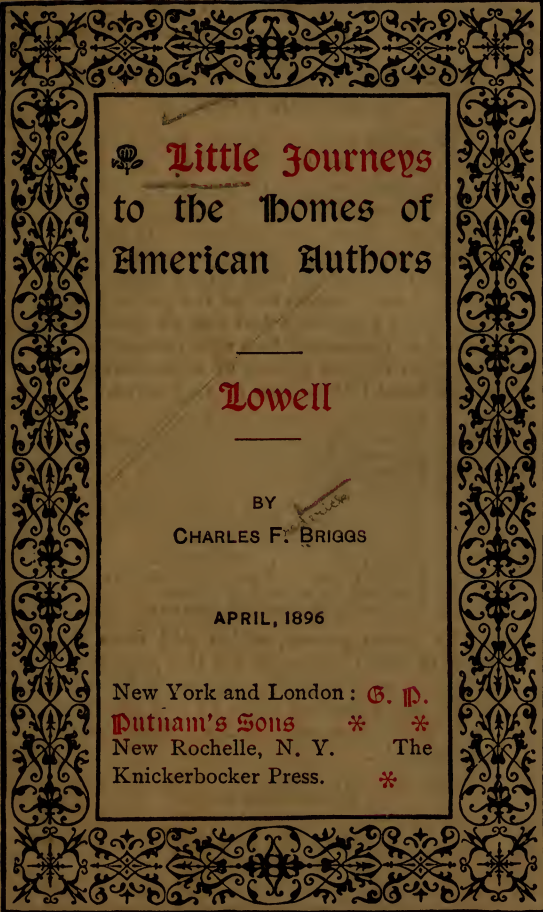



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 **Little Journeys**
to the Homes of
American Authors

—
Lowell
—

BY
CHARLES F. BRIGGS

APRIL, 1896

New York and London: G. D.
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Little Journeys

SERIES FOR 1896

Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors

The papers below specified, were, with the exception of that contributed by the editor, Mr. Hubbard, originally issued by the late G. P. Putnam, in 1853, in a series entitled *Homes of American Authors*. It is now nearly half a century since this series (which won for itself at the time a very noteworthy prestige) was brought before the public; and the present publishers feel that no apology is needed in presenting to a new generation of American readers papers of such distinctive biographical interest and literary value.

- No. 1, Emerson, by Geo. W. Curtis.
“ 2, Bryant, by Caroline M. Kirkland.
“ 3, Prescott, by Geo. S. Hillard.
“ 4, Lowell, by Charles F. Briggs.
“ 5, Simms, by Wm. Cullen Bryant.
“ 6, Walt Whitman, by Elbert Hubbard.
“ 7, Hawthorne, by Geo. Wm. Curtis.
“ 8, Audubon, by Parke Godwin.
“ 9, Irving, by H. T. Tuckerman.
“ 10, Longfellow, by Geo. Wm. Curtis.
“ 11, Everett, by Geo. S. Hillard.
“ 12, Bancroft, by Geo. W. Greene.

The above papers, which will form the series of *Little Journeys* for the year 1896, will be issued monthly, beginning January, in the same general style as the series of 1895, at 50 cts. a year. Single copies, 5 cts., postage paid.

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JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

To Charles F. Briggs.

ELMWOOD, *Aug.*, 21, 1845.

My sorrows are not literary ones, but those of daily life. I pass through the world and meet with scarcely a response to the affectionateness of my nature. Brought up in a very reserved and conventional family, I cannot in society appear what I really am. I go out sometimes with my heart so full of yearning towards my fellows that the indifferent look with which even entire strangers pass me brings tears into my eyes. And then to be looked upon by those who *do* know me (externally) as "Lowell the poet" it makes me sick. Why not as Lowell the man—the boy rather,—as Jemmy Lowell?

JAMES R. LOWELL.

FOREWORD

How it strikes a contemporary is always interesting; and inadvertence, like irrelevance, has its charm. These things being true, this essay written forty-three years ago is valuable. The author tells with a poorly masked boast that the grandfather of Mr. Lowell was a Member of Congress. For the grandson no such leap into greatness was prophesied—it was too much! And as for the Court of St. James, Mr. Briggs had n't imagination enough to dream of it. Yet I remember when the papers announced that our plain Harvard professor had been appointed Minister to England we boys thought of the big shaggy dog that tagged him through the street, of the briar-wood pipe, and the dusty suit of gray, and we were struck dumb with amazement.

