

ROAMINGS IN CLASSIC MASSACHUSETTS.

V.—FAREWELL VISITS.

A VISIT to Massachusetts in June when the mercury had suddenly mounted to 90° would have lacked one of its most attractive features without at least a glimpse of the sea, so far, alas!—from us in central Canada; and without a dip in its bracing waves, even though we were told on all hands that “the season” had not yet begun, and that, warm as the weather had become, such an anachronism as bathing out of the season might be followed by some indeterminate but fearful penalty! However, we were sure that, to any constitution which could stand the temperature of Murray Bay water in August, that of the ocean on the warm shores of Massachusetts Bay in June, would be both pleasant and innocuous. And so it proved.

The sea, though of course not visible from Boston in its long land-locked bay, is easily accessible at Nantasket Beach, even before “the season,” by the steamer which makes the trips daily to the Beach, and takes you down in about an hour’s pleasant sail. It was unfortunately a hazy day, but the haze—though limiting that view of boundless blue ocean which on a clear day is so delightful and inspiring—gave a certain dreamy softness to the distant shores of the bay which lent them with more picturesque appearance than they naturally possess. Leaving the dim outline of Boston, with its towers and spires, and the sails and steamers in harbour far behind us, we pass several islands and home bound crafts, and at length draw up at Nantasket pier. Hitherto the long sandy bar, which stretches between us and the sea, has, in the haziness of the day, completely shut the ocean out of view. But a walk of a few steps away from the pier took us across the bar to the long stretch of open sands where the mighty Atlantic, calm and gentle as an inland lake, softly lapped the beach at our feet in tiny waves that seemed scarcely to break, as they lightly curled over upon the shore. We walked some distance along the smooth and shining sands, enjoying the indescribable but unmistakable breath of the sea, the odour of the seaweed, and the wide grey expanse lost in the limiting haze, through which, however, we could distinguish distant vessels slowly bearing away northward or southward. There was a certain pleasant suggestion about it, that there was nothing between us and Europe, that Cape Cod lay south-eastward, some thirty miles away, almost in view on a clear day, and the Bay of Fundy north-eastward; and straight across that wide grey water stretched those shores of Normandy from whence came the first explorers of that indented coast, as well as the “Pioneers of New France.”

We had our dip, or rather two dips—both refreshing and invigorating, notwithstanding the unorthodoxy and the anachronism—enjoyed a picnic luncheon on the only rocks—to speak of—within sight; gathered seaweed, shells and pebbles, as everybody seems instinctively to do at the seashore, and inspected some of the seaside cottages, all ready for their summer tenants. Notwithstanding its one charm of smooth sands and open sea, Nantasket did not impress us with any ardent desire to sojourn there. It has nothing but the sea, is bare and hot and sandy, has no trees in sight and scarcely any vegetation, no picturesque crags, and landward is only a barren, sandy ridge, dotted with very unæsthetic cottages and summer hotels. On a hill, however, called Strawberry Hill—apparently from the absence of strawberries—there is a “Sea Rest,” maintained by the Woman’s Christian Association, where many a wearied working girl is treated to a week’s rest and sea-bathing free of cost. Such an instance of thoughtful Christian kindness would redeem a more uninteresting place than Nantasket Beach.

After a pleasant rest of a few hours, taking in all the sea air and “sea change” we could inhale, we had reluctantly to turn our backs on the soft, curling waves, with their lovely iridescent hues, and return to the steamer, whistling warning of her last trip. In a moment we were out of sight of sea again, with only the somewhat muddy and uninteresting Sound about us; its barren islands, the sails of passing boats gleaming white in afternoon sunshine, and by and by the distant city looming soft through the haze. Warm as the day had been, we had not felt it in the least oppressive on the steamer, or by the sea; but it was like coming into another climate to step on shore, into the stifling, heated atmosphere of the brick-built city.

There are two things which everyone interested in the American literature of the last thirty years would like to do before leaving Boston, and both we had the privilege of doing—namely, visiting the “local habitation” of the *Atlantic Monthly*, which has so long represented the highest New England culture, and conversing with a man whose bonhomie and sparkling humour have won for him a wider popularity than has been the lot of some of his greater contemporaries. No man has been more identified with literary Boston during the last generation than Oliver Wendell Holmes, whose genial personality has so diffused itself through his writings that his friends are almost synonymous with his readers.

Though Dr. Holmes has not now any official connection with the *Atlantic Monthly*, his name has been so long almost identified with it, that our visit to the home of the *Monthly* seemed as natural a preliminary to our visit to him, as one to the habitation of *Maga* would have seemed to a meeting with “Christopher North.” And indeed, though utterly dissimilar in outward appearance, there are some points of resemblance between the “Autocrat” and his Scottish prototype.

