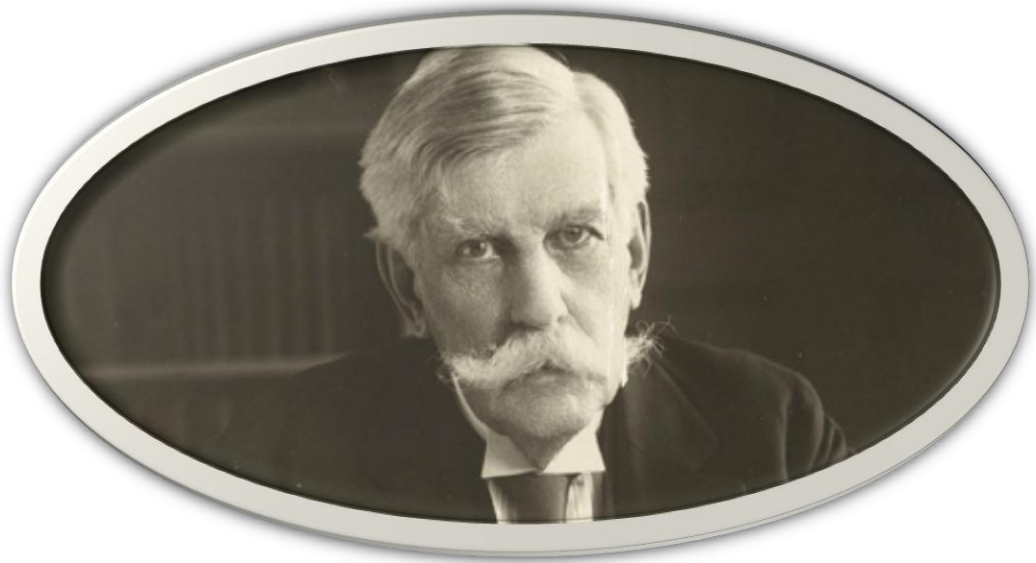


Selected Poems

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. (1809-1894)

The Poetical Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes. By Oliver Wendell Holmes [Sr.]. New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1892. *Archive.org*. Web. 9 Sept. 2013.



A HYMN OF PEACE

SUNG AT THE 'JUBILEE,' JUNE 15, 1869, TO THE MUSIC OF SELLER'S 'AMERICAN HYMN'

ANGEL of Peace, thou hast wandered too long!
Spread thy white wings to the sunshine of love!
Come while our voices are blended in song,--
Fly to our ark like the storm-beaten dove!
Fly to our ark on the wings of the dove,--
Speed o'er the far-sounding billows of song,
Crowned with thine olive-leaf garland of love,--
Angel of Peace, thou hast waited too long!

Joyous we meet, on this altar of thine
Mingling the gifts we have gathered for thee,
Sweet with the odors of myrtle and pine,
Breeze of the prairie and breath of the sea,--
Meadow and mountain and forest and sea!
Sweet is the fragrance of myrtle and pine,
Sweeter the incense we offer to thee,
Brothers once more round this altar of thine!

Angels of Bethlehem, answer the strain!
Hark! a new birth-song is filling the sky!--
Loud as the storm-wind that tumbles the main
Bid the full breath of the organ reply,--
Let the loud tempest of voices reply,--
Roll its long surge like the-earth-shaking main!
Swell the vast song till it mounts to the sky!
Angels of Bethlehem, echo the strain!

OLD IRONSIDES

Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!
Long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see
That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
And burst the cannon's roar; --
The meteor of the ocean air
Shall sweep the clouds no more.
Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,
Where knelt the vanquished foe,
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,
And waves were white below,
No more shall feel the victor's tread,
Or know the conquered knee; --
The harpies of the shore shall pluck
The eagle of the sea!

Oh, better that her shattered hulk
Should sink beneath the wave;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
And there should be her grave;
Nail to the mast her holy flag,
Set every threadbare sail,
And give her to the god of storms,
The lightning and the gale!

The Chambered Nautilus

HIS is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,
Sails the unshadowed main, --
The venturous bark that flings
On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings
In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings,
And coral reefs lie bare,
Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;
Wrecked is the ship of pearl!
And every chambered cell,
Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,
As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,
Before thee lies revealed, --
Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil
That spread his lustrous coil;
Still, as the spiral grew,
He left the past year's dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door,
Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,
Cast from her lap, forlorn!
From thy dead lips a clearer note is born
Than ever Triton blew from wreathèd horn!
While on mine ear it rings,

Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that sings: --
Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

THE TWO STREAMS

BEHOLD the rocky wall
That down its sloping sides
Pours the swift rain-drops, blending as they fall,
In rushing river-tides!

Yon stream, whose sources run
Turned by a pebble's edge,
Is Athabasca, rolling toward the sun
Through the cleft mountain-ledge.

The slender rill had strayed,
But for the slanting stone,
To evening's ocean, with the tangled braid
Of foam-flecked Oregon.

So from the heights of Will
Life's parting stream descends,
And, as a moment turns its slender rill,
Each widening torrent bends,--

From the same cradle's side,
From the same mother's knee,--
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the Peaceful Sea!

DEPARTED DAYS

YES, dear departed, cherished days,
Could Memory's hand restore
Your morning light, your evening rays,
From Time's gray urn once more,
Then might this restless heart be still,
This straining eye might close,
And Hope her fainting pinions fold,
While the fair phantoms rose.

But, like a child in ocean's arms,
We strive against the stream,
Each moment farther from the shore
Where life's young fountains gleam;
Each moment fainter wave the fields,
And wider rolls the sea;
The mist grows dark, -- the sun goes down, --
Day breaks, -- and where are we?