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Thomas Wentworth Higginson

BY

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THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON.

By Edwin D. Mead.

From the Table of the New England Magazine, February, 1900.

At the dinner of the American Historical Association, at the Hotel Brunswick, during the recent convention of the Association in Boston, the principal speaker was Colonel T. W. Higginson; and in the course of [illegible] which is likely to be remembered longer, as it is certainly deserving of being remembered longer, than another [illegible] is what he said remembering [illegible] most interesting [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] Mexico and [illegible] of Colonel Higginson's in an [illegible] which are worth repeating, as they go to the [illegible] of the [illegible]

"Twice in history has the North American republic won just gratitude from the human race when it might have forfeited it by a policy less advanced. To this day, to be sure, Mr. Cecil Rhodes, engaged in his career of empire-making, has never ceased to blame this nation for letting Mexico go, when she lay conquered in our hands, for taking down that flag which once waved in the halls of the Montezumas, and contenting ourselves with a slice of territory when we might have plundered the whole. But the world has judged differently. Many a striking case, as the case of Japan. There is in the public park at Newport, R. I., the statue of a naval hero whose greatness lay not merely in what he did, but in what he abstained from doing; so that, having for the first time opened Japan to modern civilization, Commodore Perry left it to work out its own destiny and become one of the great free nations of the world. Can any one doubt that Mexico and Japan are now far higher in condition than if they had been reduced to subject or tributary states, as Clive and Hastings reduced British India? There is no proof that the Japanese are artistically superior to the Hindoos, but the one race was left free by the Americans, and the other subjugated by Englishmen. So there is no reason that the Filipinos are not, as Admiral Dewey said, as well fitted for freedom as the Cubans, or one may add as the Mexicans. Our nation has never needed to [illegible] its power of fighting. In two instances, Japan and Mexico, it has also exercised its power of self-control. Can it be possible that we shall fail to exercise this power of self-control in dealing with the Filipinos? If we succeed, I do trust the people of Liberty, we may see them stand where the Japanese stand; if we pursue the policy of conquest, they can never rise above the [illegible] of the Hindoos. There appears to be no human being for whom the British government has less use than for an educated Hindoo."

The article from which this latter passage is taken bore as a title that stirring exclamation of Thomas Paine's, "Where liberty is not, there is my country!" emphasizing his fellow-citizenship with every man who was oppressed and needed a helping hand. It was inevitable that Colonel Higginson should be a leader among

those who condemn the course so hostile to freedom and the world's progress, into which the republic has been betrayed in the last year. It would be useful to make his words a text for a discourse upon that theme. It is not upon the question of the Philippines, however, that we here wish to write, nor upon Japan, nor Mexico, but upon Colonel Higginson himself and his lifelong services for freedom, to which his strong position in the present crisis forms simply the logical and fitting climax.

* * *

He gave to us a year or more ago that most noble, frank and fascinating of autobiographies, "Cheerful Yesterdays"; and now, just as he asks us to see to it that we do not omit the word "freedom" from our political vocabulary, there comes to us his new book, "Contemporaries," which may properly enough be considered a second volume of the autobiography. The books are necessary companions, each supplementing the other. In his "Yesterdays," Colonel Higginson pictures the scenes and the events in which he and his strong contemporaries acted together; in his "Contemporaries," he paints the portraits of the noble men and women who helped to make his yesterdays brave and great and therefore in the noblest sense cheerful. The two books together give us a survey, not surpassed in insight and value by any other, of the intellectual and moral life of New England and America during the last two generations. They remind us of the high credentials of this brave spokesman for freedom, by bringing before us as they do the harder and more trying times when just as calmly and as firmly he "stood in companies where nine-tenths of those present were on the other side." They also serve—and we confess that this has been to us their greatest service—to make us think anew of the immense service, both as a man of letters and a man of action, which Colonel Higginson has rendered America. We have been led to turn anew, and with a more definite and comprehensive purpose, to the long line of his books which stands upon the shelves of the library, to consider the great variety and extent of his writings, their literary charm and their significant contribution to American culture, and the central aims and principles which inform and inspire them.

