With best regards

Edward T. Hall

THE BEACON BIOGRAPHIES

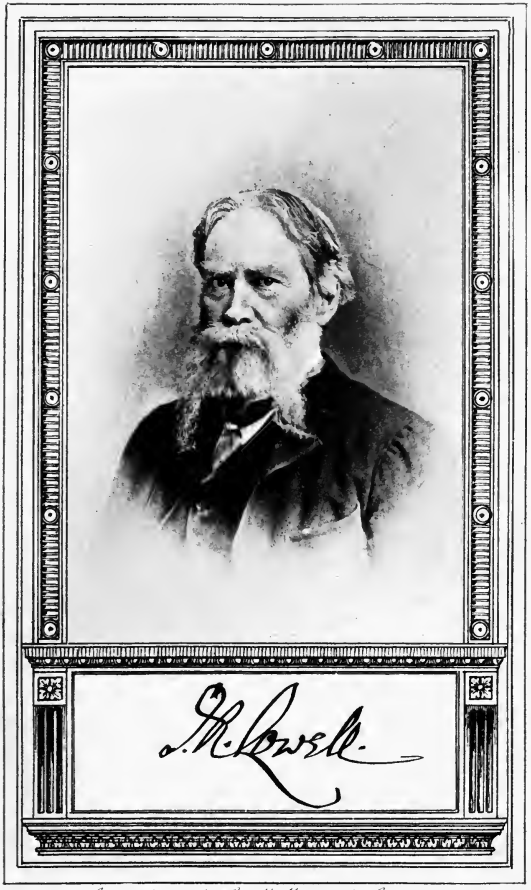
EDITED BY

M. A. DEWOLFE HOWE

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

BY

EDWARD EVERETT HALE, JR.



THE Beacon Biographies OF Eminent Americans

Edited by

M. A. DeWolfe Howe

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PREFACE.

There are already several excellent books on Lowell, and there will be many more. A real life of him by a contemporary we should like, but now shall probably never have. Professor Norton and my father have in different ways done much to fill the lack, so that we may get some idea of how Lowell appeared to those of his own time,— those who began when he began and lived through what he lived through. What is next wanted (and every year makes the chance of it rarer) is a life by some one of those younger men of letters,— Mr. Howells, for instance, or Mr. Stedman,— men of the literary generation just following Lowell, who began their work in friendship with him and in the encouragement of his interest, and whose warm personal opinion, ripened now, and with the perspective of a dozen years, would give as nearly a true idea of Lowell as one would want. It need not be said that the following essay makes no attempt to realize either of these possi-

bilities. This is but one of the lives of Lowell written by posterity.

I have written, then, from a position which has disadvantages as well as advantages. It is true that I cannot for an instant think or write of Lowell as Professor Norton or Mr. Howells can, and could not, had I their knowledge and appreciation. But, then, it is also true that they cannot think of Lowell or write of him as I can. By the time I began to be interested in literature Lowell was already a classic; and I regarded him practically as such, which means a great deal. Such a way of regarding him is not necessarily better than the way in which his friends thought of him. Certainly not that; but it is different, and with a very natural and rational difference. It is, moreover, the way Lowell must more and more come to be regarded as time goes on. Lowell can no longer be one of the living forces of our own generation. He can no longer be even a present inspiration. He is already and must remain a classic,

with all the advantages and drawbacks attendant.

A keen observer has said, in speaking of Lowell as a man, that you had to surrender yourself to his influence before he approved of you and allowed you to get his best. After that he was very glad to reveal himself. I am not quite sure that I have submitted to his influence. I rather hope not. But I also hope, all the same, that, in a way, I have got the best of him that is now possible. That is what I want,—all, I think, that any one should now ask. In this essay much has of necessity been left out; but it has been my aim to seize those characteristics and qualities which must endure, and which will make him a necessity to those who live after him.

EDWARD E. HALE, JR.

UNION COLLEGE, March 8, 1899.

CHRONOLOGY.

1819

February 22. James Russell Lowell was born.

1828

Entered Mr. Wells's school.

1834

Admitted to Harvard College.

1838

June. Rusticated, and sent to Concord.

August. Class poem.

1838–40

Attended the Harvard Law School.

1841

January. Published *A Year's Life, and Other Poems.*

November. Began contributing "The Old Dramatists" and other articles to the *Boston Miscellany.*

1842

January. Began editing the *Pioneer.*

March. Left the *Pioneer.*

October. Severed his connection with the *Boston Miscellany.*

1843

December. Published "Poems."

1844

December 26. Marriage to Miss Maria White, of Watertown.

1845

January. Published the *Conversations on Some of the Old Poets.*

1845–46

Lived in Philadelphia during the winter and began to write for the *Pennsylvania Freeman.*

1846

June. Published the first of "The Biglow Papers" in the *Boston Courier*, and began to write for the *Anti-slavery Standard.*

1847

November. Began *A Fable for Critics.*

1848

November. Published *A Fable for Critics* and *The Biglow Papers.*

December. Published *The Legend of Sir Launfal* and *Poems* in two volumes.

1851

July. Went to Europe.

1852

October. Returned to his home at Elmwood.

1853

October. Mrs. Lowell died.

November. Published "A Moosehead Journal" in *Putnam's Magazine.*

1854

January. Began the Lowell Lectures in Boston. His appointment to chair of belles-lettres at Harvard determined on.

April. Published "Cambridge Thirty Years Ago" in *Putnam's Magazine.*

1855

March. Published "Leaves from my Journal" in *Graham's Magazine.*

July. Went to Europe for the second time.

1855–56

Spent the winter in Dresden, and went to Italy in the spring.

1856

August. Returned to Cambridge.

1857

Married Miss Frances Dunlap, of Portland.

November. As editor, published the first number of the *Atlantic Monthly.*

1858

August. Published *The Pocket Celebration of the Fourth.*

1860

October. Published *The Election in November.*

1861

June. Edited the *Atlantic Monthly* for the last time.

Published the first *Biglow Papers* of the second series.

1864

Undertook with Charles Eliot Norton, the editorship of the *North American Review.*

Published the *Fireside Travels.*

1865

July. Wrote and delivered the *Commemoration Ode.*

1867

Published *The Biglow Papers,* second series.

1868

Published *Under the Willows.*

1870

Published *The Cathedral* and *Among My Books.*

1871

Published *My Study Windows.*

1872

April. Resigned the editorship of the *North American Review.*

July. Went to Europe, and spent the following winter in Paris.

1873

June. Received the degree of D.C.L. from Oxford.

1874

June. Received the degree of LL.D. from Cambridge.

1874 (*continued*)

July 4. Returned home to Elmwood.

1875

April 17. Delivered the *Centennial Ode* at Lexington.

July 3. Delivered *Under the Old Elm.* Published *Among My Books*, second series.

1876

June. Went as a delegate to the National Republican Convention.

July 4. Delivered the *Ode for the Fourth of July.*

1877

February. Delivered lectures at Johns Hopkins University.

July. Left for Spain as United States minister.

1878

April–July. Travelled in Southern Europe, reaching Constantinople and Athens.

1880

January. Named minister to England.

1881

October–December. Made a vacation tour through Germany and Italy.

1884

April. Received the degree of LL.D. from Edinburgh.

June. Received the degree of LL.D. from Harvard.

1885

February. Mrs. Lowell died.

May. Returned to America, to Deerfoot Farm, Southboro, Mass.

1886

November 8. Spoke at the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Harvard College.

1887

Published *Heartsease and Rue* and *Democracy and Other Addresses.*

1888–89

Passed the winter quietly at his books in Boston.

1889

June. Made his last visit to England.
November. Returned home to Elmwood.

1890

April–May. Edited the *Riverside Edition* of his Works.

1891

Published *Literary and Political Addresses.*
August 12. James Russell Lowell died at Elmwood.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

I.

A CERTAIN lady, who was going to write the life of a friend who had been a famous mathematician, told Ibsen of her plan. The imaginative dramatist exclaimed,—

"Is it her biography, in the ordinary sense of the word, which you intend to write, or is it not rather a poem about her?"

A poem instead of an ordinary biography,—that, surely, would be the happy privilege of a poet. Lowell himself, when he desired to commemorate the life of Agassiz, wrote a poem about him; and who will say that as much truth is not in these verses of his as may be found in any excellent article on the same subject in some encyclopædia? But to write a poem about a man or on any other subject is not allowed to all, even with the greatest freedom of

speech: it is a very restricted privilege, —the privilege of such as are able to do so.

Ordinary people, however, may fortunately turn the matter inside out, as it were, and still keep the spirit of the thing. We have as good authority as Ibsen even. A good while ago now, John Milton (looking forward to living his own life rather than writing about the life of somebody else) thought "that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praiseworthy." So as to James Russell Lowell it is hardly necessary to write a "poem about him," for to a very great degree his life was what the

older poet calls a poem. Certainly in our recollection of him there is nothing to jar the harmonies of noble ideal and noble living that his life presents. He was a man of letters and a student, deep in the languages and literatures of the Old World; and he was also a very American citizen, zealous and vigorous in his youth and full of wisdom in his later years. He was a critic who pronounced judgment and a satirist who made acceptance of his judgment by laughter; but he was also a poet not only in rhythms, but in his way of thinking. He was a public man, a man whose daily work might affect thousands whom he never saw, and of whom he never heard, but he was also one of the best and warmest friends in private life that his friends ever knew. The recollection of such a life must needs be very like a poem in the minds of the people that remember him. We may call it a poem, though not set to verse;

for it was the product of a noble nature, and because the appreciation of it ennobles us. Sidney said that he never heard the old ballad of "Chevy Chase" but that his heart moved more than at the sound of a trumpet; and it is certainly the virtue of the greatest poetry to arouse and vivify the human spirit. But even the truest poems of Lowell's never did as much for his countrymen as did his life, so far as it could well be known.

Ibsen, going on to speak of the life of the mathematician, said, "You must treat the subject romantically." This is a dark saying. The man who is realistic in fiction advises a romantic treatment, when it comes to facts. How should we treat the life of Lowell romantically? Well, if it comes to that, how shall we treat it in any other way, except with most laborious toiling in authorities and assumption of the Dryasdust attitude, which would serve no

real advantage with our present purposes?

He was born in Cambridge, it is true, not so very long ago, in a house which you can go in a trolley car and see; and yet, so far as concerns your familiarity with circumstances and conditions, he might almost as well have been born in any country of romance that you might choose. The Cambridge of those days is not the Cambridge we may see to-day. That little town and its inhabitants are "as thoroughly preterite as Romulus or Numa," "as shadowy as one of your Etruscan Lucumos or Roman consuls," and were so half a century ago, when Lowell described them. It was a country village, with dignified old colonial houses, with horse-chestnuts and lindens which had had to stay behind when the Tories went; quiet, unspeculative, without enterprise, sufficing to itself; with a character of its own, and characters, too, and with

its native festivals, — muster, Cornwallis, and August Commencement, as being the seat of the oldest college in the country. So Lowell describes the Cambridge of his youth, evidently not the Cambridge that we think of now, as the Boston of that time was not the Boston of to-day, and, we might add, as the United States of 1820 was not our country as we think of her to-day.

Cambridge in the year 1819 — when Lowell was born, on the 22d of February — was a town of about four thousand inhabitants. Boston, in which town his father was pastor of the West Church, had about fifteen times as many. Harvard College, when Lowell entered it, had, perhaps, one-eighth as many students as it has now; and the whole country had a population not much greater in proportion. But it is not only the change which comes first to our mind that we must remember. We must remember other immense differ-

ences in the time. It was in 1820 that the Missouri Compromise was passed, and the fact that most of us have to look into a book to see just what the Missouri Compromise was shows a change more important than in population. And, immediately more important than that, it was in the same year that Irving's *Sketch Book* was published, a book significant in the history of American literature. Literature and public life,—Lowell's energies were to express themselves chiefly in these two directions, or, rather, with him the two directions were to become almost parallel. So it will be a good thing for us to get an idea, or to revive our recollection, of the difference between public life then and now and literature then and now.

