AN OLD YEAR SONG.

BY OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

As through the forest, dimm and dark
By still November, late I strayed,
A lonely minstrel my ear hath
Was singing to the solitude.
I heard the music, thus I asked,
What ails the parch the leaves were spread
Beneath the oak, and crimsoned
Thy sand on the leafless bough,
Sing, little bird! Why sing alone
The sadness of the dying year.

When winter, crushed the leaf with blast
Of his cold breath, and made stage with dew
The meadows, and stole rippled rill,
The bold sing April, and sang of May
Or pass in joyous tones away
When April trembled into May!
Thy life call half so special lay
Sing, little bird! the Spring is gone.

And I remember—well—they
Thy fellow-warblers—gone—
As when behind a troubled pursuit
Some body maiden vanishes unseen;
With answering notes the woodland rung,
And eyed warbles hymn'd a song.
How deep the shade! the grove how fair!
Sing, little bird! the woods are here.

But now the Summer's chant is done
And mute the warm amphitheatre,
The birds have left the silvering pines
To fit among the trembling aspens
Or fan the air with scented pinnace
Amid the low-aired orange blooms,
And that art here alone—alone—
Sing, little bird! the rest have flown.

The snow has capped you distant hill,
At morn the run-log brook will still.
From drifted banks the dead leaves peep
Are like the smoke of cavaties,
The long gray beeches and the black
The grandfathers, changed to stubborn rock,
The pine, the hemlock, and the oak
Sing, it is bird! the frosts have come.

Fast, fast, the chilly mists of autumn creep,
The empress flowers are half asleep,
The air grows chill; the sunny gaze
May leave thee ere thy song is done,
The pulse thou wakest sky breast grow cold,
Thy secret dies with thee unsold!
The lingering sunshine is bright,
Sing, little bird! "will soon be night.

—From the *Atlantic Monthly*.

READY-MONEY MORTIBOY

A MATTER-OF-FACT STORY.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Follow me as the old novelists used to say, to Paragon place, Gray's Inn-road. This pleasant retreat lies on the east side of the road, not very far from the lordly entrance to Gray's Inn. Paragon place is well drained, and as it consists only of six houses in all, it passes a peaceful and quiet existence, having but little intercourse with the outer world. It consists of a single row of five houses, with another at the end, looking down the court. They face a paved alley of ten feet in breadth. The terraced side of Paragon place is bounded by a brick wall, eight feet high, set about and garnished, for the better protection of the inhabitants, by a plentiful topdressing of broken bottles. The wall may also serve as a protection to the printers' offices which lie beyond. At all events, it is a barrier impassable between Paragon place and the printers. Thus fashion separates itself from business; leisure and retirement from compulsory work.

I would that we might linger over Paragon place and its inhabitants. About every house there hung half a dozen histories from the tale of every dwelling might be woven a romance of real life—that is, a tale of sin and suffering, of poverty and crime. We have to do with one only. It is the third tenement in the row. Like the rest, it consists of three rooms—one, the third, called "fore and aft"—the front window looking into the court, the back commanding a view of a small yard beyond, about as large as a square, containing a water-butt and a heap of rubbish.

There is a staircase leading to two rooms, one over the other, above. On the left hand of the door, as you go in, is a sort of closet or small room, which may be used as a bedroom when the family overflows the rest of the house. It is lighted and ventilated by an aperture giving space for a single pane of glass.

The doors of the houses, which were once painted green, but long years since stand open. Everything about the court is inclerably dirty. Odds and scraps of vegetables, as cabbage stalks, potato peelings, and such small wreck and debris, lie about the court; a gutter runs along the wall, down which is merrily flowing, at the moment, the basket of contents which, No. 1, has just emptied into it. Two children, having hastily constructed a model ship out of a splinter of wood, have launched it upon this river, and are watching its progress down the tributary stream to the great Mississippi of Gray's Inn Road. They run out with it into the street, and stay there. Then the court is quiet again, except for the pulse of the steam press, which is never silent. The sun shines on the windows of the printers' office, and is reflected back on the door step of No. 3, where sits, basking in the warmth, a figure, clothed if it were proper, and smoking a long clay pipe. He is aged, bent and doubled up, from the effects of age; his shoulders stoop, and his back is rounded. On his head is a soft felt hat, much too large for him, which flops down on the side nearest the door, but is lifted up on the other side to catch the sun. A crutch is beside him. In his hand is a copy of the day before yesterday's *Daily Telegraph*, and in a reading aloud, slowly and painfully, making comments as he goes—not running so much as creeping—is his companion, a child of nine or ten, who is sitting on the stones, with his back against the wall, in the reflected sunlight. The boy's head is bare; his feet are bare. On sheer of his jacket is quite gone, the other nearly. His trousers are all rents and tatters, his white legs gleaming through the holes. His shirt will no longer hold and shows signs of approaching dissolution. All this is a truth, because the weather is warm; and rags are just as comfortable in warm weather as anything else. Besides, the boy has been brought up in a school which teaches the cultivation of personal appearance by means of sartorial art. He was far more interested in the problem of how to achieve that ragging wolf which every day gnawed at his commands, and instigated him to get food by any means.