Then, when Mr. Briggs quotes *The Courtin'*, and gives his idea of "true poetry" and "art," we bethink us that we have a few ideas in this line ourselves, and pass on.

Foreword

The reference to Maria White brings to mind *The Letters*, and we remember the poet's various references to this splendid woman.

Mr. Briggs admits that his subject is an abolitionist—'t were vain to deny it—but he is not an unreasonable fanatical abolitionist, for, mark you, even Southerners read his poetry. Well, I guess so! And, thus Mr. Briggs saves Mr. Lowell's reputation and his own—forsooth, for wise men trim ship; and a list to starboard is as bad as a list to port if you are an all 'round literary man with manuscript to market. So we think no more of Lowell on account of the Briggs' apology and no less of Briggs. A shifty loyalty is ever entertaining when viewed across the intervening years. And we smile, but the smile turns to a sigh when we remember that Briggs, like his fears, is now dust; and that in Mt. Auburn where three weeping willows stand guard, sleeps a beloved nephew of Lowell given to the cause that "raised such a commotion." A step away are simple little slate slabs that mark the graves of "James Russell Lowell, and Maria White, his wife."

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

BY CHAS. F. BRIGGS.*

CAMBRIDGE is one of the very few towns in New England that is worth visiting for the sake of its old houses. It has its full share of turreted and bedomed cottages, of piecrust battlements, and Athenian temples; but its chief glory, besides its elms, and "muses' factories," are the fine old wooden mansions, which seem to be indigenous to the soil on which they stand, like the stately trees that surround them. These well-preserved relics of our ante-revolutionary splendor are not calculated

* Written in 1853 for Putnam's *Homes of American Authors*.

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to make us feel proud of our advancement in architectural taste, since we achieved our independence ; and we cannot help thinking that men who are fond of building make-believe baronial castles, never could have had the spirit to dream of asserting their independence of the old world. People who are afraid to trust their own invention in so simple a thing as house-building, could never have trusted themselves in the more important business of government-making. Yet some of these fine old houses, that have so manly and independent a look, were built by stanch, conservative tories, who feared republicanism, and had no faith at all in the possibility of a state without a king.

The stately old mansion in which the poet Lowell was born, one of the finest in the neighborhood of Boston, was built by Thomas Oliver, the last royal Lieutenant-Governor of the province of Massachusetts, who remained true to his allegiance, and after the Declaration of

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Independence removed to England, where he died. In Eliot's Biographical Dictionary of the first settlers in New England, is the following brief account of this sturdy royalist :

“Thomas Oliver was the last Lieutenant-Governor under the crown. He was a man of letters, and possessed of much good nature and good breeding ; he was affable, courteous, a complete gentleman in his manners, and the delight of his acquaintance. He graduated at Harvard College in 1753. He built an elegant mansion in Cambridge, and enjoyed a plentiful fortune. When he left America it was with extreme regret. He lived in the shades of retirement while in Europe, and very lately (1809) his death was announced in the public papers.”

The character of the man might easily have been told from examining his house ; it bears the marks of a generous and amiable nature, as unerringly as such qualities are denoted by the shape of the head. Mean men do not build themselves such

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habitations. Much good nature is plainly traceable in its fine large rooms, and its capacious chimneys, which might well be called

The wind-pipe of good hospitalite.

It has a broad staircase with easy landings, and a hall wide enough for a traditional duel to have been fought in it, when, like many of the neighboring mansions, it was occupied by revolutionary soldiers. Washington, too, was once entertained under its roof, and after the war it became the property of Elbridge Gerry, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, who lived in it, while he was Vice-President of the United States. At his death it was purchased from the widow of Gerry by its present owner, the Rev. Charles Lowell, father of the Poet, by whom it was beautified and improved. Dr. Lowell planted the greater part of the noble trees which now surround it, conspicuous among them being the superb elms from which it derives its

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name. The grounds of Elmwood are about thirteen acres in extent, and adjoin on one side the cemetery of Mount Auburn, where two of the Poet's children, Blanche and Rose, are buried. It was on the grave of his firstborn that the beautiful poem, full of heartfelt tenderness, called *The First Snow-fall*, was written.