For a good many years before September 22, 1862, no public man could avoid taking a definite position on the subject of slavery. He might not take

a reasonable position, but some position he had to take. As we look back to the years of Lowell's boyhood, it seems as though there could have been but a single course obvious and even obligatory. In 1820 was the Missouri Compromise, in 1830 Webster's Reply to Hayne, in 1831 the *Liberator* was established, in 1832 was passed the South Carolina Nullification Ordinance, in 1837 Lovejoy was murdered, and Austin said that he had died like a fool. Things like these forced a man to feel that there was something to do in public life. Now, things are different to-day. It is not that the call to public life comes to a high-hearted young man with less authority than it did, but certainly it comes with less immediate appeal to the conscience. The poet of to-day rarely feels his heart stirred on the question of the Tariff, Civil Service Reform, or even of Municipal Government. Not that there is nothing in

our current political life which ought to arouse the sympathy: there is, and not the less that its call is less readily heard among so many jarring interests. But there is nothing that stirs the heart as did slavery.

Still, it cannot be affirmed that in the two decades of Lowell's youth the public sentiment of Massachusetts pushed everybody in the right direction in this matter. Lowell himself did not see the real possibilities of public affairs in his youthful days. He was neutral, probably, in his mind, as were, doubtless, very many more of his time,—neutral, partly because they thought other matters of greater importance, and partly because they felt that the whole matter was better hushed up and kept out of public attention, like a cholera scare that may be bad for business.

With literature the case was different. It is not remarkable that, to the young American of Lowell's youth, letters pre-

sented an immense attraction. Lowell was in college not so very long after Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth had become famous, and only a few years after the first volume of Tennyson. "Great voices were sounding in those days," says Matthew Arnold, thinking of his own days at Oxford. With Lowell we should rather say beautiful echoes, perhaps, or, indeed, not so much echoes as the calls of those who had gone on before. Especially was America alert to listen. The years of Lowell's youth were inspiring years for a young man who felt the sap of poetry within him. His earlier years saw these publications,—*The Sketch Book*, *The Spy*, *The Ages*, *Nature*, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, *Twice Told Tales*, *Voices of the Night*,—in other words, the first works of Bryant, Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Longfellow, and, with some exceptions, the first significant work of Irving and Cooper. Think, then, of the stimulus of those

years to a young man who loved letters and thought by letters to make himself a name. Nowadays everybody writes, but with no especial idea of accomplishing great things: in Lowell's youth there was the definite opportunity to have a hand in creating a literature for one's country.

So Lowell, born in Cambridge in the first quarter of the century, was born into a very different world from that which we see to-day, and one which was far more likely to give free play to the generous activities of his nature. Commercialism and Science and "Society" were all in their infancy, and Letters and Public Life called not unpersuasively to the young men of that day who had great possessions.

James Russell Lowell was certainly one of those who find themselves in an opportunity. He came of one of the honored families of New England, his father being of the profession which had for two hun-

dred years held in New England a place of peculiar honor. He received the best education of his time, at school and at Harvard College at a time when the student at Harvard could not easily miss the especial benefits that the college had for him. He had received such training as the best society of a cultivated town could give, and had also had the opportunity to know Nature intimately and to love her.

On the day of his graduation from Harvard College, when he was nineteen years old, the observer sees that it will be impossible for him to avoid his destiny save by direct effort; for he has sanctified himself according to the common custom of the poets by setting at naught the prescriptions of college authority, so that his *Class Poem* has to be printed while he is absent in rustication. Shelley and Landor, in like manner, could not bear the rule of their professors; and, if Byron and Wordsworth did take their degrees

at Cambridge, they did not come out wranglers.

On graduating from college, Lowell proceeded to study law. He received his degree from the Harvard Law School in 1840, and was called to the bar. But he was about as much of a lawyer as Walter Scott in his earlier days, or as Macaulay, to mention one or two who had preceded him. He did his reading honestly and well, despite certain waverings of intention; and he got creditably to the end of his legal studies, and he really opened an office for the practice of law. But there the matter ended except for its after influence. He was of course devoted to letters. He knew this, had always known it, and never in the bottom of his heart had he had the intention of being anything but a poet. It does not appear that he wrote poems at a very early age, as some people do; but as soon as he got to Harvard College his passion had a chance. "Let it be remembered," says another student of the

same time, "that the whole drift of fashion, occupation, and habit among the undergraduates ran in lines suggested by literature." In all these directions, then, in which literature led the college student, Lowell directed his energy. He wrote the rhymed minutes of the Hasty Pudding. He was one of the founders of Alpha Delta Phi, then at Harvard a pre-eminently literary society. He was one of the editors of *Harvardiana*, one of the pioneers of college journalism. He was the recognized poet of the class of 1838, and wrote the Class Poem. When he graduated, then, he had already made a beginning, as so many other poets had before his time, and as so many other generous-hearted boys have since, elsewhere as in the dear, if narrow, confines of the Yard.

And this beginning he continued, so that in the next few years he had already done his first work as poet, critic, and editor. In 1841 was published *A Year's Life*, his first volume of verse; in the next

year he wrote for the *Boston Miscellany* his articles on the Elizabethan Dramatists; and in 1843, with his friend Carter, he projected and edited the *Pioneer* for the three months of its noteworthy, if unprosperous career. The last two exercises we may pass lightly, but of the poems a word or two must be said.

Later in life Lowell looked back on these poems with mixed feelings. In making a final collection, he quoted the remark that Landor puts into the mouth of Petrarch, — "We neither of us are such poets as we thought ourselves when we were younger." He would gladly have suppressed many which are still reprinted. He even somewhere says of himself in college days that he was "as great an ass as ever brayed, and thought it singing." But all this must be taken for what it is worth. Lowell himself, looking back, was probably thinking that there was a lack of serious aim. In middle life he said of Dryden, "Perhaps there is no schooling

so good for an author as his own youthful indiscretions"; and about the same time in a letter he writes, "I should not be so indiscreet now, I suppose; and yet a living verse can only be made of a living experience, and that our own." Certainly, we need not think these great poems. None of them is so well known as to be remembered except because it is by him. But, if they were a young man's poems, born of visionary beauty and fancy, they had in them the seed of something more. Columbus listening as a boy

"to hear
The tall pine forests of the Apennines
Murmur their hoary legends of the sea,"

and watching

"The while a pair of herons trailingly
Flapped inland,"

never dreamed of what afterward came true. Nor did Lowell among the more homelike trees and birds of Elmwood

clearly see what work was in store for him, when his hand had later learned its best cunning and his heart been stirred to give forth its truest sympathy.

II.

In the town in which I live there is a wall on one side of the canal as it runs through the town, considerably below the level of the streets; and in that wall there is a door. That door is said to have led to one of the stations of the Underground Railway. I always look at it as I would at a scene in a theatre, and have never tried to imagine where it can lead to. Now that I think of it, I suppose that it goes into somebody's cellar. I was saying how natural it was to write of Lowell romantically. To us of the present generation the anti-slavery movement is already becoming romance. The Jubilee Singers were not so far wrong when they sang,—

"Oh, Uncle Tom's Cabin is a mighty fine book,
And 'twas written by nobody human:
'Twas written long ago, by Harriet Beecher Stowe,

And she lived upon the other side of Jordan."

Save to professed students of history, the Abolitionist movement is by this time as much a part of our heroic age as the battle of Bunker Hill or the landing of the Pilgrims. In this movement Lowell had his part.

Originally, he had not meant to do anything of the sort. His literary work in college, and his work after college for the *Boston Miscellany* and the *Pioneer*, had been of the kind that one would have supposed. The *Class Poem* and the work on the Elizabethan Dramatists were in accordance with the proper development of a young man of letters. Lowell had at this time, as he always afterward had at odd moments, a keen feeling of the alluring charm of the life with nature and books that was possible to him at Elmwood. He was passionately fond of the place, knew all the trees and all the birds, and was perfectly happy in

every season of the year with the good gifts of nature; and he was passionately fond of books and reading of all sorts. The life of a poet pure and simple,— as of Keats, for instance,— a life devoted to the love of beauty and the expression of that love, was more than possible,— was beckoning to him. It never lost its power entirely. Once seen as a possibility, it came back to him in after years as a sort of vision.

It is true that in no case would Lowell's poetry have been without serious aims and ideals. There was too much Emerson and Channing in the air. There was too much Transcendentalism, too, to use a word which, as he afterward said, was then "the maid of all work for those who could not think." He might have been more like Shelley than Keats.

But it was his good fortune to undergo a real experience. It was through Miss Maria White that Lowell first perceived

the claim that the Anti-slavery Movement made upon the poets of his time. You may see that it did make a claim upon them by glancing at the earlier poems of Whittier or Holmes. It was hard to escape the claim; although Longfellow at first was quite indifferent to it, and Emerson at first resisted it, thinking the Abolition Society one of the many societies which tended to devitalize character. Lowell also, at first, was at least indifferent. In his *Class Poem* he had even exclaimed,—

"O Abolitionists, both men and maids,
Who leave your desks, your parlors, and your trades,
To wander restless through the land and shout—
But few of you could tell us what about!"

Considering, however, who and what he was, he could not long hold aloof. On December 26, 1844, he was married to Miss White. He had been for some years en-

gaged to her. He had already felt the enthusiasm that she felt; he had already begun to see that here was something worth being a poet about. Shortly after his marriage he began to write for the *Pennsylvania Freeman* and the *Anti-slavery Standard*, and continued to write for them regularly for some years. He thus became accustomed to expressing himself on the great and living question of the day, and in scorn of the very lines which have just been quoted found himself writing: —

"Behold the baby arrows of that wit
Wherewith I dared assail the woundless Truth!
Love hath refilled the quiver, and with it
The man shall win atonement for the youth."

For slavery was a living question during the years 1844–50, the years between the annexation of Texas and the Compromise of 1850. As we look back

over that episode, as we may call it, in the extension of the United States to the Pacific, we recollect with a little thrill of surprise that in its day it was a matter very different from what we vaguely think it to have been. Whatever the necessities of history, it cannot be said that the Mexican War was in all respects a war to be proud of. Considering the question in a state of nature, without conventional limitations, — as of governments, treaties, political parties, intrigues, and what not, — the main fact would seem to be that here was a splendid country between a living nation and one not so living. It would of necessity be settled by the stronger, more virile people. All this Emerson saw at the time. The thing was to be, and how it came about would be a matter of small consequence in the course of centuries. Lowell saw it, too. He knew that the English race was to spread over the continent. But he hated to see the thing done hypocritically, as a cloak for some-

thing thoroughly wrong, as a matter of mean party politics. In fact, when you add to the natural way of doing things the existing governments and the other matters mentioned, the rights and wrongs become rather complicated. Of course the actual facts are pretty plain. The Mexican War was put through on a Might-is-Right basis, largely for the development of the Slave Power.

All this was rasping in the highest degree to those who believed from the bottom of their hearts that slavery was a killing wrong, and of these enlightened few, Lowell was now one. In the first place they felt that there was an immense amount of wrong in the Texas matter and in the Mexican War. But, further and worse, this wrong was not done to bring about any good end. There was for the moment no such consolation. Bad in itself, the war was undertaken to bring about something worse. Here it was that Lowell really found his voice.

