

Classic Poetry Series

James Russell Lowell

- 100 poems -

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James Russell Lowell (22 February 1819 – 12 August 1891)

James Russell Lowell was an American Romantic poet, critic, editor, and diplomat. He is associated with the Fireside Poets, a group of New England writers who were among the first American poets who rivaled the popularity of British poets. These poets usually used conventional forms and meters in their poetry, making them suitable for families entertaining at their fireside.

Lowell graduated from Harvard College in 1838, despite his reputation as a troublemaker, and went on to earn a law degree from Harvard Law School. He published his first collection of poetry in 1841 and married Maria White in 1844. He and his wife had several children, though only one survived past childhood. The couple soon became involved in the movement to abolish slavery, with Lowell using poetry to express his anti-slavery views and taking a job in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania as the editor of an abolitionist newspaper. After moving back to Cambridge, Lowell was one of the founders of a journal called *The Pioneer*, which lasted only three issues. He gained notoriety in 1848 with the publication of *A Fable for Critics*, a book-length poem satirizing contemporary critics and poets. The same year, he published *The Biglow Papers*, which increased his fame. He would publish several other poetry collections and essay collections throughout his literary career.

Maria White died in 1853, and Lowell accepted a professorship of languages at Harvard in 1854. He traveled to Europe before officially assuming his role in 1856; he continued to teach there for twenty years. He married his second wife, Frances Dunlap, shortly thereafter in 1857. That year Lowell also became editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. It was not until 20 years later that Lowell received his first political appointment: the ambassadorship to Spain and, later, to England. He spent his last years in Cambridge, in the same estate where he was born, where he also died in 1891.

Lowell believed that the poet played an important role as a prophet and critic of society. He used poetry for reform, particularly in abolitionism. However, Lowell's commitment to the anti-slavery cause wavered over the years, as did his opinion on African-Americans. Lowell attempted to emulate the true Yankee accent in the dialogue of his characters, particularly in *The Biglow Papers*. This depiction of the dialect, as well as Lowell's many satires, were an inspiration to writers like Mark Twain and H. L. Mencken.

Biography

Early Life

The first of the Lowell family ancestors to come to the United States from Britain was Percival Lowle, who settled in Newbury, Massachusetts in 1639.

James Russell Lowell was born February 22, 1819, the son of the Reverend Charles Russell Lowell, Sr. (1782–1861), a minister at a Unitarian church in Boston who had previously studied theology at Edinburgh, and Harriett Brackett Spence Lowell. By the time James Russell Lowell was born, the family owned a large estate in Cambridge called Elmwood. He was the youngest of six children; his older siblings were Charles, Rebecca, Mary, William, and Robert. Lowell's mother built in him an appreciation for literature at an early age, especially in poetry, ballads, and tales from her native Orkney. He attended school under Sophia Dana, who would later marry George Ripley, and, later, studied at a school run by a particularly harsh disciplinarian, where one of his classmates was Richard Henry Dana, Jr.

Beginning in 1834, at the age of 15, Lowell attended Harvard College, though he was not a good student and often got into trouble. In his sophomore year alone, he was absent from required chapel attendance 14 times and from classes 56 times. In his last year there, he wrote, "During Freshman year, I did nothing, during Sophomore year I did nothing, during Junior year I did nothing, and during Senior year I have thus far done nothing in the way of college studies". In his senior year, he became one of the editors of *Harvardiana* literary magazine, to which he contributed prose and poetry that he admitted was of low quality. As he said later, "I was as great an ass as ever brayed & thought it singing". Lowell was elected the poet of the class of 1838 and, as was tradition, was asked to recite an original poem on Class Day, the day before Commencement, on July 17, 1838. Lowell, however, was suspended and not allowed to participate. Instead, his poem was printed and made available thanks to subscriptions paid by his classmates.

Not knowing what vocation to choose after graduating, he vacillated among business, the ministry, medicine and law. Having decided to practice law, he enrolled at the Harvard Law School in 1840 and was admitted to the bar two years later. While studying law, however, he contributed poems and prose articles to various magazines. During this time, Lowell was admittedly depressed and often had suicidal thoughts. He once confided to a friend that he held a cocked pistol to his forehead and considered killing himself at the age of 20.

Marriage and Family

In late 1839, Lowell met Maria White through her brother William, a classmate of his at Harvard. The two became engaged in the autumn of 1840; her father Abijah White, a wealthy merchant from Watertown, insisted that their wedding be postponed until Lowell had gainful employment. They were finally married on December 26, 1844, shortly after the groom published *Conversations on the Old Poets*, a collection of his previously published essays. A friend described their relationship as "the very picture of a True Marriage"; Lowell himself believed she was made up "half of earth and more than of Heaven". Like Lowell, she wrote poetry and the next twelve years of Lowell's life were deeply affected by her influence. He said his first book of poetry, *A Year's Life* (1841), "owes all its beauty to her", though it only sold 300 copies. Her character and beliefs led her to become involved in the movements directed against intemperance and slavery. White was a member of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society and persuaded Lowell to become an abolitionist. Lowell had previously expressed anti-slavery sentiments but White urged him towards more active expression and involvement. His second volume of poems, *Miscellaneous Poems*, expressed these anti-slavery thoughts and its 1,500 copies sold well.

Maria was in poor health and, thinking her lungs could heal there, the couple moved to Philadelphia shortly after their marriage. In Philadelphia, he became a contributing editor for the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, an abolitionist newspaper. In the spring of 1845, the Lowells returned to Cambridge, Massachusetts to make their home at Elmwood. They had four children, though only one (Mabel, born 1847) survived past infancy. Their first, Blanche, was born December 31, 1845, but lived only fifteen months; Rose, born in 1849, survived only a few months as well; their only son, Walter, was born in 1850 but died in 1852. Lowell was very affected by the loss of

almost all of his children. His grief over the death of his first daughter in particular was expressed in his poem "The First Snowfall" (1847) Again, Lowell considered suicide, writing to a friend that he thought "of my razors and my throat and that I am a fool and a coward not to end it all at once".

Literary career

Lowell's earliest poems were published without pay in the Southern Literary Messenger in 1840. Lowell was inspired to new efforts towards self-support and joined with his friend Robert Carter in founding a literary journal, The Pioneer. The periodical was characterized by most of its content being new rather than previously published elsewhere and by having very serious criticism which covered not only literature but also art and music. Lowell wrote that it would "furnish the intelligent and reflecting portion of the Reading Public with a rational substitute for the enormous quantity of thrice-diluted trash, in the shape of namby-pamby love tales and sketches, which is monthly poured out to them by many of our popular Magazines". William Wetmore Story noted the journal's higher taste, writing that, "it took some stand & appealed to a higher intellectual Standard than our puerile milk o watery namby-pamby Mags with which we are overrun". The first issue of the journal included the first appearance of "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe. Lowell, shortly after the first issue, was treated for an eye disease in New York and, in his absence, Carter did a poor job managing the journal. After three monthly numbers, beginning in January 1843, the magazine ceased publication, leaving Lowell \$1,800 in debt. Poe mourned the journal's demise, calling it "a most severe blow to the cause—the cause of a Pure Taste".

Despite the failure of The Pioneer, Lowell continued his interest in the literary world. He wrote a series on "Anti-Slavery in the United States" for the London Daily News, though it was discontinued by the editors after four articles in May 1846. Lowell had published these articles anonymously, believing they would have more impact if they were not known to be the work of a committed abolitionist. In the spring of 1848 he formed a connection with the National Anti-Slavery Standard of New York, agreeing to contribute weekly either a poem or a prose article. After only one year, he was asked to contribute half as often to the Standard to make room for contributions from another writer and reformer named Edmund Quincy.

A Fable for Critics, one of Lowell's most popular works, was published in 1848. A satire, it was published anonymously; in it, Lowell took good-natured jabs at his contemporary poets and critics. It proved popular, and the first three thousand copies sold out quickly. Not all the subjects included were pleased, however. Edgar Allan Poe, who had been referred to as part genius and "two-fifths sheer fudge", reviewed the work in the Southern Literary Messenger and called it "'loose'—ill-conceived and feebly executed, as well in detail as in general... we confess some surprise at his putting forth so unpolished a performance". Lowell offered the profits from the book's success, which proved relatively small, to his New York friend Charles Frederick Briggs, despite his own financial needs.

In 1848, Lowell also published The Biglow Papers, later named by the Grolier Club as the most influential book of 1848. The first 1,500 copies sold out within a week and a second edition was soon issued, though Lowell made no profit having had to absorb the cost of stereotyping the book himself. The book presented three main characters, each representing different aspects of American life and using authentic American dialects in their dialogue. Under the surface, The Biglow Papers was also a denunciation of the Mexican-American War and war in general.

<b.First Trip to Europe

In 1850, Lowell's mother died unexpectedly, as did his third daughter, Rose. Her death left Lowell depressed and reclusive for six months, despite the birth of his son Walter by the end of the year. He wrote to a friend that death "is a private tutor. We have no fellow-scholars, and must lay our lessons to heart alone". These personal troubles as well as the Compromise of 1850

inspired Lowell to accept an offer from William Wetmore Story to spend a winter in Italy. To pay for the trip, Lowell sold land around Elmwood, intending to sell off further acres of the estate over time to supplement his income, ultimately selling off 25 of the original 30 acres (120,000 m²). Walter died suddenly in Rome of cholera, and Lowell and his wife, with their daughter Mabel, returned to the United States in October 1852. Lowell published recollections of his journey in several magazines, many of which would be collected years later as *Fireside Travels* (1867). He also edited volumes with biographical sketches for a series on British Poets.

His wife Maria, who had been suffering from poor health for many years, became very ill in the spring of 1853 and died on October 27 of tuberculosis. Just before her burial, her coffin was opened so that her daughter Mabel could see her face while Lowell "leaned for a long while against a tree weeping", according to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his wife, who were in attendance. In 1855, Lowell oversaw the publication of a memorial volume of his wife's poetry, with only fifty copies for private circulation. Despite his self-described "naturally joyous" nature, life for Lowell at Elmwood was further complicated by his father becoming deaf in his old age, and the deteriorating mental state of his sister Rebecca, who sometimes went a week without speaking. He again cut himself off from others, becoming reclusive at Elmwood, and his private diaries from this time period are riddled with the initials of his wife. On March 10, 1854, for example, he wrote: "Dark without & within. M.L. M.L. M.L." Longfellow, a friend and neighbor, referred to Lowell as "lonely and desolate".

Professorship and Second Marriage

At the invitation of his cousin John Amory Lowell, James Russell Lowell was asked to deliver a lecture at the prestigious Lowell Institute. Some speculated the opportunity was because of the family connection, offered as an attempt to bring him out of his depression. Lowell chose to speak on "The English Poets", telling his friend Briggs that he would take revenge on dead poets "for the injuries received by one whom the public won't allow among the living". The first of the twelve-part lecture series was to be on January 9, 1855, though by December, Lowell had only completed writing five of them, hoping for last-minute inspiration. His first lecture was on John Milton and the auditorium was oversold; Lowell had to give a repeat performance the next afternoon. Lowell, who had never spoken in public before, was praised for these lectures. Francis James Child said that Lowell, who he deemed was typically "perverse", was able to "persist in being serious contrary to his impulses and his talents". While his series was still in progress, Lowell was offered the Smith Professorship of Modern Languages at Harvard, a post vacated by Longfellow, at an annual salary of \$1,200, though he never applied for it. The job description was changing after Longfellow; instead of teaching languages directly, Lowell would supervise the department and deliver two lecture courses per year on topics of his own choosing. Lowell accepted the appointment, with the proviso that he should have a year of study abroad. He set sail on June 4 of that year, leaving his daughter Mabel in the care of a governess named Frances Dunlap. Abroad, he visited Le Havre, Paris, and London, spending time with friends including Story, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Leigh Hunt. Primarily, however, Lowell spent his time abroad studying languages, particularly German, which he found difficult. He complained: "The confounding genders! If I die I shall have engraved on my tombstone that I died of der, die, das, not because I caught them but because I couldn't."

He returned to the United States in the summer of 1856 and began his college duties. Towards the end of his professorship, then-president of Harvard Charles William Eliot noted that Lowell seemed to have "no natural inclination" to teach; Lowell agreed, but retained his position for twenty years. He focused on teaching literature, rather than etymology, hoping that his students would learn to enjoy the sound, rhythm, and flow of poetry rather than the technique of words. He summed up his method: "True scholarship consists in knowing not what things exist, but what they mean; it is not memory but judgment". Still grieving the loss of his wife, during this time Lowell avoided Elmwood and instead lived on Kirkland Street in

Cambridge, an area known as Professors' Row. He stayed there, along with his daughter Mabel and her governess Frances Dunlap, until January 1861.

Lowell had intended never to remarry after the death of his wife Maria White. However, in 1857, surprising his friends, he became engaged to Frances Dunlap, who many described as simple and unattractive. Dunlap, daughter of the former governor of Maine Robert P. Dunlap, was a friend of Lowell's first wife and formerly wealthy, though she and her family had fallen into reduced circumstances. Lowell and Dunlap married on September 16, 1857, in a ceremony performed by his brother. Lowell wrote, "My second marriage was the wisest act of my life, & as long as I am sure of it, I can afford to wait till my friends agree with me".

The War Years and Beyond

In the autumn of 1857, *The Atlantic Monthly* was established, and Lowell was its first editor. With its first issue in November of that year, he at once gave the magazine the stamp of high literature and of bold speech on public affairs. In January 1861, Lowell's father died of a heart attack, inspiring Lowell to move his family back to Elmwood. As he wrote to his friend Briggs, "I am back again to the place I love best. I am sitting in my old garret, at my old desk, smoking my old pipe... I begin to feel more like my old self than I have these ten years". Shortly thereafter, in May, he left *The Atlantic Monthly* when James Thomas Fields took over as editor; the magazine had been purchased by Ticknor and Fields for \$10,000 two years before. Lowell returned to Elmwood by January 1861 but maintained an amicable relationship with the new owners of the journal, continuing to submit his poetry and prose for the rest of his life. His prose, however, was more abundantly presented in the pages of the *North American Review* during the years 1862–1872. For the *Review*, he served as a coeditor along with Charles Eliot Norton. Lowell's reviews for the journal covered a wide variety of literary releases of the day, though he was writing fewer poems.

As early as 1845, Lowell had predicted the debate over slavery would lead to war and, as the American Civil War broke out in the 1860s, Lowell used his role at the *Review* to praise Abraham Lincoln and his attempts to maintain the Union. Lowell lost three nephews during the war, including Charles Russell Lowell, Jr, who became a Brigadier General and fell at the battle of Cedar Creek. Lowell himself was generally a pacifist. Even so, he wrote, "If the destruction of slavery is to be a consequence of the war, shall we regret it? If it be needful to the successful prosecution of the war, shall anyone oppose it?" His interest in the Civil War inspired him to write a second series of *The Biglow Papers*, including one specifically dedicated to the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation called "Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line" in 1862.

Shortly after Lincoln's assassination, Lowell was asked to present a poem at Harvard in memory of graduates killed in the war. His poem, "Commemoration Ode", cost him sleep and his appetite, but was delivered on July 21, 1865, after a 48-hour writing binge. Lowell had high hopes for his performance but was overshadowed by the other notables presenting works that day, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. "I did not make the hit I expected", he wrote, "and am ashamed at having been tempted again to think I could write poetry, a delusion from which I have been tolerably free these dozen years". Despite his personal assessment, friends and other poets sent many letters to Lowell congratulating him. Emerson referred to his poem's "high thought & sentiment" and James Freeman Clarke noted its "grandeur of tone". Lowell later expanded it with a strophe to Lincoln.

In the 1860s, Lowell's friend Longfellow spent several years translating Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* and regularly invited others to help him on Wednesday evenings. Lowell was one of the main members of the so-called "Dante Club", along with William Dean Howells, Charles Eliot Norton and other occasional guests. Shortly after serving as a pallbearer at the funeral of friend and publisher Nathaniel Parker Willis, on January 24, 1867, Lowell decided to produce another collection of his poetry. Under the *Willows and Other Poems* was released in 1869, though Lowell originally wanted to title it

The Voyage to the Vinland and Other Poems. The book, dedicated to Norton, collected poems Lowell had written within the previous twenty years and was his first poetry collection since 1848.

Lowell intended to take another trip to Europe. To finance it, he sold off more of Elmwood's acres and rented the house to Thomas Bailey Aldrich; Lowell's daughter Mabel, by this time, had moved into a new home with her husband Edward Burnett, the son of a successful businessman-farmer from Southboro, Massachusetts. Lowell and his wife set sail on July 8, 1872, after he took a leave of absence from Harvard. They visited England, Paris, Switzerland, and Italy. While overseas, he received an honorary Doctorate of Law from the University of Oxford and another from Cambridge University. They returned to the United States in the summer of 1874.

Political Appointments

Lowell resigned from his Harvard professorship in 1874, though he was persuaded to continue teaching through 1877. It was in 1876 that Lowell first stepped into the field of politics. That year, he served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, speaking on behalf of presidential candidate Rutherford B. Hayes. Hayes won the nomination and, eventually, the presidency. In May 1877, President Hayes, an admirer of The Biglow Papers, sent William Dean Howells to Lowell with a handwritten note proffering an ambassadorship to either Austria or Russia; Lowell declined, but noted his interest in Spanish literature. Lowell was then offered and accepted the role of Minister to the court of Spain at an annual salary of \$12,000. Lowell sailed from Boston on July 14, 1877, and, though he expected he would be away for a year or two, he would not return to the United States until 1885, with the violinist Ole Bull renting Elmwood for a portion of that time. The Spanish media referred to him as "José Bighlow". Lowell was well-prepared for his political role, having been trained in law, as well as being able to read in multiple languages. He had trouble socializing while in Spain, however, and amused himself by sending humorous dispatches to his political bosses in the United States, many of which were later collected and published posthumously in 1899 as Impressions of Spain. Lowell's social life improved when the Spanish Academy elected him a corresponding member in late 1878, allowing him contribute to the preparation of a new dictionary.

In January 1880, Lowell was informed he was appointed Minister to England, his nomination made without his knowledge as far back as June 1879. He was granted a salary of \$17,500 with about \$3,500 for expenses. While serving in this capacity, he addressed an importation of allegedly diseased cattle and made recommendations that predated the Pure Food and Drug Act. Queen Victoria commented that she had never seen an ambassador who "created so much interest and won so much regard as Mr. Lowell". Lowell held this role until the close of Chester A. Arthur's presidency in the spring of 1885, despite his wife's failing health. Lowell was already well known in England for his writing and, during his time there, he befriended fellow author Henry James, who referred to him as "conspicuously American". Lowell also befriended Leslie Stephen during this time and became the godfather to his daughter, future writer Virginia Woolf. Lowell was popular enough that he was offered a professorship at Oxford after his recall by president Grover Cleveland, though the offer was declined. His second wife, Frances, died on February 19, 1885, while still in England.

Later Years and Death

He returned to the United States by June 1885, living with his daughter and her husband in Southboro, Massachusetts. He then spent time in Boston with his sister before returning to Elmwood in November 1889. By this time, most of his friends were dead, including Quincy, Longfellow, Dana, and Emerson, leaving him depressed and contemplating suicide again. Lowell spent part of the 1880s delivering various speeches, and his last published works were mostly collections of essays, including Political Essays, and a collection of his poems Heartsease and Rue in 1888. His last few years he traveled back to England periodically and when he returned to the United

States in the fall of 1889, he moved back to Elmwood] with Mabel, while her husband worked for clients in New York and New Jersey. That year, Lowell gave an address at the centenary of George Washington's inauguration. Also that year, the Boston Critic dedicated a special issue to Lowell on his seventieth birthday to recollections and reminiscences by his friends, including former presidents Hayes and Benjamin Harrison and British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone as well as Alfred Tennyson and Francis Parkman.

In the last few months of his life, Lowell struggled with gout, sciatica in his left leg, and chronic nausea; by the summer of 1891, doctors believed that Lowell had cancer in his kidneys, liver, and lungs. His last few months, he was administered opium for the pain and was rarely fully conscious. He died on August 12, 1891, at Elmwood. After services in the Appleton Chapel, he was buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery. After his death, Norton served as his literary executor and published several collections of Lowell's works and his letters.

Writing Style and Literary Theory

Early in his career, James Russell Lowell's writing was influenced by Swedenborgianism, a Spiritualism-infused form of Christianity founded by Emanuel Swedenborg, causing Frances Longfellow (wife of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow) to mention that "he has been long in the habit of seeing spirits". He composed his poetry rapidly when inspired by an "inner light" but could not write to order. He subscribed to the common nineteenth-century belief that the poet was a prophet but went further, linking religion, nature, and poetry, as well as social reform. Evert Augustus Duyckinck and others welcomed Lowell as part of Young America, a New York-based movement. Though not officially affiliated with them, he shared some of their ideals, including the belief that writers have an inherent insight into the moral nature of humanity and have an obligation for literary action along with their aesthetic function. Unlike many of his contemporaries, including members of Young America, Lowell did not advocate for the creation of a new national literature. Instead, he called for a natural literature, regardless of country, caste, or race, and warned against provincialism which might "put farther off the hope of one great brotherhood". He agreed with his neighbor Longfellow that "whoever is most universal, is also most national". As Lowell said:

I believe that no poet in this age can write much that is good unless he gives himself up to [the radical] tendency ... The proof of poetry is, in my mind, that it reduces to the essence of a single line the vague philosophy which is floating in all men's minds, and so render it portable and useful, and ready to the hand ... At least, no poem ever makes me respect its author which does not in some way convey a truth of philosophy.

A scholar of linguistics, Lowell was one of the founders of the American Dialect Society. He used this interest in his writing, particularly in *The Biglow Papers*, presenting a heavily ungrammatical phonetic spelling of the Yankee dialect. In using this vernacular, Lowell intended to get closer to the common man's experience and was rebelling against more formal and, as he thought, unnatural representations of Americans in literature. As he wrote in his introduction to *The Biglow Papers*, "few American writers or speakers wield their native language with the directness, precision, and force that are common as the day in the mother country". Though intentionally humorous, this accurate presentation of the dialect was pioneering work in American literature. For example, Lowell's character Hosea Biglow says in verse:

Ef you take a sword an' dror it,
An go stick a feller thru,
Guv'ment aint to answer to it,
God'll send the bill to you.

Lowell is considered one of the Fireside Poets, a group of writers from New England in the 1840s who all had a substantial national following and whose work was often read aloud by the family fireplace. Besides Lowell, the main

figures from this group were Longfellow, Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier, and William Cullen Bryant.

Beliefs

Although he was an abolitionist, Lowell's opinions on African-Americans wavered. Though Lowell advocated suffrage for blacks, he noted that their ability to vote could be troublesome. Even so, he wrote, "We believe the white race, by their intellectual and traditional superiority, will retain sufficient ascendancy to prevent any serious mischief from the new order of things". Freed slaves, he wrote, were "dirty, lazy & lying". Even before his marriage to the abolitionist Maria White, Lowell wrote: "The abolitionists are the only ones with whom I sympathize of the present extant parties." After his marriage, Lowell at first did not share White's enthusiasm for the cause but was eventually pulled in. The couple often gave money to fugitive slaves, even when their own financial situation was not strong, especially if they were asked to free a spouse or child. Even so, he did not always fully agree with the followers of the movement. The majority of these people, he said, "treat ideas as ignorant persons do cherries. They think them unwholesome unless they are swallowed, stones and all." Lowell depicted Southerners very unfavorably in his second collection of *The Biglow Papers* but, by 1865, admitted that Southerners were "guilty only of weakness" and, by 1868, said that he sympathized with Southerners and their viewpoint on slavery. Enemies and friends of Lowell alike questioned his vacillating interest in the question of slavery. Abolitionist Samuel Joseph May accused Lowell of trying to quit the movement because of his association with Harvard and the Boston Brahmin culture: "Having got into the smooth, dignified, self-complacent, and change-hating society of the college and its Boston circles, Lowell has gone over to the world, and to 'respectability'."

Lowell was also involved in other reform movements. He urged for better conditions for factory workings, opposed capital punishment, and supported the temperance movement. His friend Longfellow was especially concerned about his fanaticism for temperance, worrying that Lowell would ask him to destroy his wine cellar. There are many references to Lowell's drinking during his college years and part of his reputation in school was based on it. His friend Edward Everett Hale denied these allegations and, even then, Lowell considered joining the "Anti-Wine" club and later became a teetotaler during the early years of his first marriage. However, as Lowell gained notoriety, he also was popular in social circles and clubs and, away from his wife, he would drink rather heavily. When he drank, he had wild mood swings, ranging from euphoria to frenzy.

Criticism and Legacy

In 1849, Lowell said of himself, "I am the first poet who has endeavored to express the American Idea, and I shall be popular by and by". Poet Walt Whitman said: "Lowell was not a grower—he was a builder. He built poems: he didn't put in the seed, and water the seed, and send down his sun—letting the rest take care of itself: he measured his poems—kept them within formula." Fellow Fireside Poet John Greenleaf Whittier praised Lowell by writing two poems in his honor and calling him "our new Theocritus" and "one of the strongest and manliest of our writers—a republican poet who dares to speak brave words of unpopular truth". British author Thomas Hughes referred to Lowell as one of the most important writers in the United States: "Greece had her Aristophanes; Rome her Juvenal; Spain has had her Cervantes; France her Rabelais, her Molière, her Voltaire; Germany her Jean Paul, her Heine; England her Swift, her Thackeray; and America has her Lowell." Lowell's satires and use of dialect were an inspiration for writers like Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, H. L. Mencken, and Ring Lardner.

Contemporary critic and editor Margaret Fuller wrote, "his verse is stereotyped; his thought sounds no depth, and posterity will not remember him". Duyckinck thought Lowell was too similar to other poets like William Shakespeare and John Milton. Ralph Waldo Emerson noted that, though Lowell had significant technical skill, his poetry "rather expresses his wish, his ambition, than the uncontrollable interior impulse which is the authentic mark of a new poem... and which is felt in the pervading tone, rather than in brilliant parts or lines". Even his friend Richard Henry Dana, Jr. questioned Lowell's abilities, calling him "very clever, entertaining & good humored... but he is rather a trifler, after all." In the twentieth century, poet Richard Armour dismissed Lowell, writing: "As a Harvard graduate and an editor for the Atlantic Monthly, it must have been difficult for Lowell to write like an illiterate oaf, but he succeeded." The poet Amy Lowell featured her relative James Russell Lowell in her poem A Critical Fable (1922), the title mocking A Fable for Critics. Here, a fictional version of Lowell says he does not believe that women will ever be equal to men in the arts and "the two sexes cannot be ranked counterparts". Modern literary critic Van Wyck Brooks wrote that Lowell's poetry was forgettable: "one read them five times over and still forgot them, as if this excellent verse had been written in water". Nonetheless, in 1969 the Modern Language Association established a prize named after Lowell, awarded annually for "an outstanding literary or linguistic study, a critical edition of an important work, or a critical biography".

Lowell's poem "The Present Crisis", an early work that addressed the national crisis over slavery leading up to the Civil War, has had an impact in the modern civil rights movement. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People named its newsletter The Crisis after the poem, and Martin Luther King, Jr. frequently quoted the poem in his speeches and sermons. The poem was also the source of the hymn Once to Every Man and Nation.

Works:

Poetry collections

A Year's Life (1841)
Miscellaneous Poems (1843)
The Biglow Papers (1848)
A Fable for Critics (1848)
Poems (1848)
The Vision of Sir Launfal (1848)
Under the Willows (1869)
The Cathedral (1870)
Heartsease and Rue (1888)

Essay Collections

Conversations on the Old Poets (1844)
Fireside Travels (1864)
Among My Books (1870)
My Study Windows (1871)
Among My Books (second collection, 1876)
Democracy and Other Addresses (1886)
Political Essays (1888)

A Chippewa Legend

The old Chief, feeling now wellnigh his end,
Called his two eldest children to his side,
And gave them, in few words, his parting charge!
'My son and daughter, me ye see no more;
The happy hunting-grounds await me, green
With change of spring and summer through the year:
But, for remembrance, after I am gone,
Be kind to little Sheemah for my sake:
Weakling he is and young, and knows not yet
To set the trap, or draw the seasoned bow;
Therefore of both your loves he hath more need,
And he, who needeth love, to love hath right;
It is not like our furs and stores of corn,
Whereto we claim sole title by our toil,
But the Great Spirit plants it in our hearts,
And waters it, and gives it sun, to be
The common stock and heritage of all:
Therefore be kind to Sheemah, that yourselves
May not be left deserted in your need.'

Alone, beside a lake, their wigwam stood,
Far from the other dwellings of their tribe:
And, after many moons, the loneliness
Wearied the elder brother, and he said,
'Why should I dwell here far from men, shut out
From the free, natural joys that fit my age?
Lo, I am tall and strong, well skilled to hunt,
Patient of toil and hunger, and not yet
Have seen the danger which I dared not look
Full in the face; what hinders me to be
A mighty Brave and Chief among my kin?'
So, taking up his arrows and his bow,
As if to hunt, he journeyed swiftly on,
Until he gained the wigwams of his tribe,
Where, choosing out a bride, he soon forgot,
In all the fret and bustle of new life,
The little Sheemah and his father's charge.

Now when the sister found her brother gone,
And that, for many days, he came not back,
She wept for Sheemah more than for herself;
For Love bides longest in a woman's heart,
And flutters many times before he flies,
And then doth perch so nearly, that a word
May lure him back to his accustomed nest;
And Duty lingers even when Love is gone,
Oft looking out in hope of his return;
And, after Duty hath been driven forth,
Then Selfishness creeps in the last of all,
Warming her lean hands at the lonely hearth,
And crouching o'er the embers, to shut out
Whatever paltry warmth and light are left,

With avaricious greed, from all beside.
So, for long months, the sister hunted wide,
And cared for little Sheemah tenderly;
But, daily more and more, the loneliness
Grew wearisome, and to herself she sighed,
'Am I not fair? at least the glassy pool,
That hath no cause to flatter, tells me so;
But, oh, how flat and meaningless the tale,
Unless it tremble on a lover's tongue!
Beauty hath no true glass, except it be
In the sweet privacy of loving eyes.'
Thus deemed she idly, and forgot the lore
Which she had learned of nature and the woods,
That beauty's chief reward is to itself,
And that Love's mirror holds no image long
Save of the inward fairness, blurred and lost
Unless kept clear and white by Duty's care.
So she went forth and sought the haunts of men,
And, being wedded, in her household cares,
Soon, like the elder brother, quite forgot
The little Sheemah and her father's charge.

But Sheemah, left alone within the lodge,
Waited and waited, with a shrinking heart,
Thinking each rustle was his sister's step,
Till hope grew less and less, and then went out,
And every sound was changed from hope to fear.
Few sounds there were:-the dropping of a nut,
The squirrel's chirrup, and the jay's harsh scream,
Autumn's sad remnants of blithe Summer's cheer,
Heard at long intervals, seemed but to make
The dreadful void of silence silenter.
Soon what small store his sister left was gone,
And, through the Autumn, he made shift to live
On roots and berries, gathered in much fear
Of wolves, whose ghastly howl he heard ofttimes,
Hollow and hungry, at the dead of night.
But Winter came at last, and, when the snow,
Thick-heaped for gleaming leagues o'er hill and plain,
Spread its unbroken silence over all,
Made bold by hunger, he was fain to glean
(More sick at heart than Ruth, and all alone)
After the harvest of the merciless wolf,
Grim Boaz, who, sharp-ribbed and gaunt, yet feared
A thing more wild and starving than himself;
Till, by degrees, the wolf and he grew friends,
And shared together all the winter through.

Late in the Spring, when all the ice was gone,
The elder brother, fishing in the lake,
Upon whose edge his father's wigwam stood,
Heard a low moaning noise upon the shore:

Half like a child it seemed, half like a wolf,
And straightway there was something in his heart
That said, 'It is thy brother Sheemah's voice.'
So, paddling swiftly to the bank, he saw,
Within a little thicket close at hand,
A child that seemed fast clinging to a wolf,
From the neck downward, gray with shaggy hair,
That still crept on and upward as he looked.
The face was turned away, but well he knew
That it was Sheemah's, even his brother's face.
Then with his trembling hands he hid his eyes,
And bowed his head, so that he might not see
The first look of his brother's eyes, and cried,
'O Sheemah! O my brother, speak to me!
Dost thou not know me, that I am thy brother?
Come to me, little Sheemah, thou shall dwell
With me henceforth, and know no care or want!'
Sheemah was silent for a space, as if
'T were hard to summon up a human voice,
And, when he spake, the voice was as a wolf's:
'I know thee not, nor art thou what thou say'st;
I have none other brethren than the wolves,
And, till thy heart be changed from what it is,
Thou art not worthy to be called their kin.'
Then groaned the other, with a choking tongue,
'Alas! my heart is changed right bitterly;
'Tis shrunk and parched within me even now!'
And, looking upward fearfully, he saw
Only a wolf that shrank away, and ran,
Ugly and fierce, to hide among the woods.

James Russell Lowell

A Christmas Carol

FOR THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH OF THE DISCIPLES

'What means this glory round our feet,'
The Magi mused, 'more bright than morn?'
And voices chanted clear and sweet,
'To-day the Prince of Peace is born!'

'What means that star,' the Shepherds said,
'That brightens through the rocky glen?'
And angels, answering overhead,
Sang, 'Peace on earth, good-will to men!'

'Tis eighteen hundred years and more
Since those sweet oracles were dumb;
We wait for Him, like them of yore;
Alas, He seems so slow to come!

But it was said, in words of gold
No time or sorrow e'er shall dim,
That little children might be bold
In perfect trust to come to Him.

All round about our feet shall shine
A light like that the wise men saw,
If we our loving wills incline
To that sweet Life which is the Law.

So shall we learn to understand
The simple faith of shepherds then,
And, clasping kindly hand in hand,
Sing, 'Peace on earth, good-will to men!'

And they who do their souls no wrong,
But keep at eve the faith of morn,
Shall daily hear the angel-song,
'To-day the Prince of Peace is born!'

James Russell Lowell

A Contrast

Thy love thou sendest oft to me,
And still as oft I thrust it back;
Thy messengers I could not see
In those who everything did lack,
The poor, the outcast and the black.

Pride held his hand before mine eyes,
The world with flattery stuffed mine ears;
I looked to see a monarch's guise,
Nor dreamed thy love would knock for years,
Poor, naked, fettered, full of tears.

Yet, when I sent my love to thee,
Thou with a smile didst take it in,
And entertain'dst it royally,
Though grimed with earth, with hunger thin,
And leprous with the taint of sin.

Now every day thy love I meet,
As o'er the earth it wanders wide,
With weary step and bleeding feet,
Still knocking at the heart of pride
And offering grace, though still denied.

James Russell Lowell

A Fable

Two fellers, Isrel named and Joe,
One Sundy mornin' 'greed to go
Agunnin' soon 'z the bells wuz done
And meetin' finally begun,
So'st no one wouldn't be about
Ther Sabbath-breakin' to spy out.

Joe didn't want to go a mite;
He felt ez though 'twarn't skeercely right,
But, when his doubts he went to speak on,
Isrel he up and called him Deacon,
An' kep' apokin' fun like sin
An' then arubbin' on it in,
Till Joe, less skeered o' doin' wrong
Than bein' laughed at, went along.

Past noontime they went trampin' round
An' nary thing to pop at found,
Till, fairly tired o' their spree,
They leaned their guns agin a tree,
An' jest ez they wuz settin' down
To take their noonin', Joe looked roun'
And see (acrost lots in a pond
That warn't mor'n twenty rod beyond)
A goose that on the water sot
Ez ef awaitin' to be shot.

Isrel he ups and grabs his gun;
Sez he, 'By ginger, here's some fun!'
'Don't fire,' sez Joe, 'it ain't no use,
Thet's Deacon Peleg's tame wil'-goose:'
Sez Isrel, 'I don't care a cent.
I've sighted an' I'll let her went;'
Bang! went queen's-arm, ole gander flopped
His wings a spell, an' quorked, an' dropped.

Sez Joe, 'I wouldn't ha' been hired
At that poor critter to ha' fired,
But since it's clean gin up the ghost,
We'll hev the tallest kind o' roast;
I guess our waistbands'll be tight
'Fore it comes ten o'clock ternight.'

'I won't agree to no such bender,'
Sez Isrel; 'keep it tell it's tender;
'Tain't wuth a snap afore it's ripe.'
Sez Joe, 'I'd jest ez lives eat tripe;
You _air_ a buster ter suppose
I'd eat what makes me hol' my nose!'

So they disputed to an' fro
Till cunnin' Isrel sez to Joe,

'Don't le's stay here an' play the fool,
Le's wait till both on us git cool,
Jest for a day or two le's hide it,
An' then toss up an' so decide it.'
'Agreed!' sez Joe, an' so they did,
An' the ole goose wuz safely hid.

Now 'twuz the hottest kind o' weather,
An' when at last they come together,
It didn't signify which won,
Fer all the mischief hed been done:
The goose wuz there, but, fer his soul,
Joe wouldn't ha' tetched it with a pole;
But Isrel kind o' liked the smell on 't
An' made _his_ dinner very well on 't.

James Russell Lowell

A Fable For Critics

Phoebus, sitting one day in a laurel-tree's shade,
Was reminded of Daphne, of whom it was made,
For the god being one day too warm in his wooing,
She took to the tree to escape his pursuing;
Be the cause what it might, from his offers she shrunk,
And, Ginevra-like, shut herself up in a trunk;
And, though 'twas a step into which he had driven her,
He somehow or other had never forgiven her;
Her memory he nursed as a kind of a tonic,
Something bitter to chew when he'd play the Byronic,
And I can't count the obstinate nymphs that he brought over
By a strange kind of smile he put on when he thought of her.
'My case is like Dido's,' he sometimes remarked;
'When I last saw my love, she was fairly embarked
In a laurel, as she thought-but (ah, how Fate mocks!)
She has found it by this time a very bad box;
Let hunters from me take this saw when they need it,-
You're not always sure of your game when you've treed it.
Just conceive such a change taking place in one's mistress!
What romance would be left?-who can flatter or kiss trees?
And, for mercy's sake, how could one keep up a dialogue
With a dull wooden thing that will live and will die a log,-
Not to say that the thought would forever intrude
That you've less chance to win her the more she is wood?
Ah! it went to my heart, and the memory still grieves,
To see those loved graces all taking their leaves;
Those charms beyond speech, so enchanting but now,
As they left me forever, each making its bough!
If her tongue had a tang sometimes more than was right,
Her new bark is worse than ten times her old bite.'

Now, Daphne-before she was happily treeified-
Over all other blossoms the lily had deified,
And when she expected the god on a visit
('Twas before he had made his intentions explicit),
Some buds she arranged with a vast deal of care,
To look as if artlessly twined in her hair,
Where they seemed, as he said, when he paid his addresses,
Like the day breaking through, the long night of her tresses;
So whenever he wished to be quite irresistible,
Like a man with eight trumps in his hand at a whist-table
(I feared me at first that the rhyme was untwistable,
Though I might have lugged in an allusion to Cristabel),-
He would take up a lily, and gloomily look in it,
As I shall at the--, when they cut up my book in it.

Well, here, after all the bad rhyme I've been spinning,
I've got back at last to my story's beginning:
Sitting there, as I say, in the shade of his mistress,
As dull as a volume of old Chester mysteries,
Or as those puzzling specimens which, in old histories,
We read of his verses-the Oracles, namely,-

(I wonder the Greeks should have swallowed them tamely,
For one might bet safely whatever he has to risk,
They were laid at his door by some ancient Miss Asterisk,
And so dull that the men who retailed them out-doors
Got the ill name of augurs, because they were bores,-)
First, he mused what the animal substance or herb is
Would induce a mustache, for you know he's _imberbis;_
Then he shuddered to think how his youthful position
Was assailed by the age of his son the physician;
At some poems he glanced, had been sent to him lately,
And the metre and sentiment puzzled him greatly;
'Mehercle! I'd make such proceeding felonious,-
Have they all of them slept in the cave of Trophonius?
Look well to your seat, 'tis like taking an airing
On a corduroy road, and that out of repairing;
It leads one, 'tis true, through the primitive forest,
Grand natural features, but then one has no rest;
You just catch a glimpse of some ravishing distance,
When a jolt puts the whole of it out of existence,-
Why not use their ears, if they happen to have any?'
-Here the laurel leaves murmured the name of poor Daphne.

'Oh, weep with me, Daphne,' he sighed, 'for you know it's
A terrible thing to be pestered with poets!
But, alas, she is dumb, and the proverb holds good,
She never will cry till she's out of the wood!
What wouldn't I give if I never had known of her?
'Twere a kind of relief had I something to groan over:
If I had but some letters of hers, now, to toss over,
I might turn for the nonce a Byronic philosopher,
And bewitch all the flats by bemoaning the loss of her.
One needs something tangible, though, to begin on,-
A loom, as it were, for the fancy to spin on;
What boots all your grist? it can never be ground
Till a breeze makes the arms of the windmill go round;
(Or, if 'tis a water-mill, alter the metaphor,
And say it won't stir, save the wheel be well wet afore,
Or lug in some stuff about water 'so dreamily,'-
It is not a metaphor, though, 'tis a simile):
A lily, perhaps, would set _my_ mill a-going,
For just at this season, I think, they are blowing.
Here, somebody, fetch one; not very far hence
They're in bloom by the score, 'tis but climbing a fence;
There's a poet hard by, who does nothing but fill his
Whole garden, from one end to t'other, with lilies;
A very good plan, were it not for satiety,
One longs for a weed here and there, for variety;
Though a weed is no more than a flower in disguise,
Which is seen through at once, if love give a man eyes.'

Now there happened to be among Phoebus's followers,
A gentleman, one of the omnivorous swallowers,

Who bolt every book that comes out of the press,
 Without the least question of larger or less,
 Whose stomachs are strong at the expense of their head,-
 For reading new books is like eating new bread,
 One can bear it at first, but by gradual steps he
 Is brought to death's door of a mental dyspepsy.
 On a previous stage of existence, our Hero
 Had ridden outside, with the glass below zero;
 He had been, 'tis a fact you may safely rely on,
 Of a very old stock a most eminent scion,-
 A stock all fresh quacks their fierce boluses ply on,
 Who stretch the new boots Earth's unwilling to try on,
 Whom humbugs of all shapes and sorts keep their eye on,
 Whose hair's in the mortar of every new Zion,
 Who, when whistles are dear, go directly and buy one,
 Who think slavery a crime that we must not say fie on,
 Who hunt, if they e'er hunt at all, with the lion
 (Though they hunt lions also, whenever they spy one),
 Who contrive to make every good fortune a wry one,
 And at last choose the hard bed of honor to die on,
 Whose pedigree, traced to earth's earliest years,
 Is longer than anything else but their ears,-
 In short, he was sent into life with the wrong key,
 He unlocked the door, and stept forth a poor donkey.
 Though kicked and abused by his bipedal betters
 Yet he filled no mean place in the kingdom of letters;
 Far happier than many a literary hack,
 He bore only paper-mill rags on his back
 (For It makes a vast difference which side the mill
 One expends on the paper his labor and skill):
 So, when his soul waited a new transmigration,
 And Destiny balanced 'twixt this and that station,
 Not having much time to expend upon bothers,
 Remembering he'd had some connection with authors,
 And considering his four legs had grown paralytic,-
 She set him on two, and he came forth a critic.

Through his babyhood no kind of pleasure he took
 In any amusement but tearing a book;
 For him there was no intermediate stage
 From babyhood up to straight-laced middle age;
 There were years when he didn't wear coat-tails behind,
 But a boy he could never be rightly defined;
 like the Irish Good Folk, though in length scarce a span,
 From the womb he came gravely, a little old man;
 While other boys' trousers demanded the toil
 Of the motherly fingers on all kinds of soil,
 Red, yellow, brown, black, clayey, gravelly, loamy,
 He sat in the corner and read Viri Romae.
 He never was known to unbend or to revel once
 In base, marbles, hockey, or kick up the devil once;
 He was just one of those who excite the benevolence

Of your old prigs who sound the soul's depths with a ledger,
And are on the lookout for some young men to 'edger-
cate,' as they call it, who won't be too costly,
And who'll afterward take to the ministry mostly;
Who always wear spectacles, always look bilious,
Always keep on good terms with each *_mater-familias_*
Throughout the whole parish, and manage to rear
Ten boys like themselves, on four hundred a year:
Who, fulfilling in turn the same fearful conditions,
Either preach through their noses, or go upon missions.

In this way our Hero got safely to college,
Where he bolted alike both his commons and knowledge;
A reading-machine, always wound up and going,
He mastered whatever was not worth the knowing,
Appeared in a gown, with black waistcoat of satin,
To spout such a Gothic oration in Latin
That Tully could never have made out a word in it
(Though himself was the model the author preferred in it),
And grasping the parchment which gave him in fee
All the mystic and-so-forths contained in A.B.,
He was launched (life is always compared to a sea)
With just enough learning, and skill for the using it,
To prove he'd a brain, by forever confusing it.
So worthy St. Benedict, piously burning
With the holiest zeal against secular learning,
Nesciensque scienter, as writers express it,
Indoctusque sapienter a Roma recessit.

'Twould be endless to tell you the things that he knew,
Each a separate fact, undeniably true,
But with him or each other they'd nothing to do;
No power of combining, arranging, discerning,
Digested the masses he learned into learning;
There was one thing in life he had practical knowledge for
(And this, you will think, he need scarce go to college for),-
Not a deed would he do, nor a word would he utter,
Till he'd weighed its relations to plain bread and butter.
When he left Alma Mater, he practised his wits
In compiling the journals' historical bits,-
Of shops broken open, men falling in fits,
Great fortunes in England bequeathed to poor printers,
And cold spells, the coldest for many past winters,-
Then, rising by industry, knack, and address,
Got notices up for an unbiased press,
With a mind so well poised, it seemed equally made for
Applause or abuse, just which chanced to be paid for:
From this point his progress was rapid and sure,
To the post of a regular heavy reviewer.