Some of Lowell's finest poems have trees for their themes, and he appears to entertain a strong affection for the leafy patriarchs beneath whose branches he had played in his boyhood. In one of the many poems which have overflowed from his prodigal genius into the columns of obscure monthly and weekly periodicals, and have not yet been published in a volume, is one called *A Day in June*, in which occurs an exquisitely touching apostrophe to the "tall elm" that forms so conspicuous an object in the view of Elmwood drawn by our artist :

Snap, chord of manhood's tenser strain ;
To-day I will be a boy again ;
The mind's pursuing element,
Like a bow slackened and unbent,

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In some dark corner shall be leant ;
The robin sings, as of old, from the limb,
The cat-bird crows in the lilac bush ;
Through the dim arbor, himself more dim,
Silently hops the hermit-thrush,
The withered leaves keep dumb for him ;
The irreverent buccaneering bee
Hath stormed and rifled the nunnery
Of the lily, and scattered the sacred floor
With haste-dropt gold from shrine to door :
There, as of yore,
The rich milk-tinging buttercup,
Its tiny polished urn holds up,
Filled with ripe summer to the edge,
The sun in his own wine to pledge ;
And one tall elm, this hundredth year
Doge of our leafy Venice here,
Who with an annual ring doth wed
The blue Adriatic overhead,
Shadows with his palatial mass
The deep canals of flowing grass,
Where grow the dandelions sparse
For shadows of Italian stars.

Lowell has studied in the life-school of poetry, and all the pictures which he has woven into the texture of his verse have been drawn directly from nature. His descriptions of scenery are full of local coloring, and, in his *Indian Summer Reverie*, there are so many accurate and vivid pictures of Elmwood and its neighborhood, of the "silver Charles,"

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the meadows, the trees, the distant hills, the colleges, "the glimmering farms," and "Coptic tombs," that we need hardly do more than transfer them to our pages to give a vivid picture of his home and its associations.

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 the red brick, which softening time
 defies,
Stand square and stiff the Muses' factories ;
How with my life knit up in every well-known
 scene !

Beyond that hillock's house-bespotted swell,
Where Gothic chapels house the horse and chaise,
Where quiet cits in Grecian temples dwell,
Where Coptic tombs resound with prayer and
 praise
Where dust and mud the equal year divide,
There gentle Alston lived, and wrought and died,
Transfiguring street and shop with his illumined
 gaze.

In this brilliant descriptive poem he exhibits his native town in a series of changing pictures that bring the scenes perfectly before us under all the varying

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phases of the year. What landscape painter has given us such pictures as these of the approaches of a New England winter?

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 firmer ice the boy eager awaits,
Trying each buckle and strap beside the fire,
And until bed-time plays with his desire,
Twenty times putting on and off his new-bought
skates.

Our poet was born at Elmwood on the 22d of February, 1819—the youngling of the flock, received his early education in Cambridge, and in 1838 graduated at Harvard, where his father and grandfather had graduated before him. After his

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“colleging” he studied law, and was admitted to the bar ; but he had opened an office in Boston, to lure clients, a very little while, when he discovered that he and the legal profession were not designed for each other. There could not have been a more uncongenial and unprofitable pursuit than that of the law for a nature so frank and generous as that of Lowell’s ; and, happily for him, necessity, which knows no law, did not compel him, as it has many others, to stick to the law, for a living, against his inclinations. So he abandoned all thoughts of the ermine, and of figuring in sheepskin volumes, if he had ever indulged in any such fancies, which is hardly probable, and, turning his back on a profession which is fitly typified by a woman with a bandage over her eyes, he turned to his books and trees at Elmwood, determined on making literature his reliance for fame and fortune.

