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O E M S

OF

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.



B O S T O N :

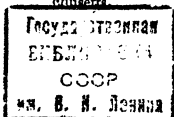
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TWENTY-THIRD EDITION.

University Press :
Welch, Bigelow, and Company,
Cambridge.



TO MY READERS.



AY, blame me not; I might have spared
 Your patience many a trivial verse,
 Yet these my earlier welcome shared,
 So, let the better shield the worse.

And some might say, "Those ruder songs
 Had freshness which the new have lost;
 To spring the opening leaf belongs,
 The chestnut-burs await the frost."

When those I wrote, my locks were brown.
 When these I write — ah, well-a-day!
 The autumn thistle's silvery down
 Is not the purple bloom of May!

Go, little book, whose pages hold
 Those garnered years in loving trust;
 How long before your blue and gold
 Shall fade and wither in the dust?

O sexton of the alcoved tomb,
Where souls in leathern cerements lie,
Tell me each living poet's doom !
How long before his book shall die ?

It matters little, soon or late,
A day, a month, a year, an age, —
I read oblivion in its date,
And *Finis* on its title-page.

Before we sighed, our griefs were told ;
Before we smiled, our joys were sung ;
And all our passions shaped of old
In accents lost to mortal tongue.

In vain a fresher mould we seek, —
Can all the varied phrases tell
That Babel's wandering children speak
How thrushes sing or lilacs smell ?

Caged in the poet's lonely heart,
Love wastes unheard its tenderest tone ;
The soul that sings must dwell apart,
Its inward melodies unknown.

Deal gently with us, ye who read !
Our largest hope is unfulfilled, —
The promise still outruns the deed, —
The tower, but not the spire, we build.