In his first book there are no poems which refer in any definite way to the question of slavery. In this particular, Lowell might as well, almost, have been an Englishman. In the years that followed, his poems were often suggested by his anti-slavery feeling. But in most of these poems we see, as a rule, the lover of freedom, if we can make the distinction, rather than the hater of slavery. There were a number of young poets of Freedom about 1840, and in this respect Lowell was merely cosmopolitan. He was very ethereal, as if he had no desire to deal with homely matters of the earth. Freedom, liberty, truth, — these may be the enthusiasms of a poet of any time and nation; but the passion of America at just that moment was anti-slavery. Whittier's poems have each some blow at slavery: Lowell thought rather of freedom. It would seem that the slavery question had not really come home to him.

The Mexican War brought it home. He saw the recruiting sergeants enlist lads in Boston to fight to bring more slave States into the Union. He heard the politicians seize eagerly upon the campaign cry, "Our Country, Right or Wrong!" He heard the few Massachusetts men in Congress who did venture to take an independent position vilified and condemned. He heard the Constitution seized and used to stamp out principles that had been most influential in making it possible. He saw Northern editors ready to print anything and Northern candidates ready to promise anything that would advance their parties or themselves, while the heroes of the war made political capital out of anything they might or might not have done. All these petty meannesses going to make up a great wrong, which was being carried through by a great people for a bad purpose,—such was the stimulus to *The Biglow Papers.* When we think how

Lowell felt, and when we think that even in ordinary moments he wrote easily and well, there is little wonder that he accomplished a masterpiece.

How much the inspiration coming from rage at public events had to do with the success of *The Biglow Papers* seems plain enough, when we compare it with *A Fable for Critics* and *The Legend of Sir Launfal*, which appeared the same year. The *Fable* is carried as far as great cleverness can carry it, the *Legend* as far as the most excellent intentions can inspire a poetic nature. The *Fable*, when we know about its subject, is quite as amusing as "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." The *Legend* is quite as charming as "Robert of Sicily." But *The Biglow Papers* is a masterpiece.

When Lowell wrote,

"And if my words seem treason to the dullard and the tame,
'Tis but my Bay State dialect,— our fathers spoke the same!"

he was not using the word "dialect" in the sense which *The Biglow Papers* suggest. But it was appropriate that this fierce cry of scorn from the North should have been couched in the uncouth dialect of New England. It rang true. The *A Fable for Critics* was in a literary form, sanctioned by much good literary authority. So was *The Legend of Sir Launfal.* For *The Biglow Papers* Lowell had, it is true, the authority of Burns, who had always been a favorite of his; but he probably cared little for authority of any kind. He conceived the idea, was pleased at it, and rushed ahead.

How he realized the whole thing in his mind is shown by the fulness and detail of the conception as it gradually came into form. It would have been something to have written the poems of Hosea Biglow; Lowell added the figure of Parson Wilbur, not to mention Ezekiel Biglow and Birdofredum Sawin. If Hosea breathes the spirit of the Abolitionist,

certainly Mr. Wilbur is a true son of the *Magnalia*, but slightly changed to accommodate himself to a new century.

By this time Lowell had done more than take his first steps: he had established himself. It is true that he was not as widely known now as afterward; but, except for increasing ripeness of character and the maturity of judgment that comes as the years go, he was now what he afterward became. Even when professor at Harvard, he was no more of a student; when writing for the *North American*, he was no more a critic; when minister to England, he was not more truly representative of his people in the mother country. He often felt afterward that he was never in his life more of a poet, and doubtless the many who know him best by the *Legend of Sir Launfal* will agree with him.

During these years he lived in Cambridge in the old place he could never leave for long, in the town which he al-

ways loved, and of which he felt as proud as Socrates was of Athens or Dante of Florence. He lived very simply, though happily, not being really even "well off," but still having enough to keep a maid, so that his wife did not have to make too much of a slave of herself. This pleased him; for he was a consistent anti-slavery man, and even girded humorously at having to allow Ellen to bring up water for his bath, and had to circumvent her in order to bring up his own coal. Something more than anti-slavery feeling led him to assume the place of nursery maid to his children, when he could get a chance, which they repaid in the simple but effective currency which children never lack. It may also be noted that he kept chickens, and increased his lore of more melodious birds. Yet he found time not only for much reading, but for much writing for the *North American Review*, the *Broadway Journal*, the *Massachusetts Quarterly*, the *Anti-slavery*

Standard, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, *Putnam's Magazine*—how curious the old names look now!—poetry by preference, but also prose as well.

Although he was not in these earlier years a very popular poet, yet he had many friends. Of these friends, fortunately, one kept a diary. Longfellow notes a walk with Clough "to see Lowell, whom we found musing before his fire in his study. His wife came in, slender and pale as a lily." He writes of a supper which Lowell gives to Thackeray, who was then lecturing in Boston. With Emerson he dines with Lowell, and they plan a new club to dine together once a month.

It was a happy life, and a good one; but it had the breaks that every life must have at one time or another. Of four children born to him, only one lived to grow up. "Death is a private tutor," he wrote afterward. "We have no fellow-scholars, and must lay our lessons to heart alone." Doubtless such things are lessons, nor need

we take it upon ourselves to feel that Lowell had too many of them. In 1853, however, came something more than a lesson. His wife died. She had long been delicate, and had been often ill, but had rallied again and again. But now she died; and his life, he felt, was broken in two. So far as years are concerned, he had certainly come to near the half-way point. And perhaps his life was never the same again. It was larger, on the whole, more brilliant, more useful, and fuller of the stuff that makes men; but probably it always lacked something. He sometimes felt afterward that now he ceased to be a poet. At such times he could hardly have thought of the breadth of meaning in the word, even as he had already defined it himself.

III.

In the *A Fable for Critics* Lowell had mentioned himself. "There is Lowell," says he, "who is always trying to be a poet, in spite of his invariable moralizing," or something like that. "A whole bale of *isms*," is his expression.

It would be hard to say whether Lowell really thought this an incisive characterization of himself. It has often been thought that it was a pity for a poet to be too much of a reformer. Milton, for instance,— many people regret that he should have gone hammer and tongs into the pamphlet war of 1641, and wish that he had stayed at Horton, writing lovely poems. Probably, however, he could never have written *Paradise Lost* (as it now stands), had he not gone into the stress of the *Animadversions* and the *Areopagitica*, the *Iconoclastes* and the *Second Defence*. As for Lowell, the most vigorous of his "isms" was Aboli-

tionism; and we have seen that the result of that was to arouse him to the production of the best thing he had ever done. Abolitionism had enabled him to do what he had always longed to do,—make a real contribution to literature.

Still, not taking these lines as absolutely literal self-criticism, looking at them rather as the expression of a certain consciousness within the man of what he really was, we must admit a good deal of truth. Practically, we have here the expression of a feeling of something in his whole make-up that was not entirely in accord with the poetic impulse. Here Lowell was certainly right. There was something in his nature that did not harmonize very well with the desire to put himself wholly into his poetry. That something, however, was not the propagandist disposition (a poet may be a propagandist,—for instance, Shelley): it was the disposition of the scholar. Nor was Lowell the only one aware of this

characteristic : it was very generally recognized. But, then, in those days there was little distinction in the general mind between letters and scholarship. So it did not seem very noteworthy. Longfellow was a scholar.

As for Longfellow, one day in the autumn of 1853, after some hours given to college work, he found his eyes suffering, and made, as he had made before, a resolution to retire from his professorship. In the spring he begins his lectures on Dante with the note, "the last course I shall ever deliver." On the 19th of April he writes, "At 11 o'clock in No. 6 University Hall I delivered my last lecture,—the last I shall ever deliver here or anywhere." But his resignation does not seem to have been formally acted upon until the autumn.

There were at once a number of persons "mentioned," as the term is, as his successor, all of them friends of his, which precluded his devoting himself to

any particular one. During the fall no choice was made.

With the beginning of the new year Lowell began a course of lectures on English Poets in the Lowell Institute, which had been founded several years before by his kinsman, John Lowell. The first lecture was given January 9, and by the end of the month it was as good as settled that Lowell was to be Longfellow's successor. The choice was recognized by everybody as most appropriate. It is true that the chair had been held for twenty years by Longfellow, so that the fact of a poet becoming a professor was not in any way a surprise. In fact, poets had been professors before (Gray, for instance, although he never screwed himself up to professing anything); and they have been professors since. It is also to be remembered that a professor in those days was not precisely what he generally is now, when a piece of parchment is apt to be thought a credential more effective

than many bays of Apollo. We must not think of the scholarship of our own time, which is not only very unpoetic, but, on the whole, much opposed to poetry : let us think only of the old-time scholarship, that acquaintance with the classics and other polite languages which was supposed to be not only the natural desire of every poet or man of letters, but also his most necessary possession. Even at that, the especial power which made Lowell really a good professor was not a power which helped his poetry.

Some time before, as has been said, Lowell, then not long out of college, had published in the *Boston Miscellany* his articles on the Old English Dramatists. It was thirteen years afterward that he delivered his course on English Poetry. Neither of these series will be found among his collected works. The essays on the Elizabethan Dramatists which he did republish were written in the last years of his life, when he re-

turned to these favorites of his youth. The matter of some of the Lowell lectures may practically be found in his later essays on Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth. Besides the lectures on particular poets, there were some more general lectures; but these he never put in print himself.

These lectures show reading and scholarship, so far as English literature was concerned; but, as the Smith Professorship of Belles-lettres was practically understood at that day to be a professorship of modern languages, it was natural that Lowell should have desired to brush up his German and Italian. He accordingly went abroad for two years, and only in 1856 did he assume the chair that had been held by Ticknor and Longfellow. When he did return, he assumed other duties as well. But, before we speak of the *Atlantic Monthly* and his career as editor there begun, we must say a word or two more on Lowell's

scholarship. If he had not been a scholar, he would not have become a professor; and, if he had not become a professor, as he was apt to think himself, he would have been a greater poet. "I believe the present generation doesn't think I was made for a poet," he wrote at a later time to Mr. Howells; "but I think I could have gone near convincing 'em if I had not estranged the muse by donning a professor's gown." This, then, was an important point in his life.

Lowell is less remembered as a scholar than as an essayist, a poet, a critic, or, as what we may call for want of a better name, a man of letters. So far as concerns those best qualified to remember (namely, other scholars), he is as a scholar best remembered for the spirit, the impulse, the encouragement, which he gave scholarship rather than for any particular work. You will find little reference to learned works of his on Shakspere or

Chaucer. In fact, he wrote no learned works. "Produce the books," is the demand on any one who would have it that one or another is a scholar. Lowell wrote no treatises; and, so far as current scholarship is concerned, he is pretty much as though he had never been. For this there are several reasons. In the first place, scholarship, in the particular line in which he was undoubtedly learned, is a very different thing from what it was forty years ago. The very fact that Lowell, when he went abroad before assuming his professorship, spent a winter in Dresden, studying German, is almost enough in itself without any further comment. In his day men went to Germany — to Dresden, if they chose — to study German: in ours they go there to study French and English. Of the kind of learning of which our professors of modern languages have accumulated much, Lowell had little: nor need we pause even to think why.

Lowell's scholarship was not the scholarship of to-day. He had but a dim conception of language as it exists at the universities to-day; or of literature, either, I had almost added. His ideas on language were, on the whole, such as he gained by reading the literature of any language in question for the moment. Further he had no especial care to go, so far as I can find out. As for the linguistic studies of his contemporary, Whitney, I presume that he regarded them as having especial connection with Sanskrit or Zend.