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The mere extent of Colonel Higginson's writings, when their serious and thorough nature is considered, is impressive. Before the title-page of "Contemporaries," the publishers, Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Company, print the list of Colonel Higginson's books published by themselves: and the list includes, besides "Contemporaries" and "Cheerful Yesterdays," the following: "Atlantic Essays," "Common Sense about Women," "Army Life in a Black Regiment," "The New World and the New Book," "Travellers and Outlaws," "Malbone," "Oldport Days," "Outdoor Papers," "The Procession of the Flowers," "The Afternoon Landscape," "The Monarch of Dreams," and "Margaret Fuller Ossoli." But this dozen and more volumes do not by any means make up the whole, although we have here his best works. A dozen more volumes must be added to complete the list which tells the story of his literary labors. There are the three little collections of miscellaneous essays, "Women and Men," "Concerning All of Us," and "Book and Heart"; there is the second little volume of poems, "Such as They Are," containing poems by Mrs. Higginson also; there are the "Tales of the Enchanted Islands of the Atlantic" and the "Book of American Explorers" for the young people. For Colonel Higginson has always had a hand for the service of the young people. Almost his first published book (1850) was "The Birthday in Fairy Land," a story for children; and when, near a quarter of a century ago, he published

His "Young Folks' History of the United States," he did one of the greatest services ever done for our American boys and girls, not only in giving them a history of their own country which still remains one of the best, but in provoking a dozen more of our best writers to work in the same field in a similar way. His "Larger History of the United States" has, like the smaller one, the supreme quality of being interesting. In the field of [illegible] besides the two short [illegible] on "Massachusetts in the War" and "Rhode Island during the Civil War" and the volume of "English History for American Readers," prepared [illegible] Professor [illegible] Mrs. Higginson [illegible] "Young Folks' History of the United States." [illegible] "Young Folks' History of the United States," [illegible] "Larger History of the United States," [illegible] "Contemporaries" [illegible] *Atlantic Monthly*—were epochs all in some manner familiar to him, and a part of which he was; while the last three chapters, on Holmes, Longfellow and Lowell, might just as well have found place in "Contemporaries."

* * *

Born in Cambridge, in 1823, Higginson has been emphatically a Cambridge man; just as Edward Everett Hale, whom we honor together with him,—our two great representatives of the great generation,—born in Boston the year before, has been emphatically a Boston man. Both men preached for a time in Worcester. Before going to Worcester, Higginson lived for some years in Newburyport, part of the time preaching there; and for many years he lived in Newport. But we regard these flights as excursions. It is a little hard to think of him as really at home in any of these places or anywhere outside of Cambridge, where he was born. More than any one of our literary men, save Lowell alone, more than Longfellow, more than Holmes, who, though born in Cambridge, is always remembering it as much a Boston man as Dr. Hale, is Higginson identified with Cambridge. "To James Russell Lowell, Schoolmate of Fifty Years Ago," is dedicated the first volume of poems, "The Monadnock Landscape." Lowell, his Cambridge fellow-undergraduate, was four years the older, born in 1819—the same year it is interesting to observe, as Julia Ward Howe, our third great veteran, whose "Reminiscences," traversing so much of the same ground and touching so many of the same men and scenes, come to us just as we are reading "Cheerful Yesterdays" and "Contemporaries."

Higginson was fittingly the orator on the occasion of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of Cambridge, in 1881; as Lowell was the orator, five years later, at the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of Harvard College. We have somewhere Lowell's letter

to Higginson, telling of the satisfaction and delight with which he had read in London the latter's Cambridge oration. There is much about Lowell scattered throughout Higginson's books; but somehow we confess that it all seems inadequate. Perhaps it is because we naturally expect so much and desire so much, where there was such rare opportunity for knowing. Criticism seems too frequent, and emphasis upon Lowell's great sides insufficient. The special essay upon Lowell is one of the slightest and most disappointing of all the many which Higginson devotes to his contemporaries, although it is redeemed in great measure by its last page, which is one of the finest tributes to Lowell ever written.

To the useful volume, by various hands, upon "Cambridge in 1806," Higginson contributed the chapter on "Life in Cambridge Town," a chapter suggesting Lowell's old essay (written in 1854) upon "Cambridge Thirty Years Ago." Referring to this delightful essay, Higginson reminds us, in his essay upon John Holmes, in "Contemporaries," that it must be supplemented by John Holmes's "Harvard Square," in the Harvard Book, if we would get "the very inmost glimpse of village life in the earlier Cambridge." The glimpses of Cambridge life generally with which this essay on John Holmes abounds constitute one of its greatest charms. Many more pages in the life of Margaret Fuller than those which make up the chapter on "Girlhood at Cambridge" are valuable contributions to the history of Cambridge intellectual and social life in the first half of the century. The opening chapters of "Cheerful Yesterdays," those upon "A Cambridge Boyhood" and "A Child of the College" are Cambridge and Harvard pictures of rare interest and of distinct historical value.