And here I must say he wrote excellent articles
On Hebraical points, or the force of Greek particles;

They filled up the space nothing else was prepared for,
And nobody read that which nobody cared for;
If any old book reached a fiftieth edition,
He could fill forty pages with safe erudition:
He could gauge the old books by the old set of rules,
And his very old nothings pleased very old fools;
But give him a new book, fresh out of the heart,
And you put him at sea without compass or chart,-
His blunders aspired to the rank of an art;
For his lore was engraft, something foreign that grew in him,
Exhausting the sap of the native and true in him,
So that when a man came with a soul that was new in him,
Carving new forms of truth out of Nature's old granite,
New and old at their birth, like Le Verrier's planet,
Which, to get a true judgment, themselves must create
In the soul of their critic the measure and weight,
Being rather themselves a fresh standard of grace,
To compute their own judge, and assign him his place,
Our reviewer would crawl all about it and round it,
And, reporting each circumstance just as he found it,
Without the least malice,-his record would be
Profoundly aesthetic as that of a flea,
Which, supping on Wordsworth, should print for our sakes,
Recollections of nights with the Bard of the Lakes,
Or, lodged by an Arab guide, ventured to render a
Comprehensive account of the ruins at Denderah.

As I said, he was never precisely unkind.
The defect in his brain was just absence of mind;
If he boasted, 'twas simply that he was self-made,
A position which I, for one, never gainsaid,
My respect for my Maker supposing a skill
In his works which our Hero would answer but ill;
And I trust that the mould which he used may be cracked, or he,
Made bold by success, may enlarge his phylactery,
And set up a kind of a man-manufactory,-
An event which I shudder to think about, seeing
That Man is a moral, accountable being.

He meant well enough, but was still in the way,
As dunces still are, let them be where they may;
Indeed, they appear to come into existence
To impede other folks with their awkward assistance;
If you set up a dunce on the very North pole
All alone with himself, I believe, on my soul,
He'd manage to get betwixt somebody's shins,
And pitch him down bodily, all in his sins,
To the grave polar bears sitting round on the ice,
All shortening their grace, to be in for a slice;
Or, if he found nobody else there to pother,
Why, one of his legs would just trip up the other,
For there's nothing we read of in torture's inventions,

Like a well-meaning dunce, with the best of intentions.

A terrible fellow to meet in society,
Not the toast that he buttered was ever so dry at tea;
There he'd sit at the table and stir in his sugar,
Crouching close for a spring, all the while, like a cougar;
Be sure of your facts, of your measures and weights,
Of your time,-he's as fond as an Arab of dates;
You'll be telling, perhaps, in your comical way,
Of something you've seen in the course of the day;
And, just as you're tapering out the conclusion,
You venture an ill-fated classic allusion,-
The girls have all got their laughs ready, when, whack!
The cougar comes down on your thunderstruck back!
You had left out a comma,-your Greek's put in joint,
And pointed at cost of your story's whole point.
In the course of the evening, you find chance for certain
Soft speeches to Anne, in the shade of the curtain:
You tell her your heart can be likened to one flower,
'And that, O most charming of women, 's the sunflower,
Which turns'-here a clear nasal voice, to your terror,
From outside the curtain, says, 'That's all an error.'
As for him, he's-no matter, he never grew tender,
Sitting after a ball, with his feet on the fender,
Shaping somebody's sweet features out of cigar smoke
(Though he'd willingly grant you that such doings are smoke):
All women he damns with mutabile semper,
And if ever he felt something like love's distemper,
'Twas tow'rds a young lady who spoke ancient Mexican,
And assisted her father in making a lexicon;
Though I recollect hearing him get quite ferocious
About Mary Clausum, the mistress of Grotius,
Or something of that sort,-but, no more to bore ye
With character-painting, I'll turn to my story.

Now, Apollo, who finds it convenient sometimes
To get his court clear of the makers of rhymes,
The genus, I think it is called, irritabile,
Every one of whom thinks himself treated most shabbily,
And nurses a-what is it?-immedicabile,
Which keeps him at boiling-point, hot for a quarrel,
As bitter as wormwood, and sourer than sorrel,
If any poor devil but look at a laurel;-
Apollo, I say, being sick of their rioting
(Though he sometimes acknowledged their verse had a quieting
Effect after dinner, and seemed to suggest a
Retreat to the shrine of a tranquil siesta),
Kept our Hero at hand, who, by means of a bray,
Which he gave to the life, drove the rabble away;
And if that wouldn't do, he was sure to succeed,
If he took his review out and offered to read;
Or, failing in plans of this milder description,

He would ask for their aid to get up a subscription,
 Considering that authorship wasn't a rich craft,
 To print the 'American drama of Witchcraft.'
 'Stay, I'll read you a scene,'-but he hardly began,
 Ere Apollo shrieked 'Help!' and the authors all ran:
 And once, when these purgatives acted with less spirit,
 And the desperate case asked a remedy desperate,
 He drew from his pocket a foolscap epistle
 As calmly as if 'twere a nine-barrelled pistol,
 And threatened them all with the judgment to come,
 Of 'A wandering Star's first impressions of Rome.'
 'Stop! stop!' with their hands o'er their ears, screamed the Muses,
 'He may go off and murder himself, if he chooses,
 'Twas a means self-defence only sanctioned his trying,
 'Tis mere massacre now that the enemy's flying;
 If he's forced to 't again, and we happen to be there,
 Give us each a large handkerchief soaked in strong ether.'

I called this a 'Fable for Critics;' you think it's
 More like a display of my rhythmical trinkets;
 My plot, like an icicle's slender and slippery,
 Every moment more slender, and likely to slip awry,
 And the reader unwilling *_in loco desipere_*
 Is free to jump over as much of my frippery
 As he fancies, and, if he's a provident skipper, he
 May have like Odysseus control of the gales,
 And get safe to port, ere his patience quite fails;
 Moreover, although 'tis a slender return
 For your toil and expense, yet my paper will burn,
 And, if you have manfully struggled thus far with me,
 You may e'en twist me up, and just light your cigar with me:
 If too angry for that, you can tear me in pieces,
 And my *_membra disjecta_* consign to the breezes,
 A fate like great Ratzau's, whom one of those bores,
 Who befleaded with bad verses poor Louis Quatorze,
 Describes (the first verse somehow ends with *_victoire_*),
 As *_dispersant partout et ses membres et sa gloire;_*
 Or, if I were over-desirous of earning
 A repute among noodles for classical learning,
 I could pick you a score of allusions, i-wis,
 As new as the jests of *_Didaskalos tis;_*
 Better still, I could make out a good solid list
 From authors recondite who do not exist,-
 But that would be naughty: at least, I could twist
 Something out of Absyrtus, or turn your inquiries
 After Milton's prose metaphor, drawn from Osiris;
 But, as Cicero says he won't say this or that
 (A fetch, I must say, most transparent and flat),
 After saying whate'er he could possibly think of,-
 I simply will state that I pause on the brink of
 A mire, ankle-deep, of deliberate confusion,
 Made up of old jumbles of classic allusion:

So, when you were thinking yourselves to be pitied,
Just conceive how much harder your teeth you'd have gritted,
An 'twere not for the dulness I've kindly omitted.

I'd apologize here for my many digressions.
Were it not that I'm certain to trip into fresh ones
('Tis so hard to escape if you get in their mesh once):
Just reflect, if you please, how 'tis said by Horatius,
That Maeonides nods now and then, and, my gracious!
It certainly does look a little bit ominous
When he gets under way with _ton d'apameibomenos_.
(Here a something occurs which I'll just clap a rhyme to,
And say it myself, ere a Zoilus have time to,-
Any author a nap like Van Winkle's may take,
If he only contrive to keep readers awake,
But he'll very soon find himself laid on the shelf,
If _they_ fall a-nodding when he nods himself.)

Once for all, to return, and to stay, will I, nill I-
When Phoebus expressed his desire for a lily,
Our Hero, whose homoeopathic sagacity
With an ocean of zeal mixed his dropp of capacity,
Set off for the garden as fast as the wind
(Or, to take a comparison more to my mind,
As a sound politician leaves conscience behind).
And leaped the low fence, as a party hack jumps
O'er his principles, when something else turns up trumps.

He was gone a long time, and Apollo, meanwhile,
Went over some sonnets of his with a file,
For, of all compositions, he thought that the sonnet
Best repaid all the toil you expended upon it;
It should reach with one impulse the end of its course,
And for one final blow collect all of its force;
Not a verse should be salient, but each one should tend
With a wave-like up-gathering to break at the end;
So, condensing the strength here, there smoothing a wry kink,
He was killing the time, when up walked Mr. D--,
At a few steps behind him, a small man in glasses
Went dodging about, muttering, 'Murderers! asses!'
From out of his pocket a paper he'd take,
With a proud look of martyrdom tied to its stake,
And, reading a squib at himself, he'd say, 'Here I see
'Gainst American letters a bloody conspiracy,
They are all by my personal enemies written;
I must post an anonymous letter to Britain,
And show that this gall is the merest suggestion
Of spite at my zeal on the Copyright question,
For, on this side the water, 'tis prudent to pull
O'er the eyes of the public their national wool,
By accusing of slavish respect to John Bull
All American authors who have more or less

Of that anti-American humbug-success,
While in private we're always embracing the knees
Of some twopenny editor over the seas,
And licking his critical shoes, for you know 'tis
The whole aim of our lives to get one English notice;
My American puffs I would willingly burn all
(They're all from one source, monthly, weekly, diurnal)
To get but a kick from a transmarine journal!

So, culling the gibes of each critical scorner
As if they were plums, and himself were Jack Horner,
He came cautiously on, peeping round every corner,
And into each hole where a weasel might pass in,
Expecting the knife of some critic assassin,
Who stabs to the heart with a caricature.
Not so bad as those daubs of the Sun, to be sure,
Yet done with a dagger-o'-type, whose vile portraits
Disperse all one's good and condense all one's poor traits.

Apollo looked up, hearing footsteps approaching,
And slipped out of sight the new rhymes he was broaching,-
'Good day, Mr. D--, I'm happy to meet
With a scholar so ripe, and a critic so neat,
Who through Grub Street the soul of a gentleman carries;
What news from that suburb of London and Paris
Which latterly makes such shrill claims to monopolize
The credit of being the New World's metropolis?'

'Why, nothing of consequence, save this attack
On my friend there, behind, by some pitiful hack,
Who thinks every national author a poor one,
That isn't a copy of something that's foreign,
And assaults the American Dick-'

Nay, 'tis clear
That your Damon there's fond of a flea in his ear,
And, if no one else furnished them gratis, on tick
He would buy some himself, just to hear the old click;
Why, I honestly think, if some fool in Japan
Should turn up his nose at the 'Poems on Man,'
(Which contain many verses as fine, by the bye,
As any that lately came under my eye,)
Your friend there by some inward instinct would know it,
Would get it translated, reprinted, and show it;
As a man might take off a high stock to exhibit
The autograph round his own neck of the gibbet;
Nor would let it rest so, but fire column after column,
Signed Cato, or Brutus, or something as solemn,
By way of displaying his critical crosses,
And tweaking that poor transatlantic proboscis,
His broadsides resulting (this last there's no doubt of)
In successively sinking the craft they're fired out of.

Now nobody knows when an author is hit,
If he have not a public hysterical fit;
Let him only keep close in his snug garret's dim ether,
And nobody'd think of his foes-or of him either;
If an author have any least fibre of worth in him,
Abuse would but tickle the organ of mirth in him;
All the critics on earth cannot crush with their ban
One word that's in tune with the nature of man.'

'Well, perhaps so; meanwhile I have brought you a book,
Into which if you'll just have the goodness to look,
You may feel so delighted (when once you are through it)
As to deem it not unworth your while to review it,
And I think I can promise your thoughts, if you do,
A place in the next Democratic Review.'

'The most thankless of gods you must surely have thought me,
For this is the forty-fourth copy you've brought me;
I have given them away, or at least I have tried,
But I've forty-two left, standing all side by side
(The man who accepted that one copy died),-
From one end of a shelf to the other they reach,
'With the author's respects' neatly written in each.
The publisher, sure, will proclaim a Te Deum,
When he hears of that order the British Museum
Has sent for one set of what books were first printed
In America, little or big,-for 'tis hinted
That this is the first truly tangible hope he
Has ever had raised for the sale of a copy.
I've thought very often 'twould be a good thing
In all public collections of books, if a wing
Were set off by itself, like the seas from the dry lands,
Marked Literature suited to desolate islands,
And filled with such books as could never be read
Save by readers of proofs, forced to do it for bread,-
Such books as one's wrecked on in small country taverns,
Such as hermits might mortify over in caverns,
Such as Satan, if printing had then been invented,
As the climax of woe, would to Job have presented.
Such as Crusoe might dip in, although there are few so
Outrageously cornered by fate as poor Crusoe;
And since the philanthropists just now are banging
And gibbeting all who're in favor of hanging
(Though Cheever has proved that the Bible and Altar
Were let down from Heaven at the end of a halter.
And that vital religion would dull and grow callous,
Unrefreshed, now and then, with a sniff of the gallows),-
And folks are beginning to think it looks odd,
To choke a poor scamp for the glory of God;
And that He who esteems the Virginia reel
A bait to draw saints from their spiritual weal,
And regards the quadrille as a far greater knavery

Than crushing his African children with slavery,-
Since all who take part in a waltz or cotillon
Are mounted for hell on the Devil's own pillion,
Who, as every true orthodox Christian well knows,
Approaches the heart through the door of the toes,-
That He, I was saying, whose judgments are stored
For such as take steps in despite of his word,
Should look with delight on the agonized prancing
Of a wretch who has not the least ground for his dancing,
While the State, standing by, sings a verse from the Psalter
About offering to God on his favorite halter,
And, when the legs droop from their twitching divergence,
Sells the clothes to a Jew, and the corpse to the surgeons;-
Now, instead of all this, I think I can direct you all
To a criminal code both humane and effectual;-
I propose to shut up every doer of wrong
With these desperate books, for such term, short or long,
As, by statute in such cases made and provided,
Shall be by your wise legislators decided:
Thus: Let murderers be shut, to grow wiser and cooler,
At hard labor for life on the works of Miss--;
Petty thieves, kept from flagranter crimes by their fears,
Shall peruse Yankee Doodle a blank term of years,-
That American Punch, like the English, no doubt,-
Just the sugar and lemons and spirit left out.

'But stay, here comes Tityrus Griswold, and leads on
The flocks whom he first plucks alive, and then feeds on,-
A loud-cackling swarm, in whose leathers warm drest,
He goes for as perfect a-swan as the rest.

'There comes Emerson first, whose rich words, every one,
Are like gold nails in temples to hang trophies on,
Whose prose is grand verse, while his verse, the Lord knows,
Is some of it pr-- No, 'tis not even prose;
I'm speaking of metres; some poems have welled
From those rare depths of soul that have ne'er been excelled;
They're not epics, but that doesn't matter a pin,
In creating, the only hard thing's to begin;
A grass-blade's no easier to make than an oak;
If you've once found the way, you've achieved the grand stroke;
In the worst of his poems are mines of rich matter,
But thrown in a heap with a crash and a clatter;
Now it is not one thing nor another alone
Makes a poem, but rather the general tone,
The something pervading, uniting the whole,
The before unconceived, unconceivable soul,
So that just in removing this trifle or that, you
Take away, as it were, a chief limb of the statue;
Roots, wood, bark, and leaves singly perfect may be,
But, clapt hodge-podge together, they don't make a tree.

'But, to come back to Emerson (whom, by the way,
 I believe we left waiting),-his is, we may say,
 A Greek head on right Yankee shoulders, whose range
 Has Olympus for one pole, for t'other the Exchange;
 He seems, to my thinking (although I'm afraid
 The comparison must, long ere this, have been made),
 A Plotinus-Montaigne, where the Egyptian's gold mist
 And the Gascon's shrewd wit cheek-by-jowl coexist;
 All admire, and yet scarcely six converts he's got
 To I don't (nor they either) exactly know what;
 For though he builds glorious temples, 'tis odd
 He leaves never a doorway to get in a god.
 'Tis refreshing to old-fashioned people like me
 To meet such a primitive Pagan as he,
 In whose mind all creation is duly respected
 As parts of himself-just a little projected;
 And who's willing to worship the stars and the sun,
 A convert to-nothing but Emerson.
 So perfect a balance there is in his head,
 That he talks of things sometimes as if they were dead;
 Life, nature, love, God, and affairs of that sort,
 He looks at as merely ideas; in short,
 As if they were fossils stuck round in a cabinet,
 Of such vast extent that our earth's a mere dab in it;
 Composed just as he is inclined to conjecture her,
 Namely, one part pure earth, ninety-nine parts pure lecturer;
 You are filled with delight at his clear demonstration,
 Each figure, word, gesture, just fits the occasion,
 With the quiet precision of science he'll sort 'em,
 But you can't help suspecting the whole a _post mortem_.

'There are persons, mole-blind to the soul's make and style,
 Who insist on a likeness 'twixt him and Carlyle;
 To compare him with Plato would be vastly fairer,
 Carlyle's the more burly, but E. is the rarer;
 He sees fewer objects, but clearer, truelier,
 If C.'s as original, E.'s more peculiar;
 That he's more of a man you might say of the one,
 Of the other he's more of an Emerson;
 C.'s the Titan, as shaggy of mind as of limb,-
 E. the clear-eyed Olympian, rapid and slim;
 The one's two thirds Norseman, the other half Greek,
 Where the one's most abounding, the other's to seek;
 C.'s generals require to be seen in the mass,-
 E.'s specialties gain if enlarged by the glass;
 C. gives nature and God his own fits of the blues,
 And rims common-sense things with mystical hues,-
 E. sits in a mystery calm and intense,
 And looks coolly around him with sharp common-sense;
 C. shows you how every-day matters unite
 With the dim transdiurnal recesses of night,-
 While E., in a plain, preternatural way,

Makes mysteries matters of mere every day;
C. draws all his characters quite _a la_ Fuseli,-
Not sketching their bundles of muscles and thews illy,
He paints with a brush so untamed and profuse,
They seem nothing but bundles of muscles and thews;
E. is rather like Flaxman, lines strait and severe,
And a colorless outline, but full, round, and clear;-
To the men he thinks worthy he frankly accords
The design of a white marble statue in words.
C. labors to get at the centre, and then
Take a reckoning from there of his actions and men;
E. calmly assumes the said centre as granted,
And, given himself, has whatever is wanted.

'He has imitators in scores, who omit
No part of the man but his wisdom and wit,-
Who go carefully o'er the sky-blue of his brain,
And when he has skimmed it once, skim it again;
If at all they resemble him, you may be sure it is
Because their shoals mirror his mists and obscurities,
As a mud-puddle seems deep as heaven for a minute,
While a cloud that floats o'er is reflected within it.

'There comes-- , for instance; to see him's rare sport,
Tread in Emerson's tracks with legs painfully short;
How he jumps, how he strains, and gets red in the face.
To keep step with the mystagogue's natural pace!
He follows as close as a stick to a rocket,
His fingers exploring the prophet's each pocket.
Fie, for shame, brother bard; with good fruit of your own,
Can't you let Neighbor Emerson's orchards alone?
Besides, 'tis no use, you'll not find e'en a core,-
-- has picked up all the windfalls before.
They might strip every tree, and E. never would catch 'em,
His Hesperides have no rude dragon to watch 'em;
When they send him a dishful, and ask him to try 'em,
He never suspects how the sly rogues came by 'em;
He wonders why 'tis there are none such his trees on,
And thinks 'em the best he has tasted this season.

'Yonder, calm as a cloud, Alcott stalks in a dream,
And fancies himself in thy groves, Academe,
With the Parthenon nigh, and the olive-trees o'er him,
And never a fact to perplex him or bore him,
With a snug room at Plato's when night comes, to walk to,
And people from morning till midnight to talk to,
And from midnight till morning, nor snore in their listening;-
So he muses, his face with the joy of it glistening,
For his highest conceit of a happiest state is
Where they'd live upon acorns, and hear him talk gratis;
And indeed, I believe, no man ever talked better,-
Each sentence hangs perfectly poised to a letter;

He seems piling words, but there's royal dust hid
In the heart of each sky-piercing pyramid.
While he talks he is great, but goes out like a taper,
If you shut him up closely with pen, ink, and paper;
Yet his fingers itch for 'em from morning till night,
And he thinks he does wrong if he don't always write;
In this, as in all things, a lamb among men,
He goes to sure death when he goes to his pen.

'Close behind him is Brownson, his mouth very full
With attempting to gulp a Gregorian bull;
Who contrives, spite of that, to pour out as he goes
A stream of transparent and forcible prose;
He shifts quite about, then proceeds to expound
That 'tis merely the earth, not himself, that turns round,
And wishes it clearly impressed on your mind
That the weathercock rules and not follows the wind;
Proving first, then as deftly confuting each side,
With no doctrine pleased that's not somewhere denied,
He lays the denier away on the shelf,
And then-down beside him lies gravely himself.
He's the Salt River boatman, who always stands willing
To convey friend or foe without charging a shilling,
And so fond of the trip that, when leisure's to spare,
He'll row himself up, if he can't get a fare.
The worst of it is, that his logic's so strong,
That of two sides he commonly chooses the wrong;
If there is only one, why, he'll split it in two,
And first pummel this half, then that, black and blue.
That white's white needs no proof, but it takes a deep fellow
To prove it jet-black, and that jet-black is yellow.
He offers the true faith to drink in a sieve,-
When it reaches your lips there's naught left to believe
But a few silly-(syllable-, I mean,)-gisms that squat 'em
Like tadpoles, o'erjoyed with the mud at the bottom.

'There is Willis, all natty and jaunty and gay,
Who says his best things in so foppish a way,
With conceits and pet phrases so thickly o'erlaying 'em,
That one hardly knows whether to thank him for saying 'em;
Over-ornament ruins both poem and prose,
Just conceive of a Muse with a ring in her nose!
His prose had a natural grace of its own,
And enough of it, too, if he'd let it alone;
But he twitches and jerks so, one fairly gets tired,
And is forced to forgive where one might have admired;
Yet whenever it slips away free and unlaced,
It runs like a stream with a musical waste,
And gurgles along with the liquidest sweep;-
'Tis not deep as a river, but who'd have it deep?
In a country where scarcely a village is found
That has not its author sublime and profound,

For some one to be slightly shallow's a duty,
And Willis's shallowness makes half his beauty.
His prose winds along with a blithe, gurgling error,
And reflects all of Heaven it can see in its mirror:
'Tis a narrowish strip, but it is not an artifice;
'Tis the true out-of-doors with its genuine hearty phiz;
It is Nature herself, and there's something in that,
Since most brains reflect but the crown of a hat.
Few volumes I know to read under a tree,
More truly delightful than his A l'Abri,
With the shadows of leaves flowing over your book,
Like ripple-shades netting the bed of a brook;
With June coming softly your shoulder to look over,
Breezes waiting to turn every leaf of your book over,
And Nature to criticise still as you read,-
The page that bears that is a rare one indeed.

'He's so innate a cockney, that had he been born
Where plain bare-skin's the only full-dress that is worn,
He'd have given his own such an air that you'd say
'T had been made by a tailor to lounge in Broadway.
His nature's a glass of champagne with the foam on 't,
As tender as Fletcher, as witty as Beaumont;
So his best things are done in the flush of the moment;
If he wait, all is spoiled; he may stir it and shake it,
But, the fixed air once gone, he can never re-make it.
He might be a marvel of easy delightfulness,
If he would not sometimes leave the _r_ out of sprightfulness;
And he ought to let Scripture alone-'tis self-slaughter,
For nobody likes inspiration-and-water.
He'd have been just the fellow to sup at the Mermaid,
Cracking jokes at rare Ben, with an eye to the barmaid,
His wit running up as Canary ran down,-
The topmost bright bubble on the wave of The Town.

'Here comes Parker, the Orson of parsons, a man
Whom the Church undertook to put under her ban
(The Church of Socinus, I mean),-his opinions
Being So-(ultra)-cinian, they shocked the Socinians:
They believed-faith, I'm puzzled-I think I may call
Their belief a believing in nothing at all,
Or something of that sort; I know they all went
For a general union of total dissent:
He went a step farther; without cough or hem,
He frankly avowed he believed not in them;
And, before he could be jumbled up or prevented,
From their orthodox kind of dissent he dissented.
There was heresy here, you perceive, for the right
Of privately judging means simply that light
Has been granted to _me_, for deciding on _you;_
And in happier times, before Atheism grew,
The deed contained clauses for cooking you too:

Now at Xerxes and Knut we all laugh, yet our foot
 With the same wave is wet that mocked Xerxes and Knut,
 And we all entertain a secure private notion,
 That our Thus far! will have a great weight with the ocean,
 'Twas so with our liberal Christians: they bore
 With sincerest conviction their chairs to the shore;
 They brandished their worn theological birches,
 Bade natural progress keep out of the Churches,
 And expected the lines they had drawn to prevail
 With the fast-rising tide to keep out of their pale;
 They had formerly dammed the Pontifical See,
 And the same thing, they thought, would do nicely for P.;
 But he turned up his nose at their mumming and shamming,
 And cared (shall I say?) not a d-- for their damming;
 So they first read him out of their church, and next minute
 Turned round and declared he had never been in it.
 But the ban was too small or the man was too big,
 For he recks not their bells, books, and candles a fig
 (He scarce looks like a man who would stay treated shabbily,
 Sophroniscus' son's head o'er the features of Rabelais):-
 He bangs and bethwacks them, -their backs he salutes
 With the whole tree of knowledge torn up by the roots;
 His sermons with satire are plenteously verjuiced,
 And he talks in one breath of Confutzee, Cass, Zerduscht,
 Jack Robinson, Peter the Hermit, Strap, Dathan,
 Cush, Pitt (not the bottomless, that he's no faith in),
 Pan, Pillicock, Shakespeare, Paul, Toots, Monsieur Tonson,
 Aldebaran, Alcander, Ben Khorat, Ben Jonson,
 Thoth, Richter, Joe Smith, Father Paul, Judah Monis,
 Musaeus, Muretus, hem, -[Greek: m] Scorpionis,
 Maccabee, Maccaboy, Mac-Mac-ah! Machiavelli,
 Condorcet, Count d'Orsay, Conder, Say, Ganganelli,
 Orion, O'Connell, the Chevalier D'O,
 (See the Memoirs of Sully,) [Greek: to pan], the great toe
 Of the statue of Jupiter, now made to pass
 For that of Jew Peter by good Romish brass,
 (You may add for yourselves, for I find it a bore,
 All the names you have ever, or not, heard before,
 And when you've done that-why, invent a few more).
 His hearers can't tell you on Sunday beforehand,
 If in that day's discourse they'll be Bibled or Koraned,
 For he's seized the idea (by his martyrdom fired)
 That all men (not orthodox) may be inspired;
 Yet though wisdom profane with his creed he may weave in,
 He makes it quite clear what he doesn't believe in,
 While some, who decry him, think all Kingdom Come
 Is a sort of a, kind of a, species of Hum,
 Of which, as it were, so to speak, not a crumb
 Would be left, if we didn't keep carefully mum,
 And, to make a clean breast, that 'tis perfectly plain
 That all kinds of wisdom are somewhat profane;
 Now P.'s creed than this may be lighter or darker,

But in one thing, 'tis clear, he has faith, namely-Parker;
And this is what makes him the crowd-drawing preacher,
There's a background of god to each hard-working feature,
Every word that he speaks has been fierily furnaced
In the blast of a life that has struggled in earnest:
There he stands, looking more like a ploughman than priest,
If not dreadfully awkward, not graceful at least,
His gestures all downright and same, if you will,
As of brown-fisted Hobnail in hoeing a drill;
But his periods fall on you, stroke after stroke,
Like the blows of a lumberer felling an oak,
You forget the man wholly, you're thankful to meet
With a preacher who smacks of the field and the street,
And to hear, you're not over-particular whence,
Almost Taylor's profusion, quite Latimer's sense.

'There is Bryant, as quiet, as cool, and as dignified,
As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is ignified,
Save when by reflection 'tis kindled o' nights
With a semblance of flame by the chill Northern Lights.
He may rank (Griswold says so) first bard of your nation
(There's no doubt that he stands in supreme iceolation),
Your topmost Parnassus he may set his heel on,
But no warm applauses come, peal following peal on,-
He's too smooth and too polished to hang any zeal on:
Unqualified merits, I'll grant, if you choose, he has 'em,
But he lacks the one merit of kindling enthusiasm;
If he stir you at all, it is just, on my soul,
Like being stirred up with the very North Pole.

'He is very nice reading in summer, but _inter
Nos_, we don't want _extra_ freezing in winter;
Take him up in the depth of July, my advice is,
When you feel an Egyptian devotion to ices.
But, deduct all you can, there's enough that's right good in him,
He has a true soul for field, river, and wood in him;
And his heart, in the midst of brick walls, or where'er it is,
Glow, softens, and thrills with the tenderest charities-
To you mortals that delve in this trade-ridden planet?
No, to old Berkshire's hills, with their limestone and granite.
If you're one who _in loco_ (add _foco_ here) _desipis_,
You will get out of his outermost heart (as I guess) a piece;
But you'd get deeper down if you came as a precipice,
And would break the last seal of its inwardest fountain,
If you only could palm yourself off for a mountain.
Mr. Quivis, or somebody quite as discerning,
Some scholar who's hourly expecting his learning,
Calls B. the American Wordsworth; but Wordsworth
May be rated at more than your whole tuneful herd's worth.
No, don't be absurd, he's an excellent Bryant;
But, my friends, you'll endanger the life of your client,
By attempting to stretch him up into a giant;

If you choose to compare him, I think there are two persons fit for a parallel-Thomson and Cowper;
I don't mean exactly,-there's something of each,
There's T.'s love of nature, C.'s penchant to preach;
Just mix up their minds so that C.'s spice of craziness
Shall balance and neutralize T.'s turn for laziness,
And it gives you a brain cool, quite frictionless, quiet,
Whose internal police nips the buds of all riot,-
A brain like a permanent strait-jacket put on
The heart that strives vainly to burst off a button,-
A brain which, without being slow or mechanic,
Does more than a larger less drilled, more volcanic;
He's a Cowper condensed, with no craziness bitten,
And the advantage that Wordsworth before him had written.

'But, my dear little bardlings, don't prick up your ears
Nor suppose I would rank you and Bryant as peers;
If I call him an iceberg, I don't mean to say
There is nothing in that which is grand in its way;
He is almost the one of your poets that knows
How much grace, strength, and dignity lie in Repose;
If he sometimes fall short, he is too wise to mar
His thought's modest fulness by going too far;
'T would be well if your authors should all make a trial
Of what virtue there is in severe self-denial,
And measure their writings by Hesiod's staff,
Which teaches that all has less value than half.

'There is Whittier, whose swelling and vehement heart
Strains the strait-breasted drab of the Quaker apart,
And reveals the live Man, still supreme and erect,
Underneath the bemummifying wrappers of sect;
There was ne'er a man born who had more of the swing
Of the true lyric bard and all that kind of thing;
And his failures arise (though he seem not to know it)
From the very same cause that has made him a poet,-
A fervor of mind which knows no separation
'Twixt simple excitement and pure inspiration,
As my Pythoness erst sometimes erred from not knowing
If 'twere I or mere wind through her tripod was blowing;
Let his mind once get head in its favorite direction
And the torrent of verse bursts the dams of reflection,
While, borne with the rush of the metre along,
The poet may chance to go right or go wrong,
Content with the whirl and delirium of song;
Then his grammar's not always correct, nor his rhymes,
And he's prone to repeat his own lyrics sometimes,
Not his best, though, for those are struck off at white-heats
When the heart in his breast like a trip-hammer beats,
And can ne'er be repeated again any more
Than they could have been carefully plotted before:
Like old what's-his-name there at the battle of Hastings

(Who, however, gave more than mere rhythmical bastings),
Our Quaker leads off metaphorical fights
For reform and whatever they call human rights,
Both singing and striking in front of the war,
And hitting his foes with the mallet of Thor;
Anne haec, one exclaims, on beholding his knocks,
Vestis filii tui, O leather-clad Fox?
Can that be thy son, in the battle's mid din,
Preaching brotherly love and then driving it in
To the brain of the tough old Goliath of sin,
With the smoothest of pebbles from Castaly's spring
Impressed on his hard moral sense with a sling?

'All honor and praise to the right-hearted bard
Who was true to The Voice when such service was hard,
Who himself was so free he dared sing for the slave
When to look but a protest in silence was brave;
All honor and praise to the women and men
Who spoke out for the dumb and the down-trodden then!
It needs not to name them, already for each
I see History preparing the statue and niche;
They were harsh, but shall _you_ be so shocked at hard words
Who have beaten your pruning-hooks up into swords,
Whose rewards and hurrahs men are surer to gain
By the reaping of men and of women than grain?
Why should _you_ stand aghast at their fierce wordy war, if
You scalp one another for Bank or for Tariff?
Your calling them cut-throats and knaves all day long
Doesn't prove that the use of hard language is wrong;
While the World's heart beats quicker to think of such men
As signed Tyranny's doom with a bloody steel-pen,
While on Fourth-of-Julys beardless orators fright one
With hints at Harmodius and Aristogeiton,
You need not look shy at your sisters and brothers
Who stab with sharp words for the freedom of others;-
No, a wreath, twine a wreath for the loyal and true
Who, for sake of the many, dared stand with the few,
Not of blood-spattered laurel for enemies braved,
But of broad, peaceful oak-leaves for citizens saved!

'Here comes Dana, abstractedly loitering along,
Involved in a paulo-post-future of song,
Who'll be going to write what'll never be written
Till the Muse, ere he think of it, gives him the mitten,-
Who is so well aware of how things should be done,
That his own works displease him before they're begun,-
Who so well all that makes up good poetry knows,
That the best of his poems is written in prose;
All saddled and bridled stood Pegasus waiting,
He was booted and spurred, but he loitered debating;
In a very grave question his soul was immersed,-
Which foot in the stirrup he ought to put first:

And, while this point and that he judicially dwelt on,
He, somehow or other, had written Paul Felton,
Whose beauties or faults, whichsoever you see there,
You'll allow only genius could hit upon either.
That he once was the Idle Man none will deplore,
But I fear he will never be anything more;
The ocean of song heaves and glitters before him,
The depth and the vastness and longing sweep o'er him.
He knows every breaker and shoal on the chart,
He has the Coast Pilot and so on by heart,
Yet he spends his whole life, like the man in the fable,
In learning to swim on his library table.

'There swaggers John Neal, who has wasted in Maine
The sinews and cords of his pugilist brain,
Who might have been poet, but that, in its stead, he
Preferred to believe that he was so already;
Too hasty to wait till Art's ripe fruit should drop,
He must pelt down an unripe and colicky crop;
Who took to the law, and had this sterling plea for it,
It required him to quarrel, and paid him a fee for it;
A man who's made less than he might have, because
He always has thought himself more than he was,-
Who, with very good natural gifts as a bard,
Broke the strings of his lyre out by striking too hard,
And cracked half the notes of a truly fine voice,
Because song drew less instant attention than noise.
Ah, men do not know how much strength is in poise,
That he goes the farthest who goes far enough,
And that all beyond that is just bother and stuff.
No vain man matures, he makes too much new wood;
His blooms are too thick for the fruit to be good;
'Tis the modest man ripens, 'tis he that achieves,
Just what's needed of sunshine and shade he receives;
Grapes, to mellow, require the cool dark of their leaves;
Neal wants balance; he throws his mind always too far,
Whisking out flocks of comets, but never a star;
He has so much muscle, and loves so to show it,
That he strips himself naked to prove he's a poet,
And, to show he could leap Art's wide ditch, if he tried,
Jumps clean o'er it, and into the hedge t'other side.
He has strength, but there's nothing about him in keeping;
One gets surelier onward by walking than leaping;
He has used his own sinews himself to distress,
And had done vastly more had he done vastly less;
In letters, too soon is as bad as too late;
Could he only have waited he might have been great;
But he plumped into Helicon up to the waist,
And muddied the stream ere he took his first taste.

'There is Hawthorne, with genius so shrinking and rare
That you hardly at first see the strength that is there;

A frame so robust, with a nature so sweet,
 So earnest, so graceful, so lithe and so fleet,
 Is worth a descent from Olympus to meet;
 'Tis as if a rough oak that for ages had stood,
 With his gnarled bony branches like ribs of the wood,
 Should bloom, after cycles of struggle and scathe,
 With a single anemone trembly and rathe;
 His strength is so tender, his wildness so meek,
 That a suitable parallel sets one to seek,-
 He's a John Bunyan Fouque, a Puritan Tieck;
 When Nature was shaping him, clay was not granted
 For making so full-sized a man as she wanted,
 So, to fill out her model, a little she spared
 From some finer-grained stuff for a woman prepared,
 And she could not have hit a more excellent plan
 For making him fully and perfectly man.
 The success of her scheme gave her so much delight,
 That she tried it again, shortly after, in Dwight;
 Only, while she was kneading and shaping the clay,
 She sang to her work in her sweet childish way,
 And found, when she'd put the last touch to his soul,
 That the music had somehow got mixed with the whole.

'Here's Cooper, who's written six volumes to show
 He's as good as a lord: well, let's grant that he's so;
 If a person prefer that description of praise,
 Why, a coronet's certainly cheaper than bays;
 But he need take no pains to convince us he's not
 (As his enemies say) the American Scott.
 Choose any twelve men, and let C. read aloud
 That one of his novels of which he's most proud,
 And I'd lay any bet that, without ever quitting
 Their box, they'd be all, to a man, for acquitting.
 He has drawn you one character, though, that is new,
 One wildflower he's plucked that is wet with the dew
 Of this fresh Western world, and, the thing not to mince,
 He has done naught but copy it ill ever since;
 His Indians, with proper respect be it said,
 Are just Natty Bumppo, daubed over with red,
 And his very Long Toms are the same useful Nat,
 Rigged up in duck pants and a sou'wester hat
 (Though once in a Coffin, a good chance was found
 To have slipped the old fellow away underground).
 All his other men-figures are clothes upon sticks,
 The derniere chemise of a man in a fix
 (As a captain besieged, when his garrison's small,
 Sets up caps upon poles to be seen o'er the wall):
 And the women he draws from one model don't vary.
 All sappy as maples and flat as a prairie.
 When a character's wanted, he goes to the task
 As a cooper would do in composing a cask;
 He picks out the staves, of their qualities heedful,

Just hoops them together as tight as is needful,
And, if the best fortune should crown the attempt, he
Has made at the most something wooden and empty.

'Don't suppose I would underrate Cooper's abilities;
If I thought you'd do that, I should feel very ill at ease;
The men who have given to one character life
And objective existence are not very rife;
You may number them all, both prose-writers and singers,
Without overrunning the bounds of your fingers,
And Natty won't go to oblivion quicker
Than Adams the parson or Primrose the vicar.

'There is one thing in Cooper I like, too, and that is
That on manners he lectures his countrymen gratis;
Not precisely so either, because, for a rarity,
He is paid for his tickets in unpopularity.
Now he may overcharge his American pictures,
But you'll grant there's a good deal of truth in his strictures;
And I honor the man who is willing to sink
Half his present repute for the freedom to think,
And, when he has thought, be his cause strong or weak,
Will risk t'other half for the freedom to speak,
Caring naught for what vengeance the mob has in store,
Let that mob be the upper ten thousand or lower.

'There are truths you Americans need to be told,
And it never'll refute them to swagger and scold;
John Bull, looking o'er the Atlantic, in choler
At your aptness for trade, says you worship the dollar;
But to scorn such eye-dollar-try's what very few do,
And John goes to that church as often as you do,
No matter what John says, don't try to outcrow him,
'Tis enough to go quietly on and outgrow him;
Like most fathers, Bull hates to see Number One
Displacing himself in the mind of his son,
And detests the same faults in himself he'd neglected
When he sees them again in his child's glass reflected;
To love one another you're too like by half;
If he is a bull, you're a pretty stout calf,
And tear your own pasture for naught but to show
What a nice pair of horns you're beginning to grow.

'There are one or two things I should just like to hint,
For you don't often get the truth told you in print;
The most of you (this is what strikes all beholders)
Have a mental and physical stoop in the shoulders;
Though you ought to be free as the winds and the waves,
You've the gait and the manners of runaway slaves;
Though you brag of your New World, you don't half believe in it;
And as much of the Old as is possible weave in it;
Your goddess of freedom, a tight, buxom girl,

With lips like a cherry and teeth like a pearl,
With eyes bold as Here's, and hair floating free,
And full of the sun as the spray of the sea,
Who can sing at a husking or romp at a shearing,
Who can trip through the forests alone without fearing,
Who can drive home the cows with a song through the grass,
Keeps glancing aside into Europe's cracked glass.
Hides her red hands in gloves, pinches up her lithe waist,
And makes herself wretched with transmarine taste;
She loses her fresh country charm when she takes
Any mirror except her own rivers and lakes.

'You steal Englishmen's books and think Englishmen's thought,
With their salt on her tail your wild eagle is caught;
Your literature suits its each whisper and motion
To what will be thought of it over the ocean;
The cast clothes of Europe your statesmanship tries
And mumbles again the old blarneys and lies;-
Forget Europe wholly, your veins throb with blood,
To which the dull current in hers is but mud:
Let her sneer, let her say your experiment fails,
In her voice there's a tremble e'en now while she rails,
And your shore will soon be in the nature of things
Covered thick with gilt drift-wood of castaway kings,
Where alone, as it were in a Longfellow's Waif,
Her fugitive pieces will find themselves safe.
O my friends, thank your god, if you have one, that he
'Twixt the Old World and you set the gulf of a sea;
Be strong-backed, brown-handed, upright as your pines,
By the scale of a hemisphere shape your designs,
Be true to yourselves and this new nineteenth age,
As a statue by Powers, or a picture by Page,
Plough, sail, forge, build, carve, paint, make all over new,
To your own New-World instincts contrive to be true,
Keep your ears open wide to the Future's first call,
Be whatever you will, but yourselves first of all,
Stand fronting the dawn on Toil's heaven-scaling peaks,
And become my new race of more practical Greeks.-
Hem! your likeness at present, I shudder to tell o't,
Is that you have your slaves, and the Greek had his helot.'

Here a gentleman present, who had in his attic
More pepper than brains, shrieked, 'The man's a fanatic,
I'm a capital tailor with warm tar and feathers,
And will make him a suit that'll serve in all weathers;
But we'll argue the point first, I'm willing to reason 't,
Palaver before condemnation's but decent:
So, through my humble person, Humanity begs
Of the friends of true freedom a loan of bad eggs.'
But Apollo let one such a look of his show forth
As when [Greek: aeie nukti eoikios], and so forth,
And the gentleman somehow slunk out of the way,

But, as he was going, gained courage to say, -
 'At slavery in the abstract my whole soul rebels,
 I am as strongly opposed to 't as any one else.'
 'Ay, no doubt, but whenever I've happened to meet
 With a wrong or a crime, it is always concrete,'
 Answered Phoebus severely; then turning to us,
 'The mistake of such fellows as just made the fuss
 Is only in taking a great busy nation
 For a part of their pitiful cotton-plantation.-
 But there comes Miranda, Zeus! where shall I flee to?
 She has such a penchant for bothering me too!
 She always keeps asking if I don't observe a
 Particular likeness 'twixt her and Minerva;
 She tells me my efforts in verse are quite clever;-
 She's been travelling now, and will be worse than ever;
 One would think, though, a sharp-sighted noter she'd be
 Of all that's worth mentioning over the sea,
 For a woman must surely see well, if she try,
 The whole of whose being's a capital I:
 She will take an old notion, and make it her own,
 By saying it o'er in her Sibylline tone,
 Or persuade you 'tis something tremendously deep,
 By repeating it so as to put you to sleep;
 And she well may defy any mortal to see through it,
 When once she has mixed up her infinite me through it.
 There is one thing she owns in her own single right,
 It is native and genuine-namely, her spite;
 Though, when acting as censor, she privately blows
 A censer of vanity 'neath her own nose.'

Here Miranda came up, and said, 'Phoebus! you know
 That the Infinite Soul has its infinite woe,
 As I ought to know, having lived cheek by jowl,
 Since the day I was born, with the Infinite Soul;
 I myself introduced, I myself, I alone,
 To my Land's better life authors solely my own,
 Who the sad heart of earth on their shoulders have taken,
 Whose works sound a depth by Life's quiet unshaken,
 Such as Shakespeare, for instance, the Bible, and Bacon,
 Not to mention my own works; Time's nadir is fleet,
 And, as for myself, I'm quite out of conceit'-

'Quite out of conceit! I'm enchanted to hear it,'
 Cried Apollo aside. 'Who'd have thought she was near it?
 To be sure, one is apt to exhaust those commodities
 One uses too fast, yet in this case as odd it is
 As if Neptune should say to his turbot and whittings,
 'I'm as much out of salt as Miranda's own writings'
 (Which, as she in her own happy manner has said,
 Sound a depth, for 'tis one of the functions of lead).
 She often has asked me if I could not find
 A place somewhere near me that suited her mind;

I know but a single one vacant, which she,
With her rare talent that way, would fit to a T.
And it would not imply any pause or cessation
In the work she esteems her peculiar vocation,-
She may enter on duty to-day, if she chooses,
And remain Tiring-woman for life to the Muses.'

