

POEMS AND SONGS OF AMERICA

And there's a nice fellow of excellent pith,—
Fate tried to conceal him by naming him Smith,
But he shouted a song for the brave and the free,—
Just read on his medal, "My Country 'Tis of Thee!"

THUS SINGS Oliver Wendell Holmes of Samuel Francis Smith in his poem "The Boys." The two were classmates at Harvard University. Dr. Smith, the author of "America," the song that more than any other song is dear to the hearts of every American, was born in Boston, October 21, 1808. For many years he was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Newton, Massachusetts. After many years spent in the pulpit he resigned from his pastorate for the purpose of devoting himself to literary and religious pursuits.

In a letter dated Newton Centre, Massachusetts, June 11, 1861, Dr. Smith wrote of his favorite poem "America": "The song was written at Andover during my student life there, I think in the winter of 1831-2. It was first used publicly at a Sunday school celebration held on one July 4th occasion, in the Park Street Church at Boston. I had in my possession a quantity of German song-books, from which I was selecting such music as pleased me and finding 'God Save the King,' I proceeded to give it the ring of American republican patriotism."

Little perhaps did this American patriot and scholar, pulpit orator and author dream that his soulful poem of his student days was destined to become a growing nation's patriotic prayer. Before his death in 1895 he had come to realize, however, that his song had gradually become the choice song

through which millions of America gave vent to their heartfelt patriotic fervor.

In a reference to his friend, Mr. Holmes once remarked: "Now there's Smith. His name will be honored by every school child in the land when I have been forgotten a hundred years. He wrote 'My Country 'Tis of Thee.' If he had said 'Our Country' the hymn would not have been immortal, but that 'My' was a master-stroke. Every one who sings the hymn at once feels a personal ownership in his native land. The hymn will last as long as the country."

A lover of nature as much as a lover of liberty, Samuel Francis Smith saw in the glories of nature his theme for rejoicing with the pilgrims for the wonderful land God had given them and with the fathers who had fought and died to keep the country free. To Smith the trees of the woodland, the "rocks and rills," "the templed hills" and every majestic mountain told the story which he so beautifully has interpreted in his "Sweet Freedom's Song" of this shrine of human liberty.

Perhaps you have just sung "America" as any other song. Read the verses below, over and over again. Put your heart in tune with the hallowed sentiments that are the story of America and you will sing it differently the next time. Then you will perhaps perceive the thrilling joy of the patriotism that inspired this young student to deliver this immortal message.

AMERICA

Words by Samuel Francis Smith

My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing:
Land where my father's died!
Land of the pilgrims' pride!
From ev'ry mountain side
Let freedom ring!

My native country, thee,
Land of the noble, free,
Thy name I love;
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills:
My heart with rapture thrills
Like that above.

Let music swell the breeze,
And ring from all the trees
Sweet freedom's song:
Let mortal tongues awake
Let all that breathe partake;
Let rocks their silence break,
The sound prolong.

Our fathers' God! to thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing:
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King!