There is much to be said in favor of scholarship of Lowell's type, even so far as language only is concerned. When a man learns a language from its poets and its great prose writers, he knows it in a manner very different from that which comes chiefly from a study of grammars and dictionaries and treatises. He has a more real appreciation of it. He misses a possible doctrinaire character: he is

more apt to see things in right relation. Now Lowell had learned English and Old French chiefly by reading English and Old French. He used to read and mark his books constantly, and the scattered notes he sometimes went over and indexed. Learning of this sort, learning based upon one's own marks and indexes, is something very different from a learning based on the marks and indexes that another man has made. Now that we have so many texts well edited and so many monographs, any recent graduate can have certainly a much broader range of scholarship than was possible to Lowell ; but the temptation is very strong to be content with a scholarship that stands lightly on the texts, as one might say, and is not rooted in them, even if it does not now and then go so far as to leave texts altogether for a flight upward into the regions of phonology and analogy. Lowell had the simple scholarship that is satisfied with knowing languages so as

to be able to feel their genius and with knowing literatures so as to be able to use them in thinking. As to sound laws and analogical formations, inquiries about sources and influences, I find no allusion to these matters in his works, and do not believe that they found any place in his lectures. His scholarship was of the old-time sort that came in with Petrarch. We might say of him what he said of Longfellow: "Mr. Longfellow is not a scholar in the German sense of the word,—that is to say, he is no pedant,—but he certainly is a scholar in another and perhaps a higher sense: I mean in range of acquirement and the flavor that comes from it." This is a little hard on German scholarship, but just here we may let that pass.

But how, one may ask, if Lowell's scholarship was the scholarship of Petrarch and Poliziano, of Ben Jonson and Milton, of Pope and Johnson, how is it that it was a bar to his poetical temper?

Any one will understand why a modern scholar, a scientist, a discoverer of laws and of sources, should not at the same time be a poet. There is a very distinct opposition in the two modes of thought. One is bound to discover what actually has been and to conform his thinking to it; and the other allows his thinking to take care of itself, or, rather, he trusts to his own springs of feeling, and brings to pass things that conform to it. That is a considerable difference: the man who is good at one is not likely to be good at the other. Well, Lowell was certainly not a thorough-paced scientific scholar (if he had been, he would probably have written no poems at all); but he had enough of the passion for seeing how things actually were, to stand at times in the way of his realizing things as he imagined them. This is the way I explain the fact that he was often out of poetic trim, that he could only write when he felt like it. He had two natures, the critical and the

creative, it is rather the fashion to call them; and they seem to have existed in pretty nearly equal degree, though not by any means in equal balance. When I say "critical," I do not mean that Lowell was necessarily what we should call a great critic. I mean that he had that faculty of mind that is not only content, but especially desires, to consider the work of other men and see what it is. A man in whom this spirit is predominant rarely creates much himself, in the common understanding of the word; and, wherever the disposition is strong, it is apt to interfere with the writing of poetry.

In another, a minor way, does the difference show. A scholar must be diligent. Lowell sometimes was: he worked hard in Dresden to learn German as he wanted to know it; he worked at other times, too, once ten hours a day for two months, making verbal indexes for Middle English poems; and he must have

done many more things of the same sort. His friends tell me that he was indolent of disposition, but a scholar who knows as much as Lowell did cannot have been indolent all the time. You cannot learn languages by inspiration. On the other hand, you can write poetry in that way; and Lowell generally did. "Sir Launfal" is said to have been written in two days and nights, and the "Commemoration Ode" in about the same time. "The Cathedral" he wrote and then rewrote, but finally came back to the first draught. Even the "Class Poem" was done under the stress of time. When he got thoroughly aroused, then he could write, and preferably poetry. It is true that for all this a great deal of preparation was necessary. "My brain requires a long brooding time," said he, "ere it can hatch anything. As soon as the *life* comes into the thing, it is quick enough in chipping the shell." Or, to reverse the figure, you can make

a coal glow very soon; but it has taken a good while to make the coal. This temper, not the white heat necessarily, but the general mood, he felt sure was his real temper. Certainly, it may have been. Our concern here is that it was not his only temper.

Of another critic he writes: "I find, somewhat to my surprise, from his letters, that he had the imaginative temper in all its force. Can't work for months together: if he tries, his forehead drips with *Angstschweiss;* feels ill and looks well,— in short, is as pure a hypochondriac as the best. This has had a kind of unhealthy interest for me, for I never read my own symptoms so well described before."

One is rather too apt to catch the idea from Lowell's own writings or from his friends that at bottom he disliked being a professor and wished to be always a poet. This cannot have been the case. Doubtless, Lowell disliked the work nec-

essary to get his materials into regular, scholarly shape; he disliked the labor of writing lectures and the ordeal of delivering them; he disliked the bother and confinement of college order. But he was passionately fond of the study of language, or, more exactly, of words not as fossil poetry, to use Emerson's phrase, but as words. Speaking of Percival's linguistic tastes, he says, "Whoever has been bitten by that gadfly knows that there is scarce a monomania so utterly absorbing." No one will pretend that Lowell's linguistic studies were not absolutely whole-hearted. Mr. Leslie Stephen, in 1863, found him at first "a singularly complete specimen of the literary recluse," sitting among books, whose ragged and thumbed appearance and well-pencilled margins showed how constantly he had used them.

If he had not loved his work devotedly, Lowell would never have accomplished as much as he did. And, wheth-

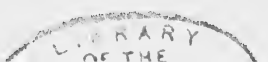
er he were more truly a scholar or a poet, we must not close this section without a word upon the soundest bit of linguistic scholarship which he ever put forth. You will not find it in his published essays: there is nothing there so important from a linguistic point of view. It is in an unlikely place; *i.e.*, prefixed to the second series of *The Biglow Papers*.

This paper is scholarly because it shows the genius of the scholar. It says things that have not gained currency in America even now. It shows an intuitive knowledge of some of the fundamental positions on which the science of language is based. It is true that it shows much else not so valuable. But when Lowell saw that the spoken word is the basis, not the written, that exact chronology must be regarded in tracing etymologies, that by comparing later forms you can infer earlier ones, he had found out the very things that were

needed to make him one of the great linguists of the day. Unfortunately for his brother scholars, he was not aware of this fact.

IV.

In the town of Goettingen there are tablets placed upon the houses where George Ticknor lived, and Edward Everett, George Bancroft, and John Lothrop Motley. But the American visitor will find no tablet over the door of Kleine Schiessgasse, 4, Dresden. To tell the truth, Lowell was never very much of a German student, and never cared much for German student life: in fact, so far as I know, he never saw anything of it. He was rather old for it at the time,—he was thirty-seven; and he was past boyish enthusiasms, as for duelling and drinking, and anxious to get from Germany what he wanted (namely, a knowledge of the language and literature) as soon as possible. It was rather a grind for him in Dresden than otherwise. In fact, he says it was one of the most miserable winters that he ever passed. The reason is not very far to seek: he



had to talk German. Now, for a man who is so easy and natural and predestined a talker as Lowell was, it is a terrible thing to be able to talk nothing but a language that you cannot quite manage. At first it condemns you to commonplace. Afterward it deprives your remarks of the true outline and character. Anyway, it makes an effort of a natural necessity.

But, if Lowell did not like Dresden much, he did, at least, learn German; and that was what he had come for. It would not seem, however, that he ever really cared much for the language or the literature. In one of his letters of this time he says that the history of the German literature is most interesting, and that it makes many things in English literature clearer to him. Lowell was not the man to go through such a winter as a mere grind. At the time he may have thought that he got something out of German literature. But, really,

could have made no great impression n him. It is true that some years afterward he read the correspondence of Lessing and wrote an article on the subject, but German literature never had any great place in his mind. You can hardly find an allusion to German literature or any mention of it in all his essays, so rich in allusions to English and French. I remember half a dozen references to Goethe and one or two to Heine; but otherwise, however much German literature illuminated English in Lowell's mind, its light was by no means reflected to his readers.

In the summer of 1856 Lowell came home, and, the house at Elmwood being still leased, took up his abode in what was called "Professors' Row." For the moment he was plunged into preparation for college work. He had to select instructors for the practical teaching of the modern languages (there were four of them, for French, German, Italian,

and Spanish, respectively); and he had to prepare his own lectures, which were on the literatures. The first duty he managed in spite of the immigrations of Teutons, Swiss, Hungarians, and Poles, who were "all desirous [especially the last three] to teach the German language at Cambridge." The second he accomplished by revising his Lowell lectures and preparing courses on Dante and German Literature.

College society at that time was agreeable. We get rather more of an idea of it from Longfellow's diary than from Lowell's letters, probably because it is a diary, for one thing, and perhaps, also, because Lowell kept a little more to himself, for another. For in a year or two Lowell moved back to Elmwood and, not being very enterprising in minor matters, he used to stay there a good deal. One more reason there was, however: he had now very little time to give his friends. He had not been at

home very long before he assumed the editorship of a new periodical to be founded,— namely, the *Atlantic Monthly*, — of which the first number was issued in November, 1857.

The reader who wishes to get the right idea of this important element in Lowell's life must for the moment forget the present stately and Bostonian isolation of the *Atlantic* among the more popular and beautifully illustrated magazines. The *Atlantic Monthly*, as then projected, was not eccentric among (American) magazines. It was conceived on lines that had already obtained very generally, only put up perhaps a little higher. It was (as it is) literary, the difference being that in those days magazines were supposed to be literary. What would be the success of a magazine at the present day which was edited by a college professor and had for star contributors only the greatest poet, the chief philosopher, and the wittiest

observer in the country, might be a problem, unless it were meant to appeal to a very limited constituency. But in Lowell's day illustrations were in their infancy, and journalism confined itself largely to the journals, so that a magazine edited by Lowell with the help of Longfellow, Emerson, and Holmes, had rather a better chance than it would to-day.

It is curious to look over the first volumes — Lowell edited seven — and see what is there. Everything is anonymous; and it gives one a little thrill, therefore, to see on the same page in the first number the mystic "If the red slayer thinks he slays," followed by "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table: Every Man his own Boswell," appearing as calmly as if wholly ignorant that they were to be classics. One may also wonder what the readers of the first number thought of "Brahma": they were probably better attuned to it than we are.

In the second number you may see on successive pages "Floyd Ireson's Ride" and "Society and Solitude," and a little later the essay on the "Library of Old Authors" following "Sandalphon." Not that the whole of the *Atlantic* was made up of such matters. A good deal of it is not so very interesting. But, out of over a hundred articles in the first volume, one may count probably more than a score that everybody remembers after forty years, which seems a large percentage.

Of Lowell's own articles in these first numbers there will be a word to say later. They were not the star articles, as his used to be later in the *North American Review*. I suppose this was because he had to do much of the editor's work himself, and found that together with his college work it took up all his time. In his letters you may find a good many snatches which give a good idea of his trials. I like best this one, written to

Mr. James T. Fields after he had given up his position. "You asked the other day for an article on 'Birds' Nests.' I don't find it, and think it must have been made into soup for a blue-buttoned Mandarin that dropped in to dinner. What could I do? Rats were not to be had on such short notice. That is my theory. Practically, it may turn up some day, like Mr. Brown's Genius,—when I had given up all hopes of ever seeing it again." It was certainly hard enough to find good articles and see that they were rightly printed. Too much was it, we shall agree with Lowell, to remember what had happened to the other ones.