Miranda meanwhile has succeeded in driving
Up into a corner, in spite of their striving,
A small flock of terrified victims, and there,
With an I-turn-the-crank-of-the-Universe air
And a tone which, at least to my fancy, appears
Not so much to be entering as boxing your ears,
Is unfolding a tale (of herself, I surmise,
For 'tis dotted as thick as a peacock's with I's),
Apropos of Miranda, I'll rest on my oars
And drift through a trifling digression on bores,
For, though not wearing ear-rings in more majorum,
Our ears are kept bored just as if we still wore 'em.
There was one feudal custom worth keeping, at least,
Roasted bores made a part of each well-ordered feast,
And of all quiet pleasures the very ne plus
Was in hunting wild bores as the tame ones hunt us.
Archaeologists, I know, who have personal fears
Of this wise application of hounds and of spears,
Have tried to make out, with a zeal more than wonted,
'Twas a kind of wild swine that our ancestors hunted;
But I'll never believe that the age which has strewn
Europe o'er with cathedrals, and otherwise shown
That it knew what was what, could by chance not have known
(Spending, too, its chief time with its buff on, no doubt)
Which beast 'twould improve the world most to thin out.
I divide bores myself, in the manner of rifles,
Into two great divisions, regardless of trifles:-
There's your smooth-bore and screw-bore, who do not much vary
In the weight of cold lead they respectively carry.
The smooth-bore is one in whose essence the mind
Not a corner nor cranny to cling by can find;
You feel as in nightmares sometimes, when you slip
Down a steep slated roof, where there's nothing to grip;
You slide and you slide, the blank horror increases,-
You had rather by far be at once smashed to pieces;
You fancy a whirlpool below white and frothing,
And finally dropp off and light upon-nothing.
The screw-bore has twists in him, faint predilections
For going just wrong in the tritest directions;
When he's wrong he is flat, when he's right he can't show it,
He'll tell you what Snooks said about the new poet,
Or how Fogrum was outraged by Tennyson's Princess;
He has spent all his spare time and intellect since his
Birth in perusing, on each art and science,
Just the books in which no one puts any reliance,

And though nemo, we're told, horis omnibus sapit,
The rule will not fit him, however you shape it,
For he has a perennial foison of sappiness;
He has just enough force to spoil half your day's happiness,
And to make him a sort of mosquito to be with,
But just not enough to dispute or agree with.

These sketches I made (not to be too explicit)
From two honest fellows who made me a visit,
And broke, like the tale of the Bear and the Fiddle,
My reflections on Halleck short off by the middle;
I sha'n't now go into the subject more deeply,
For I notice that some of my readers look sleep'ly;
I will barely remark that, 'mongst civilized nations,
There's none that displays more exemplary patience
Under all sorts of boring, at all sorts of hours,
From all sorts of desperate persons, than ours.
Not to speak of our papers, our State legislatures,
And other such trials for sensitive natures,
Just look for a moment at Congress,-appalled,
My fancy shrinks back from the phantom it called;
Why, there's scarcely a member unworthy to frown
'Neath what Fourier nicknames the Boreal crown;
Only think what that infinite bore-pow'r could do
If applied with a utilitarian view;
Suppose, for example, we shipped it with care
To Sahara's great desert and let it bore there;
If they held one short session and did nothing else,
They'd fill the whole waste with Artesian wells.
But 'tis time now with pen phonographic to follow
Through some more of his sketches our laughing Apollo:-

'There comes Harry Franco, and, as he draws near,
You find that's a smile which you took for a sneer;
One half of him contradicts t'other; his wont
Is to say very sharp things and do very blunt;
His manner's as hard as his feelings are tender,
And a sortie he'll make when he means to surrender;
He's in joke half the time when he seems to be sternest,
When he seems to be joking, be sure he's in earnest;
He has common sense in a way that's uncommon,
Hates humbug and cant, loves his friends like a woman,
Builds his dislikes of cards and his friendships of oak,
Loves a prejudice better than aught but a joke,
Is half upright Quaker, half downright Come-outer,
Loves Freedom too well to go stark mad about her,
Quite artless himself, is a lover of Art,
Shuts you out of his secrets, and into his heart,
And though not a poet, yet all must admire
In his letters of Pinto his skill on the liar.

'There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,

Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge,
 Who talks like a book of iambs and pentameters,
 In a way to make people of common sense damn metres,
 Who has written some things quite the best of their kind,
 But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind,
 Who-But hey-day! What's this? Messieurs Mathews and Poe,
 You mustn't fling mud-balls at Longfellow so,
 Does it make a man worse that his character's such
 As to make his friends love him (as you think) too much?
 Why, there is not a bard at this moment alive
 More willing than he that his fellows should thrive;
 While you are abusing him thus, even now
 He would help either one of you out of a slough;
 You may say that he's smooth and all that till you're hoarse,
 But remember that elegance also is force;
 After polishing granite as much as you will,
 The heart keeps its tough old persistency still;
 Deduct all you can, _that_ still keeps you at bay;
 Why, he'll live till men weary of Collins and Gray.
 I'm not over-fond of Greek metres in English,
 To me rhyme's a gain, so it be not too jinglish,
 And your modern hexameter verses are no more
 Like Greek ones than sleek Mr. Pope is like Homer;
 As the roar of the sea to the coo of a pigeon is,
 So, compared to your moderns, sounds old Melesigenes;
 I may be too partial, the reason, perhaps, o't is
 That I've heard the old blind man recite his own rhapsodies,
 And my ear with that music impregnate may be,
 Like the poor exiled shell with the soul of the sea,
 Or as one can't bear Strauss when his nature is cloven
 To its deeps within deeps by the stroke of Beethoven;
 But, set that aside, and 'tis truth that I speak,
 Had Theocritus written in English, not Greek,
 I believe that his exquisite sense would scarce change a line
 In that rare, tender, virgin-like pastoral Evangeline.
 That's not ancient nor modern, its place is apart
 Where time has no sway, in the realm of pure Art,
 'Tis a shrine of retreat from Earth's hubbub and strife
 As quiet and chaste as the author's own life.

There comes Philothea, her face all aglow,
 She has just been dividing some poor creature's woe,
 And can't tell which pleases her most, to relieve
 His want, or his story to hear and believe;
 No doubt against many deep griefs she prevails,
 For her ear is the refuge of destitute tales;
 She knows well that silence is sorrow's best food,
 And that talking draws off from the heart its black blood,
 So she'll listen with patience and let you unfold
 Your bundle of rags as 'twere pure cloth of gold,
 Which, indeed, it all turns to as soon as she's touched it,
 And (to borrow a phrase from the nursery) _muched_ it;

She has such a musical taste, she will go
 Any distance to hear one who draws a long bow;
 She will swallow a wonder by mere might and main,
 And thinks it Geometry's fault if she's fain
 To consider things flat, inasmuch as they're plain;
 Facts with her are accomplished, as Frenchmen would say-
 They will prove all she wishes them to either way,-
 And, as fact lies on this side or that, we must try,
 If we're seeking the truth, to find where it don't lie;
 I was telling her once of a marvellous aloe
 That for thousands of years had looked spindling and fallow,
 And, though nursed by the fruitfulest powers of mud,
 Had never vouchsafed e'en so much as a bud,
 Till its owner remarked (as a sailor, you know,
 Often will in a calm) that it never would blow,
 For he wished to exhibit the plant, and designed
 That its blowing should help him in raising the wind;
 At last it was told him that if he should water
 Its roots with the blood of his unmarried daughter
 (Who was born, as her mother, a Calvinist, said,
 With William Law's serious caul on her head),
 It would blow as the obstinate breeze did when by a
 Like decree of her father died Iphigenia;
 At first he declared he himself would be blowed
 Ere his conscience with such a foul crime he would load,
 But the thought, coming oft, grew less dark than before,
 And he mused, as each creditor knocked at his door,
 If this were but done they would dun me no more;
 I told Philothea his struggles and doubts,
 And how he considered the ins and the outs
 Of the visions he had, and the dreadful dyspepsy,
 How he went to the seer that lives at Po'keepsie,
 How the seer advised him to sleep on it first,
 And to read his big volume in case of the worst,
 And further advised he should pay him five dollars
 For writing [Old English: Hum Hum] on his wristbands and collars;
 Three years and ten days these dark words he had studied
 When the daughter was missed, and the aloe had budded;
 I told how he watched it grow large and more large,
 And wondered how much for the show he should charge,-
 She had listened with utter indifference to this, till
 I told how it bloomed, and, discharging its pistil
 With an aim the Eumenides dictated, shot
 The botanical filicide dead on the spot;
 It had blown, but he reaped not his horrible gains,
 For it blew with such force as to blow out his brains,
 And the crime was blown also, because on the wad,
 Which was paper, was writ 'Visitation of God,'
 As well as a thrilling account of the deed
 Which the coroner kindly allowed me to read.

'Well, my friend took this story up just, to be sure,

As one might a poor foundling that's laid at one's door;
She combed it and washed it and clothed it and fed it,
And as if 'twere her own child most tenderly bred it,
Laid the scene (of the legend, I mean) far away a-
-mong the green vales underneath Himalaya,
And by artist-like touches, laid on here and there,
Made the whole thing so touching, I frankly declare
I have read it all thrice, and, perhaps I am weak,
But I found every time there were tears on my cheek.

'The pole, science tells us, the magnet controls,
But she is a magnet to emigrant Poles,
And folks with a mission that nobody knows
Throng thickly about her as bees round a rose;
She can fill up the _carets_ in such, make their scope
Converge to some focus of rational hope,
And, with sympathies fresh as the morning, their gall
Can transmute into honey, -but this is not all;
Not only for those she has solace, oh say,
Vice's desperate nursling adrift in Broadway,
Who clingest, with all that is left of thee human,
To the last slender spar from the wreck of the woman,
Hast thou not found one shore where those tired drooping feet
Could reach firm mother-earth, one full heart on whose beat
The soothed head in silence reposing could hear
The chimes of far childhood throb back on the ear?
Ah, there's many a beam from the fountain of day
That, to reach us unclouded, must pass, on its way,
Through the soul of a woman, and hers is wide ope
To the influence of Heaven as the blue eyes of Hope;
Yes, a great heart is hers, one that dares to go in
To the prison, the slave-hut, the alleys of sin,
And to bring into each, or to find there, some line
Of the never completely out-trampled divine;
If her heart at high floods swamps her brain now and then,
'Tis but richer for that when the tide ebbs agen,
As, after old Nile has subsided, his plain
Overflows with a second broad deluge of grain;
What a wealth would it tiring to the narrow and sour
Could they be as a Child but for one little hour!

'What! Irving? thrice welcome, warm heart and fine brain,
You bring back the happiest spirit from Spain,
And the gravest sweet humor, that ever were there
Since Cervantes met death in his gentle despair;
Nay, don't be embarrassed, nor look so beseeching,
I sha'n't run directly against my own preaching,
And, having just laughed at their Raphaels and Dantes,
Go to setting you up beside matchless Cervantes;
But allow me to speak what I honestly feel, -
To a true poet-heart add the fun of Dick Steele,
Throw in all of Addison, _minus_ the chill,

With the whole of that partnership's stock and good-will,
Mix well, and while stirring, hum o'er, as a spell,
The fine _old_ English Gentleman, simmer it well,
Sweeten just to your own private liking, then strain,
That only the finest and clearest remain,
Let it stand out of doors till a soul it receives
From the warm lazy sun loitering down through green leaves,
And you'll find a choice nature, not wholly deserving
A name either English or Yankee,-just Irving.

'There goes,-but _stet nominis umbra_, -his name
You'll be glad enough, some day or other, to claim,
And will all crowd about him and swear that you knew him
If some English critic should chance to review him.
The old _porcos ante ne projiciatis_
MARGARITAS, for him you have verified gratis;
What matters his name? Why, it may be Sylvester,
Judd, Junior, or Junius, Ulysses, or Nestor,
For aught _I_ know or care; 'tis enough that I look
On the author of 'Margaret,' the first Yankee book
With the _soul_ of Down East in 't, and things farther East,
As far as the threshold of morning, at least,
Where awaits the fair dawn of the simple and true,
Of the day that comes slowly to make all things new.
'T has a smack of pine woods, of bare field and bleak hill,
Such as only the breed of the Mayflower could till;
The Puritan's shown in it, tough to the core,
Such as prayed, smiting Agag on red Marston Moor:
With an unwilling humor, half choked by the drouth
In brown hollows about the inhospitable mouth;
With a soul full of poetry, though it has qualms
About finding a happiness out of the Psalms;
Full of tenderness, too, though it shrinks in the dark,
Hamadryad-like, under the coarse, shaggy bark;
That sees visions, knows wrestlings of God with the Will,
And has its own Sinais and thunderings still.'

Here, 'Forgive me, Apollo,' I cried, 'while I pour
My heart out to my birthplace: O loved more and more
Dear Baystate, from whose rocky bosom thy sons
Should suck milk, strong-will-giving, brave, such as runs
In the veins of old Greylock-who is it that dares
Call thee pedler, a soul wrapped in bank-books and shares?
It is false! She's a Poet! I see, as I write,
Along the far railroad the steam-snake glide white,
The cataract-throb of her mill-hearts, I hear,
The swift strokes of trip-hammers weary my ear,
Sledges ring upon anvils, through logs the saw screams,
Blocks swing to their place, beetles drive home the beams:-
It is songs such as these that she croons to the din
Of her fast-flying shuttles, year out and year in,
While from earth's farthest corner there comes not a breeze

But wafts her the buzz of her gold-gleaning bees:
 What though those horn hands have as yet found small time
 For painting and sculpture and music and rhyme?
 These will come in due order; the need that pressed sorest
 Was to vanquish the seasons, the ocean, the forest,
 To bridle and harness the rivers, the steam,
 Making those whirl her mill-wheels, this tug in her team,
 To vassalize old tyrant Winter, and make
 Him delve surlily for her on river and lake;-
 When this New World was parted, she strove not to shirk
 Her lot in the heirdom, the tough, silent Work,
 The hero-share ever from Herakles down
 To Odin, the Earth's iron sceptre and crown:
 Yes, thou dear, noble Mother! if ever men's praise
 Could be claimed for creating heroical lays,
 Thou hast won it; if ever the laurel divine
 Crowned the Maker and Builder, that glory is thine!
 Thy songs are right epic, they tell how this rude
 Rock-rib of our earth here was tamed and subdued;
 Thou hast written them plain on the face of the planet
 In brave, deathless letters of iron and granite;
 Thou hast printed them deep for all time; they are set
 From the same runic type-fount and alphabet
 With thy stout Berkshire hills and the arms of thy Bay,-
 They are staves from the burly old Mayflower lay.
 If the drones of the Old World, in querulous ease,
 Ask thy Art and thy Letters, point proudly to these,
 Or, if they deny these are Letters and Art,
 Toil on with the same old invincible heart;
 Thou art rearing the pedestal broad-based and grand
 Whereon the fair shapes of the Artist shall stand,
 And creating, through labors undaunted and long,
 The theme for all Sculpture and Painting and Song!

'But my good mother Baystate wants no praise of mine,
 She learned from _her_ mother a precept divine
 About something that butters no parsnips, her _forte_
 In another direction lies, work is her sport
 (Though she'll curtsey and set her cap straight, that she will,
 If you talk about Plymouth and red Bunker's hill).
 Dear, notable goodwife! by this time of night,
 Her hearth is swept neatly, her fire burning bright,
 And she sits in a chair (of home plan and make) rocking,
 Musing much, all the while, as she darns on a stocking,
 Whether turkeys will come pretty high next Thanksgiving,
 Whether flour'll be so dear, for, as sure as she's living,
 She will use rye-and-injun then, whether the pig
 By this time ain't got pretty tolerable big,
 And whether to sell it outright will be best,
 Or to smoke hams and shoulders and salt down the rest,-
 At this minute, she'd swop all my verses, ah, cruel!
 For the last patent stove that is saving of fuel;

So I'll just let Apollo go on, for his phiz
Shows I've kept him awaiting too long as it is.'

'If our friend, there, who seems a reporter, is done
With his burst of emotion, why, I will go on,'
Said Apollo; some smiled, and, indeed, I must own
There was something sarcastic, perhaps, in his tone;-

'There's Holmes, who is matchless among you for wit;
A Leyden-jar always full-charged, from which flit
The electrical tingles of hit after hit;
In long poems 'tis painful sometimes, and invites
A thought of the way the new Telegraph writes,
Which pricks down its little sharp sentences spitefully
As if you got more than you'd title to rightfully,
And you find yourself hoping its wild father Lightning
Would flame in for a second and give you a fright'ning.
He has perfect sway of what I call a sham metre,
But many admire it, the English pentameter,
And Campbell, I think, wrote most commonly worse,
With less nerve, swing, and fire in the same kind of verse,
Nor e'er achieved aught in't so worthy of praise
As the tribute of Holmes to the grand Marseillaise.
You went crazy last year over Bulwer's New Timon;-
Why, if B., to the day of his dying, should rhyme on,
Heaping verses on verses and tomes upon tomes,
He could ne'er reach the best point and vigor of Holmes.
His are just the fine hands, too, to weave you a lyric
Full of fancy, fun, feeling, or spiced with satiric
In a measure so kindly, you doubt if the toes
That are trodden upon are your own or your foes'.

'There is Lowell, who's striving Parnassus to climb
With a whole bale of isms tied together with rhyme,
He might get on alone, spite of brambles and boulders,
But he can't with that bundle he has on his shoulders,
The top of the hill he will ne'er come nigh reaching
Till he learns the distinction 'twixt singing and preaching;
His lyre has some chords that would ring pretty well,
But he'd rather by half make a drum of the shell,
And rattle away till he's old as Methusalem,
At the head of a march to the last new Jerusalem.

'There goes Halleck, whose Fanny's a pseudo Don Juan,
With the wickedness out that gave salt to the true one,
He's a wit, though, I hear, of the very first order,
And once made a pun on the words soft Recorder;
More than this, he's a very great poet, I'm told,
And has had his works published in crimson and gold,
With something they call 'Illustrations,' to wit,
Like those with which Chapman obscured Holy Writ,
Which are said to illustrate, because, as I view it,

Like lucus a non, they precisely don't do it;
 Let a man who can write what himself understands
 Keep clear, if he can, of designing men's hands,
 Who bury the sense, if there's any worth having,
 And then very honestly call it engraving,
 But, to quit badinage, which there isn't much wit in,
 Halleck's better, I doubt not, than all he has written;
 In his verse a clear glimpse you will frequently find,
 If not of a great, of a fortunate mind,
 Which contrives to be true to its natural loves
 In a world of back-offices, ledgers, and stoves.
 When his heart breaks away from the brokers and banks,
 And kneels in his own private shrine to give thanks,
 There's a genial manliness in him that earns
 Our sincerest respect (read, for instance, his 'Burns'),
 And we can't but regret (seek excuse where we may)
 That so much of a man has been peddled away.

'But what's that? a mass-meeting? No, there come in lots
 The American Bulwers, Disraelis, and Scotts,
 And in short the American everything elses,
 Each charging the others with envies and jealousies;-
 By the way, 'tis a fact that displays what profusions
 Of all kinds of greatness bless free institutions,
 That while the Old World has produced barely eight
 Of such poets as all men agree to call great,
 And of other great characters hardly a score
 (One might safely say less than that rather than more),
 With you every year a whole crop is begotten,
 They're as much of a staple as corn is, or cotton;
 Why, there's scarcely a huddle of log-huts and shanties
 That has not brought forth its own Miltons and Dantes;
 I myself know ten Byrons, one Coleridge, three Shelleys,
 Two Raphaels, six Titians (I think), one Apelles,
 Leonardos and Rubenses plenty as lichens,
 One (but that one is plenty) American Dickens,
 A whole flock of Lambs, any number of Tennysons,-
 In short, if a man has the luck to have any sons,
 He may feel pretty certain that one out of twain
 Will be some very great person over again.
 There is one inconvenience in all this, which lies
 In the fact that by contrast we estimate size,
 And, where there are none except Titans, great stature
 Is only the normal proceeding of nature.
 What puff the strained sails of your praise will you furl at, if
 The calmest degree that you know is superlative?
 At Rome, all whom Charon took into his wherry must,
 As a matter of course, be well issimust and errimust,
 A Greek, too, could feel, while in that famous boat he tost,
 That his friends would take care he was [Greek: istost] and
 [Greek: otatost],
 And formerly we, as through graveyards we past,

Thought the world went from bad to worst fearfully fast;
 Let us glance for a moment, 'tis well worth the pains,
 And note what an average graveyard contains;
 There lie levellers levelled, duns done up themselves,
 There are booksellers finally laid on their shelves,
 Horizontally there lie upright politicians,
 Dose-a-dose with their patients sleep faultless physicians,
 There are slave-drivers quietly whipped under ground,
 There bookbinders, done up in boards, are fast bound,
 There card-players wait till the last trump be played,
 There all the choice spirits get finally laid,
 There the babe that's unborn is supplied with a berth,
 There men without legs get their six feet of earth,
 There lawyers repose, each wrapped up in his case,
 There seekers of office are sure of a place,
 There defendant and plaintiff get equally cast,
 There shoemakers quietly stick to the last,
 There brokers at length become silent as stocks,
 There stage-drivers sleep without quitting their box,
 And so forth and so forth and so forth and so on,
 With this kind of stuff one might endlessly go on;
 To come to the point, I may safely assert you
 Will find in each yard every cardinal virtue;
 Each has six truest patriots: four discoverers of ether,
 Who never had thought on 't nor mentioned it either;
 Ten poets, the greatest who ever wrote rhyme:
 Two hundred and forty first men of their time:
 One person whose portrait just gave the least hint
 Its original had a most horrible squint:
 One critic, most (what do they call it?) reflective,
 Who never had used the phrase ob-or subjective:
 Forty fathers of Freedom, of whom twenty bred
 Their sons for the rice-swamps, at so much a head,
 And their daughters for-faugh! thirty mothers of Gracchi:
 Non-resistants who gave many a spiritual blackeye:
 Eight true friends of their kind, one of whom was a jailer:
 Four captains almost as astounding as Taylor:
 Two dozen of Italy's exiles who shoot us his
 Kaisership daily, stern pen-and-ink Brutuses,
 Who, in Yankee back-parlors, with crucified smile,
 Mount serenely their country's funereal pile:
 Ninety-nine Irish heroes, ferocious rebellers
 'Gainst the Saxon in cis-marine garrets and cellars,
 Who shake their dread fists o'er the sea and all that,-
 As long as a copper drops into the hat:
 Nine hundred Teutonic republicans stark
 From Vaterland's battle just won-in the Park,
 Who the happy profession of martyrdom take
 Whenever it gives them a chance at a steak;
 Sixty-two second Washingtons: two or three Jacksons:
 And so many everythings else that it racks one's
 Poor memory too much to continue the list,

Especially now they no longer exist;-
I would merely observe that you've taken to giving
The puffs that belong to the dead to the living,
And that somehow your trump-of-contemporary-doom's tones
Is tuned after old dedications and tombstones.'

Here the critic came in and a thistle presented-
From a frown to a smile the god's features relented,
As he stared at his envoy, who, swelling with pride,
To the god's asking look, nothing daunted, replied,-
'You're surprised, I suppose, I was absent so long,
But your godship respecting the lilies was wrong;
I hunted the garden from one end to t'other,
And got no reward but vexation and bother,
Till, tossed out with weeds in a corner to wither,
This one lily I found and made haste to bring hither.'

'Did he think I had given him a book to review?
I ought to have known what the fellow would do,'
Muttered Phoebus aside, 'for a thistle will pass
Beyond doubt for the queen of all flowers with an ass;
He has chosen in just the same way as he'd choose
His specimens out of the books he reviews;
And now, as this offers an excellent text,
I'll give 'em some brief hints on criticism next.'
So, musing a moment, he turned to the crowd,
And, clearing his voice, spoke as follows aloud:-

'My friends, in the happier days of the muse,
We were luckily free from such things as reviews;
Then naught came between with its fog to make clearer
The heart of the poet to that of his hearer;
Then the poet brought heaven to the people, and they
Felt that they, too, were poets in hearing his lay;
Then the poet was prophet, the past in his soul
Precreated the future, both parts of one whole;
Then for him there was nothing too great or too small,
For one natural deity sanctified all;
Then the bard owned no clipper and meter of moods
Save the spirit of silence that hovers and broods
O'er the seas and the mountains, the rivers and woods;
He asked not earth's verdict, forgetting the clods,
His soul soared and sang to an audience of gods;
'Twas for them that he measured the thought and the line,
And shaped for their vision the perfect design,
With as glorious a foresight, a balance as true,
As swung out the worlds in the infinite blue;
Then a glory and greatness invested man's heart,
The universal, which now stands estranged and apart,
In the free individual moulded, was Art;
Then the forms of the Artist seemed thrilled with desire
For something as yet unattained, fuller, higher,

As once with her lips, lifted hands, and eyes listening,
 And her whole upward soul in her countenance glistening,
 Eurydice stood-like a beacon unfired,
 Which, once touched with flame, will leap heav'nward inspired-
 And waited with answering kindle to mark
 The first gleam of Orpheus that pained the red Dark.
 Then painting, song, sculpture did more than relieve
 The need that men feel to create and believe,
 And as, in all beauty, who listens with love
 Hears these words oft repeated-'beyond and above,'
 So these seemed to be but the visible sign
 Of the grasp of the soul after things more divine;
 They were ladders the Artist erected to climb
 O'er the narrow horizon of space and of time,
 And we see there the footsteps by which men had gained
 To the one rapturous glimpse of the never-attained,
 As shepherds could erst sometimes trace in the sod
 The last spurning print of a sky-cleaving god.

'But now, on the poet's dis-privacied moods
 With do this and do that the pert critic intrudes;
 While he thinks he's been barely fulfilling his duty
 To interpret 'twixt men and their own sense of beauty.
 And has striven, while others sought honor or pelf,
 To make his kind happy as he was himself,
 He finds he's been guilty of horrid offences
 In all kinds of moods, numbers, genders, and tenses;
 He's been ob and sub jective, what Kettle calls Pot,
 Precisely, at all events, what he ought not,
You have done this, says one judge; done that, says another;
You should have done this, grumbles one; that, says t'other;
 Never mind what he touches, one shrieks out Taboo!
 And while he is wondering what he shall do,
 Since each suggests opposite topics for song,
 They all shout together you're right! and you're wrong!

'Nature fits all her children with something to do,
 He who would write and can't write can surely review,
 Can set up a small booth as critic and sell us his
 Petty conceit and his pettier jealousies;
 Thus a lawyer's apprentice, just out of his teens,
 Will do for the Jeffrey of six magazines;
 Having read Johnson's lives of the poets half through,
 There's nothing on earth he's not competent to;
 He reviews with as much nonchalance as he whistles,-
 He goes through a book and just picks out the thistles;
 It matters not whether he blame or commend,
 If he's bad as a foe, he's far worse as a friend:
 Let an author but write what's above his poor scope,
 He goes to work gravely and twists up a rope,
 And, inviting the world to see punishment done,
 Hangs himself up to bleach in the wind and the sun;

'Tis delightful to see, when a man comes along
Who has anything in him peculiar and strong,
Every cockboat that swims clear its fierce (pop) gundeck at him,
And make as he passes its ludicrous Peck at him-'

Here Miranda came up and began, 'As to that-'
Apollo at once seized his gloves, cane, and hat,
And, seeing the place getting rapidly cleared,
I too snatched my notes and forthwith disappeared.

James Russell Lowell

A Familiar Epistle

Alike I hate to be your debtor,
Or write a mere perfunctory letter;
For letters, so it seems to me,
Our careless quintessence should be,
Our real nature's truant play
When Consciousness looks t'other way;
Not dropp by drop, with watchful skill,
Gathered in Art's deliberate still,
But life's insensible completeness
Got as the ripe grape gets its sweetness,
As if it had a way to fuse
The golden sunlight into juice.
Hopeless my mental pump I try,
The boxes hiss, the tube is dry;
As those petroleum wells that spout
Awhile like M.C.'s, then give out,
My spring, once full as Arethusa,
Is a mere bore as dry's Creusa;
And yet you ask me why I'm glum,
And why my graver Muse is dumb.
Ah me! I've reasons manifold
Condensed in one,-I'm getting old!

When life, once past its fortieth year,
Wheels up its evening hemisphere,
The mind's own shadow, which the boy
Saw onward point to hope and joy,
Shifts round, irrevocably set
Tow'rd morning's loss and vain regret,
And, argue with it as we will,
The clock is unconverted still.

'But count the gains,' I hear you say,
'Which far the seeming loss out-weigh;
Friendships built firm 'gainst flood and wind
On rock foundations of the mind;
Knowledge instead of scheming hope;
For wild adventure, settled scope;
Talents, from surface-ore profuse,
Tempered and edged to tools for use;
Judgment, for passion's headlong whirls;
Old sorrows crystallised into pearls;
Losses by patience turned to gains,
Possessions now, that once were pains;
Joy's blossom gone, as go it must,
To ripen seeds of faith and trust;
Why heed a snow-flake on the roof
If fire within keep Age aloof,
Though blundering north-winds push and strain
With palms benumbed against the pane?'

My dear old Friend, you're very wise;

We always are with others' eyes,
And see so clear! (our neighbor's deck on)
What reef the idiot's sure to wreck on;
Folks when they learn how life has quizzed 'em
Are fain to make a shift with Wisdom,
And, finding she nor breaks nor bends,
Give her a letter to their friends.
Draw passion's torrent whoso will
Through sluices smooth to turn a mill,
And, taking solid toll of grist,
Forget the rainbow in the mist,
The exulting leap, the aimless haste
Scattered in iridescent waste;
Prefer who likes the sure esteem
To cheated youth's midsummer dream,
When every friend was more than Damon,
Each quicksand safe to build a fame on;
Believe that prudence snug excels
Youth's gross of verdant spectacles,
Through which earth's withered stubble seen
Looks autumn-proof as painted green,-
I side with Moses 'gainst the masses,
Take you the drudge, give me the glasses!
And, for your talents shaped with practice,
Convince me first that such the fact is;
Let whoso likes be beat, poor fool,
On life's hard stithy to a tool,
Be whoso will a ploughshare made,
Let me remain a jolly blade!

What's Knowledge, with her stocks and lands,
To gay Conjecture's yellow strands?
What's watching her slow flock's increase
To ventures for the golden fleece?
What her deep ships, safe under lee,
To youth's light craft, that drinks the sea,
For Flying Islands making sail,
And failing where 'tis gain to fail?
Ah me! Experience (so we're told),
Time's crucible, turns lead to gold;
Yet what's experience won but dross,
Cloud-gold transmuted to our loss?
What but base coin the best event
To the untried experiment!

'Twas an old couple, says the poet,
That lodged the gods and did not know it;
Youth sees and knows them as they were
Before Olympus' top was bare;
From Swampscot's flats his eye divine
Sees Venus rocking on the brine,
With lucent limbs, that somehow scatter a

Charm that turns Doll to Cleopatra;
Bacchus (that now is scarce induced
To give Eld's lagging blood a boost),
With cymbals' clang and pards to draw him,
Divine as Ariadne saw him,
Storms through Youth's pulse with all his train
And wins new Indies in his brain;
Apollo (with the old a trope,
A sort of finer Mister Pope),
Apollo-but the Muse forbids:
At his approach cast down thy lids,
And think it joy enough to hear
Far off his arrows singing clear;
He knows enough who silent knows
The quiver chiming as he goes;
He tells too much who e'er betrays
The shining Archer's secret ways.

Dear Friend, you're right and I am wrong;
My quibbles are not worth a song,
And I sophisticatedly tease
My fancy sad to tricks like these.
I could not cheat you if I would;
You know me and my jesting mood,
Mere surface-foam, for pride concealing
The purpose of my deeper feeling.
I have not spilt one dropp of joy
Poured in the senses of the boy,
Nor Nature fails my walks to bless
With all her golden inwardness;
And as blind nestlings, unafraid,
Stretch up wide-mouthed to every shade
By which their downy dream is stirred,
Taking it for the mother-bird,
So, when God's shadow, which is light,
Unheralded, by day or night,
My wakening instincts falls across,
Silent as sunbeams over moss,
In my heart's nest half-conscious things
Stir with a helpless sense of wings,
Lift themselves up, and tremble long
With premonitions sweet of song.

Be patient, and perhaps (who knows?)
These may be winged one day like those;
If thrushes, close-embowered to sing,
Pierced through with June's delicious sting;
If swallows, their half-hour to run
Star-breasted in the setting sun.
At first they're but the unfledged proem,
Or songless schedule of a poem;
When from the shell they're hardly dry

If some folks thrust them forth, must I?

But let me end with a comparison
Never yet hit upon by e'er a son
Of our American Apollo,
(And there's where I shall beat them hollow,
If he indeed's no courtly St. John,
But, as West said, a Mohawk Injun.)
A poem's like a cruise for whales:
Through untried seas the hunter sails,
His prow dividing waters known
To the blue iceberg's hulk alone;
At last, on farthest edge of day,
He marks the smoky puff of spray;
Then with bent oars the shallop flies
To where the basking quarry lies;
Then the excitement of the strife,
The crimsoned waves,-ah, this is life!

But, the dead plunder once secured
And safe beside the vessel moored,
All that had stirred the blood before
Is so much blubber, nothing more,
(I mean no pun, nor image so
Mere sentimental verse, you know,)
And all is tedium, smoke, and soil,
In trying out the noisome oil.

Yes, this is life! And so the bard
Through briny deserts, never scarred
Since Noah's keel, a subject seeks,
And lies upon the watch for weeks;
That once harpooned and helpless lying,
What follows is but weary trying.

Now I've a notion, if a poet
Beat up for themes, his verse will show it;
I wait for subjects that hunt me,
By day or night won't let me be,
And hang about me like a curse,
Till they have made me into verse,
From line to line my fingers tease
Beyond my knowledge, as the bees
Build no new cell till those before
With limpid summer-sweet run o'er;
Then, if I neither sing nor shine,
Is it the subject's fault, or mine?

James Russell Lowell

A Glance Behind the Curtain

We see but half the causes of our deeds,
Seeking them wholly in the outer life,
And heedless of the encircling spirit-world,
Which, though unseen, is felt, and sows in us
All germs of pure and world-wide purposes.
From one stage of our being to the next
We pass unconscious o'er a slender bridge,
The momentary work of unseen hands,
Which crumbles down behind us; looking back,
We see the other shore, the gulf between,
And, marvelling how we won to where we stand,
Content ourselves to call the builder Chance.
We trace the wisdom to the apple's fall,
Not to the birth-throes of a mighty Truth
Which, for long ages in blank Chaos dumb,
Yet yearned to be incarnate, and had found
At last a spirit meet to be the womb
From which it might be born to bless mankind,-
Not to the soul of Newton, ripe with all
The hoarded thoughtfulness of earnest years,
And waiting but one ray of sunlight more
To blossom fully.

But whence came that ray?
We call our sorrows Destiny, but ought
Rather to name our high successes so.
Only the instincts of great souls are Fate,
And have predestined sway: all other things,
Except by leave of us, could never be.
For Destiny is but the breath of God
Still moving in us, the last fragment left
Of our unfallen nature, waking oft
Within our thought, to beckon us beyond
The narrow circle of the seen and known,
And always tending to a noble end,
As all things must that overrule the soul,
And for a space unseat the helmsman, Will.
The fate of England and of freedom once
Seemed wavering in the heart of one plain man:
One step of his, and the great dial-hand,
That marks the destined progress of the world
In the eternal round from wisdom on
To higher wisdom, had been made to pause
A hundred years. That step he did not take,-
He knew not why, nor we, but only God,-
And lived to make his simple oaken chair
More terrible and soberly august,
More full of majesty than any throne,
Before or after, of a British king.

Upon the pier stood two stern-visaged men,
Looking to where a little craft lay moored,

Swayed by the lazy current of the Thames,
 Which weltered by in muddy listlessness.
 Grave men they were, and battlings of fierce thought
 Had trampled out all softness from their brows,
 And ploughed rough furrows there before their time,
 For other crop than such as home-bred Peace
 Sows broadcast in the willing soil of Youth.
 Care, not of self, but for the common-weal,
 Had robbed their eyes of youth, and left instead
 A look of patient power and iron will,
 And something fiercer, too, that gave broad hint
 Of the plain weapons girded at their sides.
 The younger had an aspect of command,-
 Not such as trickles down, a slender stream,
 In the shrunk channel of a great descent,
 But such as lies entowered in heart and head,
 And an arm prompt to do the 'hests of both.
 His was a brow where gold were out of place,
 And yet it seemed right worthy of a crown
 (Though he despised such), were it only made
 Of iron, or some serviceable stuff
 That would have matched his brownly rugged face
 The elder, although such he hardly seemed
 (Care makes so little of some five short years),
 Had a clear, honest face, whose rough-hewn strength
 Was mildened by the scholar's wiser heart
 To sober courage, such as best befits
 The unsullied temper of a well-taught mind,
 Yet so remained that one could plainly guess
 The hushed volcano smouldering underneath.
 He spoke: the other, hearing, kept his gaze
 Still fixed, as on some problem in the sky.

'O CROMWELL we are fallen on evil times!
 There was a day when England had a wide room
 For honest men as well as foolish kings:
 But now the uneasy stomach of the time
 Turns squeamish at them both. Therefore let us
 Seek out that savage clime, where men as yet
 Are free: there sleeps the vessel on the tide,
 Her languid canvas drooping for the wind;
 Give us but that, and what need we to fear
 This Order of the Council? The free waves
 Will not say No to please a wayward king,
 Nor will the winds turn traitors at his beck:
 All things are fitly cared for, and the Lord
 Will watch us kindly o'er the exodus
 Of us his servants now, as in old time.
 We have no cloud or fire, and haply we
 May not pass dry-shod through the ocean-stream;
 But, saved or lost, all things are in His hand.'
 So spake he, and meantime the other stood

With wide gray eyes still reading the blank air.
As if upon the sky's blue wall he saw
Some mystic sentence, written by a hand,
Such as of old made pale the Assyrian king,
Girt with his satraps in the blazing feast.

'HAMPDEN! a moment since, my purpose was
To fly with thee,-for I will call it flight,
Nor flatter it with any smoother name,-
But something in me bids me not to go;
And I am one, thou knowest, who, unmoved
By what the weak deem omens, yet give heed
And reverence due to whatsoe'er my soul
Whispers of warning to the inner ear.
Moreover, as I know that God brings round
His purposes in ways undreamed by us,
And makes the wicked but his instruments
To hasten their own swift and sudden fall,
I see the beauty of his providence
In the King's order: blind, he will not let
His doom part from him, but must bid it stay
As 't were a cricket, whose enlivening chirp
He loved to hear beneath his very hearth.
Why should we fly? Nay, why not rather stay
And rear again our Zion's crumbled walls,
Not, as of old the walls of Thebes were built,
By minstrel twanging, but, if need should be,
With the more potent music of our swords?
Think'st thou that score of men beyond the sea
Claim more God's care than all of England here?
No; when He moves his arm, it is to aid
Whole peoples, heedless if a few be crushed,
As some are ever, when the destiny
Of man takes one stride onward nearer home.
Believe me, 'tis the mass of men He loves;
And, where there is most sorrow and most want,
Where the high heart of man is trodden down
The most, 'tis not because He hides his face
From them in wrath, as purblind teachers prate:
Not so: there most is He, for there is He
Most needed. Men who seek for Fate abroad
Are not so near his heart as they who dare
Frankly to face her where she faces them,
On their own threshold, where their souls are strong
To grapple with and throw her; as I once,
Being yet a boy, did cast this puny king,
Who now has grown so dotard as to deem
That he can wrestle with an angry realm,
And throw the brawned Antaeus of men's rights.
No, Hampden! they have half-way conquered Fate
Who go half-way to meet her,-as will I.
Freedom hath yet a work for me to do;

So speaks that inward voice which never yet
Spake falsely, when it urged the spirit on
To noble emprise for country and mankind.
And, for success, I ask no more than this,-
To bear unflinching witness to the truth.
All true whole men succeed; for what is worth
Success's name, unless it be the thought,
The inward surety, to have carried out
A noble purpose to a noble end,
Although it be the gallows or the block?
'Tis only Falsehood that doth ever need
These outward shows of gain to bolster her.
Be it we prove the weaker with our swords;
Truth only needs to be for once spoke out,
And there's such music in her, such strange rhythm,
As makes men's memories her joyous slaves,
And clings around the soul, as the sky clings
Round the mute earth, forever beautiful,
And, if o'erclouded, only to burst forth
More all-embracingly divine and clear:
Get but the truth once uttered, and 'tis like
A star new-born, that drops into its place,
And which, once circling in its placid round,
Not all the tumult of the earth can shake.

'What should we do in that small colony
Of pinched fanatics, who would rather choose
Freedom to clip an inch more from their hair,
Than the great chance of setting England free?
Not there, amid the stormy wilderness,
Should we learn wisdom; or if learned, what room
To put it into act,-else worse than naught?
We learn our souls more, tossing for an hour
Upon this huge and ever-vexed sea
Of human thought, where kingdoms go to wreck
Like fragile bubbles yonder in the stream,
Than in a cycle of New England sloth,
Broke only by a petty Indian war,
Or quarrel for a letter more or less
In some hard word, which, spelt in either way,
Not their most learned clerks can understand.
New times demand new measures and new men;
The world advances, and in time outgrows
The laws that in our fathers' day were best;
And, doubtless, after us, some purer scheme
Will be shaped out by wiser men than we,
Made wiser by the steady growth of truth.
We cannot hale Utopia on by force;
But better, almost, be at work in sin,
Than in a brute inaction browse and sleep.
No man is born into the world whose work
Is not born with him; there is always work,

And tools to work withal, for those who will;
And blessed are the horny hands of toil!
The busy world stoves angrily aside
The man who stands with arms akimbo set,
Until occasion tells him what to do;
And he who waits to have his task marked out
Shall die and leave his errand unfulfilled.
Our time is one that calls for earnest deeds;
Season and Government, like two broad seas,
Yearn for each other with outstretched arms
Across this narrow isthmus of the throne,
And roll their white surf higher every day.
One age moves onward, and the next builds up
Cities and gorgeous palaces, where stood
The rude log-huts of those who tamed the wild,
Rearing from out the forests they had felled
The goodly framework of a fairer state;
The builder's trowel and the settler's axe
Are seldom wielded by the selfsame hand;
Ours is the harder task, yet not the less
Shall we receive the blessing for our toil
From the choice spirits of the aftertime.
My soul is not a palace of the past,
Where outworn creeds, like Rome's gray senate, quake,
Hearing afar the Vandal's trumpet hoarse,
That shakes old systems with a thunder-fit.
That time is ripe, and rotten-ripe, for change;
Then let it come: I have no dread of what
Is called for by the instinct of mankind;
Nor think I that God's world will fall apart
Because we tear a parchment more or less.
Truth Is eternal, but her effluence,
With endless change, is fitted to the hour;
Her mirror is turned forward to reflect
The promise of the future, not the past.
He who would win the name of truly great
Must understand his own age and the next,
And make the present ready to fulfil
Its prophecy, and with the future merge
Gently and peacefully, as wave with wave.
The future works out great men's purposes;
The present is enough, for common souls,
Who, never looking forward, are indeed
Mere clay, wherein the footprints of their age
Are petrified forever; better those
Who lead the blind old giant by the hand
From out the pathless desert where he gropes,
And set him onward in his darksome way,
I do not fear to follow out the truth,
Albeit along the precipice's edge.
Let us speak plain: there is more force in names
Than most men dream of; and a lie may keep

Its throne a whole age longer, if it skulk
Behind the shield of some fair-seeming name.
Let us call tyrants _tyrants_, and maintain
That only freedom comes by grace of God,
And all that comes not by his grace must fail;
For men in earnest have no time to waste
In patching fig-leaves for the naked truth.

'I will have one more grapple with the man
Charles Stuart: whom the boy o'ercame,
The man stands not in awe of. I, perchance,
Am one raised up by the Almighty arm
To witness some great truth to all the world.
Souls destined to o'erleap the vulgar lot,
And mould the world unto the scheme of God,
Have a fore-consciousness of their high doom,
As men are known to shiver at the heart
When the cold shadow of some coming ill
Creeps slowly o'er their spirits unawares.
Hath Good less power of prophecy than Ill?
How else could men whom God hath called to sway
Earth's rudder, and to steer the bark of Truth,
Beating against the tempest tow'rd her port,
Bear all the mean and buzzing grievances,
The petty martyrdoms, wherewith Sin strives
To weary out the tethered hope of Faith?
The sneers, the unrecognizing look of friends,
Who worship the dead corpse of old king Custom,
Where it doth lie In state within the Church,
Striving to cover up the mighty ocean
With a man's palm, and making even the truth
Lie for them, holding up the glass reversed,
To make the hope of man seem farther off?
My God! when I read o'er the bitter lives
Of men whose eager heart's were quite too great
To beat beneath the cramped mode of the day,
And see them mocked at by the world they love,
Haggling with prejudice for pennyworths
Of that reform which their hard toil will make
The common birthright of the age to come,-
When I see this, spite of my faith in God,
I marvel how their hearts bear up so long;
Nor could they but for this same prophecy,
This inward feeling of the glorious end.

'Deem me not fond; but in my warmer youth,
Ere my heart's bloom was soiled and brushed away,
I had great dreams of mighty things to come;
Of conquest, whether by the sword or pen
I knew not; but some Conquest I would have,
Or else swift death: now wiser grown in years,
I find youth's dreams are but the flutterings

Of those strong wings whereon the soul shall soar
In after time to win a starry throne;
And so I cherish them, for they were lots,
Which I, a boy, cast in the helm of Fate.
Now will I draw them, since a man's right hand,
A right hand guided by an earnest soul,
With a true instinct, takes the golden prize
From out a thousand blanks. What men call luck
Is the prerogative of valiant souls,
The fealty life pays its rightful kings.
The helm is shaking now, and I will stay
To pluck my lot forth; it were sin to flee!