His first start in literature, as a business, ended disastrously. In company with his friend Robert Carter, he established

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a monthly magazine called the *Pioneer*, which, owing to the failure of his publishers, did not last longer than the third number ; but it was admirably well conducted, and made a decided impression on the literary public by the elevated tone of its criticisms, and the superiority of its essays to the ordinary class of magazine literature. Soon after the failure of the *Pioneer* he was married to Miss Maria White, of Watertown, a lady of congenial tastes, and as remarkable for her womanly graces and accomplishments, as for her elevated intellectual qualities. *The Morning Glory*, published in the last edition of his poems, was written by her. They have resided at Elmwood since their marriage, with the exception of a year and a half spent in Italy.

The ancestors of Lowell were among the earliest and most eminent settlers of New England, and there are but few Americans who could boast of a more honorable or distinguished descent. He was named after his father's maternal

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grandfather, Judge James Russell, of Charlestown, an eminent person in the colony of Massachusetts, one of whose descendants, Lechmere Russell, a general in the British army, recently died at his seat of Ashford Hall in Shropshire. The founder of the Lowell family in Massachusetts was Percival Lowell, who settled in the town of Newbury in the year 1639. The Hon. John Lowell, the Poet's grandfather, was one of the most eminent lawyers in Massachusetts ; he was a representative in Congress, and being a member of the convention which framed the first constitution of his native State, he introduced the provision into the Bill of Rights which abolished slavery in Massachusetts.

The father of Mr. Lowell is a distinguished Congregational clergyman, who has been pastor of the West Church of Boston nearly fifty years, and is the author of several works of a religious character ; he graduated at Harvard, and was an intimate friend and class-mate of

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Washington Alston. He afterwards went to Edinburgh, where he studied divinity, and matriculated at the University there at the same time with Sir David Brewster, who was also a divinity student.

A few years ago, when Dr. Lowell was in Scotland with his wife and daughter, he paid a visit to Melrose Abbey, and while there heard a man tell another that Sir David Brewster would be with him directly. He had not met the eminent philosopher since they were students together, and did not know that he was in the neighborhood of his old friend's house, which he learned, on inquiry, was the fact. When the philosopher appeared, Dr. Lowell made himself known, and found, from the heartiness of the embrace he received, that an interval of forty years had not diminished the attachment of his early friend and companion.

The mother of the Poet was a native of New Hampshire, and a sister of the late Captain Robert T. Spence, of the U. S. Navy. She was a woman of remarkable

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mind, and possessed in an eminent degree the power of acquiring languages, a faculty which is inherited by her daughter, Mrs. Putnam, whose controversy with Mr. Bowen, editor of the *North American Review*, respecting the late war in Hungary, brought her name so prominently before the public that there can be no impropriety in alluding to her here. Mrs. Putnam is probably one of the most remarkable of linguists, and there have been but few scholars whose philological learning has been greater than hers. She converses readily in French, Italian, German, Polish, Swedish, and Hungarian, and is familiar with twenty modern dialects, besides Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Persic, and Arabic. Mrs. Putnam made the first translation into English of Frederica Bremer's novel of *The Neighbors*, from the Swedish. The translation by Mary Howitt was made from the German.

The maternal ancestors of Lowell were of Danish origin, and emigrated to Amer-

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ica from Kirkwall, in the Orkneys. While Dr. Lowell was in Scotland with his family, they went to the Orkneys to visit the burial-place of his wife's forefathers, and while there they met a cousin, a native of England, whom Mrs. Lowell had never before seen, who had been many years in India, and on his return to his native land, had gone, like her, on a pious pilgrimage to visit the graves of his ancestors.

Among all the authors whose homes are noticed in this series, Lowell is the only one who has the fortune to reside in the house in which he was born. It is a happiness which few Americans of mature age can know. But Lowell has been peculiarly happy in his domestic relations ; Nature has endowed him with a vigorous constitution and a healthy and happy temperament ; and, but for the loss of his three children, the youngest of whom, his only boy, died recently in Rome, there would have been fewer shadows on his path than have fallen to the

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lot of most other poets. A nature like his can make its own sunshine, and find an oasis in every desert; yet it was a rare fortune that he found himself in such a home as his imagination would have created for him, if he had been cast homeless upon the world. He loves to throw a purple light over the familiar scene, and to invest it with a superfluousness of grateful gilding. The large-hearted love to give, whether their gifts be needed or not. The lovely landscape around Elmwood looks still lovelier in his verse than to the unaided vision; and the "dear marshes" through which the briny Charles ebbs and flows, are pleasanter for being seen through the golden haze of the Poet's affection:

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 casket, like an inland pond—
Slips seaward silently through marshes purple
and green.

