



Oliver Wendell Holmes: Physician and Man of Letters

Scott Harris Podolsky, Charles S. Bryan, editors

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Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) spent parts of the nineteenth century as America's best-known physician and best-selling author. Sir William Osler praised him as the most successful combination which the world has ever seen, of the physician and man of letters. Henry James, Sr., called him intellectually the most alive man I ever knew. Today, he is remembered as a physician for his investigation of the contagiousness of puerperal fever (well before the advent of the germ theory), for his advocacy for therapeutic skepticism and rationalism, and for coining such terms as anesthesia. He is celebrated as a literary and cultural figure for such poems as *Old Ironsides* (considered responsible for saving the U.S.S. Constitution), for his ground-breaking contributions to *The Atlantic Monthly* (which he named), and for terming Boston the Hub of the solar system and describing its Brahmin caste. The present volume, celebrating the bicentennial of Holmes's birth, offers a fresh look at Holmes in both of his major (and often intermeshing) identities.

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