Higginson has been a most loyal and loving son of Harvard; and the University honored herself as much as she honored him when she conferred upon him last summer her highest degree. We have referred to the "Harvard Memorial Biographies," which he edited. In enumerating his writings we must not forget, in this connection, his contribution to the Harvard Book, nor his "Memorials of the Class of 1833." We must not forget his contributions to the "Memorial History of Boston," to the publications of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Browning Society, the Free Religious Association. He was appropriately the orator at the centennial celebration of the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1891; for he has been one of our most zealous and faithful historical scholars. Said the president of the Historical Society in introducing him on this centennial occasion: "He has filled the Puritan ideal of a citizen's range of office,—elder, reformer, military commander, historian, deputy to the Great and General Court." He has been for years the president of the Free Religious Association. His popular tract on "The Sympathy of Religions" is a good index to the radicalism and catholicity of his own religion. The published sermons that have come down to us in the libraries, with such titles as "Man Shall not Live by Bread Alone," "Elegy without Fiction" (in 1852, with reference to Webster and Rantoul), "Scripture Idolatry," and "Massachusetts in Mourning" (1854), show that while he was in the pulpit he must have been a preacher after Theodore Parker's own heart.

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Of peculiar interest and value among Colonel Higginson's books is his little Life of Francis Higginson, the first minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony—coming to Salem in 1620—and Colonel Higginson's own first American ancestor. It is a loving study of English life in the early Puritan time, of the customs of Cambridge University in that seventeenth century, of the earliest ecclesiastical usages in New England, of Francis

To Newport, which certainly was his home for many years, although it is hard to identify him with it.—just as it is hard to think of Hawthorne as a part of Concord in the same way that we think him a part of Salem.—Colonel Higginson has generously paid his debt: as Hawthorne so well paid his debt to Concord. The "Mosses from an Old Manse" is not a better offering upon the Concord altar than "Oldport Days" upon the Newport altar: and Colonel Higginson himself, who loves Hawthorne so well, would say that that is the best thing that could be said of his book. In truth it may be said that, of all Colonel Higginson's books, "Oldport Days," with those fascinating chapters upon Oldport Wharves, the Parsonage Window, a Driftwood Fire, and Easy Chairs, is the most Hawthornesque. It has given the spirit of the old Newport, as opposed to the Newport of mere sojourn and fashion, its truest literary expression. "Malbone," the other novel of Newport is "An Oldport Romance"; and Colonel Higginson's Rhode Island life has left its marks upon more than many a book. He was a charming sympathetic guide for his English visitors to Whitehall, the Newport home of Bishop Berkeley; for a strong idealist that he is, Rhode Island's associations with the seventeenth century must have been particularly congenial to him. "There has always been," he says in his fine romance, "The Monarchy of Dreams," "ever since the days of Roger Williams, a certain taste for the ideal side of existence. It is the only state in the American Union where chief justices proudly write poetry and prosperous manufacturers print essays on the 'Freedom of the Will.'" It is a word which as we can imagine Dr. Hale also had a right to say to some visitor at Matunuck, his Rhode Island summer home. Colonel Higginson's idealism in Rhode Island or in Cambridge has always been an idealism with hands and feet, like that of his Puritan ancestors. He is always

the man of affairs as much as the man of letters; and his paper on the Public Schools of Newport, which we find in an old volume of "Contributions to the History of the Public School System of Rhode Island," is but one of many witnesses to his faithfulness in Newport to his duties as a citizen.

* * *

The scene of "A Moonglade," the closing sketch in the little volume, "The Procession of the Flowers," is laid at Newport. The other essays in that charming collection were written at Worcester, and Lake Quinsigamond gets into most of them. Their very titles—"April Days," "My Outdoor Study," "Water Lilies," "The Life of Birds"—show that they properly belong among the "Outdoor Papers"; and in the volume so entitled they finally found place. This volume is the best expression of Colonel Higginson as an outdoor man; for, like Lowell, he has always been emphatically that, a man of the fields and woods as much as a man of the library. He is the most red-blooded and rural of scholars, loving birds quite as well as books, and carrying the instinct and talent of the naturalist into the garden and on to the hills as truly as the love and sympathy of the poet.

