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— BY —

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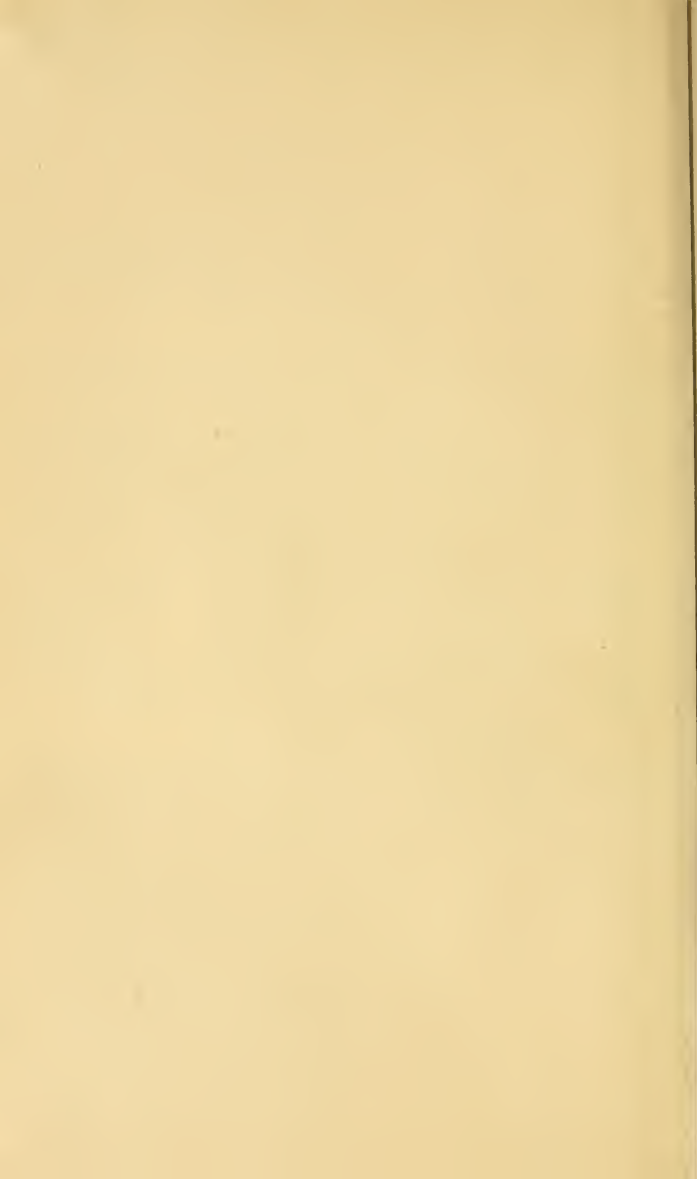
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LIFE OF LOWELL.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL was born at Cambridge, Massachusetts, February 22, 1819. His first American ancestor was Percival Lowell, who sailed from Bristol, England, in 1639 for the New World, and settled at Newbury. The descendants of Percival were respectively a cooper, a shoemaker, a minister, a statesman, the author of the clause in the Massachusetts Constitution abolishing slavery, and a "learned, saintly, and discreet" Unitarian minister, Charles Lowell, the father of the poet. The home of the Lowells at Cambridge was an old three-storied colonial mansion, called Elmwood, which had been built in 1767 by Thomas Oliver, the last royal Lieutenant-Governor before the Revolution. Here the poet was born and here he lived and died.

His early education was obtained from a retired publisher who kept a small school near Elmwood and instilled what classical knowledge he could into the small boys of the neighborhood. One of his schoolmates has described Lowell as a quiet lad, averse to taking part in the rough games of the schoolboys, and inordinately fond of reading. At Harvard the same taste was evident. He read widely, but without system. He was accustomed to say that at college he read almost everything—*except* the college text-books. Learning in its higher sense came to him later.

In 1843 Lowell published his first volume of poems, which he afterwards called

" the firstlings of my muse,
Poor windfalls of unripe experience."

The public was not profoundly stirred by these first efforts of Lowell's genius, though some of his college friends had a deep conviction that he was inspired by a divine mission. The first real success, and it was a very real success, attained by the young poet was with the *Biglow Papers*, a series of poems in the Yankee dialect, dealing humorously with the great dispute over the slave question, which was just then at its hottest. Lowell was a strong abolitionist and as such was a valuable ally to the reformers. Hitherto the laugh had been entirely at their expense, but he completely turned the tables, and soon the verses were jingling all over the country, doing good service in the great cause.

In 1844 Lowell married Miss Maria White, of Watertown, near Cambridge, and for nine years lived an idyllic life at Elmwood. In 1853 Mrs. Lowell died. Her death was the occasion for one of Longfellow's most exquisite poems, a natural tribute between poets.

Notwithstanding the sudden success of the *Biglow Papers*, it was not Lowell's intention to remain merely a writer of satire. In 1848 he wrote *The Vision of Sir Launfal* in a sort of fine frenzy; composing the whole poem in the space of forty-eight hours, during which he hardly ate or slept. This poem at once became popular and has remained one of the dearest literary heirlooms of the country. In the same year a third volume of poems appeared, among them some of his best. The *Fable for Critics*, a series of dashing sketches of American authors, was also written at this time. Lowell's critical judgment was nearly faultless; many of the sketches in the *Fable for Critics* seem now almost prophetic.