The office of the *Atlantic Monthly* is on Park Street, lying across the foot of Boston Common, and looking out into its elms, and over what seems, in leafy June, almost a “boundless contiguity of shade.” Its pleasant, bright office, through which all the best modern books pass for review, is connected with the great publishing establishment of Messrs. Houghton and Mifflin, whose “Riverside press” is familiar to all readers of classic American literature, and of classic English literature, too—in American editions. From the obliging editor we secure the address of Dr. Holmes, to whom we are fortunate enough to have an introduction from his old friend, Mr. Whittier himself; these two aged poets, who have survived so many of their contemporaries—so many broken ties of life, being linked together by a close, long-standing friendship.

Dr. Holmes resides on Beacon Street, which, for a long way up from Park Street, skirts the “Common” and the Public Gardens, while close behind it flows the St. Charles River. It is, as all Mr. Howells’ readers know, one of the fashionable streets of Boston; and its tall, four-storey brick houses, facing the park and gardens, are the homes of many of its wealthiest citizens. The abode of Dr. Holmes is in no way distinguishable from its neighbours, except by the number, though it is, perhaps, even more richly draped in the luxuriant “Japanese ivy,” which covers every inch of wall, leaving only the window openings. Will Dr. Holmes be within? we wonder—for already the Bostonians are beginning to seek their summer quarters. Happily he is at home. We are ushered into a reception-room on the lower floor, fitted up with book-cases—while Mr. Whittier’s card of introduction is taken upstairs. Then we are invited up to the Autocrat’s library, and there, in company with a young lady, his daughter-in-law, we find the Autocrat himself. And surely never was there autocrat so genial and gentle! Small in stature and unremarkable in person, Dr. Holmes is one of the most unassuming and unpretending of men. His gentle, unobtrusive courtesy makes his visitor feel at home with him at once, and the thoughtful, sensitive, and now somewhat saddened, face gains in interest every moment as he talks. He asks warmly for Mr. Whittier’s health, is clearly himself suffering from physical ailments, and feeling the depressing influence of illness and death among his own inner circle of friends. Doubtless the impending death of his friend, Lowell, was weighing on his mind, for the illness of Mr. Lowell was, even then, known to be fatal. And the last two or three years have taken from him the loved companion of life’s “long walk,” and the cherished daughter, whose cheering presence he might have hoped for to the end. “It seems to me everyone is either dead or dying” was the pathetic utterance of a feeling that one could see was just then uppermost in his heart. Yet he talked most genially, too, and sometimes even playfully; asked various questions about Canada, and responded brightly to a question as to the precise position of the “Long Walk” on Boston Common, which all lovers of “The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table” will remember as playing an important part in the closing scene of that delightful book. He took some pains to describe it, and then added, with a smile, to his companion: “I should not wonder if that had opened the way to a good many proposals”; to which she rejoined that it was to be hoped all had had as happy a fulfilment as that celebrated question of the “Autocrat” to the “schoolmistress,”—“shall we take the long walk together?” Yet, alas, all long walks—even the longest—have their ending, so far as this life is concerned.

Dr. Holmes’ library is a spacious one, and the tall, carved book-cases are abundantly filled. He has told us how he grew up in a library, and how his love of literature was developed by early association with the best; and his first love is his last, for he evidently keeps himself supplied with the best new as well as old books. Busts, statuettes and engravings of some of the world’s best pictures add their charm to the walls, and the windows look out on the calmly-flowing Charles, with Longfellow’s “Bridge” in full view. He kindly pointed out this, and the various objects of interest on the opposite shore—Cambridge, east and west—the distant towers of Harvard—the vista ending in the Brookline heights. He watched the Harvard athletes rowing their “shells” vigorously past, and remarked that it did not seem so long since he, too, had been an oarsman. Finally he added the last touch to the genial kindness he had shown during the whole interview by presenting the writer with his latest book, “Over the Tea-cups,” with an inscription carefully written in his still clear and characteristic handwriting, which, it is needless to say, added much to the value of what, as his gift, will be, in any case, a much-prized treasure. No visitor to so kindly a host can fail to mentally echo the sentiment expressed by Whittier in his poem to his friend on his eightieth birthday:—

Long be it ere the table shall be set
For the last breakfast of the Autocrat,
And Love repeat with smiles and tears thereat
His own sweet songs that time shall not forget!

