy. In 1835 he returned to his dear Boston, full of ambition. But strange to say the very traits for which he was most loved prevented his being extremely successful as a practitioner. He was too social in his habits, too witty to be acceptable to the grave Bostonians, in the medical college. His volume of medical usage is full of his most brilliant wit and his wonderful humanity. In 1840 he was married to Amelia Lee Jackson, a lady, we are told, of rare charm of mind and character. With such a mother and such a wife as Holmes had it is not strange that he possessed such chivalrous understanding of woman. In 1847 he was appointed Professor of Physiology and Anatomy at Harvard, a position he held till 1882. His lectures were, as his nature prompted, full of lively wit. Students were sent to him at the end of the day because he alone could keep them awake.

In 1836 he published his first volume of poems. In 1856 James Russell Lowell was asked by a certain publishing house in Boston to start a magazine. He promised to do so on condition that Holmes would help him. Holmes was both surprised and flattered, for he had not really been one of the select literary coterie. He threw himself into the preparations for the new magazine with all his ardor, named it the Atlantic Monthly; the name it still bears, and in giving it its initial push into existence was himself finally started upon his literary career. In each number of the first volume was one of the "Autocrat" papers. We learn that these lovely essays saved the magazine in the financial depression of 1857. Harassed merchants bought the numbers to drown their troubles in the originality, humor and New Englandism of the Autocrat. Holmes now gave up all his medical work except his lectures and devoted himself to literature.

"The Autocrat" was published in book form in 1858, and "The Professor" followed in 1859. The "Autocrat" is generally the more

popular, but many consider "The Professor" the finer. "The Autocrat" is like a lovely stream which goes running and deliciously sparkling over the stones. In "The Professor" the stream is a little larger. It has lost a little of its sparkle, but it has gained a little in depth and volume, in pathos and purpose. In all his work Holmes had one great purpose, to convert his generation from the stern dogmas of Calvinism to a more human and merciful conception of religion. Mild as his doctrines seem to us at this time, he was at first called a freethinker and an underminer of Christianity. "The Poet at the Breakfast Table" came out in 1872, but it lacks the inspiration of the other two of the series.

Holmes was now ambitious and turned to novel writing. "Elsie Venner," that strange and thrilling story, came out in 1861. The snake element of the tale is a little bit overdone. "The Guardian Angel," which was published in 1867, was better than "Elsie Venner," both in conception and art, brilliantly witty and an absolutely life-like picture of society as it then was in a New England town. In both novels his motive was the fight against Calvinism. In 1884 he wrote a third novel, "A Mortal Antipathy," which does not equal the other two.

Among others of his writings are a memoir of Motley, 1878, a Life of Emerson, 1884, and in 1888 his "Over the Tea-cups." Considering the fact that he was then seventy-nine years old, we are amazed at the continuance of his literary power. In 1886, after a four months' visit abroad, and a triumphal progress in England much like that of Mark Twain in our own time, he wrote, "Our Hundred Days in Europe." In 1894 he died and was buried, from historic old King's Chapel, to Mount Auburn cemetery.

After his return from Paris, in 1835, Dr. Holmes lived all his life in New England, save for his trip abroad in 1886. All his life and interests settled in Boston, that hub of the solar system. There he lived, as the years advanced, one of a brilliant literary set, known and loved by all for his sane humor and his kindness. His wonderful conversational powers made him welcome anywhere. Such a gift of talk is not granted to many. He knew something of all subjects and over all he maintained the play of his exquisite humor. Like the sparkling waters of a fountain his wit fell upon the most trivial subject, revealed in it unseen colors and hidden idiosyncrasies, refreshed it, and made it a thing of interest and delight. Among all her galaxy of humorists, America has no brighter star than he. Humor he had in its truest, purest form, not the buffoonery of Artemus Ward or Bill Nye, nor the

slang of Ade, but that delicate something, so wedded to true sentiment, which bespeaks the love of humanity, the well balanced mind and the heart of faith. Especially it is a humor very individual and original, as different as possible from that of Lowell, of Warner and Curtis, of Harris and Stockton, of Mark Twain at his best—different, yet none the less well-bred, pure, and wholesome. I spoke of humor as wedded to true sentiment, and indeed, the two never can be far apart. True sentiment is sensitive and shy. The moment it ceases to be so it becomes sentimentality. It creeps upon you gently for a while, until just as you perceive that it is sentiment, just before it clogs you, humor steps in and guides it away. In return, just before constant humor tires your fickle mind, sentiment takes it by the hand. Sentiment and humor, by the infinite shading and variation of these twin qualities, the mind is kept soothed and interested. So we find it in "The Autocrat." When that worthy gets to moralizing, just at the right moment some outsider, very probably "that young fellow they call John," steps in, receives the conversation by a dextrous turn and guides it back to less profound channels. Holmes' humor: always has the flavor of the soil. It is particularly and unmistakably his, it is especially and undeniably New England's; though because it is so human, it never ceases to be the world's. What more can we ask of a man than that he makes living and real for us his own personal character, and puts into words the intangible essence which creates in our nostrils the peculiar and special atmosphere of the time and place in which he lives? From him all the world learns.