So they two turned together; one to die,
Fighting for freedom on the bloody field;
The other, far more happy, to become
A name earth wears forever next her heart;
One of the few that have a right to rank
With the true Makers: for his spirit wrought
Order from Chaos; proved that right divine
Dwelt only in the excellence of truth;
And far within old Darkness' hostile lines
Advanced and pitched the shining tents of Light.
Nor shall the grateful Muse forget to tell,
That-not the least among his many claims
To deathless honor-he was MILTON'S friend,
A man not second among those who lived
To show us that the poet's lyre demands
An arm of tougher sinew than the sword.

James Russell Lowell

A Legend Of Brittany

I

As one who, from the sunshine and the green,
Enters the solid darkness of a cave,
Nor knows what precipice or pit unseen
May yawn before him with its sudden grave,
And, with hushed breath, doth often forward lean,
Dreaming he hears the plashing of a wave
Dimly below, or feels a damper air
From out some dreary chasm, he knows not where;

II

So, from the sunshine and the green of love,
We enter on our story's darker part;
And, though the horror of it well may move
An impulse of repugnance in the heart,
Yet let us think, that, as there's naught above
The all-embracing atmosphere of Art,
So also there is naught that falls below
Her generous reach, though grimed with guilt and woe.

III

Her fittest triumph is to show that good
Lurks in the heart of evil evermore,
That love, though scorned, and outcast, and withstood,
Can without end forgive, and yet have store;
God's love and man's are of the selfsame blood,
And He can see that always at the door
Of foulest hearts the angel-nature yet
Knocks to return and cancel all its debt.

IV

It ever is weak falsehood's destiny
That her thick mask turns crystal to let through
The unsuspecting eyes of honesty;
But Margaret's heart was too sincere and true
Aught but plain truth and faithfulness to see,
And Mordred's for a time a little grew
To be like hers, won by the mild reproof
Of those kind eyes that kept all doubt aloof.

V

Full oft they met, as dawn and twilight meet
In northern climes; she full of growing day

As he of darkness, which before her feet
Shrank gradual, and faded quite away,
Soon to return; for power had made love sweet
To him, and when his will had gained full sway,
The taste began to pall; for never power
Can sate the hungry soul beyond an hour.

VI

He fell as doth the tempter ever fall,
Even in the gaining of his loathsome end;
God doth not work as man works, but makes all
The crooked paths of ill to goodness tend;
Let Him judge Margaret! If to be the thrall
Of love, and faith too generous to defend
Its very life from him she loved, be sin,
What hope of grace may the seducer win?

VII

Grim-hearted world, that look'st with Levite eyes
On those poor fallen by too much faith in man,
She that upon thy freezing threshold lies,
Starved to more sinning by thy savage ban,
Seeking that refuge because foulest vice
More godlike than thy virtue is, whose span
Shuts out the wretched only, is more free
To enter heaven than thou shalt ever be!

VIII

Thou wilt not let her wash thy dainty feet
With such salt things as tears, or with rude hair
Dry them, soft Pharisee, that sit'st at meat
With him who made her such, and speak'st him fair.
Leaving God's wandering lamb the while to bleat
Unheeded, shivering in the pitiless air:
Thou hast made prisoned virtue show more wan
And haggard than a vice to look upon.

IX

Now many months flew by, and weary grew
To Margaret the sight of happy things;
Blight fell on all her flowers, instead of dew;
Shut round her heart were now the joyous wings
Wherewith it wont to soar; yet not untrue,
Though tempted much, her woman's nature clings

To its first pure belief, and with sad eyes
Looks backward o'er the gate of Paradise.

X

And so, though altered Mordred came less oft,
And winter frowned where spring had laughed before
In his strange eyes, yet half her sadness doffed,
And in her silent patience loved him more:
Sorrow had made her soft heart yet more soft,
And a new life within her own she bore
Which made her tenderer, as she felt it move
Beneath her breast, a refuge for her love.

XI

This babe, she thought, would surely bring him back,
And be a bond forever them between;
Before its eyes the sullen tempest-rack
Would fade, and leave the face of heaven serene;
And love's return doth more than fill the lack,
Which in his absence withered the heart's green:
And yet a dim foreboding still would flit
Between her and her hope to darken it.

XII

She could not figure forth a happy fate,
Even for this life from heaven so newly come;
The earth must needs be doubly desolate
To him scarce parted from a fairer home:
Such boding heavier on her bosom sate
One night, as, standing in the twilight gloam,
She strained her eyes beyond that dizzy verge
At whose foot faintly breaks the future's surge.

XIII

Poor little spirit! naught but shame and woe
Nurse the sick heart whose life-blood nurses thine:
Yet not those only; love hath triumphed so,
As for thy sake makes sorrow more divine:
And yet, though thou be pure, the world is foe
To purity, if born in such a shrine;
And, having trampled it for struggling thence,
Smiles to itself, and calls it Providence.

XIV

As thus she mused, a shadow seemed to rise
From out her thought, and turn to dreariness
All blissful hopes and sunny memories,
And the quick blood would curdle up and press
About her heart, which seemed to shut its eyes
And hush itself, as who with shuddering guess
Harks through the gloom and dreads e'en now to feel
Through his hot breast the icy slide of steel.

XV

But, at that heart-beat, while in dread she was,
In the low wind the honeysuckles gleam,
A dewy thrill flits through the heavy grass,
And, looking forth, she saw, as in a dream,
Within the wood the moonlight's shadowy mass:
Night's starry heart yearning to hers doth seem,
And the deep sky, full-hearted with the moon,
Folds round her all the happiness of June.

XVI

What fear could face a heaven and earth like this?
What silveriest cloud could hang 'neath such a sky?
A tide of wondrous and unwonted bliss
Rolls back through all her pulses suddenly,
As if some seraph, who had learned to kiss
From the fair daughters of the world gone by,
Had wedded so his fallen light with hers,
Such sweet, strange joy through soul and body stirs.

XVII

Now seek we Mordred; he who did not fear
The crime, yet fears the latent consequence:
If it should reach a brother Templar's ear,
It haply might be made a good pretence
To cheat him of the hope he held most dear;
For he had spared no thought's or deed's expense,
That by and by might help his wish to clip
Its darling bride,-the high grandmastership.

XVIII

The apathy, ere a crime resolved is done,
Is scarce less dreadful than remorse for crime;

By no allurement can the soul be won
From brooding o'er the weary creep of time:
Mordred stole forth into the happy sun,
Striving to hum a scrap of Breton rhyme,
But the sky struck him speechless, and he tried
In vain to summon up his callous pride.

XIX

In the courtyard a fountain leaped alway,
A Triton blowing jewels through his shell
Into the sunshine; Mordred turned away,
Weary because the stone face did not tell
Of weariness, nor could he bear to-day,
Heartsick, to hear the patient sink and swell
Of winds among the leaves, or golden bees
Drowsily humming in the orange-trees.

XX

All happy sights and sounds now came to him
Like a reproach: he wandered far and wide,
Following the lead of his unquiet whim,
But still there went a something at his side
That made the cool breeze hot, the sunshine dim;
It would not flee, it could not be defied,
He could not see it, but he felt it there,
By the damp chill that crept among his hair.

XXI

Day wore at last; the evening-star arose,
And throbbing in the sky grew red and set;
Then with a guilty, wavering step he goes
To the hid nook where they so oft had met
In happier season, for his heart well knows
That he is sure to find poor Margaret
Watching and waiting there with love-lorn breast
Around her young dream's rudely scattered nest.

XXII

Why follow here that grim old chronicle
Which counts the dagger-strokes and drops of blood?
Enough that Margaret by his mad steel fell,
Unmoved by murder from her trusting mood,
Smiling on him as Heaven smiles on Hell,
With a sad love, remembering when he stood

Not fallen yet, the unsealer of her heart,
Of all her holy dreams the holiest part.

XXIII

His crime complete, scarce knowing what he did,
(So goes the tale,) beneath the altar there
In the high church the stiffening corpse he hid,
And then, to 'scape that suffocating air,
Like a scared ghoul out of the porch he slid;
But his strained eyes saw blood-spots everywhere,
And ghastly faces thrust themselves between
His soul and hopes of peace with blasting mien.

XXIV

His heart went out within him like a spark
Dropt in the sea; wherever he made bold
To turn his eyes, he saw, all stiff and stark,
Pale Margaret lying dead; the lavish gold
Of her loose hair seemed in the cloudy dark
To spread a glory, and a thousand-fold
More strangely pale and beautiful she grew:
Her silence stabbed his conscience through and through.

XXV

Or visions of past days,-a mother's eyes
That smiled down on the fair boy at her knee,
Whose happy upturned face to hers replies.-
He saw sometimes: or Margaret mournfully
Gazed on him full of doubt, as one who tries
To crush belief that does love injury;
Then she would wring her hands, but soon again
Love's patience glimmered out through cloudy pain.

XXVI

Meanwhile he dared, not go and steal away
The silent, dead-cold witness of his sin;
He had not feared the life, but that dull clay,
Those open eyes that showed the death within,
Would surely stare him mad; yet all the day
A dreadful impulse, whence his will could win
No refuge, made him linger in the aisle,
Freezing with his wan look each greeting smile.

XXVII

Now, on the second day there was to be
A festival in church: from far and near
Came flocking in the sunburnt peasantry,
And knights and dames with stately antique cheer,
Blazing with pomp, as if all faerie
Had emptied her quaint halls, or, as it were,
The illuminated marge of some old book,
While we were gazing, life and motion took.

XXVIII

When all were entered, and the roving eyes
Of all were stayed, some upon faces bright,
Some on the priests, some on the traceries
That decked the slumber of a marble knight,
And all the rustlings over that arise
From recognizing tokens of delight,
When friendly glances meet,-then silent ease
Spread o'er the multitude by slow degrees.

XXIX

Then swelled the organ: up through choir and nave
The music trembled with an inward thrill
Of bliss at its own grandeur; wave on wave
Its flood of mellow thunder rose, until
The hushed air shivered with the throb it gave,
Then, poising for a moment, it stood still,
And sank and rose again, to burst in spray
That wandered into silence far away.

XXX

Like to a mighty heart the music seemed,
That yearns with melodies it cannot speak,
Until, in grand despair of what it dreamed,
In the agony of effort it doth break,
Yet triumphs breaking; on it rushed and streamed
And wantoned in its might, as when a lake,
Long pent among the mountains, bursts its walls
And in one crowding gash leaps forth and falls.

XXXI

Deeper and deeper shudders shook the air,
As the huge bass kept gathering heavily,

Like thunder when it rouses in its lair,
And with its hoarse growl shakes the low-hung sky,
It grew up like a darkness everywhere,
Filling the vast cathedral;-suddenly,
From the dense mass a boy's clear treble broke
Like lightning, and the full-toned choir awoke.

XXXII

Through gorgeous windows shone the sun aslant,
Brimming the church with gold and purple mist,
Meet atmosphere to bosom that rich chant.
Where fifty voices in one strand did twist
Their varicolored tones, and left no want
To the delighted soul, which sank abysed
In the warm music cloud, while, far below,
The organ heaved its surges to and fro.

XXXIII

As if a lark should suddenly dropp dead
While the blue air yet trembled with its song,
So snapped at once that music's golden thread,
Struck by a nameless fear that leapt along
From heart to heart, and like a shadow spread
With instantaneous shiver through the throng,
So that some glanced behind, as half aware
A hideous shape of dread were standing there.

XXXIV

As when a crowd of pale men gather round,
Watching an eddy in the leaden deep,
From which they deem the body of one drowned
Will be cast forth, from face to face doth creep
An eager dread that holds all tongues fast bound
Until the horror, with a ghastly leap,
Starts up, its dead blue arms stretched aimlessly,
Heaved with the swinging of the careless sea,-

XXXV

So in the faces of all these there grew,
As by one impulse, a dark, freezing awe,
Which with a fearful fascination drew
All eyes toward the altar; damp and raw
The air grew suddenly, and no man knew
Whether perchance his silent neighbor saw

The dreadful thing which all were sure would rise
To scare the strained lids wider from their eyes.

XXXVI

The incense trembled as it upward sent
Its slow, uncertain thread of wandering blue,
As't were the only living element
In all the church, so deep the stillness grew;
It seemed one might have heard it, as it went,
Give out an audible rustle, curling through
The midnight silence of that awe-struck air,
More hushed than death, though so much life was there.

XXXVII

Nothing they saw, but a low voice was heard
Threading the ominous silence of that fear,
Gentle and terrorless as if a bird,
Wakened by some volcano's glare, should cheer
The murk air with his song; yet every word
In the cathedral's farthest arch seemed near,
As if it spoke to every one apart,
Like the clear voice of conscience in each heart.

XXXVIII

'O Rest, to weary hearts thou art most dear!
O Silence, after life's bewildering din,
Thou art most welcome, whether in the sear
Days of our age thou comest, or we win
Thy poppy-wreath in youth! then wherefore here
Linger I yet, once free to enter in
At that wished gate which gentle Death doth ope,
Into the boundless realm of strength and hope?

XXXIX

'Think not in death my love could ever cease;
If thou wast false, more need there is for me
Still to be true; that slumber were not peace,
If't were unvisited with dreams of thee:
And thou hadst never heard such words as these,
Save that in heaven I must forever be
Most comfortless and wretched, seeing this
Our unbaptized babe shut out from bliss.

XL

'This little spirit with imploring eyes
Wanders alone the dreary wild of space;
The shadow of his pain forever lies
Upon my soul in this new dwelling-place;
His loneliness makes me in Paradise
More lonely, and, unless I see his face,
Even here for grief could I lie down and die,
Save for my curse of immortality.

XLI

'World after world he sees around him swim
Crowded with happy souls, that take no heed
Of the sad eyes that from the night's faint rim
Gaze sick with longing on them as they speed
With golden gates, that only shut on him;
And shapes sometimes from hell's abysses freed
Flap darkly by him, with enormous sweep
Of wings that roughen wide the pitchy deep.

XLII

'I am a mother, -spirits do not shake
This much of earth from them, -and I must pine
Till I can feel his little hands, and take
His weary head upon this heart of mine;
And, might it be, full gladly for his sake
Would I this solitude of bliss resign
And be shut out of heaven to dwell with him
Forever in that silence drear and dim.

XLIII

'I strove to hush my soul, and would not speak
At first, for thy dear sake; a woman's love
Is mighty, but a mother's heart is weak,
And by its weakness overcomes; I strove
To smother bitter thoughts with patience meek,
But still in the abyss my soul would rove,
Seeking my child, and drove me here to claim
The rite that gives him peace in Christ's dear name.

XLIV

'I sit and weep while blessed spirits sing;
I can but long and pine the while they praise,

And, leaning o'er the wall of heaven, I fling
My voice to where I deem my infant strays,
Like a robbed bird that cries in vain to bring
Her nestlings back beneath her wings' embrace;
But still he answers not, and I but know
That heaven and earth are both alike in woe.'

XLV

Then the pale priests, with ceremony due,
Baptized the child within its dreadful tomb
Beneath that mother's heart, whose instinct true
Star-like had battled down the triple gloom
Of sorrow, love, and death: young maidens, too.
Strewed the pale corpse with many a milkwhite bloom,
And parted the bright hair, and on the breast
Crossed the unconscious hands in sign of rest.

XLVI

Some said, that, when the priest had sprinkled o'er
The consecrated drops, they seemed to hear
A sigh, as of some heart from travail sore
Released, and then two voices singing clear,
Misereatur Deus, more and more
Fading far upward, and their ghastly fear
Fell from them with that sound, as bodies fall
From souls upspringing to celestial hall.

James Russell Lowell

A Letter

From Mr. Hosea Biglow To The Hon. J.T. Buckingham, Editor Of The Boston Courier,
Covering A Letter From Mr. B. Sawin, Private In The Massachusetts Regiment

This kind o' sogerin' aint a mite like our October trainin',
A chap could clear right out from there ef 't only looked like rainin',
An' th' Cunnles, tu, could kiver up their shappoes with bandanners,
An' send the insines skootin' to the bar-room with their banners
(Fear o' gittin' on 'em spotted), an' a feller could cry quarter
Ef he fired away his ramrod arter tu much rum an' water.
Recollect wut fun we hed, you 'n' I an' Ezry Hollis,
Up there to Waltham plain last fall, along o' the Cornwallis?

This sort o' thing aint _jest_ like thet,-I wish thet I wuz funder,-
Ninepunce a day fer killin' folks comes kind o' low fer murder,
(Wy I've worked out to slarterin' some fer Deacon Cephas Billins,
An' in the hardest times there wuz I ollers tetched ten shillins.)
There's sutthin' gits into my throat thet makes it hard to swaller,
It comes so naturel to think about a hempen collar;
It's glory,-but, in spite o' all my tryin' to git callous,
I feel a kind o' in a cart, aridin' to the gallus.
But wen it comes to _bein'_ killed,-I tell ye I felt streaked
The fust time 't ever I found out wy baggonets wuz peaked;
Here's how it wuz: I started out to go to a fandango,
The sentinul he ups an' sez, 'Thet's funder 'an you can go.'
'None o' your sarse,' sez I; sez he, 'Stan' back!' 'Aint you a buster?'
Sez I, 'I'm up to all thet air, I guess I've ben to muster;
I know wy sentinuls air sot; you aint agoin' to eat us;
Caleb haint no monopoly to court the seenorcetas;
My folks to hum air full ez good ez his'n be, by golly!
An' so ez I wuz goin' by, not thinkin' wut would folly,
The everlastin' cus he stuck his one-pronged pitchfork in me
An' made a hole right thru my close ez ef I wuz an in'my.

Wal, it beats all how big I felt hoorawin' in ole Funnel
Wen Mister Bolles he gin the sword to our Leftenant Cunnle,
(It's Mister Secondary Bolles, thet writ the prize peace essay.
Thet's wy he didn't list himself along o' us, I dessay,)
An' Rantoul, tu, talked pooty loud, but don't put _his_ foot in it,
Coz human life's so sacred thet he's principled agin it,-
Though I myself can't rightly see it's any wus achokin' on 'em;
Than puttin' bullets thru their lights, or with a bagnet pokin' on 'em;
How dreffle slick he reeled it off (like Blitz at our lyceum
Ahaulin' ribbins from his chops so quick you skeercely see 'em),
About the Anglo-Saxon race (an' saxons would be handy
To du the buryin' down here upon the Rio Grandy),
About our patriotic pas an' our star-spangled banner,
Our country's bird alookin' on an' singin' out hosanner,
An' how he (Mister B. himself) wuz happy fer Ameriky,-
I felt, ez sister Patience sez, a leetle mite histericky.
I felt, I swon, ez though it wuz a dreffle kind o' privilege
Atrampin' round thru Boston streets among the gutter's drivelage;
I act'lly thought it wuz a treat to hear a little drummin',

An' it did bonyfidy seem millanyum wuz acomin'
 Wen all on us got suits (darned like them wore in the state prison)
 An' every feller felt ez though all Mexico wuz hisn.
 This 'ere's about the meanest place a skunk could wal dlskiver
 (Saltillo's Mexican, I b'lieve, fer wut we call Salt-river):
 The sort o' trash a feller gits to eat doos beat all nater,
 I'd give a year's pay fer a smell o' one good blue-nose tater,
 The country here that Mister Bolles declared to be so charmin'
 Throughout is swarmin' with the most alarmin' kind o' varmin.
 He talked about delishis froots, but then it wuz a wopper all,
 The holl on 't 's mud an' prickly pears, with here an' there a chapparal;
 You see a feller peekin' out, an', fust you know, a lariat
 Is round your throat an' you a copse, 'fore you can say, 'Wut air ye at?'
 You never see sech darned gret bugs (it may not be irrelevant
 To say I've seen a scarabaeus pilularius big ez a year old elephant),
 The rigiment come up one day in time to stop a red bug
 From runnin off with Cunnle Wright, -'twuz jest a common cimex
lectularius.

One night I started up on eend an' thought I wuz to hum agin,
 I heern a horn, thinks I it's Sol the fisherman hez come agin,
His bellowses is sound enough, -ez I'm a livin' creeter,
 I felt a thing go thru my leg -'twuz nothin' more 'n a skeeter!
 Then there's the yaller fever, tu, they call it here el vomito, -
 (Come, that wun't du, you landcrab there, I tell ye to le' go my toe!
 My gracious! it's a scorpion that's took a shine to play with 't,
 I darsn't skeer the tarnal thing fer fear he'd run away with 't,)
 Afore I come away from hum I hed a strong persuasion
 Thet Mexicans worn't human beans, -an ourang outang nation,
 A sort o' folks a chap could kill an' never dream on 't arter,
 No more 'n a feller'd dream o' pigs thet he hed hed to slarter;
 I'd an idee thet they were built arter the darkie fashion all,
 An' kickin' colored folks about, you know 's a kind o' national;
 But wen I jined I worn't so wise ez thet air queen o' Sheby,
 Fer, come to look at 'em, they aint much diff'rent from wut we be,
 An' here we air ascrougin' 'em out o' thir own dominions,
 Ashelterin' 'em, ez Caleb sez, under our eagle's pinions,
 Wich means to take a feller up jest by the slack o' 's trowsis
 An' walk him Spanish clean right out o' all his homes an' houses;
 Wal, it doos seem a curus way, but then hooraw fer Jackson!
 It must be right, fer Caleb sez it's reg'lar Anglo-Saxon,
 The Mex'cans don't fight fair, they say, they piz'n all the water,
 An' du amazin' lots o' things thet isn't wut they ough' to;
 Bein' they haint no lead, they make their bullets out o' copper
 An' shoot the darned things at us, tu, wich Caleb sez ain proper;
 He sez they'd ough' to stan' right up an' let us pop 'em fairly
 (Guess wen he ketches 'em at thet he'll hev to git up airly),
 Thet our nation's bigger 'n theirn an' so its rights air bigger,
 An' thet it's all to make 'em free thet we air pullin' trigger,
 Thet Anglo Saxondom's idee's abreakin' 'em to pieces,
 An' thet idee's thet every man doos jest wut he damn pleases;
 Ef I don't make his meanin' clear, perhaps in some respex I can,

I know that 'every man' don't mean a nigger or a Mexican;
An' there's another thing I know, an' thet is, ef these creeters,
Thet stick an Anglosaxon mask onto State-prison feeturs,
Should come to Jaalam Centre fer to argify an' spout on 't,
The gals 'ould count the silver spoons the minnit they cleared out on 't.

This goin' ware glory waits ye haint one agreeable feetur,
An' ef it worn't fer wakin' snakes, I'd home agin short meter;
O, wouldn't I be off, quick time, ef 't worn't thet I wuz sartin
They'd let the daylight into me to pay me fer desartin!
I don't approve o' tellin' tales, but jest to you I may state
Our ossifers aiut wut they wuz afore they left the Bay-state;
Then it wuz 'Mister Sawin, sir, you're middlin' well now, be ye?
Step up an' take a nipper, sir; I'm dreffle glad to see ye:'
But now it's 'Ware's my eppylet? here, Sawin, step an' fetch it!
An' mind your eye, be thund'rin' s pry, or, damn ye, you shall ketch it!
Wal, ez the Doctor sez, some pork will bile so, but by mighty,
Ef I hed some on 'em to hum, I'd give 'em linkum vity,
I'd play the rogue's march on their hides an' other music follerin'-
But I must close my letter here, fer one on 'em 's ahollerin',
These Anglosaxon ossifers,-wal, taint no use ajawin',
I'm safe enlisted fer the war,

Yourn,
BIRDOFREDOM SAWIN.

James Russell Lowell

A Letter from a Candidate for the Presidency

Dear Sir—You wish to know my notions
On sartin pints thet rile the land;
There's nothin' thet my natur so shuns
Es bein' mum or underhand;
I'm a straight-spoken kind o' creetur
Thet blurts right out wut's in his head,
An' ef I've one pecooler feetur,
It is a nose thet wunt be led.

So, to begin at the beginnin';
An' come directly to the pint,
I think the country's underpinnin'
Is some consid'ble out o' jint;
I aint agoin' to try your patience
By tellin' who done this or thet,
I don't make no insinooations,
I jest let on I smell a rat.

Thet is, I mean, it seems to me so,
But, ef the public think I'm wrong
I wunt deny but wut I be so—
An', fact, it don't smell very strong;
My mind's tu fair to lose its balance
An' say wich party hez most sense;
There may be folks o'greater talence
Thet can't set stiddier on the fence.

I'm an eclectic: ez to choosin'
'Twixt this an'thet, I'm plaguy lawth;
I leave a side thet looks like losin',
But (wile there's doubt) I stick to both;
I stan' upon the Constitution,
Ez preudunt statesmun say, who've planned
A way to git the most profusion
O' chances ez to ware they'll stand.

Ez fer the war, I go agin it—
I mean to say I kind o' du—
Thet is, I mean thet, bein' in it,
The best way wuz to fight it thru;
Not but wut abstract war is horrid,
I sign to thet with all my heart—
But civlyzation doos git forrid
Sometimes upon a powder-cart.

About thet darned Proviso matter
I never hed a grain o' doubt,
Nor I aint one my sense to scatter
So's no one couldn't pick it out;
My love fer North an' South is equil,
So I'll just answer plump an' frank,
No matter wut may be the sequil—

Yes, sir, I am agin a Bank.

Ez to the answerin' o' questions,
I 'am an off ox at bein' druv,
Though I aint one thet ary test shuns
I'll give our folks a helpin' shove;
Kind o' promiscoous I go it
Fer the holl country, an' the ground
I take, ez nigh ez I can show it,
Is pooty gen'ally all round.

I don't appruve o' givin' pledges;
You'd ough' to leave a feller free,
An' not go knockin' out the wedges
To ketch his fingers in the tree;
Pledges air awfle breachy cattle
Thet preudent farmers don't turn out—
Ez long'z the people git their rattle,
Wut is there fer'm to grout about?

Ez to the slaves, there's no confusion
In MY idees consarnin' them—
I think they air an Institution,
A sort of—yes, jest so—ahem:
Do I own any? Of my merit
On thet pint you yourself may jedge;
All is, I never drink no sperit,
Nor I haint never signed no pledge.

Ez to my principles, I glory
In hevin' nothin' o' the sort;
I aint a Wig, I aint a Tory,
I'm jest a candidate, in short;
Thet's fair an' square an' parpendicler,
But, ef the Public cares a fig
To hev me an' thin' in particler.
Wy, I'm a kind o' peri-wig.

P. S.

Ez we're a sort o' privateerin',
O' course, you know, it's sheer an' sheer
An' there is sutthin' wuth your hearin'
I'll mention in YOUR privit ear;
Ef you git ME inside the White House,
Your head with ile I'll kio' o' 'nint
By gitt'n' YOU inside the Light-house
Down to the eend o' Jaalam Pint

An' ez the North hez took to Brustlin'
At bein' scrouged from off the roost,
I'll tell ye wut'll save all tusslin'

An' give our side a harnsome boost—
Tell 'em thet on the Slavery question
I'm RIGHT, although to speak I'm lawth;
This gives you a safe pint to rest on,
An' leaves me frontin' South by North.

Editor notes

A LETTER FROM A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN ANSWER TO SUTTIN
QUESTIONS

PROPOSED BY MR. HOSEA BIGLOW, INCLOSED IN A NOTE FROM MR. BIGLOW TO S.
H. GAY, ESQ., EDITOR OF THE NATIONAL ANTI-SLAVERY STANDARD.
JAMES RUSSEL LOWELL

Deer Sir its gut to be the fashun now to rite letters to the candid 8s
and I wus chose at a public Meetin in Jalaam to du wut wus nessary fur
that town. I writ to 271 ginerals and gut ansers to 209. the air called
candid 8s but I don't see nothin candid about em. this here 1 which I
send wus thought satty's factory. I dunno as it's ushle to print
Poscrips, but as all the ansers I got hed the saim, I sposed it wus
best. times has gretly changed. Formaly to knock a man into a
cocked hat wus to use him up, but now it ony gives him a chance furthe
cheef madgutracry.-H. B

James Russell Lowell

A Message Of Jeff Davis In Secret Session

I sent you a messige, my friens, t'other day,
To tell you I'd nothin' pertickler to say:
'twuz the day our new nation gut kin' o' stillborn,
So 'twuz my pleasant dooty t' acknowledge the corn,
An' I see clearly then, ef I didn't before,
Thet the augur in inauguration means bore.
I needn't tell you that my messige wuz written
To diffuse correc' notions in France an' Gret Britten,
An' agin to impress on the poppylar mind
The comfort an' wisdom o' goin' it blind,-
To say that I didn't abate not a hooter
O' my faith in a happy an' glorious futur',
Ez rich in each soshle an' p'litickle blessin'
Ez them that we now hed the joy o' possessin',
With a people united, an' longin' to die
For wut we call their country, without askin' why,
An' all the gret things we concluded to slope for
Ez much within reach now ez ever-to hope for.
We've gut all the ellerments, this very hour,
Thet make up a fus'-class, self-governin' power:
We've a war, an' a debt, an' a flag; an' ef this
Ain't to be inderpendunt, why, wut on airth is?
An' nothin' now henders our takin' our station
Ez the freest, enlightenedest, civerlized nation,
Built up on our bran'-new politickle thesis
Thet a Gov'ment's fust right is to tumble to pieces,-
I say nothin' henders our takin' our place
Ez the very fus'-best o' the whole human race,
A spittin' tobacker ez proud ez you please
On Victory's bes' carpets, or loaf-in' at ease
In the Tool'ries front-parlor, discussin' affairs
With our heels on the backs o' Napoleon's new chairs,
An' princes a-mixin' our cocktails an' slings,-
Excep', wal, excep' jest a very few things,
Sech ez navies an' armies an' wherewith to pay,
An' gettin' our sogers to run t'other way,
An' not be too over-pertickler in tryin'
To hunt up the very las' ditches to die in.

Ther' are critters so base that they want it explained
Jes' wut is the totle amount that we've gained,
Ez ef we could maysure stupenjious events
By the low Yankee stan'ard o' dollars an' cents:
They seem to forgit, thet, sence last year revolved,
We've succeeded in gittin' seceshed an' dissolved,
An' thet no one can't hope to git thru dissolootion
'thout some kin' o' strain on the best Constitootion.
Who asks for a prospec' more flettrin' an' bright,
When from here clean to Texas it's all one free fight?
Hain't we rescued from Seward the gret leadin' featur
Thet makes it wuth while to be reasonin' creators?
Hain't we saved Habus Coppers, improved it in fact,

By suspendin' the Unionists 'stid o' the Act?
 Ain't the laws free to all? Where on airth else d' ye see
 Every freeman improvin' his own rope an' tree?
 Ain't our piety sech (in our speeches an' messiges)
 Ez t' astonish ourselves in the bes'-composed pessiges,
 An' to make folks that knowed us in th' ole state o' things
 Think convarson ez easy ez drinkin' gin-slings?
 It's ne'ssary to take a good confident tone
 With the public; but here, jest amongst us, I own
 Things look blacker 'n thunder. Ther''s no use denyin'
 We're clean out o' money, an' 'most out o' lyin';
 Two things a young nation can't mennage without,
 Ef she wants to look wal at her fust comin' out;
 For the fust supplies physickle strength, while the second
 Gives a morril advantage that's hard to be reckoned:
 For this latter I'm willin' to du wut I can;
 For the former you'll hev to consult on a plan,-
 Though our fust want (an' this pint I want your best views on)
 Is plausible paper to print I.O.U.s on.
 Some gennlemen think it would cure all our cankers
 In the way o' finance, ef we jes' hanged the bankers;
 An' I own the proposle 'ud square with my views,
 Ef their lives wuzn't all that we'd left 'em to lose.
 Some say that more confidence might be inspired,
 Ef we voted our cities an' towns to be fired,-
 A plan that 'ud suttenly tax our endurance,
 Coz 'twould be our own bills we should git for th' insurance;
 But cinders, no matter how sacred we think 'em,
 Mightn't strike furrin minds ez good sources of income,
 Nor the people, perhaps, wouldn't like the eclaw
 O' bein' all turned into paytriotics by law.
 Some want we should buy all the cotton an' burn it,
 On a pledge, when we've gut thru the war, to return it,-
 Then to take the proceeds an' hold them ez security
 For an issue o' bonds to be met at maturity
 With an issue o' notes to be paid in hard cash
 On the fus' Monday follerin' the 'tarnal Allsmash:
 This hez a safe air, an', once hold o' the gold,
 'ud leave our vile plunderers out in the cold,
 An' might temp' John Bull, ef it warn't for the dip he
 Once gut from the banks o' my own Massissippi.
 Some think we could make, by arrangin' the figgers,
 A hendy home-currency out of our niggers;
 But it wun't du to lean much on ary sech staff,
 For they're gittin' tu current a'ready, by half.

One gennleman says, ef we lef' our loan out
 Where Floyd could git hold on 't he 'd take it, no doubt;
 But 'tain't jes' the takin', though 't hez a good look,
 We mus' git sunthin' out on it arter it's took,
 An' we need now more'n ever, with sorrer I own,
 Thet some one another should let us a loan,

Sence a soger wun't fight, on'y jes' while he draws his
Pay down on the nail, for the best of all causes,
'thout askin' to know wut the quarrel's about,-
An' once come to thet, why, our game is played out.
It's ez true ez though I shouldn't never hev said it,
Thet a hitch hez took place in our system o' credit;
I swear it's all right in my speeches an' messiges,
But ther's idees afloat, ez ther' is about sessiges:
Folks wun't take a bond ez a basis to trade on,
Without nosin' round to find out wut it's made on,
An' the thought more an' more thru the public min' crosses
Thet our Treshry hez gut 'mos' too many dead hosses.
Wut's called credit, you see, is some like a balloon,
Thet looks while it's up 'most ez harnsome 'z a moon,
But once git a leak in 't, an' wut looked so grand
Caves righ' down in a jiffy ez flat ez your hand.
Now the world is a dreffle mean place, for our sins,
Where ther' ollus is critters about with long pins
A-prickin' the bubbles we've blowed with sech care,
An' provin' ther' 's nothin' inside but bad air:
They're all Stuart Millses, poor-white trash, an' sneaks,
Without no more chivverlry 'n Choctaws or Creeks,
Who think a real gennleman's promise to pay
Is meant to be took in trade's ornery way:
Them fellers an' I couldn' never agree;
They're the nateral foes o' the Southun Idee;
I'd gladly take all of our other resks on me
To be red o' this low-lived politikle 'con'my!

Now a dastardly notion is gittin' about
Thet our bladder is bust an' the gas oozin' out,
An' onless we can mennage in some way to stop it,
Why, the thing's a gone coon, an' we might ez wal dropp it.
Brag works wal at fust, but it ain't jes' the thing
For a stiddy inves'tment the shiners to bring,
An' votin' we're prosp'rous a hundred times over
Wun't change bein' starved into livin' in clover.
Manassas done sunthin' tow'rds drawin' the wool
O'er the green, antislavery eyes o' John Bull:
Oh, _warn't_ it a godsend, jes' when sech tight fixes
Wuz crowdin' us mourners, to throw double-sixes!
I wuz tempted to think, an' it wuzn't no wonder,
Ther' wuz really a Providence,-over or under,-
When, all packed for Nashville, I fust ascertained
From the papers up North wut a victory we'd gained.
'twuz the time for diffusin' correc' views abroad
Of our union an' strength an' relyin' on God;
An', fact, when I'd gut thru my fust big surprise,
I much ez half b'lieved in my own tallest lies,
An' conveyed the idee that the whole Southun popperlace
Wuz Spartans all on the keen jump for Thermopperlies,
Thet set on the Lincolnites' bombs till they bust,

An' fight for the priv'lege o' dyin' the fust;
But Roanoke, Bufort, Millspring, an' the rest
Of our recent starn-foremost successes out West,
Hain't left us a foot for our swellin' to stand on,-
We've showed too much o' wut Buregard calls abandon,
For all our Thermopopperlies (an' it's a marcy
We hain't hed no more) hev ben clean vicy-varsy,
An' wut Spartans wuz lef' when the battle wuz done
Wuz them that wuz too unambitious to run.

Oh, ef we hed on'y jes' gut Reecognition,
Things now would ha' ben in a different position!
You'd ha' hed all you wanted: the paper blockade
Smashed up into toothpicks; unlimited trade
In the one thing thet's needfle, till niggers, I swow,
Hed ben thicker'n provisional shin-plasters now;
Quinine by the ton 'ginst the shakes when they seize ye;
Nice paper to coin into C.S.A. specie;
The voice of the driver'd be heerd in our land,
An' the univarse scringe, ef we lifted our hand:
Wouldn't thet be some like a fulfillin' the prophecies,
With all the fus' fem'lies in all the fust offices?
'twuz a beautiful dream, an' all sorrer is idle,-
But ef Lincoln would ha' hanged Mason an' Slidell!
For wouldn't the Yankees hev found they'd ketched Tartars,
Ef they'd raised two sech critters as them into martyrs?
Mason wuz F.F.V., though a cheap card to win on,
But t'other was jes' New York trash to begin on;
They ain't o' no good in European pellices,
But think wut a help they'd ha' ben on their gallowses!
They'd ha' felt they wuz truly fulfillin' their mission,
An' oh, how dog-cheap we'd ha' gut Reecognition!

But somehow another, wutever we've tried,
Though the the'ry's fust-rate, the facts wun't coincide:
Facts are contrary 'z mules, an' ez hard in the mouth,
An' they allus hev showed a mean spite to the South.
Sech bein' the case, we hed best look about
For some kin' o' way to slip our necks out:
Le's vote our las' dollar, ef one can be found,
(An', at any rate, votin' it hez a good sound,)-
Le''s swear thet to arms all our people is flyin',
(The critters can't read, an' wun't know how we're lyin',)-
Thet Toombs is advancin' to sack Cincinnater,
With a rovin' commission to pillage an' slahter,-
Thet we've throwed to the winds all regard for wut's lawfle,
An' gone in for sunthin' promiscu'sly awfle.
Ye see, hitherto, it's our own knaves an' fools
Thet we've used, (those for whetstones, an' t'others ez tools,)
An' now our las' chance is in puttin' to test
The same kin' o' cattle up North an' out West,-
Your Belmonts, Vallandighams, Woodses, an' sech,

Poor shotes that ye couldn't persuade us to tech,
Not in ornery times, though we're willin' to feed 'em
With a nod now an' then, when we happen to need 'em;
Why, for my part, I'd ruther shake hands with a nigger
Than with cusses that load an' don't darst dror a trigger;
They're the wust wooden nutmegs the Yankees perdooce,
Shaky everywheres else, an' jes' sound on the goose;
They ain't wuth a cuss, an' I set nothin' by 'em,
But we're in sech a fix that I s'pose we mus' try 'em.
I-But, Gennlemen, here's a despatch jes' come in
Which shows that the tide's begun turnin' agin',-
Gret Cornfedrit success! C'lumbus eevacooated!
I mus' run down an' hev the thing properly stated,
An' show wut a triumph it is, an' how lucky
To fin'lly git red o' thet cussed Kentucky,-
An' how, sence Fort Donelson, winnin' the day
Consists in triumphantly gittin' away.

James Russell Lowell

A Mood

I go to the ridge in the forest
I haunted in days gone by,
But thou, O Memory, pourest
No magical dropp in mine eye,
Nor the gleam of the secret restorest
That hath faded from earth and sky:
A Presence autumnal and sober
Invests every rock and tree,
And the aureole of October
Lights the maples, but darkens me.

Pine in the distance,
Patient through sun or rain,
Meeting with graceful persistence,
With yielding but rooted resistance,
The northwind's wrench and strain,
No memory of past existence
Brings thee pain;
Right for the zenith heading,
Friendly with heat or cold,
Thine arms to the influence spreading
Of the heavens, just from of old,
Thou only aspirest the more,
Unregretful the old leaves shedding
That fringed thee with music before,
And deeper thy roots embedding
In the grace and the beauty of yore;
Thou sigh'st not, 'Alas, I am older,
The green of last summer is sear!'
But loftier, hopefuller, bolder,
Winnest broader horizons each year.

To me 'tis not cheer thou art singing:
There's a sound of the sea,
O mournful tree,
In thy boughs forever clinging,
And the far-off roar
Of waves on the shore
A shattered vessel flinging.

As thou musest still of the ocean
On which thou must float at last,
And seem'st to foreknow
The shipwreck's woe
And the sailor wrenched from the broken mast,
Do I, in this vague emotion,
This sadness that will not pass,
Though the air throb with wings,
And the field laughs and sings,
Do I forebode, alas!
The ship-building longer and wearier,
The voyage's struggle and strife,

And then the darker and drearier
Wreck of a broken life?

James Russell Lowell

A New Year's Greeting

The century numbers fourscore years;
You, fortified in your teens,
To Time's alarms close your ears,
And, while he devastates your peers,
Conceive not what he means.

If e'er life's winter fleck with snow
Your hair's deep shadowed bowers,
That winsome head an art would know
To make it charm, and wear it so
As 'twere a wreath of flowers.

If to such fairies years must come,
May yours fall soft and slow
As, shaken by a bee's low hum,
The rose-leaves waver, sweetly dumb,
Down to their mates below!

James Russell Lowell

A Parable

Worn and footsore was the Prophet,
When he gained the holy hill;
'God has left the earth,' he murmured,
'Here his presence lingers still.

'God of all the olden prophets,
Wilt thou speak with men no more?
Have I not as truly served thee
As thy chosen ones of yore?

'Hear me, guider of my fathers,
Lo! a humble heart is mine;
By thy mercy I beseech thee
Grant thy servant but a sign!'

Bowing then his head, he listened
For an answer to his prayer;
No loud burst of thunder followed,
Not a murmur stirred the air:

But the tuft of moss before him
Opened while he waited yet,
And, from out the rock's hard bosom,
Sprang a tender violet.

'God! I thank thee,' said the Prophet;
'Hard of heart and blind was I,
Looking to the holy mountain
For the gift of prophecy.

'Still thou speakest with thy children
Freely as in eld sublime;
Humbleness, and love, and patience,
Still give empire over time.

'Had I trusted in my nature,
And had faith in lowly things,
Thou thyself wouldst then have sought me.
And set free my spirit's wings.

'But I looked for signs and wonders,
That o'er men should give me sway;
Thirsting to be more than mortal,
I was even less than clay.

'Ere I entered on my journey,
As I girt my loins to start,
Ran to me my little daughter,
The beloved of my heart;

'In her hand she held a flower,
Like to this as like may be,

Which, beside my very threshold,
She had plucked and brought to me.'

James Russell Lowell

A Parable - II

Said Christ our Lord, 'I will go and see
How the men, my brethren, believe in me.'
He passed not again through the gate of birth,
But made himself known to the children of earth.

Then said the chief priests, and rulers, and kings,
'Behold, now, the Giver of all good things;
Go to, let us welcome with pomp and state
Him who alone is mighty and great.'

With carpets of gold the ground they spread
Wherever the Son of Man should tread,
And in palace-chambers lofty and rare
They lodged him, and served him with kingly fare.

Great organs surged through arches dim
Their jubilant floods in praise of him;
And in church, and palace, and judgment-hall,
He saw his own image high over all.

But still, wherever his steps they led,
The Lord in sorrow bent down his head,
And from under the heavy foundation-stones,
The son of Mary heard bitter groans.

And in church, and palace, and judgment-hall,
He marked great fissures that rent the wall,
And opened wider and yet more wide
As the living foundation heaved and sighed.

'Have ye founded your thrones and altars, then,
On the bodies and souls of living men?
And think ye that building shall endure,
Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor?

'With gates of silver and bars of gold
Ye have fenced my sheep from their Father's fold;
I have heard the dropping of their tears
In heaven these eighteen hundred years.'

'O Lord and Master, not ours the guilt,
We build but as our fathers built;
Behold thine images, how they stand,
Sovereign and sole, through all our land.

'Our task is hard, -with sword and flame
To hold thine earth forever the same,
And with sharp crooks of steel to keep
Still, as thou leftest them, thy sheep.'

Then Christ sought out an artisan,
A low-browed, stunted, haggard man,

And a motherless girl, whose fingers thin
Pushed from her faintly want and sin.

These set he in the midst of them,
And as they drew back their garment-hem,
For fear of defilement, 'Lo, here,' said he,
'The images ye have made of me!'

James Russell Lowell

A Parable-III

An ass munched thistles, while a nightingale
From passion's fountain flooded all the vale.
'Hee-haw!' cried he, 'I hearken,' as who knew
For such ear-largess humble thanks were due.
'Friend,' said the winged pain, 'in vain you bray,
Who tunnels bring, not cisterns, for my lay;
None but his peers the poet rightly hear,
Nor mete we listeners by their length of ear.'

James Russell Lowell

A Prayer

God! do not let my loved one die,
But rather wait until the time
That I am grown in purity
Enough to enter thy pure clime,
Then take me, I will gladly go,
So that my love remain below!

Oh, let her stay! She is by birth
What I through death must learn to be;
We need her more on our poor earth
Than thou canst need in heaven with thee:
She hath her wings already, I
Must burst this earth-shell ere I fly.

Then, God, take me! We shall be near,
More near than ever, each to each:
Her angel ears will find more clear
My heavenly than my earthly speech;
And still, as I draw nigh to thee,
Her soul and mine shall closer be.

James Russell Lowell

A Requiem

Ay, pale and silent maiden,
Cold as thou liest there,
Thine was the sunniest nature
That ever drew the air;
The wildest and most wayward,
And yet so gently kind,
Thou seemedst but to body
A breath of summer wind.