"So you see, Bill," said the politician, in a thin quavering voice, "the Government's gone and done it again, and the country's to the devil. Now, if I was in the Onse—"

He stopped and folded his paper.

"Don't go onse the Onse, Thoosy," said the child.

"It's not the work's, stoopid. It's the House of Parlyment. Some day I think I shall go—to represent Finsbury. I wish there was the chance of a half-pint in my pocket. Who's the equal coming up into court?"

The "swell," who was looking inquiringly up and down the court, seeing the pair outside the door, turned his steps in that direction.

"Can you tell me"—he spoke to the smoker, whose face was hidden by the flying hat—"if a Mrs. Knesbone lives about here?"

He removed his pipe from his mouth, and his great hat from his head, and stood up right in the doorway, waving his hand with an air of authority.

Dick Mortiboy looked at him in astonishment. Behind the wrinkles and lines of age—not the useless wrinkles, but those which are perfectly colorless; not the shape, because the cheeks were sunken and the features prominent; not the comeliness, because the whole figure was starved and pinched; not the refinement looks, because the scattered hairs, nearly white, but sparse and unkempt, were not Dick's hair, but an indescribable look of youth.

He was about four feet and a half in height; but then he stooped a good deal. He had on a long, coarse coat, made for a grown man. His legs were cased in winkle trousers. He had a thick flannel shirt, and a wrapper round his neck. His chest was flattened in—his legs bowed—his body bent. Dick, standing before him on the stone, stared at him without speaking. He had never seen this kind of creature before.

"When you think you'll recognise me again," said the boy, sarcastically, "perhaps you'll let me know."

"It is a boy, by gad," said Dick.

The child previously addressed as Bill set up a yell of delight, clapping his hands and dancing round. It was as good fun as he ever assisted at. The other relaxed from his austerness of expression, conceding an approach to the frivolities of the situation.

"Are you a boy, or are you a man?" asked Dick. "What's your name? Tell me something about yourself."

"You can read, I suppose?" said the gentleman, with a gentle smile. "If you can do that much, I presume. Young Bill, the writin' materials. Give the old man his bit o' writin'."

Bill produced a piece of chalk from his trousers pocket.

"Here y'are, Thoosy. Hooray!"

Thoosy inspected the "materials" with care, and looked for a point. This—in what mathematicians would describe as a rough wedge-shaped, or twenty-sided solid—was difficult to find; but selecting something which would suit, he matched gravely down the steps, and, stooping the slave of his chest up to his elbow, while he supported his long legs under the left arm raised his right hand to the brick wall. Then he stepped and turned round again.

"You cute spell!" he said to Dick, looking at him sideways, as if with suspicion, but always with an eye to Bill.

Dick nodded.

"And read? Because I'm not going to take all this trouble for nothink, you know!"

Little Bill screamed, and rolled himself over and over upon the cabbage stalks. Thoosy, with not eye in his young companion, proceeded slowly with his talk.

"Then," he said, stopping back and admiring the effect of the twilight upon his strokes, "there's a G, and a OO, and a EN. If that don't spell Cook, that ain't my name, and Mathooseleah ain't my nature."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Bill, "ain't we a fizzer!"

Dick Mortiboy took the cigar out of his mouth, and contemplated the pair with an expression in which curiosity had the best part.

"So you're Mr. Mathooseleah, are you? Pray, is this Bill—little Bill?"

"That is Bill, mister," said Thoosy, "and a very good little Bill he is."

"Do you know Mrs. Knesbone? I understand that she lives here."

He stopped and folded his paper.

"Dunno, I'm sure. Thoosy," said the child.

"It's not the work's, stoopid. It's the House of Parlyment. Some day I think I shall go—to represent Finsbury. I wish there was the chance of a half-pint in my pocket. Who's the equal coming up into court?"

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"Do you know Mrs. Knesbone? I understand that she lives here."

"Yes, Mrs. Knesbone, let us understand our betters. This is for your information, provided it proves correct and true on subsequent inquiry. Is it?"

The old woman eyed the gold greedily. "I've lodged in Mrs. Knesbone's which was the name, and I've seen the director of the Bank of Ireland, and I've seen the Bishop of Ely, and I've seen the Lord Mayor of London, and I've seen the Queen of Sheba, and I've seen the Cock and Bull, and I've seen the Cat and Fiddle, and I've seen the Man in the Moon, and I've seen the Cheshire Cat, and I've seen the Mad Hatter, and I've seen the Dormouse, and I've seen the Dormouse, and I've seen the Dormouse