Holmes was a poet. We have only to read "The Chambered Nautilus," "The Last Leaf," or any other of his graceful verses to be convinced of that. But more than that he was an essayist. In the hands of its most illustrious users, such as Bacon, Addison, Lamb, Stevenson, the essay has remained "the vehicle for conveyance of a personality." Bacon calls his essays "Dispersed Meditations." This kind of essay is the true conversation of literature, the inspired chat of literature, as Mr. Burton calls it. Its writer must naturally be a good talker, and Holmes was certainly that. We are told that as he wrote he talked, but that he talked even better. Good talkers are rare now, they say. We seem to have reached a period in which we neglect the gift of talking for that of writing. The fever of pen and ink consumes us. We wish to make ourselves acceptable to posterity; therefore we neglect our contemporaries. The true essayist, like the good talker, shuns linguistic gymnastics. He cultivates simplicity and sympathy. Holmes

is idiomatic to the point of daring, yet never slangy; and circumspect as good society demands, but never stiff. His was the genius of social expression.

The work in which his charm shows most happily is "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table." As early as 1831, when fresh from Harvard, he wrote two small papers under this title, for the New England Magazine. Twenty-five years later he returned to this happy inspiration, with his powers matured, having gained experience, insight, and reputation, to work out to completion what had been a flash of youthful talent. Here, and in "The Professor," he talks in his own inimitable way. By so slight a link as the boarding-house breakfast-table, he connects a dozen or more aptly portrayed characters, each fresh from the mint of humanity. Between them the conversation flows back and forth, now grave, now gay, revealing as it goes characters of the talkers. For such as care for love-stories, there is a charming little one threading through each volume. In these books he shows his swift capacity for word-painting. He speaks of "the young fellow they call John," of "the young lady who has come to the city to be finished off for the duties of life," of "our landlady's youngest, called Benjamin Franklin after the celebrated philosopher of that name—a highly merited compliment," of "the poor relation in the oxygenated bombazine," among those who sit at the breakfast-table with the Autocrat. Can you not see each of them, painted thus by a single sentence, before ever they speak at all? Here, too, are the perfect touches of pathos, and of pensive sadness which fails to be melancholy or depressing because it is so full of hope and faith. The death of the Little Gentleman in "The Professor" is most touchingly told, but not too mournfully. It serves to remind us that life is not all humor and pleasantness, but full of deep and serious underlying significance. And here we find the epigram thickly interpolated. It is a kind of epigram which is more than a clever stringing of words. It always has a serious and deep meaning. But above all, above epigram and idiom, above suggested life-story and human interest, sounds forth the sublime good sense, the Christian charity, the human wisdom and the sane, sweet humor of the writer's personality.

The closing sentence of "The Autocrat" is, "I hope you all love me none the less for anything I have told you." I could venture to wish that in those who have not read Dr. Holmes, I may have stirred up a desire to do so, a desire which can never bear fruit of disappointment; and that all of you who have read him will love him all the more for anything I have told you.

Mr. Borden Popular Leader—Received Ovation at Montreal

"If the young men of Canada will awaken to a true realization of the political situation as it exists in the Dominion today, and I believe they are awakening, the victory is ours."—R. L. Borden, M.P.

NEVER before perhaps has the leader of the Conservative party of Canada, more appealed to the hearts of a Montreal gathering than Saturday evening, when Mr. Borden and his friends addressed the annual banquet of the Junior Conservative Club, says the Montreal Gazette. Not for long has so optimistic a feeling existed at that which pervaded the guests at the Montreal Club, presided over by the local member for St. Antoine, Mr. C. Ernest Gault, the man whom his leader described as doing much good in his own quiet way. At the table of honor were seated by the chairman: Messrs. R. L. Borden, M.P., Hon. P. E. LeBlanc, M.L.A., H. B. Ames, M.P., Dr. Schaffner, M.P., Rufus Pope, ex-M.P., Lt.-Col. Labelle, Campbell Lane, Louis Beaubien, Mr. Seigney, and T. J. Parkes, while the three vice-chairs were filled by Messrs. F. J. Curran, F. J. Whitby, and J. H. Horsfall.