When Longfellow retired from the Harvard professorship of modern languages the authorities at once "chose Lowell as his most fitting successor," thus forging

another link in the long chain of illustrious men who have raised Harvard to her proud position. No professor was ever more popular with his classes than Lowell, and no man was better fitted to speak on literary subjects. His lectures on Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Cervantes made an ineffaceable impression on those who were fortunate enough to hear him.

In 1857 Lowell married a second wife, Miss Frances Dunlap, of Portland, Maine, a cultivated lady who had undertaken the education of his daughter.

A diplomatic appointment was a fitting tribute to a man of Lowell's brilliant intellectual and social qualities. In 1877 he was appointed minister to Spain and in 1880 was transferred to England, where for five years he represented the United States with a supreme tact which it is safe to say has been equaled by no other modern diplomatist. The year 1885 saw him again settled among his books at Elmwood, where he lived for the remainder of his life, still writing and occasionally lecturing. He died in 1891, sincerely mourned by all English-speaking peoples. Probably no man has so endeared himself on both sides of the water, and the extraordinary honor of having a service held in his memory at Westminster Abbey shows the deep impress which he left on the hearts of the English people. With us he will always be one of the great fixed stars in the firmament of American letters.

CRITICAL OPINIONS.

IN the few words of sympathetic criticism to which Mr. Lowell gave utterance at the Gray Memorial ceremony at Cambridge [University, England], he remarked, though in no disparaging way, on the extent to which the element of the "commonplace" in Gray's most famous poem had contributed to its world-wide popularity. It is to the lack of this quality in Mr. Lowell's own verse that it owes, one may suspect, its comparatively narrow circle of admirers. The American poet whom all Englishmen know, and than whom few Englishmen know other, was assuredly master of this, not "golden," but plain, serviceable locksmith's-metal key to the popular heart. It need not be said—it would, indeed, be foolish to say it—in a sneering spirit, but the element of commonplace in Longfellow, the precipitate of salts insoluble in poetry which one finds at the bottom of that pellucid verse, is extraordinarily large; and the average reader who prizes his poetry for the solid residuum it leaves behind it, after its purely poetic qualities have disappeared through the not very fine-meshed strainer of his imagination, appraises his Longfellow accordingly. The knack of infusing this ingredient into his poetry in the proportion approved of by the popular palate did not come naturally to Mr. Lowell and he has never acquired it. His poetic faculty, as we trace it through some thirty years of productive effort, shares the healthy growth of a healthy mind, but has never developed that useful form of adipose tissue which serves, at the expense no doubt of the higher quality of beauty, to keep warm the poetry—and the poet. On the other hand, it is but just to Mr. Lowell to add that he has not allowed his verse to run, in revenge, into that angularity of manner which too many poets not accepted by the multitude are wont to cultivate of malice prepense—the overstrained protest of classic severity of outline against the too buxom contours of the "popular" muse.

Mr. Lowell's poetry has simply gone on perfecting itself in form and finish, until now he is as complete a specimen of "a literary man's poet," of the consummate artist in expression,—whom the lover of the art of expression is hard put to it to judge impartially, from sheer delight in his workmanship,—as it would be easy to find in a summer day's hunt through a well-filled library.

It is not difficult to trace the literary influences which have molded this highly-wrought, this artless-artful poetic manner. In the introduction to the *Biglow Papers* Mr. Lowell observes with pride that the nineteenth-century New Englander "feels more at home with Fulke Greville, Herbert of Cherbury, Quarles, George Herbert, and Browne, than with his modern English cousins."—H. D. TRAILL, *Fortnightly Review*.

PROBABLY no American student was so deeply versed in the old French romance, none knew Dante and the Italians more profoundly; German literature was familiar to him, and perhaps even Ticknor in his own domain of Spanish lore was not more a master than Lowell. The whole range of English literature, not only its noble Elizabethan heights, but a delightful realm of picturesque and unfrequented paths were his familiar park of pleasance. Yet he was not a scholarly recluse, a pedant, or a bookworm. The student of books was no less so acute and trained an observer of nature, so sensitive to the influences and aspects of out-of-door life that as Charles Briggs with singular insight said that he was meant for a politician, so Darwin with frank admiration said that he was born to be a naturalist.—GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS.

THERE is a beautiful feeling in Lowell's poems of Nature. Wordsworth has dwelt upon the contrast between the youthful regard for Nature,—the feeling of a healthy and impassioned child,—and that of the philosopher who finds in her a sense "of something far

more deeply interfused." The latter is a gift that makes us grave. It led Bryant to worship and invocation; and now, in the new light of science, we seek for, rather than feel, the soul of things. The charm of Lowell's outdoor verse lies in its spontaneity; he loves Nature with a childlike joy, her boon companion, finding even in her illusions welcome and relief,—just as one gives himself up to a story or a play, and will not be a doubter. Here he never ages, and he beguiles you and me to share his joy. It does me good to see a poet who knows a bird or flower as one friend knows another, yet loves it for itself alone.

I think, also, that *The Vision of Sir Launfal* owed its success quite as much to a presentation of Nature as to its misty legend. It really is a landscape-poem, of which the lovely passage, "And what is so rare as a day in June?" and the wintry prelude to Part Second, are the specific features. Like the *Legend of Brittany*, it was a return to poetry as poetry, and a sign that the author was groping for a theme equal to his reserved strength.