One may imagine vaguely that the duty of the editor of the *Atlantic* in those days was merely to go around once a month and get poems and articles from Longfellow and the other famous authors and household favorites, and print them. This would be a mistaken notion. To

tell the truth, Longfellow was not at first very enthusiastic; and to the two-score numbers edited by Lowell he contributed only about a dozen poems, and those mostly to the first volume. Emerson also sent several things to the first volume, but very few after that; and the same thing may be said of Whittier. As for Motley and Cabot, who had been at the foundation dinner, they wrote each two articles in Lowell's day. Now there had to be in those seven volumes about a thousand articles, less rather than more. Of this thousand Lowell himself wrote a good many, the majority being reviews of books, though some of these were practically articles, and were republished in his essays. And, of course, his right-hand man was Holmes. He had himself said on starting that Dr. Holmes was to be the main stay, and he certainly was. The *Autocrat* made a great hit, and was followed by the *Professor*, and that by *Elsie Venner* under

the name of *The Professor's Story*. Next as a reliance came probably Mr. Charles Eliot Norton: at any rate, he did a good deal of work. And Lowell soon found that Thomas Wentworth Higginson (not yet Colonel) was a stalwart helper. These four, I suppose, must have written about a third of the *Atlantic*, between them, during the years of Lowell's editorship. With such a reliance an editor, though of a new venture, could sleep easily of nights, even if he did get but a poem or so now and then from Longfellow, Whittier, Emerson, and himself.

Besides these, however, there were many others whose names are now very familiar. From New York were Bayard Taylor and Parke Godwin, who wrote the first political articles. Some younger men appeared in time, as Fitz-James O'Brien and Theodore Winthrop. Most noteworthy as a group were certain New Englanders: not only the most famous of all New England authors, Harriet

Beecher Stowe, who had been reckoned upon from the start, for, as time went on, editorial sagacity recognized Rose Terry, Harriet Prescott, the "wonderful young girl" who wrote *The Amber Gods*, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. Anonymously, I may also mention the authors of *The Queen of the Red Chessman* and of *My Double, and How He Undid Me.*

But, of all the articles in the *Atlantic* in those days, none has a more curious interest for me than certain poems that began to appear in the fifth volume. You may know them by the mottoes from Heine, or, if there be no mottoes, you may know them by keeping Heine in mind. They came from what was then the West,— namely, Columbus,— and were in due time followed by their author, who wished to make the acquaintance of the New England literati. Lowell received him cordially, and made a little dinner for him at Parker's, the table being made up of Mr. Fields and Dr. Holmes. The

latter seems to have been the only one who divined the true significance of the occasion. "Well, James," said he, "this is something like the apostolic succession: this is the laying on of hands." Probably no one of the four thought at the time that, as Lowell himself had succeeded to the primacy in letters held by Irving, so he was to pass on the responsibility to William Dean Howells.

V.

We sometimes hear the expression "pure literature" used, meaning literature that is without contamination from politics or religion or such things. This, on the whole, was not precisely Lowell's idea of literature. Indeed, his best literary work so far had had its connection with public events. Nor had the *Atlantic* been founded merely for "pure literature": it was (as it is) a "Magazine devoted to Literature, Art, and Politics." "Science" was introduced in time. In those days politics were very interesting — at least, they were about the time of the founding of the *Atlantic;* and they were also three and four years later. Mr. Francis H. Underwood, who ought to know, — for he was actively concerned in founding the *Atlantic,* — says that "one purpose of the magazine was to give the active support of letters to the anti-slavery cause."

Doubtless this was so. A magazine in which Lowell and Whittier and Mrs. Stowe wrote (not to mention others) would certainly have given literary support, even if indirectly, to the anti-slavery cause. But at the beginning the *Atlantic* was to be directly political; and in the first volume will be found several articles on political subjects, written, as has been said, by Mr. Parke Godwin, who had been for some time a writer for the New York *Evening Post.*

I cannot say just what was the impression of these articles. Mr. Godwin wrote only for the first six numbers. In the number for August, 1858, appeared an article in a somewhat different style, entitled "The Pocket Celebration of the Fourth." Unsigned, according to custom, it was probably at once recognized as being by Lowell. It was certainly an excellent exhibition of Lowell's true manner in prose. He had always said, and doubtless with perfect truth,

that prose (his best prose, he meant) was really harder for him to write than poetry. But this article he must have written with a very flowing pen. It was a sharp criticism of a speech by Rufus Choate: it may still be read with great amusement, even though we have almost forgotten what it is all about. And it is not merely an attack: Lowell really appreciated much that was fine in Rufus Choate, and what he has to say on this side is as good as what he has to say on the other. The article took, not wholly to Lowell's pleasure. "These personal things are not such as I should choose to do," he wrote in a letter, "for they subject me to all manner of vituperation; but one must take what immediate texts the newspapers afford him, and I accepted the responsibility in accepting my post." On another text afforded him by current events he wrote shortly afterward another article, this time on Caleb Cushing ("Gineral C." of *The Biglow*

Papers), not so good, he thought himself, and probably with reason. Perhaps it was not so spontaneous.

However it was, Lowell wrote no more on politics for some time, nor, indeed, on any other matter that now has great interest. His articles were largely book reviews. His editorship and his professorship evidently were taking all his time and energy, and there was little left to spare. But the Presidential election of 1860, and the events of the beginning of 1861, were things that made a call on a man. Lowell responded with "The November Election," "The Question of the Hour," "E Pluribus Unum," "The Pickens-and-Stealin's Rebellion,"—the last in June, 1861, by which time Lowell had already given up the editorship of the *Atlantic* to Mr. James T. Fields.

On these political articles it would not be easy to form a critical opinion to-day, even if it were necessary for our present purposes. They are praised by some

who read them when they came out; and Lowell included them in his *Works*, although they were not republished at the time. It does not seem to me that they are written in just the tone for such a time: they seem hardly vital enough. "My very style," he wrote later, "belongs to the last century." It is one thing to stir up the prevalent opinion of a political adversary by good-natured ridicule and common sense, but something more is needed in a crisis such as that of the first months of 1861. These articles had something more; but still, as I read them, it seems as if they did not have all that was needed.

With his handing over the editorship of the *Atlantic* to Mr. Fields, Lowell's mind must have turned to poetry. Mr. Norton urged him to read poetry; and probably, now that he had more time, he did so. Constant and regular work is apt to be a great dissuader from much reading of peetry. But, even had he

still been responsible for the *Atlantic*, it is probable that his mind would have naturally turned to the idea of more "Biglow Papers." The first series, edited in England not long before by Thomas Hughes, would have recalled the idea to him, had it been necessary. But it was not necessary; and nothing gives a better idea of how completely the first series of *The Biglow Papers* had done its work than that it seemed to so many natural, when there was a call for a representative of the patriotic North, that Hosea Biglow should be heard from. For a year and more he was heard from. In November, 1861, was a letter from Birdofredum Sawin; and from time to time thereafter till Christmas, 1862, when the Rev. Mr. Wilbur died, there were seven numbers. The other numbers in the second series were written in 1866.

The second series of *The Biglow Papers* is not so often read as the first, and I

suppose is not so good. It may have been for the general reason that revivals are always dangerous. Lowell hints at this himself, although in later years he thought that there were more staying qualities in the second series than in the first. It may also have been that Lowell was a professor now, and fifteen years older than he had been when he wrote the earlier poems. It may have been, and I believe it mainly was, because it was one thing to write of the Mexican War in opposition to it and quite another to write in the midst of the agony of the Civil War. I do not wonder that the second *Biglow Papers* are not equal to the first. The first series was satirical: what was there for the second to be satirical about? The real time to stir men to right feeling and right action by satire and ridicule was the time between the nomination of Lincoln and the first battle of Bull Run. After Bull Run the time was not wholly adapted for

satire. Lowell had poetry for the war, but it was not satirical poetry.

And yet here and there is a chance for the old fire. What, in the first series, is better than "Jonathan to John," or, in another way, than some of the stanzas added to "The Courtin'"?

But the year 1862 was not a good year for Lowell to write poetry. In October, 1861, Lieutenant William Lowell Putnam was wounded at Ball's Bluff, and died a few days after. In June, 1862, Captain James Jackson Lowell was mortally wounded at Glendale. In the November of that year Colonel Charles Russell Lowell was killed in a skirmish at Cedar Creek. These three young nephews were an immense loss to Lowell. He had no sons of his own, but he felt the deaths of these sons of his brother and of his sister almost as if they had been of those dearest to him. Some years before, looking over to Mount Auburn as the snow fell on the graves there, he

kissed his daughter Mabel; but he says that she could not know

"That my kiss was given to her sister
Folded close under deepening snow."

And these lines may give us a sense of the feeling of personal loss that lies beneath those which are so well known in the No. X. of *The Biglow Papers*, written after the war was over.

Still, like every other big-hearted man at the North, Lowell, in spite of his personal losses, had a heart for his country in everything; and there was one point on which his satire could justly be turned, — namely, the position of England. We cannot easily understand how keenly Lowell felt the hostile attitude of England (in fact, at this moment we are rather inclined to forget the whole matter) unless we remember how proud he was, not only of his own country, but of the country from which it had chiefly sprung. For, though so many of us now

are Swedes, Hungarians, Poles, and Italians, still, as a people, we feel that our true descent is from England; and in Lowell's time the feeling was much stronger, and he felt it more keenly. Nothing that France could have done, although an old friend, could have been so galling. For England to side with the South seemed to the North like being thrown down by one who should have helped you stand firm. But all this merely served to bring out more strongly Lowell's loyalty to his country and his faith in her final success.

Toward the end of the year 1863 Lowell, together with Mr. Charles Eliot Norton, assumed the editorship of the *North American Review*. "It wanted three elements to be successful," he wrote to Motley in Vienna. "It wasn't thoroughly — that is, thick and thinly — loyal, it wasn't lively, and it had no particular opinions on any particular subject." To make it loyal was no dif-

ficult task. Lowell again turned his hand to political articles, and wrote first the article on "The President's Policy," which may be found with some additions in the present essay on Abraham Lincoln. For three years, then, he wrote political articles, — on through the rest of the war and into the reconstruction period. For work such as this — guiding and restraining work — his sound sense and his high ideals gave him great power, and he used it. Mr. Norton also contributed a number of political articles; and, although the question of being "thick and thinly loyal" happily passed away with the course of events, yet the *North American Review* continued to hold a strong position in public affairs. After 1866, however, Lowell's articles were no longer political.

In 1865 came peace. On receiving the news, Lowell wrote to Mr. Norton: "The news, my dear Charles, is from heaven. I felt a strange and tender ex-

altation. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry, and ended by holding my peace and feeling devoutly thankful. There is something magnificent in having a country to love." Now, as was his custom, the feelings that had been maturing so long were ready to find expression; and an occasion offered itself at once. On Commencement of that year Harvard College held commemoration exercises for those of her sons who had fallen in the war, and Lowell was naturally called upon for the Ode. Hardly had Harvard herself lost more noble sons than he.

He gave himself up to it as he had not given himself up to anything for ten years. This was his way, this was the way he felt he could write poetry, and only in this way. "To carry a thing long in the mind is my recipe. It settles and clarifies, and you have only to tap it, and draw it off the lees." He could not easily get started; but, once going, he

relieved his heart and mind by verse that was almost improvisation. When it was done, he felt satisfied: he felt, and rightly, that he had again written poetry.

At the moment he thought that the poem did not make the effect on the audience that he had looked for: he said gloomily, that the *Daily Advertiser* of the next day had called it "a very graceful poem." He fell into the unhappiness that often follows the heat of enthusiasm. He thought he had failed. "The fact is," he wrote to Colonel Higginson, "that the Ode was written at a heat,—such a one, indeed, as leaves one colder than common afterwards." But here he must have been not unnaturally wrong,—at least, if the testimony of others is of any value. The Ode was not only fully equal to the occasion, not only listened to with exultation by those who at last felt due utterance of the emotion of years, but it was also the best, the greatest poem that he had written. It has his

greatest merits, and it lacks his defects. It is also thoroughly representative of the moods and the feeling of the poet, and of the people for whom he acted as spokesman.

VI.