* * *

Yet it is upon human themes, upon literature and history and society, that Colonel Higginson has chiefly written, and the life of a social and political reformer that has been his central life. His "Cheerful Yesterdays" are almost altogether a reformer's yesterdays; and his "Contemporaries" were almost altogether men and women living the most strenuous of strenuous lives, devoted to what one of our economists has called "the foolish attempt to make the world over." In his distinctly literary books, like "Atlantic Essays" and "The New World and the New Book," it is when he comes closest to contemporaneity and life that he is usually most interesting. But this is by no means always the case; and it is not to be said at all without saying at once and warmly that upon distinctly literary themes and as a representative of literary art Colonel Higginson stands in the very front American rank. No American essays, save Emerson's and Lowell's alone, are of higher importance or greater charm than his; and his best essays are entitled to rank with Lowell's own. He has been a constant force for culture. He has been a constant rebuke to literary slipshodness by his constant regard, through the great mass of his work, for simplicity, freshness, structure, the choice of words, and thoroughness,—to emphasize the literary qualities which he emphasizes and which he has so well exemplified. We think of few chapters of advice which the young writer could read more profitably than Colonel Higginson's "Letter to a Young Contributor." He stands for devotion to the world's great books. He is too good a scholar not to know that the best national literature must come with love and understanding of the best world literature and recognition of its canons and its inspirations.

But for a true, free national literature, for a sturdy and independent Americanism, he always speaks,—there is through all his books no note more constant. He hates the colonialism, the dependence upon English impulse and imprimatur, which has so largely marked our literature up to the very present. This is, in one way or another, the burden of almost the whole of "The New World and the New Book." Under the title of "The Evolution of an American" he traces with enthusiasm the steps by which Motley, beginning his intellectual life with aristocratic and European sentiments, was made "not merely a patriot, but a man of democratic convictions at last." Many a page in this vital American book might well have found its point of departure in Lowell's famous essay on "A Certain Condescension in Foreigners." In the essay entitled "Unnecessary

Arnold [illegible]" Is this fine and true passage:

> "Let us make the great effort of supposing Emerson an English author and Matthew Arnold an American: does any one suppose that Arnold's criticisms on Emerson would in that case have attracted serious attention in either country? Had Mr. Gosse been a New Yorker, writing for a London magazine, and any one in either side of the Atlantic have seriously cited Matthew Arnold's opinions of contemporary England, [illegible]"

[illegible] Mr. [illegible] found Francis Parkman on [illegible] A literary or social judgment of his own upon an English matter of moment would very likely attract no attention whatever in London or Oxford; while Boston and New York listen with humble deference to men like Mr. Gosse. Yet what enlightened man, American or Englishman, can fail to see that Colonel Higginson's judgment upon any matter, as compared with that of Mr. Gosse, is not simply as "thirteen to twelve"—to echo old John Higginson's figure—but as thirteen to one?

* * *

Colonel Higginson's writing is imbued throughout with Americanism and democracy of the worthiest and truest type, and informed always with a splendid enthusiasm. "It is melancholy," he says, "to see young men going forth from the college walls with less enthusiasm than they carried in, retained in a spirit which is in this country worse than English Toryism, [illegible] even retain a hearty [illegible] It is better that a man should have eyes in the back of his head, that he should be [illegible] retrospective [illegible] than that the eyes should be [illegible] before us; [illegible] ashamed of him [illegible] Better a [illegible] in a love on Scott's [illegible] Ballads than of [illegible] on the one side [illegible] and the [illegible] and on the [illegible] suffrage is [illegible] one reading [illegible] He notes [illegible] are behind the [illegible] Slavery had to be [illegible] most a common [illegible] could be [illegible] graduates of his [illegible] the first among [illegible] was nominated [illegible] to be rejected, before the academic societies of his own neighborhood. Yet during all that time the rural lecture associations showered their invitations on Parker and Phillips. Culture shunned them, but the common people heard them gladly." As to our American literature, his own eyes have always

been in the front of his head, hopefully and confidently looking forward. A generation ago he wrote: "Every form of human life is romantic; every age may become classic. Lamentations, doubts, discouragements, all are wasted things. Everything is here, between these Atlantic and Pacific shores, save only the perfected utterance that comes with years. Between Shakespeare in his cradle and Shakespeare in 'Hamlet' there was needed but an interval of time; and the same sublime condition is all that lies between the America of toil and the America of art." "It is but a few years," he says again, writing thirty years ago, "since we have dared to be American in even the details and accessories of our literary work; to make our allusions to natural objects real, not conventional; to ignore the nightingale and skylark, and look for the classic and romantic on our own soil. This change began mainly with Emerson."