Into the eternal shadow
That girds our life around,
Into the infinite silence
Wherewith Death's shore is bound,
Thou hast gone forth, beloved!
And I were mean to weep,
That thou hast left Life's shallows
And dost possess the Deep.

Thou liest low and silent,
Thy heart is cold and still.
Thine eyes are shut forever,
And Death hath had his will;
He loved and would have taken;
I loved and would have kept.
We strove,-and he was stronger,
And I have never wept.

Let him possess thy body,
Thy soul is still with me,
More sunny and more gladsome
Than it was wont to be:
Thy body was a fetter
That bound me to the flesh,
Thank God that it is broken,
And now I live afresh!

Now I can see thee clearly;
The dusky cloud of clay,
That hid thy starry spirit,
Is rent and blown away:
To earth I give thy body,
Thy spirit to the sky,
I saw its bright wings growing,
And knew that thou must fly.

Now I can love thee truly,
For nothing comes between
The senses and the spirit,
The seen and the unseen;
Lifts the eternal shadow,
The silence bursts apart,
And the soul's boundless future

Is present in my heart.

James Russell Lowell

A Revolutionary Hero

Old Joe is gone, who saw hot Percy goad
His slow artillery up the Concord road,
A tale which grew in wonder year by year;
As every time he told it, Joe drew near
To the main fight, till faded and grown gray,
The original scene to bolder tints gave way;
Then Joe had heard the foe's scared double-quick
Beat on stove drum with one uncaptured stick,
And, ere death came the lengthening tale to lop,
Himself had fired, and seen a red-coat drop;
Had Joe lived long enough, that scrambling fight
Had squared more nearly to his sense of right,
And vanquished Perry, to complete the tale,
Had hammered stone for life in Concord jail.

James Russell Lowell

A Stanza on Freedom

THEY are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak;
They are slaves who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think;
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.

James Russell Lowell

A Third Letter From B. Sawin, Esq.

I spose you recollect that I explained my gennle views
In the last billet that I writ, 'way down frum Veery Cruze,
Jest arter I'd a kin' o' ben spontaneously sot up
To run unannermously fer the Preserdential cup;
O' course it worn't no wish o' mine, 'twuz ferflely distressin',
But poppiler enthusiasm gut so almighty pressin'
Thet, though like sixty all along I fumed an' fussed an' sorrered,
There didn't seem no ways to stop their bringin' on me forrerd:
Fact is, they udged the matter so, I couldn't help admittin'
The Father o' his Country's shoes no feet but mine 'ould fit in,
Besides the savin' o' the soles fer ages to succeed,
Seein' that with one wannut foot, a pair'd be more 'n I need;
An', tell ye wut, them shoes'll want a thund'rin sight o' patchin',
Ef this ere fashion is to last we've gut into o' hatchin'
A pair o' second Washintons fer every new election,-
Though, fer ez number one's consarned, I don't make no objection.

I wuz agoin' on to say that wen at fust I saw
The masses would stick to 't I wuz the Country's father-'n-law,
(They would ha' hed it _Father_, but I told 'em 'twouldn't du,
Coz that wuz sutthin' of a sort they couldn't split in tu,
An' Washinton hed hed the thing laid fairly to his door,
Nor darsn't say 'tworn't his'n, much ez sixty year afore,)
But 'taint no matter ez to that; wen I wuz nomernated,
'Tworn't natur but wut I should feel consid'able elated,
An' wile the hooraw o' the thing wuz kind o' noo an' fresh,
I thought our ticket would ha' caird the country with a resh.

Sence I've come hum, though, an' looked round, I think I seem to find
Strong argimunts ez thick ez fleas to make me change my mind;
It's clear to any one whose brain aint fur gone in a phthisis,
Thet hail Columby's happy land is goin' thru a crisis,
An' 'twouldn't noways du to hev the people's mind distracted
By bein' all to once by sev'ral pop'lar names attackted;
'Twould save holl haycartloads o' fuss an' three four months o' jaw,
Ef some illustrious paytriot should back out an' withdraw;
So, ez I aint a crooked stick, jest like-like ole (I swow,
I dunno ez I know his name)-I'll go back to my plough.
Wenever an Amerikin distinguished politishin
Begins to try et wut they call definin' his posishin,
Wal, I, fer one, feel sure he ain't gut nothin' to define;
It's so nine cases out o' ten, but jest the tenth is mine;
An' 'taint no more 'n proper 'n' right in sech a sitooation
To hint the course you think'll be the savin' o' the nation;
To funk right out o' p'lit'cal strife aint thought to be the thing,
Without you deacon off the toon you want your folks should sing;
So I edvise the noomrous friends thet's in one boat with me
To jest up killick, jam right down their hellum hard alee,
Haul the sheets taut, an', layin' out upon the Suthun tack,
Make fer the safest port they can, wich, _I_ think, is Ole Zack.

Next thing you'll want to know, I spose, wut argimunts I seem

To see that makes me think this ere'll be the strongest team;
 Fust place, I've ben consid'ble round in bar-rooms an' saloons
 Agetherin' public sentiment, 'mongst Demmercrats and Coons,
 An' 'taint ve'y offen that I meet a chap but wut goes in
 Fer Rough an' Ready, fair an' square, hufs, taller, horns, an' skin;
 I don't deny but wut, fer one, ez fur ez I could see,
 I didn't like at fust the Pheladelphy nomernee:
 I could ha' pintoed to a man that wuz, I guess, a peg
 Higher than him,-a soger, tu, an' with a wooden leg;
 But every day with more an' more o' Taylor zeal I'm burnin',
 Seein' wich way the tide that sets to office is aturnin';
 Wy, into Bellers's we notched the votes down on three sticks,-
 'Twuz Birdofredum _one_, Cass _aught_ an Taylor _twenty-six_,
 An' bein' the on'y canderdate that wuz upon the ground,
 They said 'twuz no more 'n right that I should pay the drinks all round;
 Ef I'd expected sech a trick, I wouldn't ha' cut my foot
 By goin' an' votin' fer myself like a consumed coot;
 It didn't make no deff'rence, though; I wish I may be cust,
 Ef Bellers wuzn't slim enough to say he wouldn't trust!

Another pint that influences the minds o' sober jedges
 Is thet the Gin'ral hezn't gut tied hand an' foot with pledges;
 He hezn't told ye wut he is, an' so there aint no knowin'
 But wut he may turn out to be the best there is agoin';
 This, at the on'y spot that pinched, the shoe directly eases,
 Coz every one is free to 'xpect percisely wut he pleases:
 I want free-trade; you don't; the Gin'ral isn't bound to neither;-
 I vote my way; you, yourn; an' both air sooted to a T there.
 Ole Rough an' Ready, tu, 's a Wig, but without bein' ultry;
 He's like a holsome hayin' day, thet's warm, but isn't sultry;
 He's jest wut I should call myself, a kin' of _scratch_ ez 'tware,
 Thet aint exacly all a wig nor wholly your own hair;
 I 've ben a Wig three weeks myself, jest o' this mod'rate sort,
 An' don't find them an' Demmercrats so defferent ez I thought;
 They both act pooty much alike, an' push an' scrouge an' cus;
 They're like two pickpockets in league fer Uncle Samwells pus;
 Each takes a side, an' then they squeeze the ole man in between 'em,
 Turn all his pockets wrong side out an' quick ez lightnin' clean 'em;
 To nary one on 'em I'd trust a secon'-handed rail
 No furder off 'an I could sling a bullock by the tail.

Webster sot matters right in thet air Mashfiel' speech o' his'n;
 'Taylor,' sez he, 'aint nary ways the one thet I'd a chizzen,
 Nor he aint fittin' fer the place, an' like ez not he aint
 No more 'n a tough ole bullethead, an' no gret of a saint;
 But then,' sez he, 'obsarve my pint, he's jest ez good to vote fer
 Ez though the greasin' on him worn't a thing to hire Choate fer;
 Aint it ez easy done to dropp a ballot in a box
 Fer one ez 'tis fer t'other, fer the bull-dog ez the fox?'
 It takes a mind like Dannel's, fact, ez big ez all ou' doors,
 To find out thet it looks like rain arter it fairly pours;
 I 'gree with him, it aint so dreffle troublesome to vote

Fer Taylor arter all,-it's jest to go an' change your coat;
Wen he's once greased, you'll swaller him an' never know on 't, scurce,
Unless he scratches, goin' down, with them 'ere Gin'ral's spurs.
I've ben a votin' Demmercrat, ez reg'lar as a clock,
But don't find goin' Taylor gives my narves no gret 'f a shock;
Truth is, the cutest leadin' Wigs, ever sence fust they found
Wich side the bread gut buttered on, hev kep' a edgin' round;
They kin' o' slipt the planks frum out th' ole platform one by one
An' made it gradooally noo, 'fore folks khow'd wut wuz done,
Till, fur 'z I know, there aint an inch that I could lay my han' on,
But I, or any Demmercrat, feels comf'table to stan' on,
An' ole Wig doctrines act'lly look, their occ'pants bein' gone,
Lonesome ez steddies on a mash without no hayricks on.

I spose it's time now I should give my thoughts upon the plan,
Thet chipped the shell at Buffalo, o' settin' up ole Van.
I used to vote fer Martin, but, I swan, I'm clean disgusted,-
He aint the man thet I can say is fittin' to be trusted;
He aint half antislav'ry 'nough, nor I aint sure, ez some be,
He'd go in fer abolishin' the Deestrick o' Columby;
An', now I come to recollec', it kin' o' makes me sick 'z
A horse, to think o' wut he wuz in eighteen thirty-six.
An' then, another thing;-I guess, though mebbly I am wrong,
This Buff'lo plaster aint agoin' to dror almighty strong;
Some folks, I know, hev gut th' idee thet No'thun dough'll rise,
Though, 'fore I see it riz an' 'baked, I wouldn't trust my eyes;
'Twill take more emptins, a long chalk, than this noo party's gut,
To give sech heavy cakes ez them a start, I tell ye wut.
But even ef they caird the day, there wouldn't be no endurin'
To stan' upon a platform with sech critters ez Van Buren;-
An' his son John, tu, I can't think how thet 'ere chap should dare
To speak ez he doos; wy, they say he used to cuss an' swear!
I spose he never read the hymn thet tells how down the stairs
A feller with long legs wuz throwed thet wouldn't say his prayers.
This brings me to another pint: the leaders o' the party
Aint jest sech men ez I can act along with free an' hearty;
They aint not quite respectable, an' wen a feller's morrils
Don't toe the straightest kin' o' mark, wy, him an' me jest quarrils.
I went to a free soil meetin' once, an' wut d'ye think I see?
A feller was aspoutin' there thet act'lly come to me,
About two year ago last spring, ez nigh ez I can jedge,
An' axed me ef I didn't want to sign the Temprunce pledge!
He's one o' them that goes about an' sez you hedn't oughter
Drink nothin', mornin', noon, or night, stronger 'an Taunton water.
There's one rule I've ben guided by, in settlin' how to vote, ollers,-
I take the side thet _isn't_ took by them consarned teetotallers.

Ez fer the niggers, I've ben South, an' thet hez changed my min';
A lazier, more ongrateful set you couldn't nowers fin',
You know I mentioned in my last thet I should buy a nigger,
Ef I could make a purchase at a pooty mod'rate figger;
So, ez there's nothin' in the world I'm fonder of 'an gunnin',

I closed a bargain finally to take a feller runnin'.
 I shou'dered queen's-arm an' stumped out, an' wen I come t' th' swamp,
 'Tworn't very long afore I gut upon the nest o' Pomp;
 I come acrost a kin' o' hut, an', playin' round the door,
 Some little woolly-headed cubs, ez many 'z six or more.
 At fust I thought o' firin', but think twice is safest ollers;
 There aint, thinks I, not one on 'em but's wuth his twenty dollars,
 Or would be, ef I hed 'em back into a Christian land,-
 How temptin' all on 'em would look upon an auction-stand!
 (Not but wut I hate Slavery, in th' abstract, stem to starn,-
 I leave it ware our fathers did, a privit State consarn.)
 Soon 'z they see me, they yelled an' run, but Pomp wuz out ahoein'
 A leetle patch o' corn he hed, or else there aint no knowin'
 He wouldn't ha' took a pop at me; but I hed gut the start,
 An' wen he looked, I vow he groaned ez though he'd broke his heart;
 He done it like a wite man, tu, ez nat'ral ez a pictur,
 The imp'dunt, pis'nous hypocrite! wus 'an a boy constrictur.
 'You can't gum me, I tell ye now, an' so you needn't try,
 I 'xpect my eye-teeth every mail, so jest shet up,' sez I.
 'Don't go to actin' ugly now, or else I'll let her strip,
 You'd best draw kindly, seein' 'z how I've gut ye on the hip;
 Besides, you darned ole fool, it aint no gret of a disaster
 To be benev'lently druv back to a contented master,
 Ware you hed Christian priv'ledges you don't seem quite aware on,
 Or you'd ha' never run away from bein' well took care on;
 Ez fer kin' treatment, wy, he wuz so fond on ye, he said,
 He'd give a fifty spot right out, to git ye, 'live or dead;
 Wite folks aint sot by half ez much; 'member I run away,
 Wen I wuz bound to Cap'n Jakes, to Mattysqumscot Bay;
 Don' know him, likely? Spose not; wal, the mean old codger went
 An' offered-wut reward, think? Wal, it worn't no less 'n a cent.'

Wal, I jest gut 'em into line, an' druv 'em on afore me;
 The pis'nous brutes, I'd no idee o' the ill-will they bore me;
 We walked till som'ers about noon, an' then it grew so hot
 I thought it best to camp awile, so I chose out a spot
 Jest under a magnoly tree, an' there right down I sot;
 Then I unstrapped my wooden leg, coz it begun to chafe,
 An' laid it down 'longside o' me, supposin' all wuz safe;
 I made my darkies all set down around me in a ring,
 An' sot an' kin' o' ciphered up how much the lot would bring;
 But, wile I dranked the peaceful cup of a pure heart an' min'
 (Mixed with some wiskey, now an' then), Pomp he snaked up behin',
 An' creepin' grad'lly close tu, ez quiet ez a mink,
 Jest grabbed my leg, an' then pulled foot, quicker 'an you could wink,
 An', come to look, they each on' em hed gut behin' a tree,
 An' Pomp poked out the leg a piece, jest so ez I could see,
 An' yelled to me to throw away my pistils an' my gun,
 Or else thet they'd cair off the leg, an' fairly cut an' run.
 I vow I didn't b'lieve there wuz a decent alligatur
 Thet hed a heart so destitoot o' common human natur;
 However, ez there worn't no help, I finally give in

An' heft my arms away to git my leg safe back agin.

Pomp gethered all the weapins up, an' then he come an' grinned,
He showed his ivory some, I guess, an' sez, 'You're fairly pinned;
Jest buckle on your leg agin, an' git right up an' come,
'T wun't du fer fammerly men like me to be so long frum hum.'
At fust I put my foot right down an' swore I wouldn't budge.
'Jest ez you choose,' sez he, quite cool, 'either be shot or trudge.'
So this black-hearted monster took an' act'lly druv me back
Along the very feetmarks o' my happy mornin' track,
An' kep' me pris'ner 'bout six months, an' worked me, tu, like sin,
Till I hed gut his corn an' his Carliny taters in;
He made me larn him readin', tu (although the crittur saw
How much it hut my morril sense to act agin the law),
So'st he could read a Bible he'd gut; an' axed ef I could pint
The North Star out; but there I put his nose some out o' jint,
Fer I weeled roun' about sou'west, an', lookin' up a bit,
Picked out a middlin' shiny one an' tole him thet wuz it.
Fin'lly he took me to the door, an' givin' me a kick,
Sez, 'Ef you know wut's best fer ye, be off, now, double-quick;
The winter-time's a comin' on, an' though I gut ye cheap,
You're so darned lazy, I don't think you're hardly woth your keep;
Besides, the childrin's growin' up, an' you aint jest the model
I'd like to hev 'em immertate, an' so you'd better toddle!'

Now is there anythin' on airth'll ever prove to me
Thet renegader slaves like him air fit fer bein' free?
D' you think they'll suck me in to jine the Buff'lo chaps, an' them
Rank infidels thet go agin the Scriptur'l cus o' Shem?
Not by a jugfull! sooner 'n thet, I'd go thru fire an' water;
Wen I hev once made up my mind, a meet'nhus aint sotter;
No, not though all the crows thet flies to pick my bones wuz cawin',-
I guess we're in a Christian land,-

Yourn,

BIRDOFREDUM SAWIN.

James Russell Lowell

A Valentine

Let others wonder what fair face
Upon their path shall shine,
And, fancying half, half hoping, trace
Some maiden shape of tenderest grace
To be their Valentine.

Let other hearts with tremor sweet
One secret wish enshrine
That Fate may lead their happy feet
Fair Julia in the lane to meet
To be their Valentine.

But I, far happier, am secure;
I know the eyes benign,
The face more beautiful and pure
Than fancy's fairest portraiture
That mark my Valentine.

More than when first I singled, thee,
This only prayer is mine,-
That, in the years I yet shall see.
As, darling, in the past, thou'll be
My happy Valentine.

James Russell Lowell

A Winter-Evening Hymn to My Fire

I

Beauty on my hearth-stone blazing!
To-night the triple Zoroaster
Shall my prophet be and master;
To-night will I pure Magian be,
Hymns to thy sole honor raising,
While thou leapest fast and faster,
Wild with self-delighted glee,
Or sink'st low and glowest faintly
As an aureole still and saintly,
Keeping cadence to my praising
Thee! still thee! and only thee!

II

Elfish daughter of Apollo!
Thee, from thy father stolen and bound
To serve in Vulcan's clangorous smithy,
Prometheus (primal Yankee) found,
And, when he had tampered with thee,
(Too confiding little maid!)
In a reed's precarious hollow
To our frozen earth conveyed:
For he swore I know not what;
Endless ease should be thy lot,
Pleasure that should never falter,
Lifelong play, and not a duty
Save to hover o'er the altar,
Vision of celestial beauty,
Fed with precious woods and spices;
Then, perfidious! having got
Thee in the net of his devices,
Sold thee into endless slavery,
Made thee a drudge to boil the pot,
Thee, Helios' daughter, who dost bear
His likeness in thy golden hair;
Thee, by nature wild and wavery,
Palpitating, evanescent
As the shade of Dian's crescent,
Life, motion, gladness, everywhere!

III

Fathom deep men bury thee
In the furnace dark and still.
There, with dreariest mockery,
Making thee eat, against thy will,
Blackest Pennsylvanian stone;
But thou dost avenge thy doom,

For, from out thy catacomb,
Day and night thy wrath is blown
In a withering simoom,
And, adown that cavern drear,
Thy black pitfall in the floor,
Staggers the lusty antique cheer,
Despairing, and is seen no more!

IV

Elfish I may rightly name thee;
We enslave, but cannot tame thee;
With fierce snatches, now and then,
Thou pluckest at thy right again,
And thy down-trod instincts savage
To stealthy insurrection creep
While thy wittol masters sleep,
And burst in undiscerning ravage:
Then how thou shak'st thy bacchant locks!
While brazen pulses, far and near,
Throb thick and thicker, wild with fear
And dread conjecture, till the drear
Disordered clangor every steeple rocks!

V

But when we make a friend of thee,
And admit thee to the hall
On our nights of festival,
Then, Cinderella, who could see
In thee the kitchen's stunted thrall?
Once more a Princess lithe and tan,
Thou dancest with a whispering tread,
While the bright marvel of thy head
In crinkling gold floats all abroad,
And gloriously dost vindicate
The legend of thy lineage great,
Earth-exiled daughter of the Pythian god!
Now in the ample chimney-place,
To honor thy acknowledged race,
We crown thee high with laurel good,
Thy shining father's sacred wood,
Which, guessing thy ancestral right,
Sparkles and snaps its dumb delight,
And, at thy touch, poor outcast one,
Feels through its gladdened fibres go
The tingle and thrill and vassal glow
Of instincts loyal to the sun.

VI

O thou of home the guardian Lar,
And, when our earth hath wandered far,
Into the cold, and deep snow covers
The walks of our New England lovers,
Their sweet secluded evening-star!
'Twas with thy rays the English Muse
Ripened her mild domestic hues;
'Twas by thy flicker that she conned
The fireside wisdom that enrings
With light from heaven familiar things;
By thee she found the homely faith
In whose mild eyes thy comfort stay'th
When Death, extinguishing his torch,
Gropes for the latch-string in the porch;
The love that wanders not beyond
His earliest nest, but sits and sings
While children smooth his patient wings;
Therefore with thee I love to read
Our brave old poets; at thy touch how stirs
Life in the withered words: how swift recede
Time's shadows; and how glows again
Through its dead mass the incandescent verse,
As when upon the anvils of the brain
It glittering lay, cyclopically wrought
By the fast-throbbing hammers of the poet's thought!
Thou murmurest, too, divinely stirred,
The aspirations unattained,
The rhythms so rathe and delicate,
They bent and strained
And broke, beneath the sombre weight
Of any airiest mortal word.

VII

What warm protection dost thou bend
Round curtained talk of friend with friend,
While the gray snow-storm, held aloof,
To softest outline rounds the roof,
Or the rude North with baffled strain
Shoulders the frost-starred window-pane!
Now the kind nymph to Bacchus born
By Morpheus' daughter, she that seems
Gifted upon her natal morn
By him with fire, by her with dreams,
Nicotia, dearer to the Muse
Than all the grape's bewildering juice,
We worship, unforbid of thee;
And, as her incense floats and curls
In airy spires and wayward whirls,

Or poises on its tremulous stalk
A flower of frailest revery,
So winds and loiters, idly free,
The current of unguided talk,
Now laughter-rippled, and now caught
In smooth, dark pools of deeper thought.
Meanwhile thou mellowest every word,
A sweetly unobtrusive third;
For thou hast magic beyond wine,
To unlock natures each to each;
The unspoken thought thou canst divine;
Thou fill'st the pauses of the speech
With whispers that to dream-land reach
And frozen fancy-springs unchain
In Arctic outskirts of the brain:
Sun of all inmost confidences,
To thy rays doth the heart uncloze
Its formal calyx of pretences,
That close against rude day's offences,
And open its shy midnight rose!

VIII

Thou holdest not the master key
With which thy Sire sets free the mystic gates
Of Past and Future: not for common fates
Do they wide open fling,
And, with a far heard ring,
Swing back their willing valves melodiously;
Only to ceremonial days,
And great processions of imperial song
That set the world at gaze,
Doth such high privilege belong;
But thou a postern-door canst ope
To humbler chambers of the selfsame palace
Where Memory lodges, and her sister Hope,
Whose being is but as a crystal chalice
Which, with her various mood, the elder fills
Of joy or sorrow,
So coloring as she wills
With hues of yesterday the unconscious morrow.

IX

Thou sinkest, and my fancy sinks with thee:
For thee I took the idle shell,
And struck the unused chords again,
But they are gone who listened well;
Some are in heaven, and all are far from me:
Even as I sing, it turns to pain,

And with vain tears my eyelids throb and swell:
Enough; I come not of the race
That hawk their sorrows in the market-place.
Earth stops the ears I best had loved to please;
Then break, ye untuned chords, or rust in peace!
As if a white-haired actor should come back
Some midnight to the theatre void and black,
And there rehearse his youth's great part
Mid thin applauses of the ghosts.
So seems it now: ye crowd upon my heart,
And I bow down in silence, shadowy hosts!

James Russell Lowell

A Youthful Experiment In English Hexameters

IMPRESSIONS OF HOMER

Sometimes come pauses of calm, when the rapt bard, holding his heart back,
Over his deep mind muses, as when o'er awe-stricken ocean
Poises a heapt cloud luridly, ripening the gale and the thunder;
Slow rolls onward the verse with a long swell heaving and swinging,
Seeming to wait till, gradually wid'ning from far-off horizons,
Piling the deeps up, heaping the glad-hearted surges before it,
Gathers the thought as a strong wind darkening and cresting the tumult.
Then every pause, every heave, each trough in the waves, has its meaning;
Full-sailed, forth like a tall ship steadies the theme, and around it,
Leaping beside it in glad strength, running in wild glee beyond it,
Harmonies billow exulting and floating the soul where it lists them,
Swaying the listener's fantasy hither and thither like drift-weed.

James Russell Lowell

Above and Below

I

O dwellers in the valley-land,
Who in deep twilight grope and cower,
Till the slow mountain's dial-hand
Shorten to noon's triumphal hour,
While ye sit idle, do ye think
The Lord's great work sits idle too?
That light dare not o'erleap the brink
Of morn, because 'tis dark with you?

Though yet your valleys skulk in night,
In God's ripe fields the day is cried,
And reapers, with their sickles bright,
Troop, singing, down the mountain-side:
Come up, and feel what health there is
In the frank Dawn's delighted eyes,
As, bending with a pitying kiss,
The night-shed tears of Earth she dries!

The Lord wants reapers: oh, mount up,
Before night comes, and says, 'Too late!'
Stay not for taking scrip or cup,
The Master hungers while ye wait;
'Tis from these heights alone your eyes
The advancing spears of day can see,
That o'er the eastern hill-tops rise,
To break your long captivity.

II

Lone watcher on the mountain-height,
It is right precious to behold
The first long surf of climbing light
Flood all the thirsty east with gold;
But we, who in the shadow sit,
Know also when the day is nigh,
Seeing thy shining forehead lit
With his inspiring prophecy.

Thou hast thine office; we have ours;
God lacks not early service here,
But what are thine eleventh hours
He counts with us for morning cheer;
Our day, for Him, is long enough,
And when He giveth work to do,
The bruised reed is amply tough
To pierce the shield of error, through.

But not the less do thou aspire
Light's earlier messages to preach;

Keep back no syllable of fire,
Plunge deep the rowels of thy speech.
Yet God deems not thine aered sight
More worthy than our twilight dim;
For meek Obedience, too, is Light,
And following that is finding Him.

James Russell Lowell

Abraham Lincoln

Such was he, our Martyr-Chief,
Whom late the Nation he had led,
With ashes on her head,
Wept with the passion of an angry grief:
Forgive me, if from present things I turn
To speak what in my heart will beat and burn,
And hang my wreath on his world-honored urn.
 Nature, they say, doth dote,
 And cannot make a man
 Save on some worn-out plan,
 Repeating us by rote:
For him her Old World moulds aside she threw,
 And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
 Of the unexhausted West,
With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true.
 How beautiful to see
Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
Who loved his charge, but never loved to lead;
One whose meek flock the people joyed to be,
 Not lured by any cheat of birth,
 But by his clear-grained human worth,
And brave old wisdom of sincerity!
 They knew that outward grace is dust;
 They could not choose but trust
In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill,
 And supple-tempered will
That bent like perfect steel to spring again and thrust.
 His was no lonely mountain-peak of mind,
 Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy bars,
 A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors blind,
 Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined,
 Fruitful and friendly for all human kind,
Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of loftiest stars.
 Nothing of Europe here,
Or, then, of Europe fronting mornward still,
 Ere any names of Serf and Peer
 Could Nature's equal scheme deface;
 Here was a type of the true elder race,
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face.
 I praise him not; it were too late;
And some innate weakness there must be
In him who condescends to victory
Such as the Present gives, and cannot wait,
 Safe in himself as in a fate.
 So always firmly he:
 He knew to bide his time,
 And can his fame abide,
Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
 Till the wise years decide.
Great captains, with their guns and drums,
 Disturb our judgment for the hour,

But at last silence comes;
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame,
 The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
 New birth of our new soil, the first American.

James Russell Lowell

Abscence

Sleep is Death's image, -poets tell us so;
But Absence is the bitter self of Death,
And, you away, Life's lips their red forego,
Parched in an air unrefreshed by your breath.

Light of those eyes that made the light of mine,
Where shine you? On what happier fields and flowers?
Heaven's lamps renew their lustre less divine,
But only serve to count my darkened hours.

If with your presence went your image too,
That brain-born ghost my path would never cross
Which meets me now where'er I once met you,
Then vanishes, to multiply my loss.

James Russell Lowell

After the Burial

YES, faith is a goodly anchor;
When skies are sweet as a psalm,
At the bows it lolls so stalwart,
In bluff, broad-shouldered calm.

And when over breakers to leeward
The tattered surges are hurled,
It may keep our head to the tempest,
With its grip on the base of the world.

But, after the shipwreck, tell me
What help in its iron thews,
Still true to the broken hawser,
Deep down among sea-weed and ooze?

In the breaking gulfs of sorrow,
When the helpless feet stretch out
And find in the deeps of darkness
No footing so solid as doubt,

Then better one spar of Memory,
One broken plank of the Past,
That our human heart may cling to,
Though hopeless of shore at last!

James Russell Lowell

Agro-Dolce

One kiss from all others prevents me,
And sets all my pulses astir,
And burns on my lips and torments me:
'Tis the kiss that I fain would give her.

One kiss for all others requites me,
Although it is never to be,
And sweetens my dreams and invites me:
'Tis the kiss that she dare not give me.

Ah, could it be mine, it were sweeter
Than honey bees garner in dream,
Though its bliss on my lips were fleeter
Than a swallow's dip to the stream.

And yet, thus denied, it can never
In the prose of life vanish away;
O'er my lips it must hover forever,
The sunshine and shade of my day.

James Russell Lowell

Aladdin

When I was a beggarly boy
And lived in a cellar damp,
I had not a friend nor a toy,
But I had Aladdin's lamp;
When I could not sleep for the cold,
I had fire enough in my brain,
And builded, with roofs of gold,
My beautiful castles in Spain!

Since then I have toiled day and night,
I have money and power good store,
But I'd give all my lamps of silver bright
For the one that is mine no more;
Take, Fortune, whatever you choose,
You gave, and may snatch again;
I have nothing 'twould pain me to lose,
For I own no more castles in Spain!

James Russell Lowell

Allegra

I would more natures were like thine,
That never casts a glance before,
Thou Hebe, who thy heart's bright wine
So lavishly to all dost pour,
That we who drink forget to pine,
And can but dream of bliss in store.

Thou canst not see a shade in life;
With sunward instinct thou dost rise,
And, leaving clouds below at strife,
Gazest undazzled at the skies,
With all their blazing splendors rife,
A songful lark with eagle's eyes.

Thou wast some foundling whom the Hours
Nursed, laughing, with the milk of Mirth;
Some influence more gay than ours
Hath ruled thy nature from its birth,
As if thy natal stars were flowers
That shook their seeds round thee on earth.

And thou, to lull thine infant rest,
Wast cradled like an Indian child;
All pleasant winds from south and west
With lullabies thine ears beguiled,
Rocking thee in thine oriole's nest,
Till Nature looked at thee and smiled.

Thine every fancy seems to borrow
A sunlight from thy childish years,
Making a golden cloud of sorrow,
A hope-lit rainbow out of tears,-
Thy heart is certain of to-morrow,
Though 'yond to-day it never peers.

I would more natures were like thine,
So innocently wild and free,
Whose sad thoughts, even, leap and shine,
Like sunny wavelets in the sea,
Making us mindless of the brine,
In gazing on the brilliancy.

James Russell Lowell

An Autograph

O'er the wet sands an insect crept
Ages ere man on earth was known—
And patient Time, while Nature slept,
The slender tracing turned to stone.

'T was the first autograph: and ours?
Prithee, how much of prose or song,
In league with the creative powers,
Shall 'scape Oblivion's broom so long.

James Russell Lowell

An Incident in a Railroad Car

He spoke of Burns: men rude and rough
Pressed round to hear the praise of one
Whose heart was made of manly, simple stuff,
As homespun as their own.

And, when he read, they forward leaned,
Drinking, with thirsty hearts and ears,
His brook-like songs whom glory never weaned
From humble smiles and tears.

Slowly there grew a tender awe,
Sun-like, o'er faces brown and hard,
As if in him who read they felt and saw
Some presence of the bard.

It was a sight for sin and wrong
And slavish tyranny to see,
A sight to make our faith more pure and strong
In high humanity.

I thought, these men will carry hence
Promptings their former life above,
And something of a finer reverence
For beauty, truth, and love.

God scatters love on every side
Freely among his children all,
And always hearts are lying open wide,
Wherein some grains may fall.

There is no wind but soweth seeds
Of a more true and open life,
Which burst, unlooked for, into high-souled deeds,
With wayside beauty rife.

We find within these souls of ours
Some wild germs of a higher birth,
Which in the poet's tropic heart bear flowers
Whose fragrance fills the earth.

Within the hearts of all men lie
These promises of wider bliss,
Which blossom into hopes that cannot die,
In sunny hours like this.

All that hath been majestic
In life or death, since time began,
Is native in the simple heart of all,
The angel heart of man.

And thus, among the untaught poor,
Great deeds and feelings find a home,

That cast in shadow all the golden lore
Of classic Greece and Rome.

O mighty brother-soul of man,
Where'er thou art, in low or high,
Thy skyey arches with exulting span
O'er-roof infinity!

All thoughts that mould the age begin
Deep down within the primitive soul,
And from the many slowly upward win
To one who grasps the whole:

In his wide brain the feeling deep
That struggled on the many's tongue
Swells to a tide of thought, whose surges leap
O'er the weak thrones of wrong.

All thought begins in feeling, -wide
In the great mass its base is hid,
And, narrowing up to thought, stands glorified,
A moveless pyramid.

Nor is he far astray, who deems
That every hope, which rises and grows broad
In the world's heart, by ordered impulse streams
From the great heart of God.

God wills, man hopes: in common souls
Hope is but vague and undefined,
Till from the poet's tongue the message rolls
A blessing to his kind.

Never did Poesy appear
So full of heaven to me, as when
I saw how it would pierce through pride and fear
To the lives of coarsest men.

It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century;-

But better far it is to speak
One simple word, which now and then
Shall waken their free nature in the weak
And friendless sons of men;

To write some earnest verse or line,
Which, seeking not the praise of art,
Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine
In the untutored heart.

He who doth this, in verse or prose,
May be forgotten in his day,
But surely shall be crowned at last with those
Who live and speak for aye.

James Russell Lowell

An Indian Summer Reverie

What visionary tints the year puts on,
When failing leaves falter through motionless air
Or numbly cling and shiver to be gone!
How shimmer the low flats and pastures bare,
As with her nectar Hebe Autumn fills
The bowl between me and those distant hills,
And smiles and shakes abroad her misty, tremulous hair!

No more the landscape holds its wealth apart.
Making me poorer in my poverty,
But mingles with my senses and my heart;
My own projected spirit seems to me
In her own reverie the world to steep;
'Tis she that waves to sympathetic sleep,
Moving, as she is moved, each field and hill, and tree.

How fuse and mix, with what unfelt degrees,
Clasped by the faint horizon's languid arms,
Each into each, the hazy distances!
The softened season all the landscape charms;
Those hills, my native village that embay,
In waves of dreamier purple roll away,
And floating in mirage seem all the glimmering farms.

Far distant sounds the hidden chickadee
Close at my side; far distant sound the leaves;
The fields seem fields of dream, where Memory
Wanders like gleaning Ruth; and as the sheaves
Of wheat and barley wavered in the eye
Of Boaz as the maiden's glow went by,
So tremble and seem remote all things the sense receives.

The cock's shrill trump that tells of scattered corn,
Passed breezily on by all his flapping mates,
Faint and more faint, from barn to barn is borne,
Southward, perhaps to far Magellan's Straits;
Dimly I catch the throb of distant flails;
Silently overhead the henhawk sails,
With watchful, measuring eye, and for his quarry waits.

The sobered robin, hunger-silent now,
Leeks cedar-berries blue, his autumn cheer;
The squirrel on the shingly shagbark's bough,
Now saws, now lists with downward eye and ear,
Then drops his nut, and, with a chipping bound,
Whisks to his winding fastness underground;
The clouds like swans drift down the streaming atmosphere.

O'er yon bare knoll the pointed cedar shadows
Drowse on the crisp, gray moss; the ploughman's call
Creeps, faint as smoke from black, fresh-furrowed meadows;
The single crow a single caw lets fall

And all around me every bush and tree
Says Autumn's here, and Winter soon will
Who snows his soft, white sleep and silence over all.

The birch, most shy and lady-like of trees,
Her poverty, as best she may, retrieves,
And hints at her foregone gentilities
With some saved relics of her wealth of leaves
The swamp-oak, with his royal purple on,
Glares red as blood across the sinking sun,
As one who prouder to a falling fortune cleaves

He looks a sachem, in red blanket wrapt,
Who, mid some council of the sad-garbed whites,
Erect and stern, in his own memories lapt,
With distant eye broods over other sights,
Sees the hushed wood the city's flare replace,
The wounded turf heal o'er the railway's trace,
And roams the savage Past of his undwindled rights.

The red-oak, softer-grained, yields all for lost,
And, with his crumpled foliage stiff and dry,
After the first betrayal of the frost,
Rebuffs the kiss of the relenting sky;
The chestnuts, lavish of their long-hid gold,
To the faint Summer, beggared now and old,
Pour back the sunshine hoarded 'neath her favoring eye.

The ash her purple drops forgivingly
And sadly, breaking not the general hush;
The maple-swamps glow like a sunset sea,
Each leaf a ripple with its separate flush;
All round the wood's edge creeps the skirting blaze;
Of bushes low, as when, on cloudy days,
Ere the rain falls, the cautious farmer burns his brush.

O'er yon low wall, which guards one unkempt zone,
Where vines, and weeds, and scrub-oaks intertwine
Safe from the plough, whose rough, discordant stone
Is massed to one soft gray by lichens fine,
The tangled blackberry, crossed and recrossed, weaves
A prickly network of ensanguined leaves;
Hard by, with coral beads, the prim black-alders shine.

Pillaring with flame this crumbling boundary,
Whose loose blocks topple 'neath the ploughboy's foot,
Who, with each sense shut fast except the eye,
Creeps close and scares the jay he hoped to shoot,
The woodbine up the elm's straight stem aspires.
Coiling it, harmless, with autumnal fires;
In the ivy's paler blaze the martyr oak stands mute.

Below, the Charles—a stripe of nether sky,
Now hid by rounded apple-trees between,
Whose gaps the misplaced sail sweeps bellying by,
Now flickering golden through a woodland screen,
Then spreading out at his next turn beyond,
A silver circle like an inland pond—
Slips seaward silently through marshes purple and green.

Dear marshes! vain to him the gift of sight
Who cannot in their various incomes share,
From every season drawn, of shade and light,
Who sees in them but levels brown and bare;
Each change of storm or sunshine scatters free
On them its largesse of variety,
For nature with cheap means still works her wonders rare.

In Spring they lie one broad expanse of green,
O'er which the light winds run with glimmering feet;
Here, yellower stripes track out the creek unseen
here, darker growths o'er hidden ditches meet;
And purpler stains show where the blossoms crowd,
As if the silent shadow of a cloud
Hung there becalmed, with the next breath to fleet.

All round, upon the river's slippery edge,
Witching to deeper calm the drowsy tide,
Whispers and leans the breeze-entangling sedge;
Through emerald glooms the lingering waters slide,
Or, sometimes wavering, throw back the sun,
And the stiff banks in eddies melt and run
Of dimpling light, and with the current seem to glide.

In Summer 'tis a blithesome sight to see,
As step by step, with measured swing, they pass,
The wide-ranked mowers evading to the knee,
Their sharp scythes panting through the thick-set grass
Then, stretched beneath a rick's shade in a ring,
Their nooning take, while one begins to sing
A stave that droops and dies 'neath the close sky of brass.

Meanwhile the devil-may-care, the bobolink,
Remembering duty, in mid-quaver stops
Just ere he sweeps O'er rapture's tremulous brink,
And 'twixt the winrows most demurely drops,
A decorous bird of business, who provides
For his brown mate and fledglings six besides,
And looks from right to left, a farmer mid his crops.

Another change subdues them in the Fall,
But saddens not, they still show merrier tints,
Though sober russet seems to cover all;
When the first sunshine through their dew-drops glints,

Look how the yellow clearness, streamed across,
Redeems with rarer hues the season's loss,
As Dawn's feet there had touched and left their rosy prints.

Or come when sunset gives its freshened zest,
Lean o'er the bridge and let the ruddy thrill,
While the shorn sun swells down the hazy west,
Glow opposite; the marshes drink their fill
And swoon with purple veins, then slowly fade
Through pink to brown, as eastward moves the shade,
Lengthening with stealthy creep, of Simond's darkening hill.

Later, and yet ere Winter wholly shuts,
Ere through the first dry snow the runner grates,
And the loath cart-wheel screams in slippery ruts,
While the firmer ice the eager boy awaits,
Trying each buckle and strap beside the fire,
And until bedtime- plays with his desire,
Twenty times putting on and off his new-bought skates;—

Then, every morn, the river's banks shine bright
With smooth plate-armor, treacherous and frail,
By the frost's clinking hammers forged at night,
'Gainst which the lances of the sun prevail,
Giving a pretty emblem of the day
When guitar arms in light shall melt away,
And states shall move free limbed, loosed from war's cramping
mail.

And now those waterfalls the ebbing river
Twice everyday creates on either side
Tinkle, as through their fresh-sparred grots they shiver
In grass-arched channels to the sun denied;
High flaps in sparkling blue the far-heard crow,
The silvered flats gleam frostily below,
Suddenly drops the gull and breaks the glassy tide.

But, crowned in turn by vying seasons three,
Their winter halo hath a fuller ring;
This glory seems to rest immovably,—
The others were too fleet and vanishing;
When the hid tide is at its highest flow,
O'er marsh and stream one breathless trance of snow
With brooding fulness awes and hushes everything.

The sunshine seems blown off by the bleak wind,
As pale as formal candles lit by day;
Gropes to the sea the river dumb and blind;
The brown ricks, snow-thatched by the storm in play,
Show pearly breakers combing o'er their lee,
White crests as of some just enchanted sea,
Checked in their maddest leap and hanging poised midway.

But when the eastern blow, with rain aslant,
From mid-sea's prairies green and rolling plains
Drives in his wallowing herds of billows gaunt,
And the roused Charles remembers in his veins
Old Ocean's blood and snaps his gyves of frost,
That tyrannous silence on the shores is tost
In dreary wreck, and crumbling desolation reigns.

Edgewise or flat, in Druid-like device,
With leaden pools between or gullies bare,
The blocks lie strewn, a bleak Stonehenge of ice;
No life, no sound, to break the grim despair,
Save sullen plunge, as through the sedges stiff
Down crackles riverward some thaw-sapped cliff,
Or ashen the close-wedged fields of ice crunch here and there.

But let me turn from fancy-pictured scenes
To that whose pastoral calm before me lies:
Here nothing harsh or rugged intervenes;
The early evening with her misty dyes
Smooths off the ravelled edges of the nigh,
Relieves the distant with her cooler sky,
And tones the landscape down, and soothes the wearied eyes

There gleams my native village, dear to me,
Though higher change's waves each day are seen,
Whelming fields famed in boyhood's history,
Sanding with houses the diminished green;
There, in red brick, which softening time defies,
Stand square and stiff the Muses' factories;
How with my life knit up is every well-known scene!

Flow on, dear river! not alone you flow
To outward sight, and through your marshes wind;
Fed from the mystic springs of long-ago,
Your twin flows silent through my world of mind
Grow dim, dear marshes, in the evening's gray!
Before my inner sight ye stretch away,
And will forever, though these fleshly eyes grow blind.

James Russell Lowell

An Ode Of Thanks For Certain Cigars

Luck, my dear Norton, still makes shifts,
To mix a mortal with her gifts,
Which he may find who duly sifts.

Sweets to the sweet,—behold the clue!
Why not, then, new things to the gnu,
And trews to Highland clansmen true?

'Twas thus your kindly thought decreed
These weeds to one who is indeed,
And feels himself, a very weed,—

A weed from which, when bruised and shent,
Though some faint perfume may be rent,
Yet oftener much without a cent.

But imp, O Muse, a stronger wing
Mount, leaving self below, and sing
What thoughts these Cuban exiles bring!

He that knows aught of mythic lore
Knows how god Bacchus wandered o'er
The earth, and what strange names he bore.

The Bishop of Avranches supposes
That all these large and varying doses
Of fable mean naught else than Moses;

But waiving doubts, we surely know
He taught mankind to plough and sow,
And from the Tigris to the Po

Planted the vine; but of his visit
To this our hemisphere, why is it
We have no statement more explicit?

He gave to us a leaf divine
More grateful to the serious Nine
Than fierce inspirings of the vine.

And that he loved it more, this proved,—
He gave his name to what he loved,
Distorted now, but not removed.

Tobacco, sacred herb, though lowly,
Baffles old Time, the tyrant, wholly,
And makes him turn his hour-glass slowly;

Nay, makes as 'twere of every glass six,
Whereby we beat the heathen classics
With their weak Chians and their Massics.

These gave his glass a quicker twist,
And flew the hours like driving mist,
While Horace drank and Lesbia kissed.

How are we gainers when all's done,
If Life's swift clepsydra have run
With wine for water? 'Tis all one.

But this rare plant delays the stream
(At least if things are what they seem)
Through long eternities of dream.

What notes the antique Muse had known
Had she, instead of oat-straws, blown
Our wiser pipes of clay or stone!

Rash song, forbear! Thou canst not hope,
Untutored as thou art, to cope
With themes of such an epic scope.

Enough if thou give thanks to him
Who sent these leaves (forgive the whim)
Plucked from the dream-tree's sunniest limb.

My gratitude feels no eclipse,
For I, whate'er my other slips,
Shall have his kindness on my lips.

The prayers of Christian, Turk, and Jew
Have one sound up there in the blue,
And one smell all their incense, too.

Perhaps that smoke with incense ranks
Which curls from 'mid life's jars and clanks,
Graceful with happiness and thanks.

I pledge him, therefore, in a puff,—
rather frailish kind of stuff,
But still professional enough.