Lowell, then, is a poet who seems to represent New England more variously than either of his comrades. We find in his work, as in theirs, her loyalty and moral purpose. She has been at cost for his training, and he, in turn, has read her whole heart, honoring her as a mother before the world, and seeing beauty in her common garb and speech. To him, the Eastern States are what the fathers, as he has said, desired to found,—no New Jerusalem, but a New England, and, if it might be, a better one. His poetry has the strength, the tenderness, and the defects of the Down-East temper. His doctrines and reflections, in the midst of an ethereal distillation, betimes act like the single drop of prose which, as he reports a saying of Landor to Wordsworth, precipitates the whole. But again he is all poet, and the blithest, most unstudied songster on the old Bay Shore.—EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN, *Century Mag.*

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL, AND OTHER POEMS.

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL.

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR.—According to the mythology of the Romancers, the San Greal, or Holy Grail, was the cup out of which Jesus partook of the last supper with his disciples. It was brought into England by Joseph of Arimathea, and remained there, an object of pilgrimage and adoration, for many years in the keeping of his lineal descendants. It was incumbent upon those who had charge of it to be chaste in thought, word, and deed ; but one of the keepers having broken this condition, the Holy Grail disappeared. From that time it was a favorite enterprise of the knights of Arthur's court to go in search of it. Sir Galahad was at last successful in finding it, as may be read in the seventeenth book of the Romance of King Arthur. Tennyson has made Sir Galahad the subject of one of the most exquisite of his poems.

The plot (if I may give that name to any thing so slight) of the following poem is my own, and, to serve its purposes, I have enlarged the circle of competition in search of the miraculous cup in such a manner as to include, not only other persons than the heroes of the Round Table, but also a period of time subsequent to the date of King Arthur's reign.

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 5
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, 5
 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 ; 10
 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 ; 15
 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 ; 20
 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, 25
 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 : 30

12. **druid wood.** An oak grove was the favorite temple of the Druids, the ancient priests of Britain.

13. **benedicite.** Blessing, benediction.

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, 5
 Climbs to a soul for 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, 10
 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 15
 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 ? 20

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 drop overfills it, 25
 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 ; 30
 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 ; 5

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 ; 10
 Everything is happy now,

Everything 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 : 15

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, 20

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 ? 25

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, 30

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." 5

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 drowsed the cattle up to their knees, 10
 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 ; 15
 '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 tone her assaults defied ; 20
 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, 25
 And out of each a murmur went
 Till the breeze fell off at night.

3. **rushes.** The floors of an ancient feudal castle were strewn with rushes.

16. **North Countree.** Northern England.

25. **tent.** By *pavilions* above and *tents* here trees are of course meant.

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 5
 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, 10
 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 15
 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. 19

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, 24
 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,
 Rased 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 : 5
 “ 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 10
 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,— 15
 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 ; 21
 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 25
 From the unleafed 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 5
 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 ; 10
 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 15
 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 crystaled the beams of moon and sun,
 And made a star of every one : 20
 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, 25
 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, 30
 And sprouting is every corbel and rafter
 With the lightsome green of ivy and holly ;
 Through the deep gulf of the chimney wide

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. 5

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 10
 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 decrepity
 For a last dim look at earth and sea. 15

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, 20
 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, 25
 For it was just at the Christmas time ;

21. **cross.** The Christian knights, while on a sacred quest, wore a large red cross on the white tunic worn over their armor.

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, 5
 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, 10
 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, 14
 But Sir Launfal sees naught have the grewsome thing,
 The leper, lank as the rain-blanchèd bone,
 That cowerèd 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 20
 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 ; 25

21. **tree.** A word commonly used in mediæval literature, meaning cross. Lowell was a keen student of the early literature of our language and delighted in obsolete forms. See the Sonnet, page 49. The word as used here gives the whole passage a quaint old-time flavor.

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 5
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, 10
He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,
And gave the leper to eat and drink ;
'T was a moldy crust of coarse brown bread,
'T was water out of a wooden bowl,—
Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed, 15
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, 20
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. 24

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 hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail ;
 Behold it is here,—this cup which thou 5
 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,— 10
 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 swoond :— 15
 " 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." 20

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 ; 25
 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, 29
 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.



ALLEGRA.

I WOULD more natures were like thine, 5
 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. 10

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, 15
 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, 20
 As if thy natal-stars were flowers
 That shook their seeds round thee on earth.

7. **Hebe.** Hebe was the cup-bearer of the Greek gods.

16. **eagle's eyes.** It is said that an eagle can gaze directly at the sun without being dazzled.

17. **Hours.** The Greek mythology accords a living personality to everything, even to trees and brooks.

21. **natal-stars.** According to the science of astrology, an individual's character and fortunes are strongly influenced by the stars which happen to be in the ascendant at the time of his birth.

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, 5
 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,— 10
 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, 15
 Like sunny wavelets in the sea,
 Making us mindless of the brine
 In gazing on the brilliancy.



THE SHEPHERD OF KING ADMETUS.

THERE came a youth upon the earth,
 Some thousand years ago, 20
 Whose slender hands were nothing worth,
 Whether to plow, or reap, or sow.