Following the menu and a very enthusiastic reception of the royal toast. Mr. Gault read letters of regret from Sir Alexandre Lacoste, W. B. Northrup, M.P., W. D. Staples, M.P. The following letter from the Premier-elect of New Brunswick was greeted with a round of applause:

"C. E. Gault, Esq., President Junior Conservative Club, Montreal:

"My dear Sir,—Kindly extend to the members of the Junior Conservative Club my thanks for their congratulations contained in your telegram of March 3. I trust that at the next election we will have more favorable news from Quebec than we have hitherto had, and that our friends who have been loyally supporting the Conservative party in opposition will succeed in winning a splendid victory.

"With kind regards, I am,

"Yours truly,

"J. D. HAZEN."

The keynote of the speeches which followed was absolute loyalty to Mr. Borden and confidence that the star of victory was shining very brightly just above his head. Mr. F. J. Curran, who proposed "Our Country," told the chieftain what the Junior Conservative Club had done in the past and what they would do in the future. In an eloquent speech he declared that the administration of the great national heritage which had been built

up by such leaders as Macdonald, Cartier and McGee was about to be handed over to Mr. R. L. Borden, who would prove himself the worthy successor of the distinguished trio he had just named. (Applause.) The Leader of the Opposition was given an ovation when he rose, and it was, in fact, some moments before Mr. Borden could proceed. He began by an allusion to the magnificent work being done in the House of Commons by the eleven men who sit behind him from the province of Quebec. It was something, he said, to remember that while these eleven Conservatives represented 110,000 electors, that being the number of Opposition votes cast in this province at the last federal election, the 54 Liberal members only represented about 130,000 electors. He drew attention, therefore, to the fact that a very slight displacement of votes at the coming election would give this province a great many Conservative representatives in the House of Commons, and consequently, give victory to the party.

Mr. Borden then proceeded to describe the enthusiasm that had animated the Opposition during the session now on and to declare that while formerly they required encouragement from their leader to stimulate them this was little needed now. On the contrary, Mr. Borden said, laughingly, that he could hardly prevent them from sitting from forty to fifty hours without a break. Then he told of the splendid fight his followers had quite recently put up against this novel Liberal doctrine, that the representatives of the people had no right to examine original documents that were wanted. All this sounded strange, he declared, as coming from such a man as Hon. Frank Oliver, who used to designate himself as a radical, and equally strange from Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who prided himself as being a Liberal of the English school. Mr. Borden said, however, that they had taken issue with the Government on this position, and his hearers knew that it was not the Conservatives who had receded when the fight was over.

The Conservative leader said, amid a storm of cheers, that he had absolute confidence in the honesty of the great majority of the Canadian people, and if he felt sure that the electors possessed a true knowledge of the situation at Ottawa there could be no doubt in his mind as to the coming triumph of the Conservative party at the polls. It remained, therefore, for the members of the clubs, the platform speakers, and all those who were preparing for the coming campaign to place all the facts of the political situation as it now prevails before the electorate, and as sure as fate, Mr. Borden said,

victory would be theirs. He also referred to the splendid fight Mr. Curran had made in St. Ann's, and he felt sure that it would be many years before a Liberal was elected again in that constituency.

As to the material future of the Dominion, Mr. Borden said they had nothing to fear, but he reminded them that there were other things which a patriot should look to besides material wealth. They must look to the possession of a high standard of political morality. Both races in this land had, he said, a record of which any people or nation might well be proud. He wanted to see a broad national spirit take possession of this country, and this could be obtained by the return of the Conservative party to power. He felt greatly encouraged by the fact that the young men of Canada were awakening to their responsibilities.

"If," he concluded, "the young men of Canada are awakened, and I know they are awakening to their duty, the victory of the Conservative party at the coming general election is assured." At the conclusion of Mr. Borden's address the gathering arose and gave him another ovation.

"Our party," was proposed by Mr. Campbell Lane in a very bright and forcible speech. The Conservative party, he claimed, was co-existent with the country, since it was the Conservative party that had brought the Dominion into being and laid the lines broad and deep of her prosperity. He claimed, however, that in almost every patriotic movement carried on by Conservative leaders there had always been a good number of fair-minded Liberals willing to sink party feeling and help the leaders on with the good work. Mr. Lane had confidence in the patriotism of the old Liberal party of Canada, as once represented by men like Alexander Mackenzie, but he asked if any one today would ever think of the present ministers sitting on the treasury lid to keep it down. Today the lid was wide open for corrupt friends of the ministry to come in and help themselves. As a matter of fact the only lid the Ottawa ministers were keeping down today was the lid to cover up scandals and maladministration. The Liberals of the old school had helped Whitney in Ontario and Hazen in New Brunswick, to give good government to those provinces, and he was quite sure by the same line of reasoning, that the same men would rally to Mr. Borden's banner and give a wise administration to Canada. (Applause.)