"I AM ashamed at having been again tempted into thinking I could write *poetry*,—a delusion from which I have been tolerably free these dozen years." So wrote Lowell in the reaction which followed the composition of his greatest poem. "These dozen years" bring us back to the year 1853, the year he was meditating those lectures on the English Poets which showed that no other could rightly be the successor of Longfellow. During these years of work as a professor, and afterward as an editor, he had frequently felt a lack of poetic power. And, although this feeling was frequently shaken by a fine verse or a fine poem, yet we can easily see that there was ground for it. If you spend ten hours out of the twenty-four in hard intellectual work, you are less likely to write poetry than if you do not. That is about the way we may look at the question. It

is true that about this time Lowell was beginning to feel a sort of compensation: he was beginning to contribute to the *North American Review* those essays on the great figures of literature of which it will be soon time to speak. But, certainly, he often had the feeling that his days as a poet were numbered. It was not for two or three years yet that he regained his surety of feeling enough to collect what he had written since his last volume.

To this collection he gave the name *Under the Willows*, not only as the title of the June Idyl that came first, but because the poems called back so many moods knit into Elmwood, and those willows which he then feared were soon to become a thing of the past. He did not think too highly of them, when he had got them all together; but he felt that he should feel freer, were they once between covers. He was apt to feel this way. In 1847 he wrote: "My pieces

hamper me till I get them shut up in a book. Then I feel free of them, and can do better." Twenty years after he says, although, to tell the truth, not of all of the poems, "I was mainly induced to print them that I might get rid of them by shutting them between two covers."

But this collection of the actual year-to-year record of twenty years' feelings and thoughts is somehow less real than the poetical review of which it may well have been the cause. I have seen *The Cathedral* criticised as not having been spontaneous. I can hardly think that this can have been so. In his own letters he says, "I was happy writing it." But the poem itself is better evidence than anything one can say about it. It is not generally thought the best of Lowell's poems; but read it at just this moment of his life, and see whether he ever wrote anything more thoroughly himself. That may not be a very sound basis for literary criticism; but for us

now, who are concerned in seeing how the life of Lowell shaped itself and developed, it is surely to the purpose. The name "The Cathedral" is accidental. It would be more accurately named in prose, — "James Russell Lowell, the Poet, and his Relation to his Time."

That is to say, in this poem Lowell found voice after many years of partial utterance, of half-silence, — found in the recollection of a trivial day abroad the subtle alchemy which distilled from so many moods, so many memories, the pure quintessence which the world might keep. Nothing else that he ever wrote expresses so fully his poetical nature, that part of himself which he often (before and afterward) felt was the real himself. Everything is there: nature, religion, art, the past, democracy; early enthusiasms, even the contradiction of poetry and scholarship, the pressure of daily labors, the war, the doubts of reconstruction times; the half-diffuse ex-

uberance, the quaint figure, the incongruous whimsicality or triviality, the happy turn and word, even satire, though satire is generally dissolved in feeling,— all carried along by the life, the movement, the strength, of the emotions which reached their flood-tides in these moments of his inspiration.

We cannot go through *The Cathedral*, and say, "So Lowell thought," "This Lowell was." I suppose it might not be hard to pick out verses of which the thought is directly contradicted by what he said and felt at other times. But the dialectic of poetry often finds its most undoubtable affirmations in such contradictions. Some things, like the walls of Camelot, were never so, and are therefore so forever. The poem itself says that moments of appreciation are never again what they once were; that they come back to us in recollection, "blurred with the mist of afterthought"; that they are as short as the "wave's poise

before it break in pearl." But, really, the moment of which the poem is the immortality was like the wave's poise only because it had been upheaved from the depths of an ocean that receded far and far toward the dim horizon of memory. It was a moment in which Lowell knew himself as poet, and almost the last such moment. He was hereafter to be known best as he will be known longest.

For it was not until 1870 or even 1871 that the chance reader had the possibility of knowing Lowell at his best, so far as any particular form of literature was concerned; namely, as an essayist. *Conversations on Some of our Old Poets* was published in 1844, but it had run out of print; and, even if it had not, Lowell had got beyond it. A number of essays, *Fireside Travels*, published in magazines about the same time, came to belated book-form in the sixties. He had written many articles for the *Atlantic* and *North American Review*, but the curious

custom of printing articles unsigned in those magazines during the greater part of the time in which he had written for them made it more or less doubtful if the readers always knew when they were reading his work. In 1870, however, he gathered up a number of the essays which had appeared in the *North American Review*, and published them under the title of *Among my Books*. In 1871 he published another collection of essays, called *My Study Windows*, and in 1876 a third collection,—a second series of *Among my Books*.

In these collections we have twenty-five essays which will probably last longer than anything else of Lowell's. The greater number of them were written between the years 1865 and 1875. What prose he had written before remains unread by the great mass of readers. What he wrote subsequently never has had any such acceptance and never will be so widely known. What he wrote in other

forms, though sometimes more eagerly appreciated at the moment, will probably not remain, save for a dozen exceptional pieces; and even these, however expressive of himself, are not the best things of their kind, and will have less and less chance of life as the world goes on.

The best of Lowell's essays, however, I am inclined to believe, are as good essays, as such, as there are. For criticism, for scholarship, for philosophy, these magazine articles have been surpassed. But, as essays, they are not easily equalled. This may seem an absurd statement, or, rather, it may seem as though I were endeavoring to distinguish the thought of these essays from their form, and to praise the latter at the expense of the former. I am not trying to do that. It is just because the expression in these essays so exactly fits the thought, because the essays are so admirably expressive of Lowell thinking, that I think them so good.

They are of two classes, or, perhaps, better of four. First, those on literature, — the essays on "Dante," the "Library of Old Authors," "Rousseau," "Lessing," and on the great English poets from Chaucer to Wordsworth. Next are essays on current criticism on "Carlyle," "Emerson," "Swinburne," "Thoreau." Next on what might be called history more or less recent,— "Witchcraft," "New England Two Centuries Ago," "A Great Public Character," "Abraham Lincoln," and, lastly, — I don't know precisely under what head to group them,— "My Garden Acquaintance," "A Good Word for Winter," "On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners." This arrangement makes them look rather bookish on the whole, but an essay is apt to be bookish; and Lowell, even though he did not really look out on the world through books, was very likely to settle his own reflections on life by the fish-skin (or

egg, if you prefer) of another man's printed page.

For the most part the essays were printed just as they had appeared in the *North American Review*. Some, however, had first come out in the *Atlantic;* and some were rewritings of older articles. Even the review articles had sometimes been rewritten or condensed from previous material. Still, almost all took form in the years we are now writing of; and they serve to give us an idea of how he passed his time in those years, of how his mind worked. Lowell was himself rather of the opinion that the essay on Dryden was his best essay. I have no idea on what he based this view. It may have been but a fancy, or it may have been that the essay more exactly expressed the ideas he had had in mind when writing than any of the others,—a thing which must always be very satisfactory to the writer. Were it not for this view of Lowell himself, I should

pronounce confidently in favor of the essay on "Emerson, the Lecturer." In the narrow compass of this short essay we have the essence of Lowell's best prose, and, I had almost said, of Emerson, too; but that would be going a little too far.

But, whether it be one or the other that is the best of all, the quality of the essays in general is indisputable. Lowell has thought on fine things, and expressed himself most naturally with the richness of a full mind and the fancy of a subtle mind; and the result is that we cannot read him without our mind also taking energy to some degree at least, and that we call being interested.

I classed the essays in one way a moment ago, but now we may think of them in another. This essay on Emerson is not only an essay in current criticism, but it is very distinctly a New England essay; and so are those on "Thoreau," on "Josiah Quincy," on "Witchcraft,"

on "New England Two Centuries Ago"; and so, on the whole, are those on "My Garden Acquaintance," "A Good Word for Winter," and "A Certain Condescension." The others are the essays of the critic; but these, we cannot but feel, are rather more the essays of the man. These are not merely essays of Lowell's study. They are essays of all Elmwood, with its birds and its trees; of all Cambridge, with its dear friends and famous thinkers; of New England, now and centuries back. Lowell, the professor, lectures charmingly on English literature from Chaucer to Wordsworth; but here, to my mind at least, we have more of the life and spirit of the man.

And the form of the essays follows so easily and agrees so wholly with the fluent thought, is the thought even, we might almost say. They are so full of figure and allusion, and therefore so rich, so full of kindness and sympathy, and therefore so vital, so full of good sense

and good thought, and therefore so sound. The essay on Emerson I like, because it has in very short compass much that is very characteristic of Lowell and of his way of thinking. Take merely the figures that he loved (in poetry or in prose), and see what sort of things were running in his head. He was always comparing his idea to some lovely thing in nature, or he was illustrating it by some allusion to a favorite book, or he had seen some quaint resemblance to some every-day affair. Doubtless, now and then, his reading will take him out of the reach of yours. You may not remember about the nameless eagle of the Ygdrasil, or the profanity of Marlborough's army; but these are small matters, nor are they common in this particular essay. You can tell what he means when he speaks of "a kind of undertow in that rich barytone of his that sweeps our minds from their foothold into deeper waters with a drift we

cannot and would not resist," or of "some flash of humor which always played about the horizon of his mind, like heat lightning"; and always you are conscious of that something which with Lowell, as with Dryden, "gave flavor to whatever he wrote,—a very rare quality."

And, surely, it is as the New Englander that Lowell is most himself, will be best remembered, rather than as the critic who wrote the essays on English literature. Canons of criticism change, and the critic's reputation is apt to become a reputation by courtesy. Not to disparage Lowell's other essays, it may still be said that they gain half their charm now, not from the keenness or inspiration of the thought, but from the homely yet golden nature of the thinker.

VII.

With the year 1872 Lowell seems to have felt the need of having a little more fun. He had done a good deal of work. He had been professor for seventeen years; he had been an editor for fifteen. He had got together his poems and published them, and had gathered two volumes of essays. He felt that he deserved a vacation. "If everything goes well," he wrote to Mr. Leslie Stephen, "I mean to go abroad in a year from last June,—that is, at the end of our next college year; and, if I do, you will see a youth you never saw before." This youth was the regenerate Lowell: the old man Lowell Mr. Stephen had seen when he visited America during the war.

So far as England was concerned, it was really a different Lowell, or rather the same Lowell with a mood naturally changed by circumstances. As was most

natural for a man so devoted to the literature of England and to the principles of democracy which England has championed so long, Lowell had had a most kindly feeling for England herself. The appreciation of *The Biglow Papers* in England was very grateful to him. It made him feel that he was doing something worthy of being considered after the works of the great authors he admired so much. Only a year before the war he wrote to Thomas Hughes, who was to edit an English reprint of *The Biglow Papers*, "It has been a particular satisfaction to me to hear, now and then, some friendly voice from the old mother island say, 'Well done!' of *The Biglow Papers.*"

But, when the Civil War broke out, Lowell was grievously disappointed in the position of England, or at least of her representative men and newspapers. "Cross as terriers at your kind of neutrality," he wrote to Hughes in one of

the very few letters he sent to England at this time; but "cross," as any one will remember from the second *Biglow Papers*, was rather a mild word to describe his state of mind. At the end of the war he wrote, "I share with a great body of my countrymen in a bitterness (half resentment and half regret) which I cannot yet get over." Still, when Longfellow went to England not long afterward, Lowell, with the others of the Club, "followed his triumphal progress with pride and sympathy," so that he even rather wished himself on the other side once more. And, since it was not the acts of England so much as the feeling, the spirit of the nation, it was not unnatural that such events as the Treaty of Washington, providing for the "Alabama" arbitration, should have done much to convince him that things were not quite as they had been. He wanted to see that England felt that she had mistaken her true interest in

the sympathy she had shown for the South. And, finally, he came to think even that it had not been so much the feeling of England as the tone in which it had been expressed.