He made a lyre, and drew therefrom
 Music so strange and rich,

King Admetus. Apollo, the Greek god of music, having offended Zeus, "ruler of gods and men," was deprived of all power and dignity and sentenced to a temporary servitude in the house of Admetus, King of Thessaly.

23. **lyre.** Apollo's lyre was made of a tortoise-shell strung with seven strings.

That all men loved to hear,—and some
Muttered of fagots for a witch.

But King Admetus, one who had
Pure taste by right divine,
Decreed his singing not too bad 5
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. 10

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

Men called him but a shiftless youth, 15
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, long hour after hour, 20
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, 25
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, 29
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 5
 Each spot where he had trod,
 Till after-poets only knew
 Their first-born brother as a god.



AN INCIDENT IN A RAILROAD CAR.

HE spoke of Burns : men rude and rough
 Pressed round to hear the praise of one 10
 Whose breast was made of manly, simple stuff,
 As homespun as their own.

And, when he read, they forward leaned
 And heard, with eager hearts and ears,
 His birdlike songs whom glory never weaned 15
 From humble smiles and tears.

Slowly there grew a tender awe,
 Sunlike o'er faces brown and hard,
 As if in him who read they felt and saw
 Some presence of the bard. 20

9. **Robert Burns** (1759-1796). The national poet of Scotland and the author of some of the most charming lyrics in the language. His best-known works are the poems: "The Twa Dogs," "Hallowe'en," "Tam o' Shanter," "The Cotter's Saturday Night," "The Vision," and "The Jolly Beggars." His brief life of thirty-seven years was one continued struggle with poverty.

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 5
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, 10
And always hearts are lying open wide
Wherein some grains may fall.

There is no wind but sows some seeds
Of a more true and open life,
Which burst unlooked for into high-souled deeds 15
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. 20

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 majestical 25
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
 Which casts in shadow all the golden lore
 Of classic Greece or Rome.

Oh ! mighty brother-soul of man, 5
 Where'er thou art, in low or high,
 Thy skyey arches with exulting span
 O'er-roof infinity.

All thoughts that mold the age begin 10
 Deep down within the primitive soul,
 And, from the many, slowly upward wing
 To One who grasps the whole.

In his broad breast, the feeling deep
 Which struggled on the many's tongue,
 Swells to a tide of Thought whose surges leap 15
 O'er the weak throne of wrong.

Never did poesy appear
 So full of Heav'n to me as when
 I saw how it would pierce through pride and fear,
 To lives of coarsest men. 20

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 25
 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 unlearnèd heart.

BOSTON, April, 1842.



RHÆCUS.

GOD sends his teachers unto every age, 5
 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 10
 The life of man, and given it to grasp
 The master-key of knowledge, reverence,
 Enfolds some germs of goodness and of right ;
 Else never had the eager soul, which loathes
 The slothful down of pampered ignorance, 15
 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, 20
 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,

1. **earnest verse or line.** Read, in the critical opinions, H. D. Traill's estimate of the popular element in Lowell's own work.

22. **hazel twig.** The divining-rod used by superstitious people in looking for buried treasure, is made of a hazel twig, which is supposed to deflect from its horizontal position when carried over the hidden gold.

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 whatsoever the heart
 Hath fashioned for a solace to itself, 5
 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 10
 And earnest parables of inward lore.
 Hear now this fairy legend of old Greece,
 As full of freedom, youth, and beauty still
 As the immortal freshness of that grace
 Carved for all ages on some Attic frieze. 15

A youth named Rhœcus, 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. 20
 But, as he turned, he heard a voice behind
 That murmured " Rhœcus ! " 'T was as if the leaves,
 Stirred by a passing breath, had murmured it,
 And, while he paused bewildered, yet again
 It murmured " Rhœcus ! " softer than a breeze. 25
 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 all too fair 30
 To be a woman, and with eyes too meek
 For any that were wont to mate with gods.

15. **Attic frieze.** *Attic* because Athens in Attica was the home of Greek art.

All naked like a goddess stood she there,
 And like a goddess all too beautiful
 To feel the guilt-born earthliness of shame.
 "Rhœcus, I am the Dryad of this tree,"
 Thus she began, dropping her low-toned words 5
 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, 10
 And with a thankful joy it shall be thine."

Then Rhœcus, 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 ? 15
 Give me thy love, or but the hope of that
 Which must be evermore my spirit's goal."
 After a little pause she said again,
 But with a glimpse of sadness in her tone,
 " I give it, Rhœcus, though a perilous gift ; 20
 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, 25
 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 30

4. **Dryad.** Greek mythology ascribed to the tree-nymphs or dryads the distinguishing characteristics of the particular tree to whose life they were wedded.

Of likelihood, but reverently deemed
 Nothing too wondrous or too beautiful
 To be the guerdon of a daring heart.
 So Rhœcus made no doubt that he was blest,
 And all along unto the city's gate 5
 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. 10

Young Rhœcus had a faithful heart enough,
 But one that in the present dwelt too much,
 And taking with blithe welcome whatsoever
 Chance gave of joy, was wholly bound in that,
 Like the contented peasant of a vale, 15
 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, 20
 And Rhœcus, 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 too light. And Rhœcus laughed and said, 25
 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
 Rhœcus did beat him off with growing wrath. 30
 Then through the window flew the wounded bee,
 And Rhœcus, 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, 5
 And o'er the plain, which now the wood's long shade,
 By the low sun thrown forward broad and dim,
 Darkened well-nigh unto the city's wall.

