

**THE IRON GATE,
AND OTHER POEMS**

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The Iron Gate, And Other Poems by Oliver Wendell Holmes

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OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

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AND OTHER POEMS**

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BY

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.



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THE IRON GATE,
AND OTHER POEMS.

THE IRON GATE.

READ AT THE BREAKFAST GIVEN IN HONOR OF DR. HOLMES'S
SEVENTEENTH BIRTHDAY BY THE PUBLISHERS OF THE ATLANTIC
MONTHLY, BOSTON, DECEMBER 3, 1879.

WHERE is this patriarch you are kindly greeting?
Not unfamiliar to my ear his name,
Nor yet unknown to many a joyous meeting
In days long vanished, — is he still the same,

Or changed by years, forgotten and forgetting,
Dull-eared, dim-sighted, slow of speech and
thought,
Still o'er the sad, degenerate present fretting,
Where all goes wrong, and nothing as it ought?

Old age, the graybeard! Well, indeed, I know
him, —
Shrunk, tottering, bent, of aches and ills the prey;
In sermon, story, fable, picture, poem,
Oft have I met him from my earliest day:

In my old Æsop, toiling with his bundle, —
 His load of sticks, — politely asking Death,
 Who comes when called for, — would he lug or
 trundle
 His fagot for him ? — he was scant of breath.

And sad "Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher," —
 Has he not stamped the image on my soul,
 In that last chapter, where the worn-out Teacher
 Sighs o'er the loosened cord, the broken bowl ?

Yes, long, indeed, I've known him at a distance,
 And now my lifted door-latch shows him here ;
 I take his shrivelled hand without resistance,
 And find him smiling as his step draws near.

What though of gilded baubles he bereaves us,
 Dear to the heart of youth, to manhood's prime ;
 Think of the calm he brings, the wealth he leaves us,
 The hoarded spoils, the legacies of time !

Altars once flaming, still with incense fragrant,
 Passion's uneasy nurslings rocked asleep,
 Hope's anchor faster, wild desire less vagrant,
 Life's flow less noisy, but the stream how deep !

Still as the silver cord gets worn and slender,
 Its lightened task-work tugs with lessening strain,

Hands get more helpful, voices, grown more tender,
Soothe with their softened tones the slumberous
brain.

Youth longs and manhood strives, but age re-
members,
Sits by the raked-up ashes of the past,
Spreads its thin hands above the whitening embers
That warm its creeping life-blood till the last.

Dear to its heart is every loving token
That comes unbidden ere its pulse grows cold,
Ere the last lingering ties of life are broken,
Its labors ended and its story told.

Ah, while around us rosy youth rejoices,
For us the sorrow-laden breezes sigh,
And through the chorus of its jocund voices
Throbs the sharp note of misery's hopeless cry.

As on the gauzy wings of fancy flying
From some far orb I track our watery sphere,
Home of the struggling, suffering, doubting, dying,
The silvered globule seems a glistening tear.

But Nature lends her mirror of illusion
To win from saddening scenes our age-dimmed
eyes,