Hock-cups breed hiccups; let us feel
The god along our senses steel
More nobly and without his reel.

Each temperately 'baccy plenus,
May no grim fate of doubtful genus
E'er blow the smallest cloud between us.

And as his gift I shall devote
To fire, and o'er their ashes gloat,—
Let him do likewise with this note.

James Russell Lowell

Are Ye Truly Free?

Men! whose boast it is that ye
Come of fathers brave and free;
If there breathe on earth a slave,
Are ye truly free and brave?
Are ye not base slaves indeed,
Men unworthy to be freed,
If ye do not feel the chain,
When it works a brother's pain?

Women! who shall one day bear
Sons to breathe God's bounteous air,
If ye hear without a blush,
Deeds to make the roused blood rush
Like red lava through your veins,
For your sisters now in chains;
Answer! are ye fit to be
Mothers of the brave and free?

Is true freedom but to break
Fetters for our own dear sake,
And, with leathern hearts forget
That we owe mankind a debt?
No! true freedom is to share
All the chains our brothers wear,
And with hand and heart to be
Earnest to make others free.

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak;
They are slaves, who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than, in silence, shrink
From the truth they needs must think;
They are slaves, who dare not be
In the right with two or three.

James Russell Lowell

Ausplex

My heart, I cannot still it,
Nest that had song-birds in it;
And when the last shall go,
The dreary days to fill it,
Instead of lark or linnet,
Shall whirl dead leaves and snow.

Had they been swallows only,
Without the passion stronger
That skyward longs and sings,—
Woe's me, I shall be lonely
When I can feel no longer
The impatience of their wings!

A moment, sweet delusion,
Like birds the brown leaves hover;
But it will not be long
Before their wild confusion
Fall wavering down to cover
The poet and his song.

James Russell Lowell

Flowers

O poet! above all men blest,
Take heed that thus thou store them;
Love, Hope, and Faith shall ever rest,
Sweet birds (upon how sweet a nest!)
Watchfully brooding o'er them.
And from those flowers of Paradise
Scatter thou many a blessed seed,
Wherefrom an offspring may arise
To cheer the hearts and light the eyes
Of after-voyagers in their need.
They shall not fall on stony ground,
But, yielding all their hundred-fold,
Shall shed a peacefulness around,
Whose strengthening joy may not be told!
So shall thy name be blest of all,
And thy remembrance never die;
For of that seed shall surely fall
In the fair garden of Eternity,
Exult then in the nobleness
Of this thy work so holy,
Yet be not thou one jot the less
Humble and meek and lowly,
But let thine exultation be
The reverence of a bended knee;
And by thy life a poem write,
Built strongly day by day—
on the rock of Truth and Right
Its deep foundations lay.

James Russell Lowell

For an Autograph

THOUGH old the thought and oft exprest,
'Tis his at last who says it best,
I'll try my fortune with the rest.
Life is a leaf of paper white
Whereon each one of us may write
His word or two, and then comes night.

'Lo, time and space enough,' we cry,
'To write an epic!' so we try
Our nibs upon the edge, and die.
Muse not which way the pen to hold,
Luck hates the slow and loves the bold,
Soon come the darkness and the cold.

Greatly begin! though thou have time
But for a line, be that sublime,
Not failure, but low aim, is crime.
Ah, with what lofty hope we came!
But we forget it, dream of fame,
And scrawl, as I do here, a name.

James Russell Lowell

George Washington

Soldier and statesman, rarest unison;
High-poised example of great duties done
Simply as breathing, a world's honors worn
As life's indifferent gifts to all men born;
Dumb for himself, unless it were to God,
But for his barefoot soldiers eloquent,
Tramping the snow to coral where they trod,
Held by his awe in hollow-eyed content;
Modest, yet firm as Nature's self; unblamed
Save by the men his nobler temper shamed;
Never seduced through show of present good
By other than unsetting lights to steer
New-trimmed in Heaven, nor than his steadfast mood
More steadfast, far from rashness as from fear,
Rigid, but with himself first, grasping still
In swerveless poise the wave-beat helm of will;
Not honored then or now because he wooed
The popular voice, but that he still withstood;
Broad-minded, higher-souled, there is but one
Who was all this and ours, and all men's—WASHINGTON.

James Russell Lowell

Hakon's Lay

Then Thorstein looked at Hakon, where he sate,
Mute as a cloud amid the stormy hall,
And said: 'O Skald, sing now an olden song,
Such as our fathers heard who led great lives;
And, as the bravest on a shield is borne
Along the waving host that shouts him king,
So rode their thrones upon the thronging seas!'

Then the old man arose; white-haired he stood,
White-bearded with eyes that looked afar
From their still region of perpetual snow,
Over the little smokes and stirs of men:
His head was bowed with gathered flakes of years,
As winter bends the sea-foreboding pine,
But something triumphed in his brow and eye,
Which whoso saw it, could not see and crouch:
Loud rang the emptied beakers as he mused,
Brooding his eyried thoughts; then, as an eagle
Circles smooth-winged above the wind-vexed woods,
So wheeled his soul into the air of song
High o'er the stormy hall; and thus he sang:

'The fletcher for his arrow-shaft picks out
Wood closest-grained, long-seasoned, straight as light;
And, from a quiver full of such as these,
The wary bow-man, matched against his peers,
Long doubting, singles yet once more the best.
Who is it that can make such shafts as Fate?
What archer of his arrows is so choice,
Or hits the white so surely? They are men,
The chosen of her quiver; nor for her
Will every reed suffice, or cross-grained stick
At random from life's vulgar fagot plucked:
Such answer household ends; but she will have
Souls straight and clear, of toughest fibre, sound
Down to the heart of heart; from these she strips
All needless stuff, all sapwood; hardens them;
From circumstance untoward feathers plucks
Crumpled and cheap; and barbs with iron will:
The hour that passes is her quiver-boy;
When she draws bow, 'tis not across the wind,
Nor 'gainst the sun, her haste-snatched arrow sings,
For sun and wind have plighted faith to her
Ere men have heard the sinew twang, behold,
In the butt's heart her trembling messenger!

'The song is old and simple that I sing;
Good were the days of yore, when men were tried
By ring of shields, as now by ring of gold;
But, while the gods are left, and hearts of men,
And the free ocean, still the days are good;
Through the broad Earth roams Opportunity

And knocks at every door of but or hall,
Until she finds the brave soul that she wants.'

He ceased, and instantly the frothy tide
Of interrupted wassail roared along;
But Leif, the son of Eric, sat apart
Musing, and, with his eyes upon the fire,
Saw shapes of arrows, lost as soon as seen;
And then with that resolve his heart was bent,
Which, like a humming shaft, through many a stripe
Of day and night across the unventured seas,
Shot the brave prow to cut on Vinland sands
The first rune in the Saga of the West.

James Russell Lowell

Hebe

I saw the twinkle of white feet,
I saw the flush of robes descending;
Before her ran an influence fleet,
That bowed my heart like barley bending.

As, in bare fields, the searching bees
Pilot to blooms beyond our finding,
It led me on, by sweet degrees
Joy's simple honey-cells unbinding.

Those Graces were that seemed grim Fates;
With nearer love the sky leaned o'er me;
The long-sought Secret's golden gates
On musical hinges swung before me.

I saw the brimmed bowl in her grasp
Thrilling with godhood; like a lover
I sprang the proffered life to clasp;-
The beaker fell; the luck was over.

The Earth has drunk the vintage up;
What boots it patch the goblet's splinters?
Can Summer fill the icy cup,
Whose treacherous crystal is but Winter's?

O spendthrift haste! await the Gods;
The nectar crowns the lips of Patience;
Haste scatters on unthankful sods
The immortal gift in vain libations.

Coy Hebe flies from those that woo,
And shuns the hands would seize upon her;
Follow thy life, and she will sue
To pour for thee the cup of honor.

James Russell Lowell

Impartiality

I cannot say a scene is fair
Because it is beloved of thee
But I shall love to linger there,
For sake of thy dear memory;
I would not be so coldly just
As to love only what I must.

I cannot say a thought is good
Because thou foundest joy in it;
Each soul must choose its proper food
Which Nature hath decreed most fit;
But I shall ever deem it so
Because it made thy heart o'erflow.

I love thee for that thou art fair;
And that thy spirit joys in aught
Createth a new beauty there,
With throe own dearest image fraught;
And love, for others' sake that springs,
Gives half their charm to lovely things.

James Russell Lowell

Irene

Hers is a spirit deep, and crystal-clear;
Calmly beneath her earnest face it lies,
Free without boldness, meek without a fear,
Quicker to look than speak its sympathies;
Far down into her large and patient eyes
I gaze, deep-drinking of the infinite,
As, in the mid-watch of a clear, still night,
I look into the fathomless blue skies.

So circled lives she with Love's holy light,
That from the shade of self she walketh free;
The garden of her soul still keepeth she
An Eden where the snake did never enter;
She hath a natural, wise sincerity,
A simple truthfulness, and these have lent her
A dignity as moveless as the centre;
So that no influence of our earth can stir
Her steadfast courage, nor can take away
The holy peacefulness, which night and day,
Unto her queenly soul doth minister.

Most gentle is she; her large charity
(An all unwitting, childlike gift in her)
Not freer is to give than meek to bear;
And, though herself not unacquaint with care,
Hath in her heart wide room for all that be,-
Her heart that hath no secrets of its own,
But open is as eglantine full blown.
Cloudless forever is her brow serene,
Speaking calm hope and trust within her, whence
Welleth a noiseless spring of patience,
That keepeth all her life so fresh, so green
And full of holiness, that every look,
The greatness of her woman's soul revealing,
Unto me bringeth blessing, and a feeling
As when I read in God's own holy book.

A graciousness in giving that doth make
The small'st gift greatest, and a sense most meek
Of worthiness, that doth not fear to take
From others, but which always fears to speak
Its thanks in utterance, for the giver's sake;-
The deep religion of a thankful heart,
Which rests instinctively in Heaven's clear law
With a full peace, that never can depart
From its own steadfastness;-a holy awe
For holy things,-not those which men call holy,
But such as are revealed to the eyes
Of a true woman's soul bent down and lowly
Before the face of daily mysteries;-
A love that blossoms soon, but ripens slowly
To the full goldenness of fruitful prime,

Enduring with a firmness that defies
All shallow tricks of circumstance and time,
By a sure insight knowing where to cling,
And where it clingeth never withering;-
These are Irene's dowry, which no fate
Can shake from their serene, deep-built state.

In-seeing sympathy is hers, which chasteneth
No less than loveth, scorning to be bound
With fear of blame, and yet which ever hasteneth
To pour the balm of kind looks on the wound,
If they be wounds which such sweet teaching makes,
Giving itself a pang for others' sakes;
No want of faith, that chills with sidelong eye,
Hath she; no jealousy, no Levite pride
That passeth by upon the other side;
For in her soul there never dwelt a lie.
Right from the hand of God her spirit came
Unstained, and she hath ne'er forgotten whence
It came, nor wandered far from thence,
But laboreth to keep her still the same,
Near to her place of birth, that she may not
Soil her white raiment with an earthly spot.

Yet sets she not her soul so steadily
Above, that she forgets her ties to earth,
But her whole thought would almost seem to be
How to make glad one lowly human hearth;
For with a gentle courage she doth strive
In thought and word and feeling so to live
As to make earth next heaven; and her heart
Herein doth show its most exceeding worth,
That, bearing in our frailty her just part,
She hath not shrunk from evils of this life,
But hath gone calmly forth into the strife,
And all its sins and sorrows hath withstood
With lofty strength of patient womanhood:
For this I love her great soul more than all,
That, being bound, like us, with earthly thrall,
She walks so bright and heaven-like therein,-
Too wise, too meek, too womanly, to sin.

Like a lone star through riven storm-clouds seen
By sailors, tempest-tost upon the sea,
Telling of rest and peaceful heavens nigh,
Unto my soul her star-like soul hath been,
Her sight as full of hope and calm to me;-
For she unto herself hath builded high
A home serene, wherein to lay her head,
Earth's noblest thing, a Woman perfected.

James Russell Lowell

Jeffries Wyman Died September 4, 1874.

The wisest man could ask no more of Fate
Than to be simple, modest, manly, true,
Safe from the Many, honoured by the Few;
To count as naught in World, or Church, or State,
But inwardly in secret to be great;
To feel mysterious Nature ever new;
To touch, if not to grasp, her endless clue,
And learn by each discovery how to wait.
He widened knowledge and escaped the praise;
He wisely taught, because more wise to learn;
He toiled for science, not to draw men's gaze,
But for her lore of self-denial stern.
That such a man could spring from our decay
Fans the soul's nobler faith until it burn.

James Russell Lowell

Jonathan to John

It don't seem hardly right, John,
When both my hands was full,
To stump me to a fight, John,—
Your cousin, tu, John Bull!
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess
We know it now,' sez he,
'The lion's paw is all the law,
Accordin' to J. B.,
Thet's fit for you an' me!'
You wonder why we're hot, John?
Your mark wuz on the guns,
The neutral guns, thet shot, John,
Our brothers an' our sons:
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess
There's human blood,' sez he,
'By fits an' starts, in Yankee hearts,
Though 't may surprise J. B.
More 'n it would you an' me.'

Ef I turned mad dogs loose, John,
On your front-parlor stairs,
Would it jest meet your views, John,
To wait and sue their heirs?
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess,
I only guess,' sez he,
'Thet ef Vattel on his toes fell,
'Twould kind o' rile J. B.,
Ez wal ez you an' me!'

Who made the law thet hurts, John,
Heads I win,—ditto tails?
'J. B.' was on his shirts, John,
Unless my memory fails,
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess
(I'm good at thet),' sez he,
'Thet sauce for goose ain't jest the juice
For ganders with J. B.,
No more than you or me!'

When your rights was our wrongs, John,
You didn't stop for fuss,—
Britanny's trident prongs, John,
Was good 'nough law for us.
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess,
Though physic's good,' sez he,
'It doesn't foller that he can swaller
Prescriptions signed 'J. B.,'
Put up by you an' me!'

We own the ocean, tu, John:
You mus'n' take it hard,

Ef we can't think with you, John,
It's jest your own back-yard.
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess,
Ef that's his claim,' sez he,
'The fencin'-stuff 'll cost enough
To bust up friend J. B.,
Ez wal ez you an' me!'

Why talk so dreffle big, John,
Of honor when it meant
You didn't care a fig, John,
But jest for ten per cent?
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess
He's like the rest,' sez he:
'When all is done, it's number one
Thet's nearest to J. B.,
Ez wal ez you an' me!'

We give the critters back, John,
Cos Abram thought 'twas right;
It warn't your bullyin' clack, John,
Provokin' us to fight.
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess
We've a hard row,' sez he,
'To hoe jest now; but thet somehow,
May happen to J. B.,
Ez wal ez you an' me!'

We ain't so weak an' poor, John,
With twenty million people,
An' close to every door, John,
A school-house an' a steeple.
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess
It is a fact,' sez he,
'The surest plan to make a Man
Is, think him so, J. B.,
Ez much ez you or me!'

Our folks believe in Law, John;
An' it's for her sake, now,
They've left the ax an' saw, John,
The anvil an' the plough.
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess,
Ef 'twarn't for law,' sez he,
'There'd be one shindy from here to Indy,
An' thet don't suit J. B.
(When 'tain't 'twixt you an' me!)

We know we've got a cause, John,
Thet's honest, just an' true;
We thought 'twould win applause, John,
Ef nowheres else, from you.

Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess
His love of right,' sez he,
'Hangs by a rotten fibre o' cotton:
There's natur' in J. B.,
Ez wal ez you an' me!'

The South says, 'Poor folks down!' John,
An, 'All men up!' say we,—
White, yaller, black, an' brown, John:
Now which is your idee?
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess,
John preaches wal,' sez he;
'But, sermon thru, an' come to du,
Why, there's the old J. B.
A crowdin' you an' me!'

Shall it be love, or hate, John?
It's you thet's to decide;
Ain't your bonds held by Fate, John,
Like all the world's beside?
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess
Wise men forgive,' sez he,
'But not forget; an' some time yet
Thet truth may strike J. B.,
Ez wal ez you an' me!'

God means to make this land, John,
Clear thru, from sea to sea,
Believe an' understand, John,
The wuth o' bein' free.
Ole Uncle S. sez he, 'I guess,
God's price is high,' sez he;
'But nothin' else than wut He sells
Wears long, an' thet J. B.
May larn, like you an' me!'

James Russell Lowell

Lines Suggested By The Graves Of Two English Soldiers On The Concord Battle-Ground

The same good blood that now refills
The dotard Orient's shrunken veins,
The same whose vigor westward thrills,
Bursting Nevada's silver chains,
Poured here upon the April grass,
Freckled with red the herbage new;
On reeled the battle's trampling mass,
Back to the ash the bluebird flew.

Poured here in vain;-that sturdy blood
Was meant to make the earth more green,
But in a higher, gentler mood
Than broke this April noon serene;
Two graves are here: to mark the place,
At head and foot, an unhewn stone,
O'er which the herald lichens trace
The blazon of Oblivion.

These men were brave enough, and true
To the hired soldier's bull-dog creed;
What brought them here they never knew,
They fought as suits the English breed:
They came three thousand miles, and died,
To keep the Past upon its throne:
Unheard, beyond the ocean tide,
Their English mother made her moan.

The turf that covers them no thrill
Sends up to fire the heart and brain;
No stronger purpose nerves the will,
No hope renews its youth again:
From farm to farm the Concord glides,
And trails my fancy with its flow;
O'erhead the balanced hen-hawk slides,
Twinned in the river's heaven below.

But go, whose Bay State bosom stirs,
Proud of thy birth and neighbor's right,
Where sleep the heroic villagers
Borne red and stiff from Concord fight;
Thought Reuben, snatching down his gun,
Or Seth, as ebb'd the life away,
What earthquake rifts would shoot and run
World-wide from that short April fray?

What then? With heart and hand they wrought,
According to their village light;
'Twas for the Future that they fought,
Their rustic faith in what was right.
Upon earth's tragic stage they burst
Unsummoned, in the humble sock;
Theirs the fifth act; the curtain first

Rose long ago on Charles's block.

Their graves have voices; if they threw
Dice charged with fates beyond their ken,
Yet to their instincts they were true,
And had the genius to be men.
Fine privilege of Freedom's host,
Of humblest soldiers for the Right!-
Age after age ye hold your post,
Your graves send courage forth, and might.

James Russell Lowell

Longing

Of all the myriad moods of mind
That through the soul come thronging,
Which one was e'er so dear, so kind,
So beautiful as Longing?
The thing we long for, that we are
For one transcendent moment,
Before the Present poor and bare
Can make its sneering comment.

Still, through our paltry stir and strife,
Glow down the wished ideal,
And Longing moulds in clay what Life
Carves in the marble Real;
To let the new life in, we know,
Desire must ope the portal;
Perhaps the longing to be so
Helps make the soul immortal.

Longing is God's fresh heavenward will.
With our poor earthward striving;
We quench it that we may be still
Content with merely living;
But, would we learn that heart's full scope
Which we are hourly wronging,
Our lives must climb from hope to hope
And realize our longing.

Ah! let us hope that to our praise
Good God not only reckons
The moments when we tread his ways,
But when the spirit beckons,-
That some slight good is also wrought
Beyond self-satisfaction,
When we are simply good in thought,
Howe'er we fail in action.

James Russell Lowell

Love

Our love is not a fading earthly flower:
Its wingèd seed dropped down from Paradise,
And, nursed by day and night, by sun and shower,
Doth momentarily to fresher beauty rise.
To us the leafless autumn is not bare,
Nor winter's rattling boughs lack lusty green:
Our summer hearts make summer's fulness where
No leaf or bud or blossom may be seen:
For nature's life in love's deep life doth lie,
Love,—whose forgetfulness is beauty's death,
Whose mystic key these cells of Thou and I
Into the infinite freedom openeth,
And makes the body's dark and narrow grate
The wide-flung leaves of Heaven's palace-gate

James Russell Lowell

Love and Sorrow

I thought our love at full, but I did err;
Joy's wreath drooped o'er mine eyes; I could not see
That sorrow in our happy world must be
Love's deepest spokesman and interpreter.
But, as a mother feels her child first stir
Under her heart, so felt I instantly
Deep in my soul another bond to thee
Thrill with that life we saw depart from her.
O mother of our angel-child! twice dear!
Death knits as well as parts, and still, I wis,
Her tender radiance shall enfold us here;
Even as the light borne up by inward bliss
Threads the void glooms of space without a fear,
To print on farthest stars her pitying kiss.

James Russell Lowell

May is a Pious Fraud

May is a pious fraud of the almanac.
A ghastly parody of real Spring
Shaped out of snow and breathed with eastern wind;
Or if, o'er-confident, she trust the date,
And, with her handful of anemones,
Herself as shivery, steal into the sun,
The season need but turn his hour-glass round,
And Winter suddenly, like crazy Lear,
Reels back, and brings the dead May in his arms,
Her budding breasts and wan dislusted front
With frosty streaks and drifts of his white beard
All overblown. Then, warmly walled with books,
While my wood-fire supplies the sun's defect,
Whispering old forest-sagas in its dreams,
I take my May down from the happy shelf
Where perch the world's rare song-birds in a row,
Waiting my choice to open with full breast,
And beg an alms of springtime, ne'er denied
Indoors by vernal Chaucer, whose fresh woods
Throb thick with merle and mavis all the years.

James Russell Lowell

Midnight

The moon shines white and silent
On the mist, which, like a tide
Of some enchanted ocean,
O'er the wide marsh doth glide,
Spreading its ghost-like billows
Silently far and wide.

A vague and starry magic
Makes all things mysteries,
And lures the earth's dumb spirit
Up to the longing skies:
I seem to hear dim whispers,
And tremulous replies.

The fireflies o'er the meadow
In pulses come and go;
The elm-trees' heavy shadow
Weighs on the grass below;
And faintly from the distance
The dreaming cock doth crow.

All things look strange and mystic,
The very bushes swell
And take wild shapes and motions,
As if beneath a spell;
They seem not the same lilacs
From childhood known so well.

The snow of deepest silence
O'er everything doth fall,
So beautiful and quiet,
And yet so like a pall;
As if all life were ended,
And rest were come to all.

O wild and wondrous midnight,
There is a might in thee
To make the charmed body
Almost like spirit be,
And give it some faint glimpses
Of immortality!

James Russell Lowell

My Love

Not as all other women are
Is she that to my soul is dear;
Her glorious fancies come from far,
Beneath the silver evening-star,
And yet her heart is ever near.

Great feelings has she of her own,
Which lesser souls may never know;
God giveth them to her alone,
And sweet they are as any tone
Wherewith the wind may choose to blow.

Yet in herself she dwelleth not,
Although no home were half so fair;
No simplest duty is forgot,
Life hath no dim and lowly spot
That doth not in her sunshine share.

She doeth little kindnesses,
Which most leave undone, or despise;
For naught that sets one heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low-esteemed in her eyes.

She hath no scorn of common things,
And, though she seem of other birth,
Round us her heart entwines and clings,
And patiently she folds her wings
To tread the humble paths of earth.

Blessing she is: God made her so,
And deeds of week-day holiness
Fall from her noiseless as the snow,
Nor hath she ever chanced to know
That aught were easier than to bless.

She is most fair, and thereunto
Her life loth rightly harmonize;
Feeling or thought that was not true
Ne'er made less beautiful the blue
Unclouded heaven of her eyes.

She is a woman: one in whom
The spring-time of her childish years
Hath never lost its fresh perfume,
Though knowing well that life bath room
For many blights and many tears.

I love her with a love as still
As a broad river's peaceful might,
Which, by high tower and lowly mill,
Goes wandering at its own will,

And yet doth ever flow aright.

And, on its full, deep breast serene,
Like quiet isles my duties lie;
It flows around them and between,
And makes them fresh and fair and green,
Sweet homes wherein to live and die.

James Russell Lowell

Ode

I

In the old days of awe and keen-eyed wonder,
The Poet's song with blood-warm truth was rife;
He saw the mysteries which circle under
The outward shell and skin of daily life.
Nothing to him were fleeting time and fashion,
His soul was led by the eternal law;
There was in him no hope of fame, no passion,
But with calm, godlike eyes he only saw.
He did not sigh o'er heroes dead and buried,
Chief-mourner at the Golden Age's hearse,
Nor deem that souls whom Charon grim had ferried
Alone were fitting themes of epic verse:
He could believe the promise of to-morrow,
And feel the wondrous meaning of to-day;
He had a deeper faith in holy sorrow
Than the world's seeming loss could take away.
To know the heart of all things was his duty,
All things did sing to him to make him wise,
And, with a sorrowful and conquering beauty,
The soul of all looked grandly from his eyes.
He gazed on all within him and without him,
He watched the flowing of Time's steady tide,
And shapes of glory floated all about him
And whispered to him, and he prophesied.
Than all men he more fearless was and freer,
And all his brethren cried with one accord,-
'Behold the holy man! Behold the Seer!
Him who hath spoken with the unseen Lord!
He to his heart with large embrace had taken
The universal sorrow of mankind,
And, from that root, a shelter never shaken,
The tree of wisdom grew with sturdy rind.
He could interpret well the wondrous voices
Which to the calm and silent spirit come;
He knew that the One Soul no more rejoices
In the star's anthem than the insect's hum.
He in his heart was ever meek and humble.
And yet with kingly pomp his numbers ran,
As he foresaw how all things false should crumble
Before the free, uplifted soul of man;
And, when he was made full to overflowing
With all the loveliness of heaven and earth,
Out rushed his song, like molten iron glowing,
To show God sitting by the humblest hearth.
With calmest courage he was ever ready
To teach that action was the truth of thought,
And, with strong arm and purpose firm and steady,
An anchor for the drifting world he wrought.
So did he make the meanest man partaker
Of all his brother-gods unto him gave;

All souls did reverence him and name him Maker,
And when he died heaped temples on his grave.
And still his deathless words of light are swimming
Serene throughout the great deep infinite
Of human soul, unwaning and undimming,
To cheer and guide the mariner at night.

II

But now the Poet is an empty rhymer
Who lies with idle elbow on the grass,
And fits his singing, like a cunning timer,
To all men's prides and fancies as they pass.
Not his the song, which, in its metre holy,
Chimes with the music of the eternal stars,
Humbling the tyrant, lifting up the lowly,
And sending sun through the soul's prison-bars.
Maker no more, -oh no! unmaker rather,
For he unmakes who doth not all put forth
The power given freely by our loving Father
To show the body's dross, the spirit's worth.
Awake! great spirit of the ages olden!
Shiver the mists that hide thy starry lyre,
And let man's soul be yet again beholden
To thee for wings to soar to her desire.
Oh, prophesy no more to-morrow's splendor,
Be no more shamefaced to speak out for Truth,
Lay on her altar all the gushings tender,
The hope, the fire, the loving faith of youth!
Oh, prophesy no more the Maker's coming,
Say not his onward footsteps thou canst hear
In the dim void, like to the awful humming
Of the great wings of some new-lighted sphere!
Oh, prophesy no more, but be the Poet!
This longing was but granted unto thee
That, when all beauty thou couldst feel and know it,
That beauty in its highest thou shouldst be.
O thou who moanest tost with seallike longings,
Who dimly hearest voices call on thee,
Whose soul is overfilled with mighty throngings
Of love, and fear, and glorious agony.
Thou of the toil-strung hands and iron sinews
And soul by Mother Earth with freedom fed,
In whom the hero-spirit yet continues,
The old free nature is not chained or dead,
Arouse! let thy soul break in music-thunder,
Let loose the ocean that is in thee pent,
Pour forth thy hope, thy fear, thy love, thy wonder,
And tell the age what all its signs have meant.
Where'er thy wildered crowd of brethren jostles,
Where'er there lingers but a shadow of wrong,

There still is need of martyrs and apostles,
There still are texts for never-dying song:
From age to age man's still aspiring spirit
Finds wider scope and sees with clearer eyes,
And thou in larger measure dost inherit
What made thy great forerunners free and wise.
Sit thou enthroned where the Poet's mountain
Above the thunder lifts its silent peak,
And roll thy songs down like a gathering fountain,
They all may drink and find the rest they seek.
Sing! there shall silence grow in earth and heaven,
A silence of deep awe and wondering;
For, listening gladly, bend the angels, even,
To hear a mortal like an angel sing.

III

Among the toil-worn poor my soul is seeking
For who shall bring the Maker's name to light,
To be the voice of that almighty speaking
Which every age demands to do it right.
Proprieties our silken bards environ;
He who would be the tongue of this wide land
Must string his harp with chords of sturdy iron
And strike it with a toil-imbrowned hand;
One who hath dwelt with Nature well attended,
Who hath learnt wisdom from her mystic books,
Whose soul with all her countless lives hath blended,
So that all beauty awes us in his looks:
Who not with body's waste his soul hath pampered,
Who as the clear northwestern wind is free,
Who walks with Form's observances unhampered,
And follows the One Will obediently;
Whose eyes, like windows on a breezy summit,
Control a lovely prospect every way;
Who doth not sound God's sea with earthly plummet,
And find a bottom still of worthless clay;
Who heeds not how the lower gusts are working,
Knowing that one sure wind blows on above,
And sees, beneath the foulest faces lurking,
One God-built shrine of reverence and love;
Who sees all stars that wheel their shining marches
Around the centre fixed of Destiny,
Where the encircling soul serene o'erarches
The moving globe of being like a sky;
Who feels that God and Heaven's great deeps are nearer
Him to whose heart his fellow-man is nigh,
Who doth not hold his soul's own freedom dearer
Than that of all his brethren, low or high;
Who to the Right can feel himself the truer
For being gently patient with the wrong,

Who sees a brother in the evildoer,
And finds in Love the heart's-blood of his song;-
This, this is he for whom the world is waiting
To sing the beatings of its mighty heart,
Too long hath it been patient with the grating
Of scrannel-pipes, and heard it misnamed Art.
To him the smiling soul of man shall listen,
Laying awhile its crown of thorns aside,
And once again in every eye shall glisten
The glory of a nature satisfied.
His verse shall have a great commanding motion,
Heaving and swelling with a melody
Learnt of the sky, the river, and the ocean,
And all the pure, majestic things that be.
Awake, then, thou! we pine for thy great presence
To make us feel the soul once more sublime,
We are of far too infinite an essence
To rest contented with the lies of Time.
Speak out! and lo! a hush of deepest wonder
Shall sink o'er all this many-voiced scene,
As when a sudden burst of rattling thunder
Shatters the blueness of a sky serene.

James Russell Lowell

Ode Recited At The Harvard Commemoration July 21, 1865

Weak-Winged is Song,
Nor aims at that clear-ethered height
Whither the brave deed climbs for light
We seem to do them wrong,
Bringing our robin's-leaf to deck their hearse
Who in warm life-blood wrote their nobler verse.
Our trivial song to honor those who come
With ears attuned to strenuous trump and drum.
And shaped in squadron-strophes their desire
Live battle-odes whose lines mere steel and fire:
Yet sometimes feathered words are strong,
A gracious memory to buoy up and save
From Lethe's dreamless ooze, the common grave
Of the unventurous throng.

Many loved Truth, and lavished Life's best oil
Amid the dust of books to find her,
Content at last, for guerdon of their toil,
With the cast mantle she hath left behind her.
Many in sad faith sought for her,
Many with crossed hands sighed for her;
But these, our brothers, fought for her,
At life's dear peril wrought for her,
So loved her that they died for her,
Tasting the raptured fleetness
Of her divine completeness
Their higher instinct knew
Those love her best who to themselves are true,
And what they dare to dream of, dare to do;
They followed her and found her
Where all may hope to find,
Not in the ashes of the burnt-out mind,
But beautiful, with danger's sweetness round her.
Where faith made whole with deed
Breathes its awakening breath
Into the lifeless creed,
They saw her plumed and mailed,
With sweet, stern face unveiled,
And all-repaying eyes, look proud on them in death.

Our slender life runs rippling by, and glides
Into the silent hollow of the past;
What is there that abides
To make the next age better for the last?
Is earth too poor to give us
Something to live for here that shall outlive us?
Some more substantial boon
Than such as flows and ebbs with
Fortune's fickle moon?
The little that we see:
From doubt is never free;
The little that we do

Is but half-nobly true;
With our laborious hiving
What men call treasure, and the gods call dross,
Life seems a jest of Fate's contriving,
Only secure in every one's conniving,
A long account of nothings paid with loss,
Where we poor puppets, jerked by unseen wires,
After our little hour of strut and rave,
With all our pasteboard passions and desires,
Loves, hates, ambitions, and immortal fires,
Are tossed pell-mell together in the grave.
But stay! no age was e'er degenerate,
Unless men held it at too cheap a rate,
For in our likeness still we shape our fate.

Whither leads the path
To ampler fates that leads?
Not down through flowery meads,
To reap an aftermath
Of youth's vainglorious weeds,
But up the steep, amid the wrath
And shock of deadly-hostile creeds,
Where the world's best hope and stay
By battle's flashes gropes a desperate way,
And every turf the fierce foot clings to bleeds.
Peace hath her not ignoble wreath,
Ere yet the sharp, decisive word
Light the black lips of cannon, and the sword
Dreams in its easeful sheath;
But some day the live coal behind the thought,
Whether from Baal's stone obscene,
Or from the shrine serene
Of God's pure altar brought,
Bursts up in flame; the war of tongue and pen
Learns with what deadly purpose it was fraught,
And, helpless in the fiery passion caught,
Shakes all the pillared state with shock of men
Some day the soft Ideal that we wooed
Confronts us fiercely, foe-beset, pursued,
And trips reproachful: 'Was it, then, my praise,
And not myself was loved? Prove now thy truth;
I claim of thee the promise of thy youth;
Give me thy life, or cower in empty phrase,
The victim of thy genius, not its mate!'
Life may be given in many ways,
And loyalty to Truth be sealed
As bravely in the closet as the field,
So bountiful is Fate;
But then to stand beside her,
When craven churls deride her,
To front a lie in arms and not to yield,
This shows, methinks, God's plan

And measure of a stalwart man,
Limbed like the old heroic breeds,
Who stands self-poised on manhood's solid earth,
Not forced to frame excuses for his birth,
Fed from within with all the strength he needs.

Such was he, our Martyr-Chief,
Whom late the Nation he had led,
With ashes on her head,
wept with the passion of an angry grief.
Forgive me, if from present things I turn
To speak what in my heart will beat and burn,
And hang my wreath on his world-honored urn.
Nature, they say, doth dote,
And cannot make a man
Save on some worn-out plan,
Repeating us by rote
For him her Old-World moulds aside she threw,
And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
Of the unexhausted West,
With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
Vise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true.
How beautiful to see
Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
Who loved his charge, but never loved to lead;
One whose meek flock the people joyed to be,
Not lured by any cheat of birth,
But by his clear-grained human worth,
And brave old wisdom of sincerity!
They knew that outward grace is dust;
They could not choose but trust
In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill,
And supple-tempered will
That bent like perfect steel to spring again and thrust.
His was no lonely mountain-peak of mind,
Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy bars,
A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors blind;
Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined,
Fruitful and friendly for all human kind,
Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of loftiest stars.
Nothing of Europe here,
Or, then, of Europe fronting mornward still,
Ere any names of Serf and Peer
Could Nature's equal scheme deface
And thwart her genial will;
Here was a type of the true elder race,
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face.
I praise him not; it were too late;
And some innate weakness there must be
In him who condescends to victory
Such as the Present gives, and cannot wait,
Safe in himself as in a fate.

So always firmly he
He knew to bide his time,
And can his fame abide,
Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
Till the wise years decide.
Great captains, with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes;
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame,
The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.

James Russell Lowell

Of the Dawn of Freedom

Careless seems the great Avenger;
History's lessons but recorded
One death-grapple in the darkness
"Twixt old systems and the Word;
Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above His own.

James Russell Lowell

Remembered Music

A FRAGMENT

Thick-rushing, like an ocean vast
Of bisons the far prairie shaking,
The notes crowd heavily and fast
As surfs, one plunging while the last
Draws seaward from its foamy breaking.

Or in low murmurs they began,
Rising and rising momentarily,
As o'er a harp AEolian
A fitful breeze, until they ran
Up to a sudden ecstasy.

And then, like minute-drops of rain
Ringing in water silvery,
They lingering dropped and dropped again,
Till it was almost like a pain
To listen when the next would be.

James Russell Lowell

Rhoecus

God sends his teachers unto every age,
To every clime, and every race of men,
With revelations fitted to their growth
And shape of mind, nor gives the realm of Truth
Into the selfish rule of one sole race:
Therefore each form of worship that hath swayed
The life of man, and given it to grasp
The master-key of knowledge, reverence,
Infolds some germs of goodness and of right;
Else never had the eager soul, which loathes
The slothful down of pampered ignorance,
Found in it even a moment's fitful rest.

There is an instinct in the human heart
Which makes that all the fables it hath coined,
To justify the reign of its belief
And strengthen it by beauty's right divine,
Veil in their inner cells a mystic gift,
Which, like the hazel twig, in faithful hands,
Points surely to the hidden springs of truth.
For, as in nature naught is made in vain,
But all things have within their hull of use
A wisdom and a meaning which may speak
Of spiritual secrets to the ear
Of spirit; so, in whatsoe'er the heart
Hath fashioned for a solace to itself,
To make its inspirations suit its creed,
And from the niggard hands of falsehood wring
Its needful food of truth, there ever is
A sympathy with Nature, which reveals,
Not less than her own works, pure gleams of light
And earnest parables of inward lore.
Hear now this fairy legend of old Greece,
As full of gracious youth, and beauty still
As the immortal freshness of that grace
Carved for all ages on some Attic frieze.

A youth named Rhoecus, wandering in the wood,
Saw an old oak just trembling to its fall,
And, feeling pity of so fair a tree,
He propped its gray trunk with admiring care,
And with a thoughtless footstep loitered on.
But, as he turned, he heard a voice behind
That murmured 'Rhoecus!' 'Twas as if the leaves,
Stirred by a passing breath, had murmured it,
And, while he paused bewildered, yet again
It murmured 'Rhoecus!' softer than a breeze.
He started and beheld with dizzy eyes
What seemed the substance of a happy dream
Stand there before him, spreading a warm glow
Within the green glooms of the shadowy oak.
It seemed a woman's shape, yet far too fair

To be a woman, and with eyes too meek
For any that were wont to mate with gods.
All naked like a goddess stood she there,
And like a goddess all too beautiful
To feel the guilt-born earthliness of shame.
'Rhoecus, I am the Dryad of this tree,'
Thus she began, dropping her low-toned words
Serene, and full, and clear, as drops of dew,
'And with it I am doomed to live and die;
The rain and sunshine are my caterers,
Nor have I other bliss than simple life;
Now ask me what thou wilt, that I can give,
And with a thankful joy it shall be thine.'

Then Rhoecus, with a flutter at the heart,
Yet by the prompting of such beauty bold,
Answered: 'What is there that can satisfy
The endless craving of the soul but love?
Give me thy love, or but the hope of that
Which must be evermore my nature's goal.'
After a little pause she said again,
But with a glimpse of sadness in her tone,
'I give it, Rhoecus, though a perilous gift;
An hour before the sunset meet me here.'
And straightway there was nothing he could see
But the green glooms beneath the shadowy oak,
And not a sound came to his straining ears
But the low trickling rustle of the leaves,
And far away upon an emerald slope
The falter of an idle shepherd's pipe.

Now, in those days of simpleness and faith,
Men did not think that happy things were dreams
Because they overstepped the narrow bourn
Of likelihood, but reverently deemed
Nothing too wondrous or too beautiful
To be the guerdon of a daring heart.
So Rhoecus made no doubt that he was blest,
And all along unto the city's gate
Earth seemed to spring beneath him as he walked,
The clear, broad sky looked bluer than its wont,
And he could scarce believe he had not wings,
Such sunshine seemed to glitter through his veins
Instead of blood, so light he felt and strange.

Young Rhoecus had a faithful heart enough,
But one that in the present dwelt too much,
And, taking with blithe welcome whatso'er
Chance gave of joy, was wholly bound in that,
Like the contented peasant of a vale,
Deemed it the world, and never looked beyond.
So, haply meeting in the afternoon

Some comrades who were playing at the dice,
He joined them, and forgot all else beside.

The dice were rattling at the merriest,
And Rhoecus, who had met but sorry luck,
Just laughed in triumph at a happy throw,
When through the room there hummed a yellow bee
That buzzed about his ear with down-dropped legs
As if to light. And Rhoecus laughed and said,
Feeling how red and flushed he was with loss,
'By Venus! does he take me for a rose?'
And brushed him off with rough, impatient hand.
But still the bee came back, and thrice again
Rhoecus did beat him off with growing wrath.
Then through the window flew the wounded bee,
And Rhoecus, tracking him with angry eyes,
Saw a sharp mountain-peak of Thessaly
Against the red disk of the setting sun,-
And instantly the blood sank from his heart,
As if its very walls had caved away.
Without a word he turned, and, rushing forth,
Ran madly through the city and the gate,
And o'er the plain, which now the wood's long shade,
By the low sun thrown forward broad and dim,
Darkened wellnigh unto the city's wall.

Quite spent and out of breath he reached the tree,
And, listening fearfully, he heard once more
The low voice murmur 'Rhoecus!' close at hand:
Whereat he looked around him, but could see
Naught but the deepening glooms beneath the oak.
Then sighed the voice, 'O Rhoecus! nevermore
Shalt thou behold me or by day or night,
Me, who would fain have blessed thee with a love
More ripe and bounteous than ever yet
Filled up with nectar any mortal heart:
But thou didst scorn my humble messenger,
And sent'st him back to me with bruised wings,
We spirits only show to gentle eyes,
We ever ask an undivided love,
And he who scorns the least of Nature's works
Is thenceforth exiled and shut out from all.
Farewell! for thou canst never see me more.'

Then Rhoecus beat his breast, and groaned aloud,
And cried, 'Be pitiful! forgive me yet
This once, and I shall never need it more!'
'Alas!' the voice returned, 'tis thou art blind,
Not I unmerciful; I can forgive,
But have no skill to heal thy spirit's eyes;
Only the soul hath power o'er itself.'
With that again there murmured 'Nevermore!'

And Rhoecus after heard no other sound,
Except the rattling of the oak's crisp leaves,
Like the long surf upon a distant shore,
Raking the sea-worn pebbles up and down.
The night had gathered round him: o'er the plain
The city sparkled with its thousand lights,
And sounds of revel fell upon his ear
Harshly and like a curse; above, the sky,
With all its bright sublimity of stars,
Deepened, and on his forehead smote the breeze:
Beauty was all around him and delight,
But from that eve he was alone on earth.

James Russell Lowell

Self-Study

A presence both by night and day,
That made my life seem just begun,
Yet scarce a presence, rather say
The warning aureole of one.

And yet I felt it everywhere;
Walked I the woodland's aisles along,
It seemed to brush me with its hair;
Bathed I, I heard a mermaid's song.

How sweet it was! A buttercup
Could hold for me a day's delight,
A bird could lift my fancy up
To ether free from cloud or blight.

Who was the nymph? Nay, I will see,
Methought, and I will know her near;
If such, divined, her charm can be,
Seen and possessed, how triply dear!

So every magic art I tried,
And spells as numberless as sand,
Until, one evening, by my side
I saw her glowing fulness stand.

I turned to clasp her, but 'Farewell,'
Parting she sighed, 'we meet no more;
Not by my hand the curtain fell
That leaves you conscious, wise, and poor.

'Since you have found me out, I go;
Another lover I must find,
Content his happiness to know,
Nor strive its secret to unwind.

James Russell Lowell

Serenade

From the close-shut windows gleams no spark,
The night is chilly, the night is dark,
The poplars shiver, the pine-trees moan,
My hair by the autumn breeze is blown,
Under thy window I sing alone,
Alone, alone, ah woe! alone!

The darkness is pressing coldly around,
The windows shake with a lonely sound,
The stars are hid and the night is drear,
The heart of silence throbs in thine ear,
In thy chamber thou sittest alone,
Alone, alone, ah woe! alone!

The world is happy, the world is wide.
Kind hearts are beating on every side;
Ah, why should we lie so coldly curled
Alone in the shell of this great world?
Why should we any more be alone?
Alone, alone, ah woe! alone!

Oh, 'tis a bitter and dreary word,
The saddest by man's ear ever heard!
We each are young, we each have a heart,
Why stand we ever coldly apart?
Must we forever, then, be alone?
Alone, alone, ah woe! alone!

James Russell Lowell

She Came and Went

As a twig trembles, which a bird
Lights on to sing, then leaves unbent,
So is my memory thrilled and stirred;—
I only know she came and went.

As clasps some lake, by gusts unriven,
The blue dome's measureless content,
So my soul held that moment's heaven;—
I only know she came and went.

As, at one bound, our swift spring heaps
The orchards full of bloom and scent,
So clove her May my wintry sleeps;—
I only know she came and went.

An angel stood and met my gaze,
Through the low doorway of my tent;
The tent is struck, the vision stays;—
I only know she came and went.

Oh, when the room grows slowly dim,
And life's last oil is nearly spent,
One gush of light these eyes will brim,
Only to think she came and went.

James Russell Lowell

Song: To M.L.

TO M.L.

A lily thou wast when I saw thee first,
A lily-bud not opened quite,
That hourly grew more pure and white,
By morning, and noontide, and evening nursed:
In all of nature thou hadst thy share;
Thou wast waited on
By the wind and sun;
The rain and the dew for thee took care;
It seemed thou never couldst be more fair.

A lily thou wast when I saw thee first,
A lily-bud; but oh, how strange,
How full of wonder was the change,
When, ripe with all sweetness, thy full bloom burst!
How did the tears to my glad eyes start,
When the woman-flower
Reached its blossoming hour,
And I saw the warm deeps of thy golden heart!