Of course no pilgrim to “classic Massachusetts” could leave Boston without a visit to Cambridge—now almost as venerated a name as its English godmother. Harvard, with its heterogeneous collection of academic buildings, some ugly, with the bare stiffness of old colonial days—some beautiful, like its grand “Memorial Hall,” with the profuse decoration of modern Norman Gothic—its broad campus, with its magnificent elms, and all its bustle and stir of academic life just before the festivities of “com-

mencement,” is of itself a sight full of interest. That interest centres, perhaps, in its Memorial Hall, with its beautiful Latin inscriptions and touching epitaphs on young sons of Harvard, who illustrated the old time-honoured legend, “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*” Two fine statues of specially distinguished young warriors stand at the head of the long hall, which has all the dignity and solemnity of a chapel. Close by is a very different scene. In another long hall, hung with portraits, old and new, of all the celebrities of New England, from the colonial days downwards, not omitting, of course, several portraits of Washington, were spread the long tables at which several hundred young men sit down three times a day to their very social meals, quite undismayed by the portentous array of learning, statesmanship and Puritan “divinity” that looks down upon so different a generation to-day. The gymnasium at Harvard is one of its sights—so spacious, so complete in its arrangements and so lavishly equipped. Agassiz Museum we had, with much regret, to leave unvisited, for lack of time to do it justice.

Longfellow’s house, of course, every visitor sees, at least from without, and we had the privilege of standing for a few moments in the poet’s library, which has been made familiar to many in illustrated magazine articles. The massive carved chair presented to him by the children, made out of the “spreading chestnut tree” under which “the village blacksmith toiled,” catches the eye at once. In the hall, too, one notices instantly “the old clock on the stairs.”

Half way up the stairs it stands,
And points and beckons with its hands.

And we seem to see that massive leonine head bent over the round study table as he translates for us its ceaseless burden, “*forever, never; never, forever!*” It is evident that Mr. Longfellow was a lover of good pictures, as the rooms and corridors testify. A large picture that hangs near the door in the entrance hall, representing a Franciscan monk leading a donkey which draws a load of green boughs, attracts special notice, and suggests the probability that it may have suggested the image in the second stanza of the “Old Clock on the Stairs.”

The house, a spacious one, built of wood of a warm, cream colour picked out with white, and a white-pillared verandah at one side, stands

Somewhat back from the village street,

in a nicely-kept shrubbery, the gate flanked by lilacs and the door by rosebushes. At the time of our visit it was uninhabited by any member of the poet’s family—his daughter, who usually resides there, being absent in Europe. The house overlooks the River Charles, being divided from it only by the road and a strip of ground, once belonging to the poet’s property, now being planted with trees for a park to be called by his name. The river is not strikingly picturesque at this point. Doubtless the encroaching advances of commerce have tended to make it less so; still, there is enough of quiet, sylvan beauty about its winding course to enable us to understand the feeling that inspired the lines to the

River! that in silence windest
Through the meadows, bright and free,
Till at length thy rest thou findest
In the bosom of the sea!

We pass on from the home of Longfellow; and, a little further on, in the quiet of the soft June evening, we linger wistfully for a few minutes at the gate of Elmwood, then still the home of James Russell Lowell. Embowered in its “overarching vaults of shade,” as Dr. Holmes has well described them—the quiet, old white homestead, with its spacious green fields and spreading elms, seemed an ideal home for such a man; and those who love his noble verse can often read into it the happy influences of this lovely and sequestered spot. As we look, a little golden-haired girl comes out, and stands petting a horse just driven into the ample court-yard. She is doubtless one of the poet’s grandchildren—such an one as he addresses in one of his sweetest poems. It is a pretty picture—seen in the soft evening light with the long shadows of the great trees stretching across the verdant lawn and about the quiet house. But the shadow of death is even then overclouding its summer beauty, and there is no hope of catching a glimpse of its suffering master, who is so soon to precede some of his older friends into the “Silent Land.” A charming, shady lane leads from Elmwood to the charmed stillness of Mount Auburn, close by, and in this lovely and sacred spot, where so many “long walks” have come to a close, we appropriately conclude our roamings in “classic Massachusetts.” Longfellow’s tomb is the first we notice, as we traverse the winding paths amid bright blossoming shrubs. It is a plain, grey sarcophagus, of Grecian style and decoration—Charles Sumner’s closely resembles it, though of different tint. Every now and then we come on some family name noted in the annals of New England. The tall, white obelisk that marks the grave of Charlotte Cushman seems to beset her pure and blameless memory. The turf is emerald velvet, and the shrubs and trees show the most untiring care; yet, partly perhaps because of its very trimness, Mount Auburn lacks the subtle charm of free, sylvan beauty which we find in Sleepy Hollow, with its cluster of venerated graves under the venerable pines that seem to sigh a perpetual elegy. The “Mount,” which gradually rises towards the centre, is crowned by a round tower, from whence there is an extensive and beautiful view over the picturesque, undulating country for many miles; and from hence we can trace the River Charles, winding like a looped, silver ribbon through meadow and