Quite spent and out of breath he reached the tree,
 And, listening fearfully, he heard once more 10
 The low voice murmur "Rhœcus!" close at hand:
 Whereat he looked around him, but could see
 Naught but the deepening glooms beneath the oak.
 Then sighed the voice, "O Rhœcus! nevermore
 Shalt thou behold me or by day or night, 15
 Me, who would fain have blest 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. 20
 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." 25

Then Rhœcus 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, "'t is thou art blind,
 Not I unmerciful; I can forgive, 30
 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 Rhœcus 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 5
 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 : 10
 Beauty was all around him and delight,
 But from that eve he was alone on earth.

TO THE SPIRIT OF KEATS.

GREAT soul, thou sittest with me in my room,
 Uplifting me with thy vast, quiet eyes, 15
 On whose full orbs, with kindly luster, lies

12. "A still better piece of art work is Rhœcus, that Greek legend of the wood-nymph and the bee. The poet by chance subjected himself, and not discreditably, to the test of a comparison with the most bewitching of Landor's Hellenics, *The Hamadryad*. Much might be said, in view of these two idyls, upon the antique and modern handlings of a theme. Landor worked as a Grecian might, giving the tale in chiseled verse, with no curious regard for its teachings. Its beauty is enough for him, and there it stands—a Periclean vase. His instinct became a conscious method. In a letter to Forster he begs him to amend the poem by striking out a bit of 'reflection' which a true hamadryad should cut 'across.' Mr. Lowell's *Rhœcus* is an example of the modern feeling. Passages such as that beginning, 'A youth named Rhœcus, wandering in the wood,' are simple and lovely ; the scene where Rhœcus, playing dice, rudely treats the winged messenger, is a picture equalling the best of Landor's. But the story itself is preceded by a moralizing commentary, and other glosses of the same kind are here and there. The whole is treated as an allegory conveying a lesson. This method confuses the beauty of the poem, though distinct enough in its purpose."
 —*E. C. Stedman*.

13. **John Keats** (1795–1821). One of the most truly inspired of England's great poets. He died at the early age of twenty-six, after

"Wrestling with the young poet's agonies,
 Neglect and scorn."

The twilight warmth of ruddy ember-gloom :
 Thy clear, strong tones will oft bring sudden bloom
 Of hope secure, to him who lonely cries,
 Wrestling with the young poet's agonies,
 Neglect and scorn, which seem a certain doom : 5
 Yes ! the few words which, like great thunder-drops,
 Thy large heart down to earth shook doubtfully,
 Thrilled by the inward lightning of its might,
 Serene and pure, like gushing joy of light,
 Shall track the eternal chords of Destiny, 10
 After the moon-led pulse of ocean stops.

1841.



AN INCIDENT OF THE FIRE AT HAMBURG.

THE tower of old Saint Nicholas soared upward to
 the skies,
 Like some huge piece of Nature's make, the growth
 of centuries ;
 You could not deem its crowding spires a work of
 human art,
 They seemed to struggle lightward so from a sturdy
 living heart. 15

Not Nature's self more freely speaks in crystal or in
 oak
 Than, through the pious builder's hand, in that gray
 pile she spoke ;

11. **moon-led pulse of ocean.** The tides are caused by the undulating attractions of sun and moon. Compare Emerson's

"As the heaped waves of the Atlantic follow the moon."

12. **The fire at Hamburg.** The great fire occurred in 1842. It lasted for three days and occasioned great loss of life and property, one third of the whole city being destroyed. The church of St. Nicholas has since been restored and is now Hamburg's chief pride.

And as from acorn springs the oak, so freely and
 alone,
 Sprang from his heart this hymn to God, sung in
 obedient stone.

It seemed a wondrous freak of chance, so perfect,
 yet so rough,
 A whim of Nature crystallized slowly in granite
 tough ; 5
 The thick spires yearned toward the sky in quaint
 harmonious lines,
 And in broad sunlight basked and slept, like a grove
 of blasted pines.

Never did rock or stream or tree lay claim with better
 right
 To all the adorning sympathies of shadow and of
 light ; 9
 And, in that forest petrified, as forester there dwells
 Stout Herman, the old sacristan, sole lord of all its
 bells.

Surge leaping after surge, the fire roared onward,
 red as blood,
 Till half of Hamburg lay engulfed beneath the eddy-
 ing flood ;
 For miles away, the fiery spray poured down its
 deadly rain,
 And back and forth the billows drew, and paused,
 and broke again. 15

From square to square, with tiger leaps, still on and
 on it came ;
 The air to leeward trembled with the pantings of the
 flame,

And church and palace, which even now stood
 whelmed but to the knee,
 Lift their black roofs like breakers lone amid the
 rushing sea.

Up in his tower old Herman sat and watched with
 quiet look ;
 His soul had trusted God too long to be at last
 forsook :
 He could not fear, for surely God a pathway would
 unfold 5
 Through this red sea, for faithful hearts, as once he
 did of old.