He did go abroad, and, as if to show that "Jonathan to John" had left no lasting trace, the University of Oxford conferred on him the degree of D.C.L., and the next year Cambridge gave him the LL.D. As a university man himself and as a man of public reputation, he was naturally much pleased at these distinctions; and England was safe in his good graces again, as he was in hers. The winter of 1872–73, however, he spent in Paris, and the next winter in Italy, though not without visits to London. In the summer of 1874 he came back to America and was heartily glad to find himself at home again. He was never happy, he sometimes thought, away from Elmwood; and, certainly, he was surrounded by a group of friends

there who made life delightful to him. We are apt to imagine that distinguished men must always have other distinguished men for their friends. It is not always so. Distinguished men get to a curiously just estimate of the value of fame, in part, perhaps, by seeing among their friends men of quite as much character or even ability as the most famous of all, who remain entirely out of the eye of the public. Lowell was the intimate friend of Longfellow, Emerson, and Holmes, and saw them often. But quite as near his heart were others; and, if when abroad he felt homesick, as he sometimes did, we may be quite sure that it was not merely the society of Longfellow, Emerson, and Holmes that he missed. Other old friends were especially dear to him (though names and gifts need not be here recorded); and one of the great charms of Cambridge was that there he continued the friendships that had long come of age, and

were indeed now stretching on toward the fortieth and fiftieth year. It should have been said some time before, but that the continuity of other lines would have been broken thereby, that in 1856 Lowell married Miss Frances Dunlap, a lady who had for some years had the care of his daughter Mabel. Thus Elmwood had again become a home, in the fullest sense of the word. Here, too, I ought to commemorate a constant factor in Lowell's life; namely, the famous whist club which gathered once a week for fifty years, with Mr. John Bartlett and Mr. John Holmes as the most regular members.

While abroad, he had rejoiced his heart with the thought of giving up his professorship. He had always liked to think of it as something of a cross: we have seen that he made it the scapegoat for his unpoetical moments. It would be impossible to say, hardly worth while to try to guess, what might have been his

fortune, had he declined the offer made him almost twenty years before. Would he have been more possessed by poetry? We might as well speculate as to what would have resulted, had he tried to write a novel, as Mr. Fields once asked him. He himself always thought, as has been said, that his professorship had stood in the way of his success in poetry. Some years after this he wrote to another author, who had been offered a professorship, "If you are able now, without overworking mind and body, to keep the wolf from the door and to lay by something for a rainy day, . . . I should refuse the offer," said he, and went on, "If you are a systematic worker, independent of moods, and sure of your genius whenever you want it, there might be no risk in accepting." When we think that Lowell was not a very systematic worker, not independent of moods, not sure of his genius whenever he wanted it, and that he was quite

aware of his own character in this direction, we can see what he really thought of the matter. We have seen that Lowell's scholarship was no great aid to his poetry. Still there is room for thinking that the practical man-to-man work of a professor is a good thing for those who wish to understand life.

However he felt, he did not give up his professorship. The zero weather of the winter found him walking to and from the college, where he lectured on Old French and Dante. Nor was he without poetic moments, for here belong the three Centennial Odes.

In the autumn of 1876 he had a new experience: he was chosen one of the electors of the President of the United States. The office is an honorary one, for an elector is supposed to vote as his constituents desire; but the point is one of interest in the life of Lowell. He had, of course, always done his best in public matters. But he began as a writer who

does his work with his pen; and as a writer he had continued, as has been seen. He had never been without what our American phrase calls "activity" in politics. Now, however, came an occasion; namely, a Presidential election. The eight years of General Grant's holding office had not been marked by an exceptionally lofty tone in politics; and Lowell, who was very proud of his country in the best way, had even under Grant's first administration writhed a good deal under much that had gone on, although he believed in Grant himself. But it would seem that his absence from the country had given him a standpoint whence he could see more clearly than he had seen at home. Certainly, he had not been at home very long before he began with his old weapon. Was the time for it gone by? At any rate, he did not content himself with satire; but in the very beginning of the Presidential campaign — or, rather, of the campaign

for the delegates to the Republican Convention — he "appeared in a new capacity, as chairman of a political meeting." He did not feel particularly hopeful; but he said, "If there be any hope, it is in getting independent thinkers to be independent voters."

He wrote to Mr. Leslie Stephen that he feared he had "made an ass of himself." Instead of this he had practically made himself a delegate to Cincinnati, where he was extremely interested in seeing America as he had never seen it before. He did not succeed in nominating the candidate whom he especially favored, but he did help in defeating the candidate whose nomination he felt would have been a national calamity. R. B. Hayes was nominated, and Lowell was named one of the Massachusetts electors. It seems, however, that, although actually on the State ticket, he had had himself some doubt as to whether he would vote for Hayes or Tilden.

The election of 1876 was a contested election, and the result in the college of electors was finally decided by one vote. Mr. George William Curtis, in the eulogy on Lowell pronounced at Brooklyn, says that, "in the multitude of electors, Lowell alone was mentioned as one who might exercise the right" of voting according to his judgment rather than according to instructions. Lowell would not have done so, for he believed that acceptance to the nomination to the electorship was a tacit promise to vote the party ticket. But the incident was regarded as proof of Lowell's independence in politics.

Hayes was elected; and, not long after he had become President, Lowell was asked to represent the United States at one of the courts of Europe. Vienna and Berlin were at first mentioned; but Lowell seems to have had no desire to go to Germany again, and he declined each. He was asked then if he would not go to

Spain, having in some way let it be known that he was not so averse to Madrid. It was an honorable position, and probably he had some thought that he would like the chance of knowing a little better the language of his favorite Calderon. So, like Washington Irving before him, he became minister to Spain; and, with many regrets at leaving Elmwood and the birds, he proceeded in a leisurely manner to Madrid, which he reached the middle of August, 1877. Our diplomatic and consular service is a peculiar thing. It can hardly be said to be governed by any fixed principle; but, among the various principles that more or less affect it, one is that it is well to appoint men of letters now and then. When you consider that men of letters are not generally thought of as eminently practical persons, it seems curious that they should be held especially qualified to manage the affairs of their country in foreign lands. Lowell

was certainly one of the most practical men of letters we have had, for his great distinction had been that he had known how to use letters as a force in public affairs. He was a poet; but he had never secluded himself and fed on bee-food,—at least, never for a long time.

He remained in Spain only two years and a half, and gradually grew to enjoy himself very much, although he had frequent desires to go home. He devoted himself to the study of Spanish,—a spirited proceeding in a man of nearly sixty,—working with a professor two hours a day, translating French into Spanish, and, in fact, working almost as hard as he had worked in Dresden. But his stay was not absolutely to his liking. In 1880 he was fortunately transferred to England.

It was fortunate that Lowell was transferred to England, not only because he had in England a remarkably delightful time, but chiefly because he was

such an excellent representative of his country there. It was not so much what he did as what he was that made him excellent; for his labors were not very arduous, except in the cases of a number of Americans, whose very close relations to Ireland at a time of some delicacy led to complications. It was not, however, what Lowell did, but what he was, that made him so good a representative of his country. It cannot with truth be said that Lowell was a representative American because there were so many Americans just like him. No, he was not a realistic representative of America: he was rather an idealization of America. His qualities were, on the whole, American qualities,— his humor, his common sense, his democratic breadth, his love of nature, his facility of speech. And, without wishing to appropriate to ourselves all the excellent and delightful qualities which made Lowell such a favorite with the best

people in England, we may at least be glad that we had such a man to be even technically our representative.

But Lowell was our representative in other than official ways. He was the one to speak on the dedication of a bust in Westminster Abbey to Longfellow. He spoke at the great memorial meeting held at Exeter Hall on the death of President Garfield. He spoke to the Midland Institute on Democracy. Nor was he merely the proper person to speak on such occasions. He seemed to be as gifted as an occasional orator as he was as a poet or essayist. He spoke also many other times when England was glad to hear what the New England critic had to say on Gray, Coleridge, Pepys. And on a thousand private occasions, also, Lowell did for one or another group of people what he was doing for the people of England as a whole.

When Cleveland was elected Presi-

dent, it became probable that Lowell, according to the common custom, would be recalled on account of difference in politics. He had been appointed by a Republican President; but, as far as politics were concerned, it is very probable that, had he been in America during the Presidential campaign, he would have voted the Democratic ticket. Still, by unhappy fortune, it fell out that he was very glad to be relieved from duty. In the winter of 1884 his wife died; and he came back to America,—glad to be away from England, glad to get home, but without any special care whether he were minister or not.

These years now to come—the last six years of Lowell's life—we are apt to look upon as being, on the whole, melancholy and pathetic. There is some reason for the feeling; for the years began with the lost feeling that is left by the death of one we have loved and depended on, and they ended with the

pain and trouble of recurrent illness. It is to be said, also, that Lowell did not return to the old place which he loved so dearly, nor to the duties which had made up his life, even when he had girded at them. Then the feeling of growing old is always in itself melancholy, and the surviving one's old friends and one's old powers is painful.

But except for these necessities, as we may well enough call them, the last years of Lowell's life were singularly happy. He would not go back to Elmwood; but the Deerfoot Farm, Southboro, where he went to live with his daughter, Mrs. Burnett,— though not exactly a substitute in kind,— was a place where he could enjoy himself outdoors and in much the same ways that had always been his favorites. He came back also to his old friends — to those oldest friends — whom he had loved for so many years, and to those a bit younger who were gradually moving up into the places

which were falling vacant. To the old friends of his study he also came back (if we can say that he ever really left them). To these years belong several studies in literature,—on Donne, an old favorite, on Izaak Walton, on Landor. He settled down for occupations and amusements, much as was natural, considering the necessary changes in circumstance. Nor was there a trace of weakening of his powers. It is true that never again did he rise quite to the height which, some dozen times before, he had for moments touched. But that one hardly expects. He could still write poetry, and could still write prose. He did not entirely give up college work, but for the first years had his class at Harvard on Dante; and he lectured once more before the Lowell Institute, this time upon his old-time favorites,—the Elizabethan Dramatists. He was often called on for occasions: at the Harvard Two Hundred and Fiftieth An-

niversary, at the Centenary of the Ratification of the Constitution. He was, perhaps, less in the eye of the public than he had been before his absence in Spain and England; but he was still an influence in America, both in literature and in politics.

His summers he usually spent in England. Going over in April or May, he would stay in London for the season, and then go to Whitby in the north, a favorite place with him. In London he had many friends of whom he was very fond; but he had also that curious love of the great city itself, the fascination for the busy world of men and (now) of women, which you are very apt to find in intellectual men, especially in those whose occupation is a little out of the practical ordinary run of things. He loved the city when he was in London, and he had the country and the sea when he was at Whitby.

In 1889 he returned to Elmwood, and

not alone; for with him were his daughter and his grandchildren. And here he lived until his death, two years afterward. The great pleasures of the old are unselfish. When a man passes seventy, if not before, he is apt to take his greatest pleasure in the happiness of those about him. We need not think much of Lowell himself during these last years, for he was not over-thoughtful of himself. Reading old books and looking pleasantly on young people, he passed the time easily until the end (Aug. 12, 1891), which, if not happily sudden, was at least preceded by no weakness of the mind or of the spirit.

VIII.

BEFORE Lowell's death he had been felt generally and rightly to be the representative American man of letters of his day. As such he is still regarded, and in all probability time will never take from him the distinction of having been the successor in this respect of Washington Irving. Other reputations may change, but this one is likely to endure; for it is rather historical than critical. It is more a matter of fact than a question of taste.