Colonel Higginson is conspicuously a lover of England. He is never happier than in his London reminiscences, of which we have delightful chapters both in "Cheerful Yesterdays" and "Contemporaries." "We cannot spare the Englishman from our blood; but it is our business to make him more than an Englishman." He is a true child of the Puritan, and believes that the spirit which founded New England is the best possible foundation for the better things for which we hope in literature and in life. "Of course the forest pioneer cannot compose orchestral symphonies, nor the founders of a state carve statues. But the thoughtful and scholarly men who created the Massachusetts Colony brought with them the traditions of their universities, and left these embodied in a college. The Puritan life was only historically inconsistent with culture; there was no logical antagonism." As a literary man he is a defender of Puritanism, because what he wishes to see breathe through all our literature is "the invigorating air of great moral principles." He says: "As the foundation of all true greatness is in the conscience, so we are safe if we can but carry into science and art the same earnestness of spirit which has fought through the great civil war and slain slavery. As 'the Puritan triumphed' in this stern contest, so must the Puritan triumph in the more graceful emulations that are to come; but it must be the Puritanism of Milton, not of Cromwell only."

* * *

A Milton in his own way, in his equal love of beauty and passion for freedom and justice, Colonel Higginson himself is; as in his own way he is a Sidney too. Was it not Sidney who said, or to whom it was said, "Whenever you hear of a good war, go to it?" Whenever Colonel Higginson has heard of a good war, he has gone to it; and the campaigns for freedom, equality and progress, in the various fields of American life, in these two generations, in which he has not been one of the first to volunteer, without counting the company or the cost, have been few indeed. He led a regiment of negroes in the civil war; he has stood in the front rank of many a regiment in many a war before and since. He has been eminently a knightly and chivalric man. He has been, in the highest and best sense of the word, a romantic one. He has been his whole life long the conspicuous friend and champion of woman. No other man has written so constantly, so variedly, so attractively or so cogently in behalf of the emancipation of woman from the legal and industrial disabilities by which she has been hampered and her elevation to every educational and political privilege. He has been in this reform our John Stuart Mill. He tells us how, very early in life, he became impressed by the absurdity of the denial of political rights to women; and he signed the call for the first national convention to promote the woman's rights move-

ment, in 1850. "Of all the movements in which I ever took part," he wrote two years ago, "except the anti-slavery agitation, this seems to me the most important; nor have I ever waivered in the opinion announced by Wendell Phillips, that it is 'the grandest movement ever launched upon the century as typifying the freedom of one-[illegible] human race.'" His "Common Sense about Women" is the best [illegible] in existence upon [illegible] rights. There is no phase [illegible] which is not some-[illegible], and the treatment is al-[illegible] grave and judicial, [illegible] to win the reader [illegible]. A typical argument [illegible] is perfectly [illegible] but very [illegible] question [illegible] government [illegible] that [illegible]

Thirty years ago, at the close of the civil war, Colonel Higginson seemed a little appalled lest there might be no important cause left to fight for except that of woman's rights. Being himself, by nature and by grace, a fighter, having proved in his own life the immense good that comes to a man, as Whittier used to put it, from "identifying himself early with a good and unpopular cause," he had considerable anxiety about the moral muscle of the rising generation. He said then:

"As one looks forward to the America of fifty years hence, the main source of danger appears to be in a probable excess of prosperity, and in the want of a good allowance. We seem nearly at the end of those great public wrongs which require a special moral organization to end them. There will be social and religious changes, perhaps great ones, but they are no omens of any very fierce upheaval. And seeing the [illegible] to a generation of the [illegible] has contended, and especially [illegible] slavery enterprise, one [illegible] our successors, who seem likely to have no [illegible] may [illegible] these great comics? [illegible] history that all re-[illegible] by persecution. [illegible] amount of [illegible] ages from deterior-[illegible] comfort and