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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 largess of variety,
For nature with cheap means still works her
wonders rare.

Elmwood is half a mile or so beyond the colleges, and lies off from the main street; the approach to it is through a pleasant green lane, or at least it was green when we last saw it, the trees having been freshly washed of their "brown dust" by a shower which was still falling, and the muddy division of the year having apparently just commenced. The house is so surrounded with trees that you catch but a glimpse of it until you stand opposite to it. Though built of wood, and nearly a century old, it shows no signs of decay. It is most appropriately furnished, and contains many interesting relics, old family pictures, and some choice works of art, among which are two busts by Powers, and two or three portraits by Page, among the finest he

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has painted. Perhaps it may be gratifying to the reader to know that the Poet's study, in which nearly all of his poems have been written, is on the third floor, in that far corner of the house on which, in the engraving, the light falls so pleasantly.

Lowell is generally looked upon as a serious poet, and, indeed, no one has a better claim to be so regarded, for seriousness is one of the first essentials of all genuine poetry. But seriousness is not necessarily sadness. Much of his poetry overflows with mirthful and jocund feelings, and, in his most pungent satire there is a constant bubbling up of a genial and loving nature; the brilliant flashes of his wit are softened by an evident gentleness of motive. He is the first of our poets who has succeeded in making our harsh and uncouth Yankee dialect subservient to the uses of poetry; this he has done with entire success in that admirable piece of humorous satire, *The Bigelow Papers*. No productions of a

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similar character, in this country, were ever held so popular as the pithy verses of Hosea Bigelow, in spite of their being so strongly imbued with a trenchant spirit of opposition to the popular political views of the multitude; and many of them have been widely circulated by the newspapers without any intimation being given of their origin. We were sitting one evening in the bar-room of a hotel in Washington, just after the election of General Taylor, when our poetical metropolis was filled with office-seekers from all parts of the country. The room was crowded with rude men who were discussing political matters, and the last thing we could have looked for was a harangue on American poetry. A roughly-dressed down-easter, or at least he had the accent and look of one, came into the bar-room, and addressing himself to a knot of men who appeared to know him, exclaimed, "Who says there are no American poets?" And he looked around upon the company, as though he would be

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rather pleased than otherwise to encounter an antagonist.

But nobody seemed disposed to venture such an assertion; the novelty of the question, however, attracted the attention of the people near him, which was probably all he wanted. "Well," continued the speaker, with an air of defiant confidence, "if anybody says so, I am prepared to dispute him. I have found an American poet. I don't know who he is, nor where he lives, but he is the author of these lines, and he is a poet." He took a newspaper from his pocket, and read what Parson Wilbur, in the *Bigelow Papers*, called a *New England Pastoral* ;

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

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

The wannut logs shot sparkless out
Toward the pootiest, bless her !

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An' leetle fires danced all about
The chiny on the dresser.

The very room, coz she was in,
Looked warm frum floor to ceilin',
An' she looked full as rosy agin
Ez th' apples she wus peelin'.

She heerd a foot an' knowed it, tu,
Araspin' on the scraper,—
All ways to once her feelins flew
Like sparks in burnt-up paper.

He kin' o' l'itered on the mat,
Some doubtfle o' the seekle ;
His heart kep' goin' pitypat,
But hern went pity Zekle.

The Yankee read it with proper emphasis and an unctuous twang, and all the company agreed with him, that it was genuine poetry "and no mistake."

And so poetry makes its way in the crowd. If it have the true spirit in it, it will find a sure response in the great heart of the multitude, who are, after all, the only judges in art. There is no appeal from their decisions. And, in the case of Lowell, the decision was unmistakably in his favor. He is acknowledged as one of the poets of the people. There are

James Russell Lowell

none of our poets whose short pieces we find more frequently in the corners of newspapers, although they are but rarely attributed to their author.