But scarcely can he cross himself, or on his good
 saints call,
 Before the sacrilegious flood o'erleaped the church-
 yard wall,
 And, ere a *pater* half was said, 'mid smoke and
 crackling glare,
 His island tower scarce juts its head above the wide
 despair. 10

Upon the peril's desperate peak his heart stood up
 sublime ;
 His first thought was for God above, his next was
 for his chime ;
 " Sing now, and make your voices heard in hymns
 of praise," cried he,
 " As did the Israelites of old, safe-walking through
 the sea ! "

" Through this red sea our God hath made our path-
 way safe to shore ; 15
 Our promised land stands full in sight ; shout now
 as ne'er before."

And, as the tower came crashing down, the bells, in
 clear accord,
 Pealed forth the grand old German hymn—"All
 good souls praise the Lord!"



HEBE.

I SAW the twinkle of white feet,
 I saw the flash of robes descending ;
 Before her ran an influence fleet, 5
 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. 10

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 15
 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 ? 20
 Can Summer fill the icy cup,
 Whose treacherous crystal is but Winter's ?

3. **Hebe.** The Greek goddess Hebe was the personification of youth. She was the cup-bearer of the gods, and presented to them the youth-renewing nectar and ambrosia. In this poem of course the immortal food typifies the poetic inspiration.

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

Coy Hebe flies from those that woo, 5
 And shuns the hands would seize upon her ;
 Follow thy life, and she will sue
 To pour for thee the cup of honor.



TO THE DANDELION.

DEAR common flower, that grow'st beside the way, 10
 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, 15

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, 20

Nor wrinkled the lean brow
 Of age, to rob the lover's heart of ease ;
 'T is the Spring's largess, which she scatters now
 To rich and poor alike, with lavish hand,
 Though most hearts never understand 25

15. **Eldorado.** The land of gold which the adventurous mariners of the sixteenth century were constantly seeking. It was supposed to exist somewhere in central South America. The word is derived from the Spanish *el* = the, and *dorado* = gilt.

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 5
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 10
From the dark green thy yellow circles burst.

Then think I of deep shadows in the grass,—
Of meadows where in sun the cattle graze,
 Where, as the breezes pass,
The gleaming rushes lean a thousand ways,— 15
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 19
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, 25
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.

10. *Sybaris*. A Greek colony in Magna Græcia, notorious for the excessive and enervated luxury of the lives of its inhabitants.

Thou art the type of those meek charities
 Which make up half the nobleness of life,
 Those cheap delights the wise
 Pluck from the dusty wayside of earth's strife ;
 Words of frank cheer, glances of friendly eyes, 5
 Love's smallest coin, which yet to some may give
 The morsel that may keep alive
 A starving heart, and teach it to behold
 Some glimpse of God where all before was cold.

Thy wingèd seeds, whereof the winds take care, 10
 Are like the words of poet and of sage
 Which through the free heaven fare,
 And, now unheeded, in another age
 Take root, and to the gladdened future bear
 That witness which the present would not heed, 15
 Bringing forth many a thought and deed,
 And, planted safely in the eternal sky,
 Bloom into stars which earth is guided by.

Full of deep love thou art, yet not more full
 Than all thy common brethren of the ground, 20
 Wherein, were we not dull,
 Some words of highest wisdom might be found ;
 Yet earnest faith from day to day may cull
 Some syllables, which, rightly joined, can make
 A spell to soothe life's bitterest ache, 25
 And ope Heaven's portals, which are near us still,
 Yea, nearer ever than the gates of Ill.

How like a prodigal doth Nature seem,
 When thou, for all thy gold, so common art !
 Thou teachest me to deem 30
 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.

But let me read thy lesson right or no,
 Of one good gift from thee my heart is sure ; 5
 Old I shall never grow
 While thou each year dost come to keep me pure
 With legends of my childhood ; ah, we owe
 Well more than half life's holiness to these
 Nature's first lowly influences, 10
 At thought of which the heart's glad doors burst ope,
 In dreariest days, to welcome peace and hope.



LINES

SUGGESTED BY THE GRAVES OF TWO ENGLISH SOLDIERS
 ON CONCORD BATTLE-GROUND.

THE same good blood that now refills
 The dotard Orient's shrunken veins, 15
 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, 20
 Back to the ash the bluebird flew.

12. "The opening phrase ranks with the selectest of Wordsworth and Keats, to whom imaginative diction came intuitively. This poem contains many of its author's peculiar beauties and none of his faults; it was the outcome of the mood that can summon a rare spirit of art to express the gladdest thought and most elusive feeling."—*E. C. Stedman, in Century Magazine.*

15. **dotard Orient's shrunken veins.** A reference to England's investment of India.

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, 5
 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 ; 10
 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, 15
 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 : 20
 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, 25
 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 ebbed the life away, 30
 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 ;
 'T was for the Future that they fought
 Their rustic faith in what was right.
 Upon earth's tragic stage they burst 5
 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, 10
 Yet to their instincts they were true,
 And had the genius to be men.
 Fine privilege of Freedom's host,
 . Of even foot-soldiers for the Right !—
 For centuries dead, ye are not lost, 15
 Your graves send courage forth, and might.



THE BOBOLINK.

ANACREON of the meadow,
 Drunk with the joy of spring !
 Beneath the tall pine's voiceful shadow 20

6. **humble sock.** The Greek and Roman actors in comedy wore the sock as a distinctive mark of their profession. The tragic actors wore the *cothurnus*, or buskin, on the stage.