[illegible] these thirty [illegible] Colonel Higginson had [illegible] for anxiety on this particular [illegible]. He noted himself, some years later, in discussing the importance of great moral causes as a [illegible] that Helen Hunt Jackson was as thoroughly thrilled and inspired by the wrongs of the American Indians as was Mrs. Stowe by those of the negroes. He also quietly saw, as Phillips saw, that the great social and industrial questions which were looming above the horizon would make their imperative call upon radical and heroic men, and furnish all the moral gymnasium necessary for a long time to come for men in danger of a life of "comfort

[illegible] limited."

and good dinners." His own voice has rung as true and strong upon the issues of the new social revolution as it rang in the old conflict with slavery. As he saw that woman was in the due course of things to have her opportunity and rights, so he has seen that the poor man was to have his. Among his poems we think of none more stirring than that, fittingly inscribed to Edward Bellamy, entitled "Heirs of Time":

"From street and square, from hill and glen
Of this vast world beyond my door,
I hear the tread of marching men,
The patient armies of the poor.

The halo of the city's lamps
Hangs, a vast torchlight, in the air;
I watch it through the evening damps:
The masters of the world are there.

Not ermine-clad or clothed in state,
Their title-deeds not yet made plain;
But waking early, toiling late,
The heirs of all the earth remain.

Some day, by laws as fixed and fair
As guide the planets in their sweep,
The children of each outcast heir
The harvest-fruits of time shall reap.

The peasant brain shall yet be wise,
The untamed pulse grow calm and still;
The blind shall see, the lowly rise,
And work in peace Time's wondrous will.

Some day, without a trumpet's call,
This news will o'er the world be blown:
'The heritage comes back to all!
The myriad monarchs take their own!'"

Into the cause of pure civil service, into the cause of the education and the political rights of the freedmen in the South, into the cause of internationalism, into every cause which in the generation since the war has called for courageous championship, Colonel Higginson has thrown himself with the same enthusiasm with which he came to the side of Garrison and Phillips and Parker. No rebukes have been nobler than his of the militarism and materialism which have menaced the republic in the year that has passed. His word at the dinner of the American Historical Association was but one of many in which in this time he has reminded America of her duty to herself and to the cause of freedom in the world. No word read at the great Faneuil Hall meeting a few nights ago, called to express the sympathy of Boston with the Boers, was more emphatic or impressive than his: "Every step in the demands of the English government upon the Transvaal has implied claims such as would be resisted by unanimous voice in every nation of the civilized world. Surely we have a right to meet in Faneuil Hall to protest against such injustice and to do honor to the courage unsurpassed since Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans 'spent one day in dying' in the pass of Thermopylæ." If Colonel Higginson lives to be a hundred, he will never hear the bugle blown in behalf of any cause of freedom without becoming young again and giving to the cause the reinforcement of his energetic word.

* * *

It is in Colonel Higginson's poems that we often have the most stirring expression of his love of freedom and his prophetic confidence in a future greater and nobler than any celebrated past. One of the finest of his sonnets is that to Whittier, with its grateful confession that it was the poet's voice which gave him his own peculiar call to duty:

"At dawn of manhood came a voice to me
That said to startled conscience, 'Sleep no more!'
Like some loud cry that peals from door to door
It roused a generation; and I see,
Now looking back through years of memory,
That all of school or college, all the lore
Of worldly maxims, all the statesman's store,
Were nought beside that voice's mastery.
If any good to me or from me came
Through life, and if no influence less divine
Has quite usurped the place of duty's flame;
If aught rose worthy in this heart of mine,
Aught that, viewed backward, wears no shade of shame,—
Bless thee, old friend! for that high call was thine."

Significant, too, and for the Boston man inspiring, are the lines upon Boston in the Memorial Ode read before the Grand Army Posts of Boston in 1881:

> Not in the past, but in the future, we
> Must seek the mastery
> Of fate and fortune, thought and word and deed.
> Gone, gone for aye, the little Puritan homes;
> Gone the beleaguered town, from out whose spires
> Flashed forth the warning fires
> Telling the Cambridge rustics, 'Percy comes!'
> And gone those later days of grief and shame
> When slavery changed our court-house to a jail,
> And blood-drops stained its threshold. Now we hail,
> After the long affray,
> A time of calmer order, wider aim,
> More mingled races, manhood's larger frame,
> [illegible] the Boston [illegible] day.
>
> Though our country's star be [illegible]
> Our heroes pass away, our poets die,
> Our passion [illegible] ardors [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> Courage and truth [illegible]
> Trust in the great hereafter [illegible]
> In some high hour of need
> There [illegible] the heroic breed,
> The Boston of the future [illegible]
> Bartletts and Lowells [illegible]
> 'Here!'"