Glad death may pluck thee, but never before
The gold dust of thy bloom divine
Hath dropped from thy heart into mine,
To quicken its faint germs of heavenly lore;
For no breeze comes nigh thee but carries away
Some impulses bright
Of fragrance and light,
Which fall upon souls that are lone and astray,
To plant fruitful hopes of the flower of day.

James Russell Lowell

Sonnet

The Maple puts her corals on in May,
While loitering frosts about the lowlands cling,
To be in tune with what the robins sing,
Plastering new log-huts 'mid her branches gray;
But when the Autumn southward turns away,
Then in her veins burns most the blood of Spring,
And every leaf, intensely blossoming,
Makes the year's sunset pale the set of day.
O Youth unprescient, were it only so
With trees you plant, and in whose shade reclined,
Thinking their drifting blooms Fate's coldest snow,
You carve dear names upon the faithful rind,
Nor in that vernal stem the cross foreknow
That Age may bear, silent, yet unresigned!

James Russell Lowell

Sonnet XI

There never yet was flower fair in vain,
Let classic poets rhyme it as they will;
The seasons toil that it may blow again,
And summer's heart doth feel its every ill;
Nor is a true soul ever born for naught;
Wherever any such hath lived and died,
There hath been something for true freedom wrought,
Some bulwark levelled on the evil side:
Toil on, then, Greatness! thou art in the right,
However narrow souls may call thee wrong;
Be as thou wouldst be in thine own clear sight,
And so thou shalt be in the world's erelong;
For worldlings cannot, struggle as they may,
From man's great soul one great thought hide away.

James Russell Lowell

Sonnet-II

What were I, Love, if I were stripped of thee,
If thine eyes shut me out whereby I live.
Thou, who unto my calmer soul dost give
Knowledge, and Truth, and holy Mystery,
Wherein Truth mainly lies for those who see
Beyond the earthly and the fugitive,
Who in the grandeur of the soul believe,
And only in the Infinite are free?
Without thee I were naked, bleak, and bare
As yon dead cedar on the sea-cliff's brow;
And Nature's teachings, which come to me now,
Common and beautiful as light and air,
Would be as fruitless as a stream which still
Slips through the wheel of some old ruined mill.

James Russell Lowell

Stanzas on Freedom

Men! whose boast it is that ye
Come of fathers brave and free,
If there breathe on earth a slave,
Are ye truly free and brave?
If ye do not feel the chain,
When it works a brother's pain,
Are ye not base slaves indeed,
Slaves unworthy to be freed?

Women! who shall one day bear
Sons to breathe New England air,
If ye hear, without a blush,
Deeds to make the roused blood rush
Like red lava through your veins,
For your sisters now in chains,-
Answer! are ye fit to be
Mothers of the brave and free?

Is true Freedom but to break
Fetters for our own dear sake,
And, with leathern hearts, forget
That we owe mankind a debt?
No! true freedom is to share
All the chains our brothers wear
And, with heart and hand, to be
Earnest to make others free!

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak;
They are slaves who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think;
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.

James Russell Lowell

Summer Storm

Untremulous in the river clear,
Toward the sky's image, hangs the imaged bridge;
 So still the air that I can hear
The slender clarion of the unseen midge;
 Out of the stillness, with a gathering creep,
Like rising wind in leaves, which now decreases,
Now lulls, now swells, and all the while increases,
 The huddling trample of a drove of sheep
Tilts the loose planks, and then as gradually ceases
 In dust on the other side; life's emblem deep,
A confused noise between two silences,
Finding at last in dust precarious peace.
On the wide marsh the purple-blossomed grasses
 Soak up the sunshine; sleeps the brimming tide,
Save when the wedge-shaped wake in silence passes
 Of some slow water-rat, whose sinuous glide
Wavers the sedge's emerald shade from side to side;

But up the west, like a rock-shivered surge,
 Climbs a great cloud edged with sun-whitened spray;
Huge whirls of foam boil toppling o'er its verge,
 And falling still it seems, and yet it climbs away.

 Suddenly all the sky is hid
 As with the shutting of a lid,
One by one great drops are falling
 Doubtful and slow,
Down the pane they are crookedly crawling,
 And the wind breathes low;
Slowly the circles widen on the river,
 Widen and mingle, one and all;
Here and there the slenderer flowers shiver,
 Struck by an icy rain-drop's fall.

Now on the hills I hear the thunder mutter,
 The wind is gathering in the west;
The upturned leaves first whiten and flutter,
 Then droop to a fitful rest;
Up from the stream with sluggish flap
 Struggles the gull and floats away;
Nearer and nearer rolls the thunder-clap,-
 We shall not see the sun go down to-day:
Now leaps the wind on the sleepy marsh,
 And tramples the grass with terrified feet,
The startled river turns leaden and harsh,
 You can hear the quick heart of the tempest beat.

 Look! look! that livid flash!
And instantly follows the rattling thunder,
As if some cloud-crag, split asunder,
 Fell, splintering with a ruinous crash,
On the Earth, which crouches in silence under;

And now a solid gray wall of rain
Shuts off the landscape, mile by mile;
For a breath's space I see the blue wood again,
And ere the next heart-beat, the wind-hurled pile,
That seemed but now a league aloof,
Bursts crackling o'er the sun-parched roof;
Against the windows the storm comes dashing,
Through tattered foliage the hail tears crashing,
The blue lightning flashes,
The rapid hail clashes,
The white waves are tumbling,
And, in one baffled roar,
Like the toothless sea mumbling
A rock-bristled shore,
The thunder is rumbling
And crashing and crumbling,-
Will silence return nevermore?

Hush! Still as death,
The tempest holds his breath
As from a sudden will;
The rain stops short, but from the eaves
You see it drop, and hear it from the leaves,
All is so bodingly still;
Again, now, now, again
Plashes the rain in heavy gout,
The crinkled lightning
Seems ever brightening,
And loud and long
Again the thunder shouts
His battle-song,-
One quivering flash,
One wildering crash,
Followed by silence dead and dull,

As if the cloud, let go,
Leapt bodily below
To whelm the earth in one mad overthrow.
And then a total lull.

Gone, gone, so soon!
No more my half-dazed fancy there,
Can shape a giant In the air,
No more I see his streaming hair,
The writhing portent of his form;-
The pale and quiet moon
Makes her calm forehead bare,
And the last fragments of the storm,
Like shattered rigging from a fight at sea,
Silent and few, are drifting over me.

James Russell Lowell

Sumthin' in the Pastoral Line

Once git a smell o' musk into a draw,
An' it clings hold like precer dents in law;
Your gra'ma'am put it there,—when, goodness knows,—
To jes this—worldify her Sunday-clo'es;
But the old chist wun't sarve her gran'son's wife,
(For, 'thout new funnitooor, wut good in life?)
An' so ole clawfoot, from the precinks dread
O' the spare chamber, slinks into the shed,
Where, dim with dust, it fust or last subsides
To holdin' seeds an' fifty things besides;
But better days stick fast in heart an' husk,
An' all you keep in't gits a scent o' musk.
Jes' so with poets: wut they've airly read
Git,s kind o' worked into their heart-an' head,
So 's 't they can't seem to write but jest on sheers
With furrin countries or played-out ideers,
Nor hev a feelin', ef it doosn't smack
O' wut some critter chose to feel 'way back.
This makes 'em talk o' daisies, larks, an' things,
Ez though we'd nothin' here that blows an' sings,—
(Why, I'd give more for one live bobolink
Than a square mile o' larks in printer's ink,)
This makes 'em think our fust o' May is May,
Which 't ain't, for all the almanicks can say.
O little city-gals, don't never go it
Blind on the word o' noospaper or poet!
They're apt to puff, an' May-day seldom looks
Up in the country, ez it dons in books
They're no more like than hornets'-nests an' hives,
Or printed sarmons be to holy lives.
I, with my trousers perched on cow-hide boots,
Tuggin' my foundered feet out by the roots,
Hev seen ye come to fling on April's hearse
Your muslin nosegays from the milliner's,
Puzzlin' to find dry ground your queen to choose,
An' dance your throats sore m morocker shoes
I've seen ye an' felt proud, thet, come wut would,
Our Pilgrim stock wuz pithed with hardihood.
Pleasure doos make us Yankees kind o' winch,
Ez though 'twuz sunthin' paid for by the inch;
But yit we du contrive to worry thru,
Ef Dooty tells us thet the thing's to du,
An' kerry a hollerday, ef we set out,
Ez stidchly ez though 'twaz a redoubt.
I, country-born an' bred, know where to find
Some blooms thet make the season suit the mind,
An' seem to metch the doubtin' bluebird's notes,—
Half-vent'rin' liverworts in furry coats,
Bloodroots, whose rolled-up leaves ef you oncurl,
Each on 'em 's cradle to a baby-pearl,—
But these are jes' Spring's pickets; sure ez sin,
The rebble frosts'll try to drive 'em in;

For half our May's so awfully like Mayn't,
'Twould rile a Shaker or an evrige saint;
Though I own up I like our back'ard springs
Thet kind o' haggel with their greens an' things,
An' when you most give up, 'ithout more words
Toss the fields full o' blossoms, leaves, an' birds
Thet's Northun natur', slow an' apt to doubt,
But when it doos git stirred, ther' 's no gin-out!

Fust come the blackbirds clatt'rin' in tall trees,
An' settlin' things in windy Congresses,—
Queer politicians, though, for I'll be skinned
Ef all on 'em don't head against the wind.
'Fore long the trees begin to show belief,
The maple crimsones to a coral-reef,
Then saffern swarms swing off from' all the willers
So plump they look like yaller caterpillars,
Then gray hossches'nuts leetle hands unfold
Softer'n a baby's be at three days old
Thet's robin-redbreast's almanick; he knows
Thet arter this ther' 's only blossom-snows
So, choosin' out a handy crotch an' spouse,
He goes to plast'rin' his adobe house.
Then seems to come a hitch,—things lag behind,
Till some fine mornin' Spring makes up her mind,
An' ez, when snow-swelled avers cresh their dams
Heaped-up with ice thet dovetails in an' jams,
A leak comes spirtin thru some pin-hole cleft,
Grows stronger, fercer, tears out right an' left,
Then all the waters bow themselves an' come
Suddin, in one gret slope o' shedderin' foam,
Jes' so our Spring gits everythin' in tune
An gives one leap from April into June
Then all comes crowdin' in; afore you think,
Young oak-leaves mist the side-hill woods with pink
The catbird in the laylock-bush is loud;
The orchards turn to heaps o' rosy cloud;
Red-cedars blossom tu, though few folks know it,
An' look all dipt in sunshine like a poet;
The lime-trees pile their solid stacks o' shade
An' drows'ly simmer with the bees' sweet trade;
In ellum-shrouds the flashin' hangbird clings
An' for the summer vy'ge his hammock slings;
All down the loose-walled lanes in archin' bowers
The barb'ry droops its strings o' golden flowers,
Whose shrinkin' hearts the school-gals love to try
With pins—they'll worry yourn so, boys, bimeby!
But I don't love your cat'logue style,—do you?—
Ez ef to sell off Natur' b y vendoo;
One word with blood in 't 's twice ez good ez two:
'Nuff sed, June's bridesman, poet o' the year,
Gladness on wings, the bobolink, is here;

Half-hid in tip-top apple-blooms he swings,
 Or climbs against the breeze with quiverin' wings,
 Or, givin' way to't in a mock despair,
 Runs down, a brook o' laughter, thru the air.
 I ollus feels the sap start in my veins
 In Spring, with curus heats an' prickly pains,
 Thet drive me, when I git a chance, to walk
 Off by myself to hev a privit talk
 With a queer critter thet can't seem to 'gree
 Along o' me like most folks,—Mister Me.
 Ther' 's times when I'm unsoshle ez a stone
 An' sort o' suffocate to be alone,—
 I'm crowded jes' to think thet folks are nigh,
 An' can't bear nothin' closer than the sky;
 Now the wind's full ez shifty in the mind
 Ez wut it is ou'-doors, ef I ain't blind,
 An' sometimes, in the fairest sou'west weather,
 My innard vane pints east for weeks together,
 My natur' gits all goose-flesh, an' my sins
 Come drizzlin' on my conscience sharp ez pins:
 Wal, et sech times I jes' slip out o' sight
 An' take it out in a fair stan'-up fight
 With the one cuss I can't lay on the shelf,
 The crook'dest stick in all the heap,—Myself.

'Twuz so las' Sabbath arter meetin'-time:
 F'indin' my feelin's wouldn't noways rhyme
 With nobody's, but off the hendle flew
 An' took things from an east-wind pint o' view,
 I started off to lose me in the hills
 Where the pines be, up back o' Siah's Mills:
 Pines, ef you're blue, are the best friends I know,
 They mope an' sigh an' sheer your feelin's so,—
 They hesh the ground beneath so, tu, I swan,
 You half-forgit you've gut a body on.
 'Ther' 's a small school'us' there where four road, meet,
 The door-steps hollered out by little feet,
 An side-posts carved with names whose owners grew
 To gret men, some on 'em an' deacons, tu;
 'Tain't used no longer, coz the town hez gut
 A high-school, where they teach the Lord knows wut:
 Three-story larnin' 's poplar now: I guess
 We thriv' ez wal on jes' two stories less,
 For it strikes me ther' 's sech a thing ez sinnin'
 By overloadin' children's underpinnin':
 Wal, here it wuz I larned my A B C,
 An' it's a kind o' favorite spot with me.
 We're curus critters: Now ain't jes' the minute
 Thet ever fits us easy while we're in it;
 Long ez 'twuz futur', 'twouId be perfect bliss,—
 Soon ez it's past, thet time's wuth ten o' this
 An' yit there ain't a man thet need be told

Thet Now's the only bird lays eggs o' gold.
A knee-high lad, I used to plot an' plan
An' think 'twuz life's cap-sheaf to be a man;
Now, gittin' gray, there's nothin' I enjoy
Like dreamin' back along into a boy:
So the ole school'us' is a place I choose
Afore all others, ef I want to muse;
I set down where I used to set, an' git
Diy boyhood back, an' better things with it,—
Faith, Hope, an' sunthin' ef it isn't Cherrity,
It's want o' guile, an' thet's ez gret a rerrity.
Now, 'fore I knowed, thet Sabbath arternoon
Thet I sot out to tramp myself in tune,
I found me in the school'us' on my seat,
Drummin' the march to No-wheres with my feet.
Thinkin' o' nothin', I've heerd ole folks say,
Is a hard kind o' dooty in its way:
It's thinkin' everythin' you ever knew,
Or ever hearn, to make your feelin's blue.

From this to thet I let my worryin' creep
Till finally I must ha' fell asleep.

Our lives in sleep are some like streams thet glide
Twixt flesh an' sperrit boundin' on each side,
Where both shores' shadders kind o' mix an' mingle
In sunthin' thet ain't jes' like either single;
An' when you cast off moorin's from To-day,
An' down towards To-morrer drift away,
The imiges thet tengle on the stream
Make a new upside-down'ard world o' dream:
Sometimes they seem like sunrise-streaks an' warnin's
O' wut'll be in Heaven on Sabbath-mornin's,
An', mixed right in ez ef jest out o' spite,
Sunthin' thet says your supper ain't gone right.
I'm gret on dreams: an' often, when I wake,
I've lived so much it makes my mem'ry ache,
An' can't skurce take a cat-nap in my cheer
'Thout hevin' 'em, some good, some bad, all queer.

Now I wuz settin' where I'd ben, it seemed,
An' ain't sure yit whether I rally dreamed,
Nor, ef I did, how long I might ha' slep',
When I hearn some un stompin' up the step,
An' lookirz' round, ef two an' two make four,
I see a Pilgrim Father in the door.

He wore a steeple-hat, tall boots, an' spurs
With rowels to 'em big ez ches'nut-burrs,
An' his gret sword behind him sloped away
Long'z a man's speech thet dunno wut to say.—
'Ef your name's Biglow, an' your given-name

Hosee,' sez he, 'it's arter you I came;
 I'm your gret-gran they multiplied by three.'
 'My wut?' sez I.—your gret-gret-gret,' sez he:
 'You wouldn't ha' never ben here but for me.
 Two hundred an' three year ago this May,
 The ship I come in sailed up Boston Bay;
 I'd been a cunnle in our Civil War,—
 But wut on girth hev ,you gut up one for?
 Coz we du things in England, 'tain't for you
 To git a notion you can du 'em tu:
 I'm told you write in public prints: ef true,
 It's nateral you should know a thing or two.'—
 'Thet air's an argymunt I can't endorse,—
 'Twould prove, coz you wear spurs, you kep' a horse:

But du pray tell me, 'fore we furder go,
 How in all Natur' did you come to know
 'Bout our affairs,' sez I 'in Kingdom-Come?'—
 'Wal, I worked round at sperrit-rappin' some,
 An' danced the tables till their legs wuz gone,
 In hopes o' larnin wut wuz goin' on,'
 Sez he, 'but mejums lie so like all-split
 Thet I concluded it wuz best to quit.
 But, come now, ef you wun't confess to knowin',
 You've some conjectures how the thing's a-goin'.'—
 'Gran'ther,' sez I, 'a vane warn't never known
 Nor asked to hev a jedgment of its own;
 An' yit, ef 'tain't gut rusty in the jints,
 It's safe to trust its say on certin pints
 It knows the wind's opinions to a T,
 An' the wind settles wut the weather'll be.'
 'I never thought a scion of our stock
 Could grow the wood to make a weathercock;
 When I wuz younger'n you, skurce more'n a shaver,
 No airthly wind,' sez he, 'could make me waver!'
 (Ez he said this, he clinched his jaw an' forehead,
 Hitchin' his belt to bring his sword-hilt forrard.)
 'Jes' so it wuz with me,' sez I, 'I swow,
 When I wuz younger'n wut you see me now,—
 Nothin' from Adam's fall to Huldy's bonnet,
 Thet I warm't full-cocked with my jedgment on it;
 But now I'm gittin' on in life, I find
 It's a sight harder to make up my mind,—
 Nor I don't often try tu, when events
 Will du it for me free of all expense.
 The moral question's ollus plain enough,—
 It's jes' the human-natur' side thet's tough;
 Wut's best to think mayn't puzzle me nor you,—
 The pinch comes in decidin' wut to du;
 Ef you read History, all runs smooth ez grease,
 Coz there the men ain't nothin' more'n ideas,—
 But come to make it, ez we must to-day,

Th' idees hev arms an' legs an' stop the way
It's easy fixin' things in facts an' figgers,—
They can't resist, nor warn't brought up with nigers;
But come to try your the'ry on,—why, then
Your facts an' figgers change to ign'ant men
Actin' ez ugly—'—'Smite 'em hip an' thigh!
Sez gran'ther, 'and let every man-child die!
Oh for three weeks o' Crommle an' the Lord!
Up, Isr'el, to your tents an' grind the sword!
'Thet kind o' thing worked wal in ole Judee,
But you forgit how long it's hen A.D.;
You think thet's ellerkence—I call it shoddy,
A thing,' sez I, 'wun't cover soul nor body;
I like the plain all-wool o' common-sense,
Thet warms ye now, an' will a twelvemonth hence.
You took to follerin' where the Prophets beckoned.
An', fust you knowed on, back come Charles the Second;
Now, wut I want's to hev all we gain stick,
An' not to start Millennium too quick;
We hain't to punish only, but to keep,
An' the cure's gut to go a cent'ry deep'
'Wal, milk-an'-water ain't the best o' glue,'
Sez he, 'an' so you'll find before you're thru;

'Strike soon,' sez he, 'or you'll be deadly ailin'—
Folks thet's afeared to fail are sure o' failin';
God hates your sneakin' creturs thet believe
He'll settle things they run away an' leave!
He brought his foot down fercely, ez he spoke,
An' give me sech a startle thet I woke.

James Russell Lowell

The Beggar

A beggar through the world am I,
From place to place I wander by.
Fill up my pilgrim's scrip for me,
For Christ's sweet sake and charity!

A little of thy steadfastness,
Bounded with leafy gracefulness,
Old oak, give me,
That the world's blasts may round me blow,
And I yield gently to and fro,
While my stout-hearted trunk below
And firm-set roots unshaken be.

Some of thy stern, unyielding might,
Enduring still through day and night
Rude tempest-shock and withering blight,
That I may keep at bay
The changeful April sky of chance
And the strong tide of circumstance,-
Give me, old granite gray.

Some of thy pensiveness serene,
Some of thy never-dying green,
Put in this scrip of mine,
That griefs may fall like snowflakes light,
And deck me in a robe of white,
Ready to be an angel bright,
O sweetly mournful pine.

A little of thy merriment,
Of thy sparkling, light content,
Give me, my cheerful brook,
That I may still be full of glee
And gladness, where'er I be,
Though fickle fate hath prisoned me
In some neglected nook.

Ye have been very kind and good
To me, since I've been in the wood;
Ye have gone nigh to fill my heart;
But good-by, kind friends, every one,
I've far to go ere set of sun;
Of all good things I would have part,
The day was high ere I could start,
And so my journey's scarce begun.

Heaven help me! how could I forget
To beg of thee, dear violet!
Some of thy modesty,
That blossoms here as well, unseen,
As if before the world thou'dst been,
Oh, give, to strengthen me.

James Russell Lowell

The Birch-Tree

Rippling through thy branches goes the sunshine,
Among thy leaves that palpitate forever;
Ovid in thee a pining Nymph had prisoned,
The soul once of some tremulous inland river,
Quivering to tell her woe, but, ah! dumb, dumb forever!

While all the forest, witched with slumberous moonshine,
Holds up its leaves in happy, happy stillness,
Waiting the dew, with breath and pulse suspended,
I hear afar thy whispering, gleamy islands,
And track thee wakeful still amid the wide-hung silence.

On the brink of some wood-nestled lakelet,
Thy foliage, like the tresses of a Dryad,
Dripping round thy slim white stem, whose shadow
Slopes quivering down the water's dusky quiet,
Thou shrink'st as on her bath's edge would some startled Naiad.

Thou art the go-between of rustic lovers;
Thy white bark has their secrets in its keeping;
Reuben writes here the happy name of Patience,
And thy lithe boughs hang murmuring and weeping
Above her, as she steals the mystery from thy keeping.

Thou art to me like my beloved maiden,
So frankly coy, so full of trembly confidences;
Thy shadow scarce seems shade, thy pattering leaflets
Sprinkle their gathered sunshine o'er my senses,
And Nature gives me all her summer confidences.

Whether my heart with hope or sorrow tremble,
Thou sympathizest still; wild and unquiet,
I fling me down; thy ripple, like a river,
Flows valleyward, where calmness is, and by it
My heart is floated down into the land of quiet.

James Russell Lowell

The Candidate's Creed

I du believe in Freedom's cause,
Ez fur away ez Paris is;
I love to see her stick her claws
In them infarnal Pharisees;
It's wal enough agin a king
To dror resolves and triggers,—
But libbaty's a kind o' thing
Thet don't agree with niggers.

I du believe the people want
A tax on teas and coffees,
Thet nothin' aint extravygunt,—
Purvidin' I'm in office;
For I hev loved my country sence
My eye-teeth filled their sockets,
An' Uncle Sam I reverence,
Partic'larly his pockets.

I du believe in ANY plan
O' levyin' the taxes,
Ez long ez, like a lumberman,
I git jest wut I axes:
I go free-trade thru thick an' thin,
Because it kind o' rouses
The folks to vote—and keep us in
Our quiet custom-houses.

I du believe it's wise an' good
To sen' out furrin missions,
Thet is, on sartin understood
An' orthydox conditions;—
I mean nine thousan' dolls. per ann.,
Nine thousan' more fer outfit,
An' me to recommend a man
The place 'ould jest about fit.

I du believe in special ways
O' prayin' an' convartin';
The bread comes back in many days,
An' buttered, tu, fer sartin;—
I mean in preyin' till one busts
On wut the party chooses,
An' in convartin' public trusts
To very privit uses.

I do believe hard coin the stuff
Fer 'lectioneers to spout on;
The people's ollers soft enough
To make hard money out on;
Dear Uncle Sam pervides fer his,
An' gives a good-sized junk to all—
I don't care HOW hard money is,

Ez long ez mine's paid punctooal.

I du believe with all my soul
In the gret Press's freedom,
To pint the people to the goal
An' in the traces lead 'em:
Palsied the arm that forges yokes
At my fat contracts squintin',
An' wilhered be the nose that pokes
Inter the gov'ment printin'!

I du believe that I should give
Wut's his'n unto Caesar,
Fer it's by him I move an' live,
From him my bread an' cheese air
I du believe that all o' me
Doth bear his souperscription,—
Will, conscience, honor, honesty,
An' things o' thet description.

I du believe in prayer an' praise
To him thet hez the grantin'
O' jobs—in every thin' thet pays,
But most of all in CANTIN';
This doth my cup with marcies fill,
This lays all thought o' sin to rest—
I DON'T believe in princerple,
But, O, I DU in interest.

I du believe in bein' this
Or thet, ez it may happen
One way, or t' other hendiest is
To ketch the people nappin';
It aint by princerples nor men
My preudent course is steadied—
I scent wich pays the best, an' then
Go into it baldheaded.

I du believe thet holdin' slaves
Comes nat'ral tu a President,
Let 'lone the rowdedow it saves
To have a wal-broke precedunt;
Fer any office, small or gret,
I could'nt ax with no face,
Without I'd been, thru dry an' wet,
The unrizziest kind o' doughface.

I du believe wutever trash
'll keep the people in blindness,—
Thet we the Mexicans can thrash
Right inter brotherly kindness—
Thet bombshells, grape, an' powder 'n' ball

Air good-will's strongest magnets—
Thet peace, to make it stick at all,
Must be druv in with bagnets.

In short, I firmly du believe
In Humbug generally,
Fer it's a thing thet I perceive
To hev a solid vally;
This heth my faithful shepherd ben,
In pasturs sweet heth led me,
An' this'll keep the people green
To feed ez they have fed me.

James Russell Lowell

The Courtin'

God makes sech nights, all white an' still
Fur 'z you can look or listen,
Moonshine an' snow on field an' hill,
All silence an' all glisten.

Zekle crep' up quite unbeknown
An' peeked in thru' the winder,
An' there sot Huldy all alone,
'Ith no one nigh to hender.

A fireplace filled the room's one side
With half a cord o' wood in—
There warn't no stoves (tell comfort died)
To bake ye to a puddin'.

The wa'nut logs shot sparkles out
Towards the pootiest, bless her,
An' leetle flames danced all about
The chiny on the dresser.

Agin the chimbley crook-necks hung,
An' in amongst 'em rusted
The ole queen's arm that gran'ther Young
Fetched back from Concord busted.

The very room, coz she was in,
Seemed warm from floor to ceilin',
An' she looked full ez rosy agin
Ez the apples she was peelin'.

'Twas kin' o' kingdom-come to look
On seek a blessed cretur,
A dogrose blushin' to a brook
Ain't modester nor sweeter.

He was six foot o' man, A 1,
Clean grit an' human natur';
None couldn't quicker pitch a ton
Nor dror a furrer straighter.

He'd sparked it with full twenty gals,
He'd squired 'em, danced 'em, druv 'em,
Fust this one, an' then thet, by spells—
All is, he couldn't love 'em.

But long o' her his veins 'ould run
All crinkly like curled maple,
The side she breshed felt full o' sun
Ez a south slope in Ap'il.

She thought no v'ice hed sech a swing
Ez hisn in the choir;

My! when he made Ole Hunderd ring,
She knowed the Lord was nigher.

An' she'd blush scarlit, right in prayer,
When her new meetin'-bunnet
Felt somehow thru' its crown a pair
O' blue eyes sot upun it.

Thet night, I tell ye, she looked some!
She seemed to 've gut a new soul,
For she felt sartin-sure he'd come,
Down to her very shoe-sole.

She heered a foot, an' knowed it tu;
A-raspin' on the scraper,—
All ways to once her feelin's flew
Like sparks in burnt-up paper.

He kin' o' l'itered on the mat,
Some doubtfle o' the sekle,
His heart kep' goin' pity-pat,
But hern went pity Zekle.

An' yit she gin her cheer a jerk
Ez though she wished him furder,
An' on her apples kep' to work,
Parin' away like murder.

'you want to see my Pa, I s'pose?'
'Wal...no...I come dasignin'—
'To see my Ma? She's sprinklin' clo'es
Agin to-morrer's i'nin'.'

To say why gals acts so or so,
Or don't, 'ould be presumin';
Mebby to mean yes an' say no
Comes nateral to women.

He stood a spell on one foot fust,
Then stood a spell on t'other,
An' on which one he felt the wust
He couldn't ha' told ye nuther.

Says he, 'I'd better call agin;'
Says she, 'Think likely, Mister;'
Thet last word pricked him like a pin,
An'... Wal, he up an' kist her.

When Ma bimeby upon 'em slips,
Huldy sot pale ez ashes,
All kin' o' smily roun' the lips
An' teary roun' the lashes.

For she was jes' the quiet kind
Whose naturs never vary,
Like streams that keep a summer mind
Snowhid in Jenooary.

The blood clost roun' her heart felt glued
Too tight for all expressin',
Tell mother see how metters stood,
And gin 'em both her blessin'.

Then her red come back like the tide
Down to the Bay o' Fundy,
An' all I know is they was cried
In meetin' come nex' Sunday.

James Russell Lowell

The Falcon

I know a falcon swift and peerless
As e'er was cradled In the pine;
No bird had ever eye so fearless,
Or wing so strong as this of mine.

The winds not better love to pilot
A cloud with molten gold o'er run,
Than him, a little burning islet,
A star above the coming sun.

For with a lark's heart he doth tower,
By a glorious upward instinct drawn;
No bee nestles deeper in the flower
Than he in the bursting rose of dawn.

No harmless dove, no bird that singeth,
Shudders to see him overhead;
The rush of his fierce swooping bringeth
To innocent hearts no thrill of dread.

Let fraud and wrong and baseness shiver,
For still between them and the sky
The falcon Truth hangs poised forever
And marks them with his vengeful eye.

James Russell Lowell

The Fatherland

Where is the true man's fatherland?
Is it where he by chance is born?
Doth not the yearning spirit scorn
In such scant borders to be spanned?
Oh yes! his fatherland must be
As the blue heaven wide and free!

Is it alone where freedom is,
Where God is God and man is man?
Doth he not claim a broader span
For the soul's love of home than this?
Oh yes! his fatherland must be
As the blue heaven wide and free!

Where'er a human heart doth wear
Joy's myrtle-wreath or sorrow's gyves,
Where'er a human spirit strives
After a life more true and fair,
There is the true man's birthplace grand,
His is a world-wide fatherland!

Where'er a single slave doth pine,
Where'er one man may help another,-
Thank God for such a birthright, brother,-
That spot of earth is thine and mine!
There is the true man's birthplace grand,
His is a world-wide fatherland!

James Russell Lowell

The First Snowfall

THE snow had begun in the gloaming,
And busily all the night
Had been heaping field and highway
With a silence deep and white.

Every pine and fir and hemlock
Wore ermine too dear for an earl,
And the poorest twig on the elm-tree
Was ridged inch deep with pearl.

From sheds new-roofed with Carrara
Came Chanticleer's muffled crow,
The stiff rails were softened to swan's-down,
And still fluttered down the snow.

I stood and watched by the window
The noiseless work of the sky,
And the sudden flurries of snow-birds,
Like brown leaves whirling by.

I thought of a mound in sweet Auburn
Where a little headstone stood;
How the flakes were folding it gently,
As did robins the babes in the wood.

Up spoke our own little Mabel,
Saying, 'Father, who makes it snow?'
And I told of the good All-father
Who cares for us here below.

Again I looked at the snowfall,
And thought of the leaden sky
That arched o'er our first great sorrow,
When that mound was heaped so high.

I remembered the gradual patience
That fell from that cloud like snow,
Flake by flake, healing and hiding
The scar of our deep-plunged woe.

And again to the child I whispered,
'The snow that husheth all,
Darling, the merciful Father
Alone can make it fall!'

Then, with eyes that saw not, I kissed her;
And she, kissing back, could not know
That my kiss was given to her sister,
Folded close under deepening snow.

James Russell Lowell

The Forlorn

The night is dark, the stinging sleet,
Swept by the bitter gusts of air,
Drives whistling down the lonely street,
And glazes on the pavement bare.

The street-lamps flare and struggle dim
Through the gray sleet-clouds as they pass,
Or, governed by a boisterous whim,
dropp down and rustle on the glass.

One poor, heart-broken, outcast girl
Faces the east-wind's searching flaws,
And, as about her heart they whirl,
Her tattered cloak more tightly draws.

The flat brick walls look cold and bleak,
Her bare feet to the sidewalk freeze;
Yet dares she not a shelter seek,
Though faint with hunger and disease.

The sharp storm cuts her forehead bare,
And, piercing through her garments thin,
Beats on her shrunken breast, and there
Makes colder the cold heart within.

She lingers where a ruddy glow
Streams outward through an open shutter,
Adding more bitterness to woe,
More loneliness to desertion utter.

One half the cold she had not felt
Until she saw this gush of light
Spread warmly forth, and seem to melt
Its slow way through the deadening night.

She hears a woman's voice within,
Singing sweet words her childhood knew,
And years of misery and sin
Furl off, and leave her heaven blue.

Her freezing heart, like one who sinks
Outwearied in the drifting snow.
Drowns to deadly sleep and thinks
No longer of its hopeless woe;

Old fields, and clear blue summer days,
Old meadows, green with grass, and trees
That shimmer through the trembling haze
And whiten in the western breeze.

Old faces, all the friendly past
Rises within her heart again,

And sunshine from her childhood cast
Makes summer of the icy rain.

Enhaloed by a mild, warm glow,
From man's humanity apart,
She hears old footsteps wandering slow
Through the lone chambers of the heart.

Outside the porch before the door,
Her cheek upon the cold, hard stone,
She lies, no longer foul and poor,
No longer dreary and alone.

Next morning something heavily
Against the opening door did weigh,
And there, from sin and sorrow free,
A woman on the threshold lay.

A smile upon the wan lips told
That she had found a calm release,
And that, from out the want and cold,
The song had borne her soul in peace.

For, whom the heart of man shuts out,
Sometimes the heart of God takes in,
And fences them all round about
With silence mid the world's loud din;

And one of his great charities
Is Music, and it doth not scorn
To close the lids upon the eyes
Of the polluted and forlorn;

Far was she from her childhood's home,
Farther in guilt had wandered thence,
Yet thither it had bid her come
To die in maiden innocence.

James Russell Lowell

The Fountain

Into the sunshine,
Full of the light,
Leaping and flashing
From morn till night!

Into the moonlight,
Whiter than snow,
Waving so flower-like
When the winds blow!

Into the starlight,
Rushing in spray,
Happy at midnight,
Happy by day!

Ever in motion,
Blithesome and cheery.
Still climbing heavenward,
Never weary

Glad of all weathers,
Still seeming best,
Upward or downward,
Motion thy rest;—

Full of a nature
Nothing can tame,
Changed every moment,
Ever the same;—

Ceaseless aspiring,
Ceaseless content,
Darkness or sunshine
Thy element;—

Glorious fountain!
Let my heart be
Fresh, changeful, constant,
Upward, like thee!

James Russell Lowell

The Fountain of Youth

I

'Tis a woodland enchanted!
By no sadder spirit
Than blackbirds and thrushes,
That whistle to cheer it
All day in the bushes.
This woodland is haunted:
And in a small clearing,
Beyond sight or hearing
Of human annoyance,
The little fount gushes,
First smoothly, then dashes
And gurgles and flashes,
To the maples and ashes
Confiding its joyance;
Unconscious confiding,
Then, silent and glossy,
Slips winding and hiding
Through alder-stems mossy,
Through gossamer roots
Fine as nerves,
That tremble, as shoots
Through their magnetized curves
The allurements delicious
Of the water's capricious
Thrills, gushes, and swerves.

II

'Tis a woodland enchanted!
I am writing no fiction;
And this fount, its sole daughter,
To the woodland was granted
To pour holy water
And win benediction;
In summer-noon flushes,
When all the wood hushes,
Blue dragon-flies knitting
To and fro in the sun,
With sidelong jerk flitting
Sink down on the rashes,
And, motionless sitting,
Hear it bubble and run,
Hear its low inward singing,
With level wings swinging
On green tasselled rushes,
To dream in the sun.

III

'Tis a woodland enchanted!

The great August noonlight!
Through myriad rifts slanted,
Leaf and bole thickly sprinkles
With flickering gold;
There, in warm August gloaming,
With quick, silent brightenings,
From meadow-lands roaming,
The firefly twinkles
His fitful heat-lightnings;
There the magical moonlight
With meek, saintly glory
Steeps summit and wold;
There whippoorwills plain in the solitudes hoary
With lone cries that wander
Now hither, now yonder,
Like souls doomed of old
To a mild purgatory;
But through noonlight and moonlight
The little fount tinkles
Its silver saints'-bells,
That no sprite ill-boding
May make his abode in
Those innocent dells.

IV

'Tis a woodland enchanted!
When the phebe scarce whistles
Once an hour to his fellow.
And, where red lilies flaunted,
Balloons from the thistles
Tell summer's disasters,
The butterflies yellow,
As caught in an eddy
Of air's silent ocean,
Sink, waver, and steady
O'er goats'-beard and asters,
Like souls of dead flowers,
With aimless emotion
Still lingering unready
To leave their old bowers;
And the fount is no dumber,
But still gleams and flashes,
And gurgles and plashes,
To the measure of summer;
The butterflies hear it,
And spell-bound are holden,
Still balancing near it
O'er the goats' beard so golden.

V

'Tis a woodland enchanted!
A vast silver willow,
I know not how planted,
(This wood is enchanted,
And full of surprises.)
Stands stemming a billow,
A motionless billow
Of ankle-deep mosses;
Two great roots it crosses
To make a round basin.
And there the Fount rises;
Ah, too pure a mirror
For one sick of error
To see his sad face in!
No dew-dropp is stiller
In its lupin-leaf setting
Than this water moss-bounded;
But a tiny sand-pillar
From the bottom keeps jetting,
And mermaid ne'er sounded
Through the wreaths of a shell,
Down amid crimson dulses
In some cavern of ocean,
A melody sweeter
Than the delicate pulses,
The soft, noiseless metre,
The pause and the swell
Of that musical motion:
I recall it, not see it;
Could vision be clearer?
Half I'm fain to draw nearer
Half tempted to flee it;
The sleeping Past wake not,
Beware!
One forward step take not,
Ah! break not
That quietude rare!
By my step unaffrighted
A thrush hops before it,
And o'er it
A birch hangs delighted,
Dipping, dipping, dipping its tremulous hair;
Pure as the fountain, once
I came to the place,
(How dare I draw nearer?)
I bent o'er its mirror,
And saw a child's face
Mid locks of bright gold in it;
Yes, pure as this fountain once,-
Since, bow much error!
Too holy a mirror
For the man to behold in it

His harsh, bearded countenance!

VI

'Tis a woodland enchanted!
Ah, fly unreturning!
Yet stay;-
'Tis a woodland enchanted,
Where wonderful chances
Have sway;
Luck flees from the cold one,
But leaps to the bold one
Half-way;
Why should I be daunted?
Still the smooth mirror glances,
Still the amber sand dances,
One look,-then away!
O magical glass!
Canst keep in thy bosom
Shades of leaf and of blossom
When summer days pass,
So that when thy wave hardens
It shapes as it pleases,
Unharm'd by the breezes,
Its fine hanging gardens?
Hast those in thy keeping.
And canst not uncover,
Enchantedly sleeping,
The old shade of thy lover?
It is there! I have found it!
He wakes, the long sleeper!
The pool is grown deeper,
The sand dance is ending,
The white floor sinks, blending
With skies that below me
Are deepening and bending,
And a child's face alone
That seems not to know me,
With hair that fades golden
In the heaven-glow round it,
Looks up at my own;
Ah, glimpse through the portal
That leads to the throne,
That opes the child's olden
Regions Elysian!
Ah, too holy vision
For thy skirts to be holden
By soiled hand of mortal!
It wavers, it scatters,
'Tis gone past recalling!
A tear's sudden falling
The magic cup shatters,

Breaks the spell of the waters,
And the sand cone once more,
With a ceaseless renewing,
Its dance is pursuing
On the silvery floor,
O'er and o'er,
With a noiseless and ceaseless renewing.

VII

'Tis a woodland enchanted!
If you ask me, _Where is it?_
I can but make answer,
"Tis past my disclosing;
Not to choice is it granted
By sure paths to visit
The still pool enclosing
Its blithe little dancer;
But in some day, the rarest
Of many Septembers,
When the pulses of air rest,
And all things lie dreaming
In drowsy haze steaming
From the wood's glowing embers,
Then, sometimes, unheeding,
And asking not whither,
By a sweet inward leading
My feet are drawn thither,
And, looking with awe in the magical mirror,
I see through my tears,
Half doubtful of seeing,
The face unperturbed,
The warm golden being
Of a child of five years;
And spite of the mists and the error.
And the days overcast,
Can feel that I walk undeserted,
But forever attended
By the glad heavens that bended
O'er the innocent past;
Toward fancy or truth
Doth the sweet vision win me?
Dare I think that I cast
In the fountain of youth
The fleeting reflection
Of some bygone perfection
That still lingers in me?

James Russell Lowell

The Heritage

The rich man's son inherits lands,
And piles of brick and stone, and gold,
And he inherits soft white hands,
And tender flesh that fears the cold,
Nor dares to wear a garment old;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

The rich man's son inherits cares;
The bank may break, the factory burn,
A breath may burst his bubble shares,
And soft white hands could hardly earn
A living that would serve his turn;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

The rich man's son inherits wants,
His stomach craves for dainty fare;
With sated heart, he hears the pants
Of toiling hinds with brown arms bare,
And wearies in his easy-chair;
A heritage, it seems to me,
One scarce would wish to hold in fee.

What doth the poor man's son inherit?
Stout muscles and a sinewy heart,
A hardy frame, a hardier spirit;
King of two hands, he does his part
In every useful toil and art;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

What doth the poor man's son inherit?
Wishes o'erjoyed with humble things,
A rank adjudged by toil-won merit,
Content that from employment springs,
A heart that in his labor sings;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

What doth the poor man's son inherit?
A patience learned of being poor,
Courage, if sorrow come, to bear it,
A fellow-feeling that is sure
To make the outcast bless his door;
A heritage, it seems to me,
A king might wish to hold in fee.

O rich man's son! there is a toil
That with all others level stands:
Large charity doth never soil,
But only whiten, soft white hands:

This is the best crop from thy lands,
A heritage, it seems to me,
Worth being rich to hold in fee.

O poor man's son! scorn not thy state;
There is worse weariness than thine,
In merely being rich and great;
Toil only gives the soul to shine,
And make rest fragrant and benign;
A heritage, it seems to me,
Worth being poor to hold in fee.

Both, heirs to some six feet of sod,
Are equal in the earth at last;
Both, children of the same dear God,
Prove title to your heirship vast
By record of a well-filled past;
A heritage, it seems to me,
Well worth a life to hold in fee.

James Russell Lowell

The Moon

My soul was like the sea.
Before the moon was made,
Moaning in vague immensity,
Of its own strength afraid,
Unresful and unstaed.
Through every rift it foamed in vain,
About its earthly prison,
Seeking some unknown thing in pain,
And sinking restless back again,
For yet no moon had risen:
Its only voice a vast dumb moan,
Of utterless anguish speaking,
It lay unhopefully alone,
And lived but in an aimless seeking.

So was my soul; but when 'twas full
Of unrest to o'erloading,
A voice of something beautiful
Whispered a dim foreboding,
And yet so soft, so sweet, so low,
It had not more of joy than woe;

And, as the sea doth oft lie still,
Making its waters meet,
As if by an unconscious will,
For the moon's silver feet,
So lay my soul within mine eyes
When thou, its guardian moon, didst rise.

And now, howe'er its waves above
May toss and seem uneasyful,
One strong, eternal law of Love,
With guidance sure and peaceful,
As calm and natural as breath,
Moves its great deeps through life and death.

James Russell Lowell

The Origin of Didactic Poetry

When wise Minerva still was young
And just the least romantic,
Soon after from Jove's head she flung
That preternatural antic,
'Tis said to keep from idleness
Or flirting,—those twin curses,—
She spent her leisure, more or less,
In writing poems, no, verses.

How nice they were! to rhyme with far
A kind star did not tarry;
The metre, too, was regular
As schoolboy's dot and carry;
And full they were of pious plums,
So extra-super-moral,—
For sucking Virtue's tender gums
Most tooth-enticing coral.

A clean, fair copy she prepares,
Makes sure of moods and tenses,
With her own hand,—for prudence spares
A man- (or woman) -uensis;
Complete, and tied with ribbons proud,
She hinted soon how cosy a
Treat it would be to read them loud
After next day's Ambrosia.

The Gods thought not it would amuse
So much as Homer's Odyssees,
But could not very well refuse
The properest of Goddesses;
So all sat round in attitudes
Of various dejection,
As with a hem! the queen of prudes
Began her grave prelection.

At the first pass Zeus said, 'Well sung!—
I mean—ask Phoebus,—he knows.'
Says Phoebus, 'Zounds! a wolf's among
Admetus's merinos!
Fine! very fine! but I must go;
They stand in need of me there;
Excuse me!' snatched his stick, and so
Plunged down the gladdened ether.

With the next gap, Mars said, 'For me
Don't wait,—naught could be finer;
But I'm engaged at half-past three,—
A fight in Asia Minor!'
Then Venus lisped, 'How very thad!
It rainth down there in torrinth;
But I mutht go, becauthe they've had

A thacrifithe in Corinth!'