7. **fifth act.** The tragedy consists of five acts, conventionally.

8. **Charles's block.** Charles I. was executed January 30, 1649, in front of the palace at Whitehall. This was the first English revolution.

18. **Anacreon.** One of the most esteemed lyric poets of Greece. His poems were composed in honor of wine and beauty. The few that are now in existence are marked by great simplicity and delicacy of expression, fertility of invention, and variety of illustration. According to tradition, Anacreon died, very appropriately, by being choked to death by a grape. He was immortalized by a statue on the Acropolis of Athens, which represented him in a state of vinous hilarity.

I lie and drink thy jargonings ;
 My soul is full with melodies,
 One drop would overflow it,
 And send the tears into mine eyes—
 But what carest thou to know it ? 5
 Thy heart is free as mountain air,
 And of thy lays thou hast no care,
 Scattering them gayly everywhere,
 Happy, unconscious poet !

Upon a tuft of meadow grass, 10
 While thy loved-one tends the nest,
 Thou swayest as the breezes pass,
 Unburdening thine o'erfull breast
 Of the crowded songs that fill it,
 Just as joy may choose to will it. 15
 Lord of thy love and liberty,
 The blithest bird of merry May,
 Thou turnest thy bright eyes on me,
 That say as plain as eye can say—
 " Here sit we, here in the summer weather, 20
 I and my modest mate together ;
 Whatever your wise thoughts may be,
 Under that gloomy old pine-tree,
 We do not value them a feather."

Now, leaving earth and me behind, 25
 Thou beatest up against the wind,
 Or, floating slowly down before it,
 Above thy grass-hid nest thou flutterest
 And thy bridal love-song utterest,
 Raining showers of music o'er it, 30
 Weary never, still thou trillest,
 Spring-gladsome lays,
 As of moss-rimmed water-brooks
 Murmuring through pebbly nooks

In quiet summer days.
 My heart with happiness thou fillest,
 I seem again to be a boy
 Watching thee, gay, blithesome lover,
 O'er the bending grass-tops hover, 5
 Quivering thy wings for joy.
 There's something in the apple-blossom,
 The greening grass and bobolink's song,
 That wakes again within my bosom
 Feelings which have slumbered long. 10
 As long, long years ago I wandered,
 I seem to wander even yet.
 The hours the idle schoolboy squandered,
 The man would die ere he'd forget.
 O hours that frosty eld deemed wasted, 15
 Nodding his gray head toward my books,
 I dearer prize the lore I tasted
 With you, among the trees and brooks,
 Than all that I have gained since then
 From learnèd books or study-withered men. 20
 Nature, thy soul was one with mine,
 And, as a sister by a younger brother
 Is loved, each flowing to the other,
 Such love for me was thine.
 Or wert thou not more like a loving mother 25
 With sympathy and loving power to heal,
 Against whose heart my throbbing head I'd lay
 And moan my childish sorrows all away,
 Till calm and holiness would o'er me steal?
 Was not the golden sunset a dear friend?
 Found I no kindness in the silent moon,
 And the green trees, whose tops did sway and bend,
 Low singing evermore their pleasant tune?
 Felt I no heart in dim and solemn woods—
 No loved one's voice in lonely solitudes? 35

Yes, yes ! unhoodwinked then my spirit's eyes,
Blind leaders had not *taught me* to be wise.

Dear hours ! which now again I overlive,
Hearing and seeing with the ears and eyes
Of childhood, ye were bees, that to the hive 5
Of my young heart came laden with rich prize,
Gathered in fields and woods and sunny dells, to be
My spirit's food in days more wintery.
Yea, yet again ye come ! ye come !
And, like a child once more at home 10
After long sojourning in alien climes,
I lie upon my mother's breast,
Feeling the blessedness of rest,
And dwelling in the light of other times.

O ye whose living is not *Life*, 15
Whose dying is but death,
Song, empty toil and petty strife,
Rounded with loss of breath !
Go, look on Nature's countenance,
Drink in the blessing of her glance ; 20
Look on the sunset, hear the wind,
The cataract, the awful thunder ;
Go, worship by the sea ;
Then, and then only, shall ye find,
With ever-growing wonder, 25
Man is not all in all to ye ;
Go with a meek and humble soul,
Then shall the scales of self unroll
From off your eyes—the weary packs
Drop from your heavy-laden backs ; 30
And ye shall see,
With reverent and hopeful eyes,
Glowing with new-born energies,
How great a thing it is to BE !

APPLEDORE.

How looks Appledore in a storm ?

I have seen it when its crags seemed frantic,
 Butting against the maddened Atlantic,
 When surge after surge would heap enorme,
 Cliffs of Emerald topped with snow, 5
 That lifted and lifted and then let go
 A great white avalanche of thunder,
 A grinding, blinding, deafening ire
 Monadnock might have trembled under ;
 And the island, whose rock-roots pierce below 10
 To where they are warmed with the central fire,
 You could feel its granite fibers racked,
 As it seemed to plunge with a shudder and thrill
 Right at the breast of the swooping hill,
 And to rise again, snorting a cataract 15
 Of rage-froth from every cranny and ledge,
 While the sea drew its breath in hoarse and deep,
 And the next vast breaker curled its edge,
 Gathering itself for a mighty leap.
 North, east, and south there are reefs and breakers,
 You would never dream of in smooth weather, 21
 That toss and gore the sea for acres,
 Bellowing and gnashing and snarling together ;
 Look northward, where Duck Island lies,
 And over its crown you will see arise, 25
 Against a background of slaty skies,
 A row of pillars still and white
 That glimmer and then are out of sight,

1. **Appledore.** One of the group of eight islands, the Isles of Shoals, which lie about ten miles southeast of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. There is a large summer hotel on Appledore Island.