Mr. H. B. Ames, M.P., Dr. Schaffner, M.P., and Mr. Rufus Pope replied to this toast: The

federal member for St. Antoine, who was the first speaker, after paying an eloquent tribute to the memory of their late lamented friend, Mr. Frank Jones, said that the Opposition at Ottawa were forging campaign material that could not but be effective when the day of battle arrived, and the reason it was effective was because the people believed in their work. The Opposition had victoriously maintained the right of free speech and free investigation, and it was noticeable that a great change had come over the spirit of the Government's dreams during the last few weeks. His parliamentary experience, he said, had not been long, but he had never before seen blows delivered with such telling effect as those delivered during this session by the Opposition. The Opposition had felt called upon to assert rights which they knew were their own, and they had asserted them in good earnest and with telling effect. There was not the same tyranny and blocking of committees as before, and the old-time arrogance had also disappeared so with the development of the vigorous campaign Mr. Ames felt bold to predict that the Opposition, following such an able leader as Mr. R. L. Borden, would complete the victory in New Brunswick by securing a victory at the next Dominion election. (Applause.)

Dr. Schaffner, M.P., said that he expected to spend the Easter holidays with the other Manitoba members in their respective constituencies, and he knew that in visiting thirty or more towns in his county every second man would be asking about Quebec. He was always met with this question: "What are they going to do in Quebec?" He felt sure that if Quebec would give them fifteen members in the next Parliament, the Laurier government was doomed. (Cheers, and cries: "You will get more than that.")

"Well," replied the speaker, "you should give us forty, but fifteen will do," and then he told what the West would be sure to do.

There would, he predicted, be thirty-four members in the next house from the country west of Lake Superior, and a large majority of them would be supporters of Mr. Borden. They would, he said, sweep British Columbia and Manitoba, and secure a majority from Saskatchewan, while Alberta would probably go Liberal.

Mr. Rufus Pope delivered a ringing speech, declaring that although the French-Canadian voters were justly proud of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, yet he was confident that as soon as they realized that his administration merited con-

demnation they would be the first to go to the polls and mark their ballots for the Borden candidates. Mr. Pope said that the spectacle of 110,000 Quebec voters going to the polls on two successive occasions and voting squarely against Laurier, Liberalism, appeals to race feeling, whiskey and other arguments was a thing that future generations would always place to the credit of the French-Canadian people. (Applause.)

The toast of "Our Province" was proposed in a brief speech by Mr. R. Guy Harwood. Hon. P. E. LeBlanc, speaking in English, made a powerful appeal to the English-speaking people of Quebec to take a greater interest in the Quebec Legislature, for their interests were many in that body. He reviewed the different provincial regimes, and held that the present one was no better than that which had been condemned so unanimously by the electorate in 1892, when the Mercier Government was driven from power. He contended that a fair provincial election had not been held in this province for ten years, as in every case the constitution had been trampled underfoot. The Gouin government was not, however, invincible, and he declared that if the Conservative party would stand together victory would be theirs just as soon as the election takes place. (Applause.)

BRITISH RAILWAY TRAFFIC

The total railway mileage of the United Kingdom at the close of 1906 amounted to 23,063, an increase of 216 miles over that of the previous year. The paid-up capital increased from \$6,363,005,000 in 1905 to \$6,434,415,000 in 1906. The number of passengers carried on the several lines in 1906, not including persons holding season tickets, was 1,240,347,000 from whom fares amounting to \$249,413,888 were collected, against 1,199,022,000 persons carried and \$342,600,600 collected in fares in 1905. The quantity of merchandise conveyed in 1905 aggregated 461,139,000 tons, from which the receipts amounted to \$282,657,945, against 488,790,000 tons and \$291,971,085 in receipts in 1906, making the total gross receipts from all traffic \$525,658,545 in 1905 and \$541,384,965 in 1906. To these sums must be added the receipts from miscellaneous sources, amounting to \$41,996,550 in 1905 and \$44,754,690 in 1906, which brings up the total gross receipts to \$567,655,095 and \$586,739,655 for the two years respectively. The total expenditure in 1906 amounted to \$363,989,270, an increase of \$13,655,955 over those of the preceding year.