Then Bacchus,—'With those slamming doors
I lost the last half dist—(hic!)
Mos' bu'ful se'ments! what's the Chor's?
My voice shall not be missed—(hic!)'
His words woke Hermes; 'Ah!' he said,
'I so love moral theses!'
Then winked at Hebe, who turned red,
And smoothed her apron's creases.

Just then Zeus snored,—the Eagle drew
His head the wing from under;
Zeus snored,—o'er startled Greece there flew
The many-volumed thunder;
Some augurs counted nine,—some, ten,—
Some said, 'twas war,—some, famine,—
And all, that other-minded men
Would get a precious plunder.

Proud Pallas sighed, 'It will not do;
Against the Muse I've sinned, oh!'
And her torn rhymes sent flying through
Olympus's back window.
Then, packing up a peplus clean,
She took the shortest path thence,
And opened, with a mind serene,
A Sunday-school in Athens.

The verses? Some, in ocean swilled,
Killed every fish that bit to 'em;
Some Galen caught, and, when distilled,
Found morphine the residuum;
But some that rotted on the earth
Sprang up again in copies,
And gave two strong narcotics birth,—
Didactic bards and poppies.

Years after, when a poet asked
The Goddess's opinion,
As being one whose soul had basked
In Art's clear-aired dominion,—
'Discriminate,' she said, 'betimes;
The Muse is unforgiving;
Put all your beauty in your rhymes,
Your morals in your living.'

James Russell Lowell

The Pregnant Comment

Opening one day a book of mine,
I absent, Hester found a line
Praised with a pencil-mark, and this
She left transfigured with a kiss.

When next upon the page I chance,
Like Poussin's nymphs my pulses dance,
And whirl my fancy where it sees
Pan piping 'neath Arcadian trees,
Whose leaves no winter-scenes rehearse,
Still young and glad as Homer's verse.
'What mean,' I ask, 'these sudden joys?
This feeling fresher than a boy's?
What makes this line, familiar long,
New as the first bird's April song?
I could, with sense illumined thus,
Clear doubtful texts in AEeschylus!'

Laughing, one day she gave the key,
My riddle's open-sesame;
Then added, with a smile demure,
Whose downcast lids veiled triumph sure,
'If what I left there give you pain,
You-you-can take it off again;
'Twas for _my_ poet, not for him,
Your Doctor Donne there!'

Earth grew dim
And wavered in a golden mist,
As rose, not paper, leaves I kissed.
Donne, you forgive? I let you keep
Her precious comment, poet deep.

James Russell Lowell

The Rose: a Ballad

I

In his tower sat the poet
Gazing on the roaring sea,
'Take this rose,' he sighed, 'and throw it
Where there's none that loveth me.
On the rock the billow bursteth
And sinks back into the seas,
But in vain my spirit thirsteth
So to burst and be at ease.
Take, O sea! the tender blossom
That hath lain against my breast;
On thy black and angry bosom
It will find a surer rest.
Life is vain, and love is hollow,
Ugly death stands there behind,
Hate and scorn and hunger follow
Him that toileth for his kind.'
Forth into the night he hurled it,
And with bitter smile did mark
How the surly tempest whirled it
Swift into the hungry dark.
Foam and spray drive back to leeward,
And the gale, with dreary moan,
Drifts the helpless blossom seaward,
Through the breakers all alone.

II

Stands a maiden, on the morrow,
Musing by the wave-beat strand,
Half in hope and half in sorrow,
Tracing words upon the sand:
'Shall I ever then behold him
Who hath been my life so long,
Ever to this sick heart told him,
Be the spirit of his song?
Touch not, sea, the blessed letters
I have traced upon thy shore,
Spare his name whose spirit fetters
Mine with love forevermore!
Swells the tide and overflows it,
But, with omen pure and meet,
Brings a little rose, and throws it
Humbly at the maiden's feet.
Full of bliss she takes the token,
And, upon her snowy breast,
Soothes the ruffled petals broken
With the ocean's fierce unrest.
'Love is thine, O heart! and surely
Peace shall also be thine own,

For the heart that trusteth purely
Never long can pine alone.'

III

In his tower sits the poet,
Blisses new and strange to him
Fill his heart and overflow it
With a wonder sweet and dim.
Up the beach the ocean slideth
With a whisper of delight,
And the moon in silence glideth
Through the peaceful blue of night.
Rippling o'er the poet's shoulder
Flows a maiden's golden hair,
Maiden lips, with love grown bolder,
Kiss his moon-lit forehead bare.
'Life is joy, and love is power,
Death all fetters doth unbind,
Strength and wisdom only flower
When we toil for all our kind.
Hope is truth,-the future giveth
More than present takes away,
And the soul forever liveth
Nearer God from day to day.'
Not a word the maiden uttered,
Fullest hearts are slow to speak,
But a withered rose-leaf fluttered
Down upon the poet's cheek.

James Russell Lowell

The Search

I went to seek for Christ,
And Nature seemed so fair
That first the woods and fields my youth enticed,
And I was sure to find him there:
The temple I forsook,
And to the solitude
Allegiance paid; but Winter came and shook
The crown and purple from my wood;
His snows, like desert sands, with scornful drift,
Besieged the columned aisle and palace-gate;
My Thebes, cut deep with many a solemn rift,
But epitaphed her own sepulchred state:
Then I remembered whom I went to seek,
And blessed blunt Winter for his counsel bleak.
Back to the world I turned,
For Christ, I said, is King;
So the cramped alley and the hut I spurned,
As far beneath his sojourning:
Mid power and wealth I sought,
But found no trace of him,
And all the costly offerings I had brought
With sudden rust and mould grew dim:
I found his tomb, indeed, where, by their laws,
All must on stated days themselves be imprison,
Mocking with bread a dead creed's grinning jaws,
Witless how long the life had thence arisen;
Due sacrifice to this they set apart,
Prizing it more than Christ's own living heart.

So from my feet the dust
Of the proud World I shook;
Then came dear Love and shared with me his crust,
And half my sorrow's burden took.
After the World's soft bed,
Its rich and dainty fare,
Like down seemed Love's coarse pillow to my head,
His cheap food seemed as manna rare;
Fresh-trodden prints of bare and bleeding feet,
Turned to the heedless city whence I came,
Hard by I saw, and springs of worship sweet
Gushed from my cleft heart smitten by the same;
Love looked me in the face and spake no words,
But straight I knew those footprints were the Lord's.

I followed where they led,
And in a hovel rude,
With naught to fence the weather from his head,
The King I sought for meekly stood;
A naked, hungry child
Clung round his gracious knee,
And a poor hunted slave looked up and smiled
To bless the smile that set him free;

New miracles I saw his presence do, -
No more I knew the hovel bare and poor,
The gathered chips into a woodpile grew,
The broken morsel swelled to goodly store;
I knelt and wept: my Christ no more I seek,
His throne is with the outcast and the weak.

James Russell Lowell

The Shepherd Of King Admetus

There came a youth upon the earth,
Some thousand years ago,
Whose slender hands were nothing worth,
Whether to plow, to reap, or sow.

Upon an empty tortoise-shell
He stretched some chords, and drew
Music that made men's bosoms swell
Fearless, or brimmed their eyes with dew.

Then King Admetus, one who had
Pure taste by right divine,
Decreed his singing not too bad
To hear between the cups of wine

And so, well-pleased with being soothed
Into a sweet half-sleep,
Three times his kingly beard he smoothed,
And made him viceroy o'er his sheep.

His words were simple words enough,
And yet he used them so,
That what in other mouths was rough
In his seemed musical and low.

Men called him but a shiftless youth,
In whom no good they saw;
And yet, unwittingly, in truth,
They made his careless words their law.

They knew not how he learned at all,
For idly, hour by hour,
He sat and watched the dead leaves fall,
Or mused upon a common flower.

It seemed the loveliness of things
Did teach him all their use,
For, in mere weeds, and stones, and springs,
He found a healing power profuse.

Men granted that his speech was wise,
But, when a glance they caught
Of his slim grace and woman's eyes,
They laughed, and called him good-for-naught.

Yet after he was dead and gone,
And e'en his memory dim,
Earth seemed more sweet to live upon,
More full of love, because of him.

And day by day more holy grew
Each spot where he had trod,

Till after—poets only knew
Their first-born brother as a god.

James Russell Lowell

The Sirens

The sea is lonely, the sea is dreary,
The sea is restless and uneasy;
Thou seekest quiet, thou art weary,
Wandering thou knowest not whither;-
Our little isle is green and breezy,
Come and rest thee! Oh come hither,
Come to this peaceful home of ours,
 Where evermore
The low west-wind creeps panting up the shore
To be at rest among the flowers;
Full of rest, the green moss lifts,
 As the dark waves of the sea
Draw in and out of rocky rifts,
 Calling solemnly to thee
With voices deep and hollow,-
 'To the shore
Follow! Oh, follow!
To be at rest forevermore!
 Forevermore!

Look how the gray old Ocean
From the depth of his heart rejoices,
Heaving with a gentle motion,
When he hears our restful voices;
List how he sings in an undertone,
Chiming with our melody;
And all sweet sounds of earth and air
Melt into one low voice alone,
That murmurs over the weary sea,
And seems to sing from everywhere,-
'Here mayst thou harbor peacefully,
Here mayst thou rest from the aching oar;
 Turn thy curved prow ashore,
And in our green isle rest forevermore!
 Forevermore!'
And Echo half wakes in the wooded hill,
 And, to her heart so calm and deep,
Murmurs over in her sleep,
Doubtfully pausing and murmuring still,
 'Evermore!'
 Thus, on Life's weary sea,
 Heareth the marinere
 Voices sweet, from far and near,
 Ever singing low and clear,
 Ever singing longingly.

Is it not better here to be,
Than to be toiling late and soon?
In the dreary night to see
Nothing but the blood-red moon
Go up and down into the sea;
Or, in the loneliness of day,

To see the still seals only
Solemnly lift their faces gray,
Making it yet more lonely?
Is it not better than to hear
Only the sliding of the wave
Beneath the plank, and feel so near
A cold and lonely grave,
A restless grave, where thou shalt lie
Even in death unquietly?
Look down beneath thy wave-worn bark,
Lean over the side and see
The leaden eye of the sidelong shark
Upturned patiently,
Ever waiting there for thee:
Look down and see those shapeless forms,
Which ever keep their dreamless sleep
Far down within the gloomy deep,
And only stir themselves in storms,
Rising like islands from beneath,
And snorting through the angry spray,
As the frail vessel perisheth
In the whirls of their unwieldy play;
Look down! Look down!
Upon the seaweed, slimy and dark,
That waves its arms so lank and brown,
Beckoning for thee!
Look down beneath thy wave-worn bark
Into the cold depth of the sea!
Look down! Look down!
Thus, on Life's lonely sea,
Heareth the marinere
Voices sad, from far and near,
Ever singing full of fear,
Ever singing drearfully.

Here all is pleasant as a dream;
The wind scarce shaketh down the dew,
The green grass floweth like a stream
Into the ocean's blue;
Listen! Oh, listen!
Here is a gush of many streams,
A song of many birds,
And every wish and longing seems
Lulled to a numbered flow of words,-
Listen! Oh, listen!
Here ever hum the golden bees
Underneath full-blossomed trees,
At once with glowing fruit and flowers crowned;-
So smooth the sand, the yellow sand,
That thy keel will not grate as it touches the land;
All around with a slumberous sound,
The singing waves slide up the strand,

And there, where the smooth, wet pebbles be,
The waters gurgle longingly,
As if they fain would seek the shore,
To be at rest from the ceaseless roar,
To be at rest forevermore,-
Forevermore.

Thus, on Life's gloomy sea,
Hearth the marinere
Voices sweet, from far and near,
Ever singing in his ear,
'Here is rest and peace for thee!'

James Russell Lowell

The Street

They pass me by like shadows, crowds on crowds,
Dim ghosts of men that hover to and fro,
Hugging their bodies round them, like thin shrouds
Wherein their souls were buried long ago:
They trampled on their youth, and faith, and love,
They cast their hope of human-kind away,
With Heaven's clear messages they madly strove,
And conquered,—and their spirits turned to clay.
Lo! how they wander round the world, their grave,
Whose ever-gaping maw by such is fed,
Gibbering at living men, and idly rave,
'We, only, truly live, but ye are dead.'
Alas! poor fools, the anointed eye may trace
A dead soul's epitaph in every face!

James Russell Lowell

The Token

It is a mere wild rosebud,
Quite fallow now, and dry,
Yet there's something wondrous in it,
Some gleams of days gone by,
Dear sights and sounds that are to me
The very moons of memory,
And stir my heart's blood far below
Its short-lived waves of joy and woe.

Lips must fade and roses wither,
All sweet times be o'er;
They only smile, and, murmuring 'Thither!'
Stay with us no more:
And yet ofttimes a look or smile,
Forgotten in a kiss's while,
Years after from the dark will start,
And flash across the trembling heart.

Thou hast given me many roses,
But never one, like this,
O'erfloods both sense and spirit
With such a deep, wild bliss;
We must have instincts that glean up
Sparse drops of this life in the cup,
Whose taste shall give us all that we
Can prove of immortality.

Earth's stablest things are shadows,
And, in the life to come.
Haply some chance-saved trifle
May tell of this old home:
As now sometimes we seem to find,
In a dark crevice of the mind,
Some relic, which, long pondered o'er,
Hints faintly at a life before.

James Russell Lowell

The Vision Of Sir Launfal

Prelude to Part First

Over his keys the musing organist,
Beginning doubtfully and far away,
First lets his fingers wander as they list,
And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay:
Then, as the touch of his loved instrument
Gives hopes and fervor, nearer draws his theme,
First guessed by faint auroral flushes sent
Along the wavering vista of his dream.

Not only around our infancy
Doth heaven with all its splendors lie;
Daily, with souls that cringe and plot,
We Sinais climb and know it not;
Over our manhood bend the skies;
Against our fallen and traitor lives
The great winds utter prophecies;
With our faint hearts the mountain strives;
Its arms outstretched, the druid wood
Waits with its benedicite;
And to our age's drowsy blood
Still shouts the inspiring sea.

Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us;
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,
The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us,
We bargain for the graves we lie in;
At the Devil's booth are all things sold
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
Bubbles we earn with a whole soul's tasking:
'T is heaven alone that is given away,
'T is only God may be had for the asking;
There is no price set on the lavish summer,
And June may be had by the poorest comer.

And what is so rare as a day in June?
Then, if ever, come perfect days;
Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays:
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten;
Every clod feels a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And, grasping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers;
The flush of life may well be seen
Thrilling back over hills and valleys;
The cowslip startles in meadows green,
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,
And there 's never a leaf or a blade too mean

To be some happy creature's palace;
The little bird sits at his door in the sun,
 Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,
And lets his illumined being o'errun
 With the deluge of summer it receives;
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings;
He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest,—
In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best?

Now is the high-tide of the year,
 And whatever of life hath ebbed away
Comes flooding back, with a ripply cheer,
 Into every bare inlet and creek and bay;
Now the heart is so full that a dropp overfills it,
We are happy now because God so wills it;
No matter how barren the past may have been,
'T is enough for us now that the leaves are green;
We sit in the warm shade and feel right well
How the sap creeps up and the blossoms swell;
We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing
That skies are clear and grass is growing;
The breeze comes whispering in our ear,
That dandelions are blossoming near,
 That maize has sprouted, that streams are flowing,
That the river is bluer than the sky,
That the robin is plastering his house hard by;
And if the breeze kept the good news back,
For other couriers we should not lack;
 We could guess it all by yon heifer's lowing,—
And hark! how clear bold chanticleer,
Warmed with the new wine of the year,
 Tells all in his lusty crowing!

Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how;
Every thing is happy now,
 Every thing is upward striving;
'T is as easy now for the heart to be true
As for grass to be green or skies to be blue,—
 'T is the natural way of living:
Who knows whither the clouds have fled?
 In the unscarred heaven they leave no wake;
And the eyes forget the tears they have shed,
 The heart forgets its sorrow and ache;
The soul partakes the season's youth,
 And the sulphurous rifts of passion and woe
Lie deep 'neath a silence pure and smooth,
 Like burnt-out craters healed with snow.
What wonder if Sir Launfal now
Remembered the keeping of his vow?

Part First

I

'My golden spurs now bring to me,
And bring to me my richest mail,
For to-morrow I go over land and sea
In search of the Holy Grail;
Shall never a bed for me be spread,
Nor shall a pillow be under my head,
Till I begin my vow to keep;
Here on the rushes will I sleep,
And perchance there may come a vision true
Ere day create the world anew.'
Slowly Sir Launfal's eyes grew dim,
Slumber fell like a cloud on him,
And into his soul the vision flew.

II

The crows flapped over by twos and threes,
In the pool drownd the cattle up to their knees,
The little birds sang as if it were
The one day of summer in all the year,
And the very leaves seemed to sing on the trees:
The castle alone in the landscape lay
Like an outpost of winter, dull and gray;
'T was the proudest hall in the North Countree,
And never its gates might opened be,
Save to lord or lady of high degree;
Summer besieged it on every side,
But the churlish stone her assaults defied;
She could not scale the chilly wall,
Though round it for leagues her pavilions tall
Stretched left and right,
Over the hills and out of sight;
Green and broad was every tent,
And out of each a murmur went
Till the breeze fell off at night.

III

The drawbridge dropped with a surly clang,
And through the dark arch a charger sprang,
Bearing Sir Launfal, the maiden knight,
In his gilded mail, that flamed so bright
It seemed the dark castle had gathered all
Those shafts the fierce sun had shot over its wall
In his siege of three hundred summers long,
And, binding them all in one blazing sheaf,
Had cast them forth: so, young and strong,

And lightsome as a locust-leaf,
Sir Launfal flashed forth in his unscarred mail,
To seek in all climes for the Holy Grail.

IV

It was morning on hill and stream and tree,
And morning in the young knight's heart;
Only the castle moodily
Rebuffed the gifts of the sunshine free,
And gloomed by itself apart;
The season brimmed all other things up
Full as the rain fills the pitcher-plant's cup.

V

As Sir Launfal made morn through the darksome gate,
He was ware of a leper, crouched by the same,
Who begged with his hand and moaned as he sate;
And a loathing over Sir Launfal came,
The sunshine went out of his soul with a thrill,
The flesh 'neath his armor did shrink and crawl,
And midway its leap his heart stood still
Like a frozen waterfall;
For this man, so foul and bent of stature,
Rasped harshly against his dainty nature,
And seemed the one blot on the summer morn,—
So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.

VI

The leper raised not the gold from the dust:
'Better to me the poor man's crust,
Better the blessing of the poor,
Though I turn me empty from his door;
That is no true alms which the hand can hold;
He gives nothing but worthless gold
Who gives from a sense of duty;
But he who gives a slender mite,
And gives to that which is out of sight,
That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty
Which runs through all and doth all unite,—
The hand cannot clasp the whole of his alms,
The heart outstretches its eager palms,
For a god goes with it and makes it store
To the soul that was starving in darkness before.'

Prelude to Part Second

Down swept the chill wind from the mountain peak,

From the snow five thousand summers old;
On open wold and hill-top bleak
It had gathered all the cold,
And whirled it like sleet on the wanderer's cheek;
It carried a shiver everywhere
From the unleaved boughs and pastures bare;
The little brook heard it and built a roof
'Neath which he could house him, winter-proof;
All night by the white stars' frosty gleams
He groined his arches and matched his beams;
Slender and clear were his crystal spars
As the lashes of light that trim the stars;
He sculptured every summer delight
In his halls and chambers out of sight;
Sometimes his tinkling waters slipt
Down through a frost-leaved forest-crypt,
Long, sparkling aisles of steel-stemmed trees
Bending to counterfeit a breeze;
Sometimes the roof no fretwork knew
But silvery mosses that downward grew;
Sometimes it was carved in sharp relief
With quaint arabesques of ice-fern leaf;
Sometimes it was simply smooth and clear
For the gladness of heaven to shine through, and here
He had caught the nodding bulrush-tops
And hung them thickly with diamond drops,
Which crystallised the beams of moon and sun,
And made a star of every one:
No mortal builder's most rare device
Could match this winter-palace of ice;
'T was as if every image that mirrored lay
In his depths serene through the summer day,
Each flitting shadow of earth and sky,
Lest the happy model should be lost,
Had been mimicked in fairy masonry
By the elfin builders of the frost.

Within the hall are song and laughter,
The cheeks of Christmas glow red and jolly,
And sprouting is every corbel and rafter
With the lightsome green of ivy and holly;
Through the deep gulf of the chimney wide
Wallows the Yule-log's roaring tide;
The broad flame-pennons droop and flap
And belly and tug as a flag in the wind;
Like a locust shrills the imprisoned sap,
Hunted to death in its galleries blind;
And swift little troops of silent sparks,
Now pausing, now scattering away as in fear,
Go threading the soot-forest's tangled darks
Like herds of startled deer.

But the wind without was eager and sharp,
Of Sir Launfal's gray hair it makes a harp,
And rattles and wrings
The icy strings,
Singing, in dreary monotone,
A Christmas carol of its own,
Whose burden still, as he might guess,
Was—'Shelterless, shelterless, shelterless!'

The voice of the seneschal flared like a torch
As he shouted the wanderer away from the porch,
And he sat in the gateway and saw all night
The great hall-fire, so cheery and bold,
Through the window-slits of the castle old,
Build out its piers of ruddy light
Against the drift of the cold.

Part Second

I

There was never a leaf on bush or tree,
The bare boughs rattled shudderingly;
The river was dumb and could not speak,
For the frost's swift shuttles its shroud had spun;
A single crow on the tree-top bleak
From his shining feathers shed off the cold sun;
Again it was morning, but shrunk and cold,
As if her veins were sapless and old,
And she rose up decrepitiy
For a last dim look at earth and sea.

II

Sir Launfal turned from his own hard gate,
For another heir in his earldom sate;
An old, bent man, worn out and frail,
He came back from seeking the Holy Grail;
Little he recked of his earldom's loss,
No more on his surcoat was blazoned the cross,
But deep in his soul the sign he wore,
The badge of the suffering and the poor.

III

Sir Launfal's raiment thin and spare
Was idle mail 'gainst the barbed air,
For it was just at the Christmas time;
So he mused, as he sat, of a sunnier clime,
And sought for a shelter from cold and snow

In the light and warmth of long ago;
He sees the snake-like caravan crawl
O'er the edge of the desert, black and small,
Then nearer and nearer, till, one by one,
He can count the camels in the sun,
As over the red-hot sands they pass
To where, in its slender necklace of grass,
The little spring laughed and leapt in the shade,
And with its own self like an infant played,
And waved its signal of palms.

IV

'For Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms';
The happy camels may reach the spring,
But Sir Launfal sees naught save the grewsome thing,
The leper, lank as the rain-blanch'd bone,
That cower'd beside him, a thing as lone
And white as the ice-isles of Northern seas
In the desolate horror of his disease.

V

And Sir Launfal said,—'I behold in thee
An image of Him who died on the tree;
Thou also hast had thy crown of thorns,—
Thou also hast had the world's buffets and scorns,—
And to thy life were not denied
The wounds in the hands and feet and side:
Mild Mary's Son, acknowledge me;
Behold, through him, I give to thee!'

VI

Then the soul of the leper stood up in his eyes
And looked at Sir Launfal, and straightway he
Remembered in what a haughtier guise
He had flung an alms to leprosie,
When he caged his young life up in gilded mail
And set forth in search of the Holy Grail.
The heart within him was ashes and dust;
He parted in twain his single crust,
He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,
And gave the leper to eat and drink;
'T was a mouldy crust of coarse brown bread,
'T was water out of a wooden bowl,—
Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed,
And 't was red wine he drank with his thirsty soul.

VII

As Sir Launfal mused with a downcast face,
A light shone round about the place;
The leper no longer crouched at his side,
But stood before him glorified,
Shining and tall and fair and straight
As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful Gate,—
Himself the Gate whereby men can
Enter the temple of God in Man.

VIII

His words were shed softer than leaves from the pine,
And they fell on Sir Launfal as snows on the brine,
Which mingle their softness and quiet in one
With the shaggy unrest they float down upon;
And the voice that was calmer than silence said,
'Lo, it is I, be not afraid!
In many climes, without avail,
Thou had spent thy life for the Holy Grail;
Behold, it is here,—this cup which thou
Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now;
This crust is my body broken for thee,
This water His blood that died on the tree;
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another's need,—
Not that which we give, but what we share,—
For the gift without the giver is bare;
Who bestows himself with his alms feeds three,—
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me.'

IX

Sir Launfal awoke, as from a swoon:—
'The Grail in my castle here is found!
Hang my idle armor up on the wall,
Let it be the spider's banquet-hall;
He must be fenced with stronger mail
Who would seek and find the Holy Grail.'

X

The castle-gate stands open now,
And the wanderer is welcome to the hall
As the hangbird is to the elm-tree bough;
No longer scowl the turrets tall,
The Summer's long siege at last is o'er;
When the first poor outcast went in at the door,
She entered with him in disguise,
And mastered the fortress by surprise;
There is no spot she loves so well on ground,

She lingers and smiles there the whole year round;
The meanest serf on Sir Launfal's land
Has hall and bower at his command;
And there 's no poor man in the North Countree
But is lord of the earldom as much as he.

James Russell Lowell

The Washers of the Shroud

Along a riverside, I know not where,
I walked one night in mystery of dream;
A chill creeps curdling yet beneath my hair,
To think what chanced me by the pallid gleam
Of a moon-wraith that waned through haunted air.

Pale fireflies pulsed within the meadow-mist
Their halos, wavering thistledowns of light;
The loon, that seemed to mock some goblin tryst,
Laughed; and the echoes, huddling in affright,
Like Odin's hounds, fled baying down the night.

Then all was silent, till there smote my ear
A movement in the stream that checked my breath:
Was it the slow splash of a wading deer?
But something said, 'This water is of Death!
The Sisters wash a shroud,—ill thing to hear!'

I, looking then, beheld the ancient Three
Known to the Greek's and to the Northman's creed,
That sit in shadow of the mystic Tree,
Still crooning, as they weave their endless brede,
One song: 'Time was, Time is, and Time shall be.'

No wrinkled crones were they, as I had deemed,
But fair as yesterday, to-day, to-morrow,
To mourner, lover, poet, ever seemed;
Something too high for joy, too deep for sorrow,
Thrilled in their tones, and from their faces gleamed.

'Still men and nations reap as they have strawn,'
So sang they, working at their task the while;
The fatal raiment must be cleansed ere dawn;
For Austria? Italy? the Sea-Queen's isle?
O'er what quenched grandeur must our shroud be drawn?

Or is it for a younger, fairer corse,
That gathered States for children round his knees,
That tamed the wave to be his posting-horse,
Feller of forests, linker of the seas,
Bridge-builder, hammerer, youngest son of Thor's?

'What make we, murmur'st thou? and what are we?
When empires must be wound, we bring the shroud,
The time-old web of the implacable Three:
Is it too coarse for him, the young and proud?
Earth's mightiest deigned to wear it,—why not he?'

'Is there no hope?' I moaned, 'so strong, so fair!
Our Fowler whose proud bird would brook erewhile
No rival's swoop in all our western air!
Gather the ravens, then, in funeral file

For him, life's morn yet golden in his hair?'

'Leave me not hopeless, ye un pitying dames!
I see, half seeing. Tell me, ye who scanned
The stars, Earth's elders, still must noblest aims
Be traced upon oblivious ocean-sands?
Must Hesper join the wailing ghosts of names?'

'When grass-blades stiffen with red battle-dew
Ye deem we choose the victor and the slain:
Say, choose we them that shall be leal and true
To the heart's longing, the high faith of brain?
Yet there the victory lies, if ye but knew.'

'Three roots bear up Dominion: Knowledge, Will,—
These twain are strong, but stronger yet the third,—
Obedience,—'t is the great tap-root that still,
Knit round the rock of Duty, is not stirred,
Though Heaven-loosed tempests spend their utmost skill.'

'Is the doom sealed for Hesper? 'T is not we
Denounce it, but the Law before all time:
The brave makes danger opportunity;
The waverer, paltering with the chance sublime,
Dwarfs it to peril: which shall Hesper be?'

'Hath he let vultures climb his eagle's seat
To make Jove's bolts purveyors of their maw?
Hath he the Many's plaudits found more sweet
Than Wisdom? held Opinion's wind for Law?
Then let him hearken for the doomster's feet.'

'Rough are the steps, slow-hewn in flintiest rock,
States climb to power by; slippery those with gold
Down which they stumble to eternal mock:
No chafferer's hand shall long the sceptre hold,
Who, given a Fate to shape, would sell the block.'

'We sing old Sagas, songs of weal and woe,
Mystic because too cheaply understood;
Dark sayings are not ours; men hear and know,
See Evil weak, see strength alone in Good,
Yet hope to stem God's fire with walls of tow.'

'Time Was unlocks the riddle of Time Is,
That offers choice of glory or of gloom;
The solver makes Time Shall Be surely his.
But hasten, Sisters! for even now the tomb
Grates its slow hinge and calls from the abyss.'

'But not for him,' I cried, 'not yet for him,
Whose large horizon, westering, star by star

Wins from the void to where on Ocean's rim
The sunset shuts the world with golden bar,
Not yet his thews shall fail, his eye grow dim!

'His shall be larger manhood, saved for those
That walk unblenching through the trial-fires;
Not suffering, but faint heart, is worst of woes,
And he no base-born son of craven sires,
Whose eye need blench confronted with his foes.'

'Tears may be ours, but proud, for those who win
Death's royal purple in the foeman's lines;
Peace, too, brings tears; and 'mid the battle-din,
The wiser ear some text of God divines,
For the sheathed blade may rust with darker sin.'

'God, give us peace! not such as lulls to sleep,
But sword on thigh, and brow with purpose knit!
And let our Ship of State to harbor sweep,
Her ports all up, her battle-lanterns lit,
And her leashed thunders gathering for their leap!'

So cried I with clenched hands and passionate pain,
Thinking of dear ones by Potomac's side;
Again the loon laughed mocking, and again
The echoes bayed far down the night and died,
While waking I recalled my wandering brain.

James Russell Lowell

Threnodia

Gone, gone from us! and shall we see
Those sibyl-leaves of destiny,
Those calm eyes, nevermore?
Those deep, dark eyes so warm and bright,
Wherein the fortunes of the man
Lay slumbering in prophetic light,
In characters a child might scan?
So bright, and gone forth utterly!
Oh stern word-Nevermore!

The stars of those two gentle eyes
Will shine no more on earth;
Quenched are the hopes that had their birth,
As we watched them slowly rise,
Stars of a mother's fate;
And she would read them o'er and o'er,
Pondering, as she sate,
Over their dear astrology,
Which she had conned and conned before,
Deeming she needs must read aright
What was writ so passing bright.
And yet, alas! she knew not why.
Her voice would falter in its song,
And tears would slide from out her eye,
Silent, as they were doing wrong.
Oh stern word-Nevermore!

The tongue that scarce had learned to claim
An entrance to a mother's heart
By that dear talisman, a mother's name,
Sleeps all forgetful of its art!
I loved to see the infant soul
(How mighty in the weakness
Of its untutored meekness!)
Peep timidly from out its nest,
His lips, the while,
Fluttering with half-fledged words,
Or hushing to a smile
That more than words expressed,
When his glad mother on him stole
And snatched him to her breast!
Oh, thoughts were brooding in those eyes,
That would have soared like strong-winged birds
Far, far into the skies,
Gladding the earth with song,
And gushing harmonies,
Had he but tarried with us long!
Oh stern word-Nevermore!

How peacefully they rest,
Crossfolded there
Upon his little breast,

Those small, white hands that ne'er were still before,
But ever sported with his mother's hair,
Or the plain cross that on her breast she wore!
Her heart no more will beat
To feel the touch of that soft palm,
That ever seemed a new surprise
Sending glad thoughts up to her eyes
To bless him with their holy calm,-
Sweet thoughts! they made her eyes as sweet.
How quiet are the hands
That wove those pleasant bands!
But that they do not rise and sink
With his calm breathing, I should think
That he were dropped asleep.
Alas! too deep, too deep
Is this his slumber!
Time scarce can number
The years ere he shall wake again.
Oh, may we see his eyelids open then!
Oh stern word-Nevermore!

As the airy gossamere,
Floating in the sunlight clear,
Where'er it toucheth clingeth tightly,
Bound glossy leal or stump unsightly,
So from his spirit wandered out
Tendrils spreading all about,
Knitting all things to its thrall
With a perfect love of all:
Oh stern word-Nevermore!

He did but float a little way
Adown the stream of time,
With dreamy eyes watching the ripples play,
Or hearkening their fairy chime;
His slender sail
Ne'er felt the gale;
He did but float a little way,
And, putting to the shore
While yet 't was early day,
Went calmly on his way,
To dwell with us no more!
No jarring did he feel,
No grating on his shallop's keel;
A strip of silver sand
Mingled the waters with the land
Where he was seen no more:
Oh stern word-Nevermore!

Full short his journey was; no dust
Of earth unto his sandals clave;
The weary weight that old men must,

He bore not to the grave.
He seemed a cherub who had lost his way
And wandered hither, so his stay
With us was short, and 't was most meet
That he should be no delver in earth's clod,
Nor need to pause and cleanse his feet
To stand before his God:
Oh blest word-Evermore!

James Russell Lowell

To a Friend Who gave me a group of weeds and grasses, after a drawing of Dürer

True as the sun's own work, but more refined,
It tells of love behind the artist's eye,
Of sweet companionships with earth and sky,
And summers stored, the sunshine of the mind.
What peace! Sure, ere you breathe, the fickle wind
Will break its truce and bend that grass-plume high,
Scarcely yet quiet from the gilded fly
That flits a more luxurious perch to find.
Thanks for a pleasure that can never pall,
A serene moment, deftly caught and kept
To make immortal summer on my wall.
Had he who drew such gladness ever wept?
Ask rather could he else have seen at all,
Or grown in Nature's mysteries an adept?

James Russell Lowell

To Miss D. T. On her giving me a drawing of little street arabs

As, cleansed of Tiber's and Oblivion's slime,
Glow Farnesina's vaults with shapes again
That dreamed some exiled artist from his pain
Back to his Athens and the Muse's clime,
So these world-orphaned waifs of Want and Crime,
Purged by Art's absolution from the stain
Of the polluting city-flood, regain
Ideal grace secure from taint of time.
An Attic frieze you give, a pictured song;
For as with words the poet paints, for you
The happy pencil at its labour sings,
Stealing his privilege, nor does him wrong,
Beneath the false discovering the true,
And Beauty's best in unregarded things.

James Russell Lowell

To Perdita, Singing

Thy voice is like a fountain,
Leaping up in clear moonshine;
Silver, silver, ever mounting,
 Ever sinking,
 Without thinking,
 To that brimful heart of thine.
Every sad and happy feeling,
Thou hast had in bygone years,
Through thy lips comes stealing, stealing,
 Clear and low;
All thy smiles and all thy tears
 In thy voice awaken,
 And sweetness, wove of joy and woe,
 From their teaching it hath taken:
Feeling and music move together,
Like a swan and shadow ever
Floating on a sky-blue river
In a day of cloudless weather.

It hath caught a touch of sadness,
 Yet it is not sad;
It hath tones of clearest gladness,
 Yet it is not glad;
A dim, sweet twilight voice it is
 Where to-day's accustomed blue
Is over-grayed with memories,
 With starry feelings quivered through.

Thy voice is like a fountain
Leaping up in sunshine bright,
 And I never weary counting
Its clear droppings, lone and single,
Or when in one full gush they mingle,
 Shooting in melodious light.

Thine is music such as yields
Feelings of old brooks and fields,
And, around this pent-up room,
Sheds a woodland, free perfume;
 Oh, thus forever sing to me!
 Oh, thus forever!
The green, bright grass of childhood bring to me,
 Flowing like an emerald river,
 And the bright blue skies above!
Oh, sing them back, as fresh as ever,
 Into the bosom of my love,-
The sunshine and the merriment,
The unsought, evergreen content,
 Of that never cold time,
The joy, that, like a clear breeze, went
 Through and through the old time!
Peace sits within thine eyes,

With white hands crossed in joyful rest,
While, through thy lips and face, arise
The melodies from out thy breast;
 She sits and sings,
 With folded wings
 And white arms crost,
'Weep not for bygone things,
 They are not lost:
The beauty which the summer time
O'er thine opening spirit shed,
The forest oracles sublime
That filled thy soul with joyous dread,
The scent of every smallest flower
That made thy heart sweet for an hour,
Yea, every holy influence,
Flowing to thee, thou knewest not whence,
In thine eyes to-day is seen,
Fresh as it hath ever been;
Promptings of Nature, beckonings sweet,
Whatever led thy childish feet,
Still will linger unawares
The guiders of thy silver hairs;
Every look and every word
Which thou givest forth to-day,
Tell of the singing of the bird
Whose music stilled thy boyish play.'

Thy voice is like a fountain,
Twinkling up in sharp starlight,
When the moon behind the mountain
Dims the low East with faintest white,
 Ever darkling,
 Ever sparkling,
 We know not if 'tis dark or bright;
But, when the great moon hath rolled round,
 And, sudden-slow, its solemn power
Grows from behind its black, clear-edged bound,
 No spot of dark the fountain keepeth,
 But, swift as opening eyelids, leapeth
 Into a waving silver flower.

James Russell Lowell

To the Dandelion

Dear common flower, that grow'st beside the way,
Fringing the dusty road with harmless gold,
 First pledge of blithesome May,
Which children pluck, and, full of pride uphold,
 High-hearted buccaneers, o'erjoyed that they
An Eldorado in the grass have found,
 Which not the rich earth's ample round
 May match in wealth, thou art more dear to me
 Than all the prouder summer-blooms may be.

Gold such as thine ne'er drew the Spanish prow
Through the primeval hush of Indian seas,
 Nor wrinkled the lean brow
Of age, to rob the lover's heart of ease;
'Tis the Spring's largess, which she scatters now
To rich and poor alike, with lavish hand,
 Though most hearts never understand
 To take it at God's value, but pass by
 The offered wealth with unrewarded eye.

Thou art my tropics and mine Italy;
To look at thee unlocks a warmer clime;
 The eyes thou givest me
Are in the heart, and heed not space or time:
 Not in mid June the golden-cuirassed bee
Feels a more summer-like warm ravishment
 In the white lily's breezy tent,
 His fragrant Sybaris, than I, when first
 From the dark green thy yellow circles burst.

Then think I of deep shadows on the grass,
Of meadows where in sun the cattle graze,
 Where, as the breezes pass,
The gleaming rushes lean a thousand ways,
 Of leaves that slumber in a cloudy mass,
Or whiten in the wind, of waters blue
 That from the distance sparkle through
 Some woodland gap, and of a sky above,
 Where one white cloud like a stray lamb doth move.

My childhood's earliest thoughts are linked with thee;
The sight of thee calls back the robin's song,
 Who, from the dark old tree
Beside the door, sang clearly all day long,
 And I, secure in childish piety,
Listened as if I heard an angel sing
 With news from heaven, which he could bring
 Fresh every day to my untainted ears
 When birds and flowers and I were happy peers.

How like a prodigal doth nature seem,
When thou, for all thy gold, so common art!

Thou teachest me to deem
More sacredly of every human heart,
Since each reflects in joy its scanty gleam
Of heaven, and could some wondrous secret show,
Did we but pay the love we owe,
And with a child's undoubting wisdom look
On all these living pages of God's book.

James Russell Lowell

Trial

I

Whether the idle prisoner through his grate
Watches the waving of the grass-tuft small,
Which, having colonized its rift i' th' wall,
Accepts God's dole of good or evil fate,
And from the sky's just helmet draws its lot
Daily of shower or sunshine, cold or hot;-
Whether the closer captive of a creed,
Cooped up from birth to grind out endless chaff,
Sees through his treadmill-bars the noonday laugh,
And feels in vain, his crumpled pinions breed;-
Whether the Georgian slave look up and mark,
With bellying sails puffed full, the tall cloud-bark
Sink northward slowly, -thou alone seem'st good,
Fair only thou, O Freedom, whose desire
Can light in muddiest souls quick seeds of fire,
And strain life's chords to the old heroic mood.

II

Yet are there other gifts more fair than thine,
Nor can I count him happiest who has never
Been forced with his own hand his chains to sever,
And for himself find out the way divine;
He never knew the aspirer's glorious pains,
He never earned the struggle's priceless gains.
Oh, block by block, with sore and sharp endeavor,
Lifelong we build these human natures up
Into a temple fit for Freedom's shrine,
And, Trial ever consecrates the cup
Wherefrom we pour her sacrificial wine.

James Russell Lowell

What Mr. Robinson thinks

Guvener B. is a sensible man;
He stays to his home an' looks arter his folks;
He draws his furrer ez straight ez he can,
An' into nobody's tater-patch pokes;—
But John P.
Robinson he
Sez he wunt vote fer Guvener B.

My! aint it terrible? Wut shall we du?
We can't never choose him o' course,—thet's flat;
Guess we shall hev to come round, (don't you?)
An' go in fer thunder an' guns, an' all that;
Fer John P.
Robinson he
Sez he wunt vote fer Guvener

Gincral C. is a dreffle smart man:
He's ben on all sides thet give places or pelf;
But consistency still wuz a part of his plan,—
He's been true to one party—an' thet is himself;—
So John P.
Robinson he
Sez he shall vote fer General C.

General C. he goes in fer the war;
He don't vally principle more 'n an old cud;
Wut did God make us raytional creeturs fer,
But glory an' gunpowder, plunder an' blood?
So John P.
Robinson he
Sez he shall vote fer General C.

We were gittin' on nicely up here to our village,
With good old idees o' wut's right an' wut aint
We kind o' thought Christ went agin war an' pillage,
An' thet eppyletts worn't the best mark of a saint,
But John P.
Robinson he
Sez this kind o' thing's an exploded idee.

The side of our country must oilers be took,
An' Presidunt Polk' you know he is our country.
An' the angel thet writes all our sins in a book
Puts the debit to him, an' to us the per contry
An' John P.
Robinson he
Sez this is his view o' the thing to a T.

Parson Wilbur he calls all these argimunts lies;
Sez they're nothin' on airth but jest fee, faw, fum:
An' thet all this big talk of our destinies
Is half on it ign'ance, an' t' other half rum,

But John P.
Robinson he
Sez it aint no seek thing; an', of course, so must we.

Parson Wilbur sez he never heerd in his life
Thet th' Apostles rigged out in their swaller-tail coats,
An' marched round in front of a drum an' a fife,
To git some on 'em office, an' some on 'em votes,
But John P.
Robinson he
Sez they didn't know everthin' down in Judee.

Wal, it's a marcy we've gut folks to tell us
The rights an' the wrongs o' these matters,
I vow, God sends country lawyers, an' other wise fellers
To start the world's team wen it gits in a Slough;
Fer John P.
Robinson he
Sez the world 'll go right, ef he hollers out Gee!

James Russell Lowell

Winter Evening Hymn To My Fire

Nicotia, dearer to the Muse
Than all the grape's bewildering juice,
We worship, unforbid of thee;
And as her incense floats and curls
In airy spires and wayward whirls,
Or poises on its tremulous stalk
A flower of frailest reverie,
So winds and loiters, idly free,
The current of unguided talk,
Now laughter-rippled, and now caught
In smooth dark pools of deeper thought
Meanwhile thou mellowest every word,
A sweetly unobtrusive third;
For thou hast magic beyond wine
To unlock natures each to each;
The unspoken thought thou canst divine;
Thou fill'st the pauses of the speech
With whispers that to dreamland reach,
And frozen fancy-springs unchain
In Arctic outskirts of the brain.
Sun of all inmost confidences,
To thy rays doth the heart unclose
Its formal calyx of pretences,
That close against rude day's offences,
And open its shy midnight rose!

James Russell Lowell

With a Pressed Flower

This little blossom from afar
Hath come from other lands to thine;
For, once, its white and drooping star
Could see its shadow in the Rhine.

Perchance some fair-haired German maid
Hath plucked one from the selfsame stalk,
And numbered over, half afraid,
Its petals in her evening walk.

'He loves me, loves me not,' she cries;
'He loves me more than earth or heaven!'
And then glad tears have filled her eyes
To find the number was uneven.

And thou must count its petals well,
Because it is a gift from me;
And the last one of all shall tell
Something I've often told to thee.

But here at home, where we were born,
Thou wilt find blossoms just as true,
Down-bending every summer morn,
With freshness of New England dew.

For Nature, ever kind to love,
Hath granted them the same sweet tongue,
Whether with German skies above,
Or here our granite rocks among.

James Russell Lowell

Without And Withiin

My coachman, in the moonlight there,
Looks through the sidelight of the door;
I hear him with his brethren swear,
As I could do—but only more.

Flattening his nose against the pane,
He envies me my brilliant lot,
Breathes on his aching fist in vain,
And dooms me to a place more hot.

He sees me into supper go,
A silken wonder at my side,
Bare arms, bare shoulders, and a row
Of flounces, for the door too wide.

He thinks how happy is my arm,
'Neath its white-gloved and jeweled load;
And wishes me some dreadful harm,
Hearing the merry corks explode.

Meanwhile I inly curse the bore
Of hunting still the same old coon,
And envy him, outside the door,
The golden quiet of the moon.

The winter wind is not so cold
As the bright smile he sees me win,
Nor the host's oldest wine so old
As our poor gabble, sour and thin.

I envy him the rugged prance
By which his freezing feet he warms,
And drag my lady's chains and dance,
The galley-slave of dreary forms.

Oh, could he have my share of din,
And I his quiet—past a doubt
'Twould still be one man bored within,
And just another bored without.

James Russell Lowell