Lowell's prose writings are as remarkable as his poetry ; the copiousness of his illustrations, the richness of his imagery, the easy flow of his sentences, the keenness of his wit, and the force and clearness of his reasoning, give to his reviews and essays a fascinating charm that would place him in the front rank of our prose writers, if he did occupy a similar position among our poets. He has written considerably for the *North American Review*, and some other periodicals, but the only volume of prose which he published, besides the *Bigelow Papers*, was the *Conversations on the Old Dramatists*, which appeared in 1849.

Lowell is naturally a politician, but we do not imagine he will ever be elected a member of Congress, as his grandfather was. He is such a politician as Milton was, and will never narrow himself down

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to any other party than one which includes all mankind within its lines. But he cannot shut his eyes to the great movements of the day, and dally with his Muse, when he can invoke her aid in the cause of the oppressed and suffering. He has to contend with the disadvantages of a reputation for abolitionism, which is as unfavorable to the prospects of a poet as of a politician ; but his abolitionism is of a very different type from that which has made so great a commotion among us during the last ten or fifteen years. Notwithstanding the unpopular imputation which rests upon his name, it does not appear to have made him enemies in the South. Some of his warmest and most attached friends are residents of slave States and are slave-holders ; and one of the heartiest and most appreciative criticisms on his writings that have appeared in this country was published in a Southern journal, a paper which can hardly be suspected of giving aid and encouragement to any enemy of the South.

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Not so terrible to the enemy as it is!*
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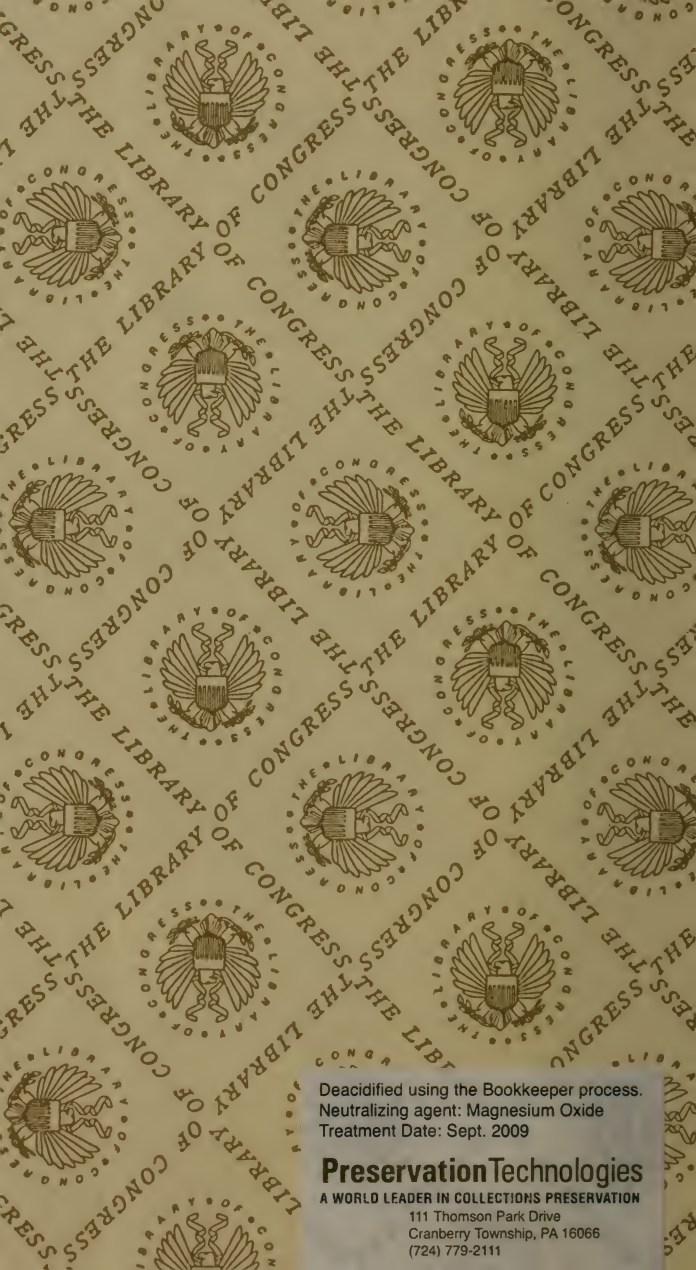


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