If we ask what is to be understood by the phrase "the representative man of letters," we may say at once that it does not mean the greatest genius, in the ordinary acceptance of the word. Johnson would probably be taken as the representative man of letters of his time, although he was not such a poet as Goldsmith nor even a man of such pre-eminent genius in so many directions.

Goldsmith wrote not only the best poems, but the best comedies, the best novel, the best essays of his day. Johnson wrote nothing that can be, or rather that is, compared with them. But Johnson, not Goldsmith, is the representative man of letters. In like manner Dryden is the representative man of letters of an earlier day, although his comedies are not so good as those of Congreve nor his tragedies as those of Otway. He is not a greater master of prose than Temple, nor a man of such genius or influence as Bunyan. Still, he was held in his own day, and he still is, the chief figure in the world of letters of his time.

So with Lowell. As a poet, he was surpassed by Longfellow and Poe, to consider the feeling of his own time and of ours. As a scholar, he was not the superior of Whitney or of Marsh. As a writer of prose, he is neither better nor more admired than Hawthorne or Parkman. Nor as an acknowledged influ-

ence among thinking men was he the superior of Emerson in one direction or Beecher in the other. Neither can we say that he reached his eminence through no especial power in some particular direction, but through energy in all. This is never a great advantage in the world of letters, so far as fame is concerned: it is a disadvantage. "Jack-of-all-trades" we say, when a man essays all departments of literature and attains the first place in none.

The pre-eminence of Lowell was quite justly gained: he was pre-eminent in a quality which has not yet been named,—a quality which will account in a measure for eminence in so many lines of literature, even without pre-eminence in any of them. It was the quality that made him a man of letters in a sense almost literal, a man who understood literature, who, on feeling himself called upon to speak, understood thoroughly the instrument he had to use, even

though unable to touch its greatest possibilities in any particular use.

This is not to say that Lowell was a critic, except in a very large sense of the word. He was a critic, it is true; but it was not because he was a critic, as we commonly think of critics, that he is a more representative man than Emerson or Longfellow or Hawthorne. It was because he understood better the place and the possibilities of literature in the life around him. If we call that being a critic (and, in a large sense, we may well do so), Lowell was mainly a critic. That he could not write poetry like Longfellow's, nor novels like those of Hawthorne, nor essays like Emerson's, does not take away this honor from him. Longfellow wrote poems, not because he understood that certain things might be done by means of poetry, but because he liked to do so. Hawthorne wrote novels, not to exploit any purpose or problem, but because he liked to write

novels. Longfellow was popular, Hawthorne at first unpopular; but the one fact does not show the powers and the other does not show the limitations of literature as a force in life. Nor can we say that Emerson thoroughly understood the means of which he availed himself. If he had, he would have been a power long before he was.

Lowell understood that literature was not merely the expression of the artist or the means of communication of the thinker any more than the privilege of a mandarin caste or the respectable necessity of a growing nation. He felt that it was a force in the world and an immense one, and he did his best to use it. Not always purposely and consciously; his own especial desire was to sit in his study or outdoors about the house, and write poetry of lofty aspiration and imaginative insight and whimsical fancy. But, fortunately, he was not able to confine himself to this occupation: he could

not resist the feeling that he had something more to do in the world. This something he could accomplish by no other means than the spoken and written word. Other men work with their hands, or plan work for inferiors, or fight, or sail ships, or make shoes, or conceive foreign policies for the nation. There are unnumbered ways whereby people bring things to pass. With Lowell, literature, too, became an active force, not only accomplishing things itself, but taking also its place in the things accomplished by the nation. So Lowell kept in the current of events, and did what he could. He was willing to use any good means that circumstances put into his hand. At first he wrote poems, then newspaper articles, then poems again where he made his first great hit, then lectures where he made his second hit. Then he did editorial work, and took to political leaders. Then he turned to poetry again, and

then to fresh forms. And by this time he had been at work for a generation; and people knew that here was a man who was one of the leaders of America, one who understood America, and who had a keen eye out ahead for her future, and who used all the talents that had been intrusted to him for her use and special behoof. He thus became, if not ruler over ten cities, at least one of the *de facto* joint-rulers over a greater number of commonwealths.

In other words, Lowell was one of the men who helped to shape the destiny of America; and his means was literature. And this people recognized, on the whole; and, although he could not write poems like Longfellow, and although he had no philosophy like that of Emerson, they regarded him yet as the foremost figure in literature because he had been a worker to such real advantage.

It does not follow from this that every representative man of letters is a man

who uses letters as a practical force. Irving was not, and yet he was quite as representative a man of letters of his own time as Lowell was of his. Irving is the representative of the first generation of American literature, say from 1810--1840; Lowell, of the second, say 1840--1870. The two periods were very different. The one called for culture, the other for action. Irving was a man who saw everything as literature, and this was what was wanted in a nation that was doing little more than settling down and in a manner forming itself. Lowell, on the other hand, did not see everything as literature. He saw literature itself as an impulse to action; and, as action was called for by the time, he made literature his means rather than his end.

In his generation, literature was distinctively a force for action. Not that it was nothing else: it was, as it has often been, on the whole didactic, as in

"Brahma," for instance; it probed the depths of life, as in *The Scarlet Letter;* it was frankly and merely beautiful, as in "Annabel Lee" or "Ulalume"; it was a charming relaxation after the burden and heat of the day, as in *Hiawatha.* Even with Lowell himself, it was all these things to a greater or less degree in "Sir Launfal," "The Cathedral," "A Legend of Brittany," "The Courtin'." But in those years literature was also and especially a national force, so that the historian, who says nothing of "mere literature" as such, will probably take account of *The Biglow Papers, Uncle Tom's Cabin,* "Ichabod," and (I like to think) *The Man without a Country.*

In our own time literature is hardly such a force. What happens under our eyes is hard to see clearly. But it seems, on the whole, as if we had neither Irving's object especially in view, nor Lowell's. We have got perfectly used

to looking at everything as literature, so that any five years' graduate can turn out as good literature as you need right from the topics of the day. Nor is it so particularly necessary to use literature as a means of bringing things to pass. The people who wish to do anything nowadays are using means which, for the time being, are infinitely more powerful. Literature is now serving a wholly different purpose, so far as it is serious: it is serving as an interpreter of the secret of life,—a matter in which we have become much interested. This was a matter in which the preceding generation was not as much concerned as we are, and hence neither the work of Irving nor of Lowell intrinsically can hold the same place for us that it held in their own day. They were particularly and pre-eminently men of letters of their own time.

But we need not feel that because Lowell is a figure of a past generation

that he has nothing to say to us. It is true that directly he has not very much. The man who is more or less influenced by the present currents of thought and feeling has not very much real and direct interest in Lowell's work as literature. A smile or two over *The Biglow Papers*, a thrill over the "Commemoration Ode," half a dozen familiar quotations, a number of good bits of criticism tucked up in capital figures, these are the residuum of a reading of Lowell on the average reader who knows and cares for the life and literature of the present. But — and the "but" is a large one — any one who will appreciate Lowell as he himself used to appreciate his predecessors, will gain from Lowell's collected work, not the supreme æsthetic pleasure that we get only from the art of our own time, the few great geniuses of all time, and the few curious exceptions that each one of us insists on making in the deadening judgment of the years, — not that, but a

consciousness of the vigor and power of the thinking and feeling man as a working element in society. This is a thing that we cannot easily get from any author of our own race and generation, because we have no such man to-day as Lowell. It is something that we cannot get so easily from the work of men of any other nation, for such authors deal always with a civilization that is not our own. Lowell was essentially an American.

An understanding of the power of letters as a factor in the world's work, that is what we get from Lowell. It is something that we cannot get from Emerson or Longfellow or Hawthorne. To the same degree we cannot get it from others who worked along with Lowell, from Mrs. Stowe or Whittier, because no other writer of his time used the power of literature so broadly and so finely as did he. He was the personification of letters in life.

And this feeling is something that we can never do without. Literature is Protean, now one thing and now another. So soon as we begin to think of it as something definite, something fixed, it begins to harden : instead of letters in any broad sense, we have hieratic writing. Lowell himself saw literature differently at different times. But the main tendency of his own activity made literature a force in the world. When we forget that literature is a force in the world, we close our eyes to the facts. Lowell may well stand even in times whose tendencies are different from the tendencies of his own time : he will always awaken, stimulate, and vivify.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

The first books to read, if you wish to know something of Lowell, are his own writings. The "Standard Library Edition" is in eleven volumes, ten revised by himself, the other by Professor Norton. This edition contains all of Lowell's work that he wished to preserve. It omits a number of his early poems, his articles for the *Boston Miscellany*, "Conversations on Some of the Old Poets," the Lowell Lectures of 1855, and a greater number of his periodical contributions.

There is so far no full life of Lowell. There are, however, several books that go far toward enabling us to form our own opinions. The following list of books will amply serve even the most careful reader: —

I. JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL: A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY. By F. H. Underwood. (Boston, 1882: J. R. Osgood &

Co.) Worth reading, although written during Lowell's lifetime, and consequently incomplete as a life-study.

II. POETS OF AMERICA. (Boston, 1885: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.) The essay on Lowell is by Edmund Clarence Stedman, and is a very excellent critical study.

III. LATEST LITERARY AND POLITICAL ADDRESSES OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL. Edited by Professor Charles Eliot Norton. (Boston, 1892: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.)

IV. THE OLD ENGLISH DRAMATISTS. By James Russell Lowell. Edited by Professor Norton. (Boston, 1892: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.)

V. THE POET AND THE MAN: RECOLLECTIONS AND APPRECIATIONS OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL. By F. H. Underwood. (Boston, 1893: Lee & Shepard.) Mr. Underwood was very intimate with Lowell for many years, espe-

cially during those following the founding of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and this appreciation is on that account of great value. The book is, of course, biographically more complete than number one on this list, by the same author, having been written at a much later date, and after the death of Lowell.

VI. JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL: AN ADDRESS. By George William Curtis. (New York, 1893: Harper & Brothers.) Curtis was also an intimate friend of Lowell. This address, though short, is of value, not only from the writer's opportunity to know, but from his clear judgment.

VII. THE LETTERS OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL. Edited by Charles Eliot Norton. Two volumes. (New York, 1894: Harper & Brothers.) After Lowell's published Works, this is the book most necessary to a knowledge of him. It does not give so good an idea of his out-

ward life as it does of his inner life of thought and feeling. Professor Norton, one of Lowell's most intimate friends and his literary associate and executor, has added enough facts to enable one to read it with understanding.

VIII. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE. By Brander Matthews. (New York, 1896: American Book Company.) Contains a clear and valuable estimate of Lowell.

IX. Volume XVI. of the LIBRARY OF THE WORLD'S BEST LITERATURE. Edited by Charles Dudley Warner. (New York, 1897: Magazine Publishing Company.) Contains also a good criticism of Lowell.

X. AMERICAN LITERATURE. By C. F. Richardson. (New York, 1898: G. P. Putnam's Sons.) This contains a short account of Lowell and is a good specimen of work of its class.

XI. AMERICAN BOOKMEN. By M. A. DeWolfe Howe. (New York, 1898: Dodd, Mead & Co.) Gives also a clear, brief critical estimate of the poet, much like number six, but with more illustration by portrait and fac-simile.

XII. JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL AND HIS FRIENDS. By Edward Everett Hale. (Boston, 1899: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.) This is not exactly a life. It is more a series of reminiscences, of memoirs of the time. Dr. Hale was in the class after Lowell at Harvard, but became a close friend of his. His own life in so many places crossed or paralleled that of Lowell, and his connections reach so widely into the field of Lowell's activity, that he has been able to collect an immense amount of most interesting illustration of our subject, besides supplying the standpoint of one at once a contemporary of Lowell and of ourselves.

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