With such a faith in the future of the Puritan city, he has also been its stanch defender from ignorant and unjust criticism. In his essay on "Literary Tonics" there is no passage more interesting than this about Boston:

"Some minor English critic wrote lately of Dr. Holmes's 'Life of Emerson': 'The Boston of his day does not seem to have been a very strong place; we lack performance.' The Boston of which he speaks was the Boston of Garrison and Phillips, of Whittier and Theodore Parker; it was the headquarters of those old-time abolitionists of whom the English Earl of Carlisle wrote that they were 'fighting a battle without a parallel in the history of ancient or modern heroism.' It was also the place which nurtured those young Harvard students who are chronicled in the 'Harvard Memorial Biographies'—those who fell in the war of the Rebellion; those of whom Lord Houghton once wrote tersely to me: 'They are men whom Europe has learned to honor and would do well to imitate.' The service of all these men, and its results, give a measure of the tonic afforded in the Boston of that day. Nay, Emerson himself was directly responsible for much of their strength. 'To him more than to all other causes together,' says Lowell, 'did the young martyrs of our Civil War owe the sustaining strength of moral heroism that is so touching in every record of their lives.' And when the force thus developed in Boston and elsewhere came to do its perfect work, that work turned out to be the fighting of a gigantic war and the freeing of four millions of slaves; and this in the teeth of every sympathy and desire of all that appeared influential in England. This is what is meant, in American history at least, by 'performance.'"

This was the Boston which was the capital of the movement which purged the land of slavery, as it was the capital of the movement which gave us our independence. It was the great centre of the activities of most of the men and women named in Colonel Higginson's "Contemporaries." Emerson, Alcott, Parker, Whittier, Lydia Maria Child, Dr. Howe, Garrison, Phillips and Sumner are the heroes of the great era of reform to whom special essays are devoted in this latest volume; and there are also essays upon Walt Whitman, Sidney Lanier, Helen Hunt, John Holmes, Thaddeus William Harris and General Grant. "An Evening with Mrs. Hawthorne" tells of a conversation devoted mainly to the birth-hour of the "Scarlet Letter." "A Visit to John Brown's Household in 1859," contributed originally to Redpath's "Life of John Brown," is the story of an evening spent with the family at North Elba while the old hero lay in the Virginia

jail awaiting execution. In all literature we know of no stronger or tenderer picture of homely heroism and absolute devotion. "It had been my privilege," wrote Higginson, "to live in the best society all my life—namely, that of abolitionists and fugitive slaves. I had seen the most eminent persons of the age—several men on whose heads tens of thousands of dollars had been set. . . . I had known these, and such as these; but I had not known the Browns. Nothing short of knowing them can be called a liberal education." He prophesied then that John Brown would become "the favorite hero of all American romance"; and he said this memorable word of his old-fashioned Puritanism: "John Brown is almost the only radical abolitionist I have ever known who was not more or less radical in religious matters also. His theology was Puritan, like his practice; and accustomed as we now are to see Puritan doctrines and Puritan virtues separately exhibited, it seems quite strange to behold them combined in one person again."

The essays in "Contemporaries" differ in interest and value. Garrison is warmly recognized as "the living centre" of the group of reformers; but the essay upon him is not one of the most important. That upon Phillips is much better, and the fine description and analysis of Phillips's oratory which it contains is alone sufficient to give it permanent value. The following word is a fine tribute to Phillips's fine fearlessness at the time when in the autumn and winter of 1860 he was speaking at Music Hall to Theodore Parker's congregation, and was each Sunday followed home by a mob, while his house was guarded through the nights by friends and the police: "During all this time there was something peculiarly striking and characteristic in his demeanor. There was absolutely nothing of bulldog combativeness, but a careless, buoyant, almost patrician air, as if nothing in the way of mob violence were worth considering, and all threats of opponents were simply beneath contempt. He seemed like some English Jacobite nobleman on the scaffold, carelessly taking snuff and kissing his hand to the crowd before laying his head upon the block." It seems to us that Colonel Higginson does not do quite sufficient justice to Phillips's last days. He may have made mistakes,—he doubtless did,—in his discussions of capital and labor and of the currency; but the significant thing is that he recognized so much more clearly than most of the old reformers where the next battlefield with slavery lay, and that he threw himself into the fight on the right side. The finest passage in the essay on Sumner is that where, writing of the day before Sumner's funeral, Higginson's thought goes back to the beginning of Sumner's chivalrous career and he traces the changes that had come to Boston in the intervening years:

> "Standing amid that crowd at the State House, it was impossible not to ask one's self: 'Can this be Boston? The city whose bells toll for Sumner—is it the same city that fired one hundred guns for the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law? The King's Chapel, which is to hold his funeral rites—can it be the same King's Chapel which furnished from among its worshippers the only Massachusetts representative who voted for that law? These black soldiers who guard the coffin of their great friend—are they of the same race with those unarmed black men who were marched down yonder street surrounded by the bayonets of Boston militiamen?' It is said that when Sumner made his first conspicuous appearance as an orator in Boston, and delivered his address on 'The True Grandeur of Nations,' a prominent merchant said indignantly, as he went out of the building: 'Well, if that young man is going to talk in that way, we cannot expect Boston to hold him up.' Boston did not hold him up; but Massachusetts so sustained him that he held up Boston, until it had learned to sustain him in return."

Far finer and more considerable than any of these essays is that upon Theodore Parker. There is not, in all the books in the library, a nobler tribute to Parker than this, none which expounds more adequately his

marvellous learning, his great achievements and the sources of his power.

"Parker lived his life much as he walked the streets of Boston,—not quite gracefully, but yet statelily, but with quick, strong, solid step, with sagacious eyes wide open, thrusting his broad shoulders a little forward, as if butting away the throng of evil deeds around him, and scattering whole atmospheres of unwholesome cloud. Wherever he went, there went a glance of fearless vigilance, an unforgetting memory, a tongue that never faltered, and an arm that never quailed."

The essay upon Lydia Maria Child is one of the best in the volume, a most impressive account of that great woman's varied and remarkable achievements. To her famous "Appeal for that Class of Americans called Africans," published in 1833, Higginson pays this high tribute: "It was the first antislavery work ever printed in America in book form, and I have always thought it the best; that is, it covered the whole ground better than any other." Even more interesting is the essay upon Theodore Parker, whose friend Colonel Higginson was from the very beginning of his literary career, and who speaks fervently of his friendship as one of the most fortunate and stimulating influences of his life. There is no chapter in the book more personal, vital or [illegible]

[illegible] discusses, [illegible] society's [illegible] a kind [illegible] "What- [illegible] be in that [illegible] that in- [illegible] does not [illegible] of pos- [illegible] insight" as this gives the man of fashion and the fool have no instinct that can tell where God is on the field in their own place and time. To the conventional man of Boston and of the nation, the period of the great heroes of these glowing pages was "a time when truth was called treason." How quickly was the conventional verdict set aside! "It is a striking fact," Higginson notes at the close of his essay on Garrison, "that in the valhalla of contemporary statues in his own city, only two, those of Webster and Everett, commemorate those who stood for the party of conservatism in the great antislavery conflict; while all the rest, Lincoln, Quincy, Sumner, Andrew, Mann, Garrison and Shaw, represent the party of attack. It is the verdict of time, confirming in bronze and marble the great words of Emerson, 'What forests of laurel we bring, and the tears of mankind, to those who stood firm against the opinion of their contemporaries!'" But to the eye of Emerson himself his contemporaries were as the immortals. To him history and the newspaper were one; and he knew John Brown for a hero while the musketry yet rattled at Harper's Ferry as truly as the men of Concord Bridge whose shot had been heard round the world and been applauded all along the line. To Higginson also the men with whom he labored in the cause of freedom were the same men and held the same rank when they were contemporaries as now when they are memories and their statues stand in the streets.

In the great group of American fighters for freedom, Colonel Higginson will hold an immortal place. Gladstone at Oxford in his later life reviewed the changes through which he had passed since he began his public career as "the rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories," and said: "I have come to place a higher and ever higher value upon human liberty, and there, and there only, is the secret of the change." With Colonel Higginson there has been no change. His whole life is one great sermon on freedom. He began his public career as its champion, his long years have all been spent in its service, and so long as he is with us, and when his presence is withdrawn, his word will still be heard charging the republic never to give that sacred and commanding word a second place.

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