As if the moon should suddenly kiss,
 While you crossed the gusty desert by night,
 The long colonnades of Persepolis,
 And then as sudden a darkness would follow
 To gulp the whole scene at a single swallow, 5
 The city's ghost, the drear, brown waste,
 And the string of camels, elumsy-paced :—
 Look southward for White Island light,
 The lantern stands ninety feet o'er the tide ;
 There is first a half-mile of tumult and fight, 10
 Of dash and roar and tumble and fright,
 And surging bewilderment wild and wide,
 Where the breakers struggle left and right,
 Then a mile or more of rushing sea,
 And then the light-house slim and lone ; 15
 And whenever the whole weight of ocean is thrown
 Full and fair on White Island head,
 A great mist-jotun you will see
 Lifting himself up silently
 High and huge o'er the lighthouse top, 20
 With hands of wavering spray outspread,
 Groping after the little tower,
 That seems to shrink, and shorten and cower,
 Till the monster's arms of a sudden drop,
 And silently and fruitlessly 25
 He sinks again into the sea.

You, meanwhile, where drenched you stand,
 Awaken once more to the rush and roar

3. **Persepolis.** The Greek translation of the lost name of the capital of ancient Persia. Some remarkable ruins are now the only remains of that city, which was generally designated by the ancient writers "the Glory of the East." The architecture of Persepolis, as now suggested by the ruins, made a great use of columns, and these may be observed from a great distance on the plain below the terraces on which the city was built.

18. **mist-jotun.** In Scandinavian mythology, Jötunheim is the home of the frost giants or "jotuns."

And on the rock-point tighten your hand,
 As you turn and see a valley deep,
 That was not there a moment before,
 Suck rattling down between you and a heap
 Of toppling billow, whose instant fall 5
 Must sink the whole island once for all—
 Or watch the silenter, stealthier seas
 Feeling their way to you more and more ;
 If they once should clutch you high as the knees
 They would whirl you down like a sprig of kelp, 10
 Beyond all reach of hope or help ;—
 And such in a storm is Appledore.

SONNET.

IF some small savor creep into my rhyme
 Of the old poets, if some words I use, 15
 Neglected long, which have the lusty thews
 Of that gold-haired and earnest-hearted time,
 Whose loving joy and sorrow all sublime
 Have given our tongue its starry eminence,—
 It is not pride, God knows, but reverence 20
 Which hath grown in me since my childhood's prime ;
 Wherein I feel that my poor lyre is strung
 With soul-strings like to theirs, and that I have
 No right to muse their holy graves among,
 If I can be a custom-fettered slave, 25
 And, in mine own true spirit, am not brave
 To speak what rusheth upward to my tongue.

15. **old poets.** Lowell was passionately fond of the old English poets, especially Spenser, and frequently he succeeds admirably in imitating them. This taste, however, led him sometimes into grave errors in the use of words.

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 5
 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, and with eyes that looked afar
 From their still region of perpetual snow, 10
 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 : 15
 Loud rang the emptied beakers as he mused,
 Brooding his aered 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 : 20

" 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 bowman, matched against his peers,
 Long doubting, singles yet once more the best. 25

1. **Thorstein.** Leif and Thorstein were the sons of Eric the Red, a famous Viking hero who had discovered Greenland.

3. **Skald.** The Vikings held the skalds, or poets, in great esteem. They enlivened the long winter evenings by reciting or singing songs in honor of different heroes.

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 5
 At random from life's vulgar fagot plucked :
 Such answer household ends ; but she will have
 Souls straight and clear, of toughest fiber, sound
 Down to the heart of heart ; from these she strips
 All needless stuff, all sapwood, hardens them, 10
 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, 't is not across the wind, 14
 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 20
 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 hut or hall, 25
 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, sate apart
 Musing, and, with his eyes upon the fire, 30
 Saw shapes of arrows, lost as soon as seen ;
 But then with that resolve his heart was bent,
 Which, like a humming shaft, through many a strife

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.



THE BIRCH-TREE.

RIPPLING through thy branches goes the sunshine, 5
 Among thy leaves that palpitate for ever ;
 Ovid in thee a pining Nymph had prisoned,
 The soul once of some tremulous inland river,
 Quiyering to tell her woe, but, ah ! dumb, dumb for
 ever !

While all the forest, witched with slumberous sun-
 shine, 10
 Holds up its leaves in happy, happy silence,
 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. 15

2. **Vinland.** It is claimed that the Vinland discovered by Leif, the son of Eric, was really America, and the theory has found very wide acceptance.

3. **rune.** The letters of the Norse alphabet were called runes.

3. **Saga.** The long recitals of the deeds of heroes chanted by the scalds. It is from the Sagas which are still in existence that we derive our knowledge of Scandinavian history and mythology.

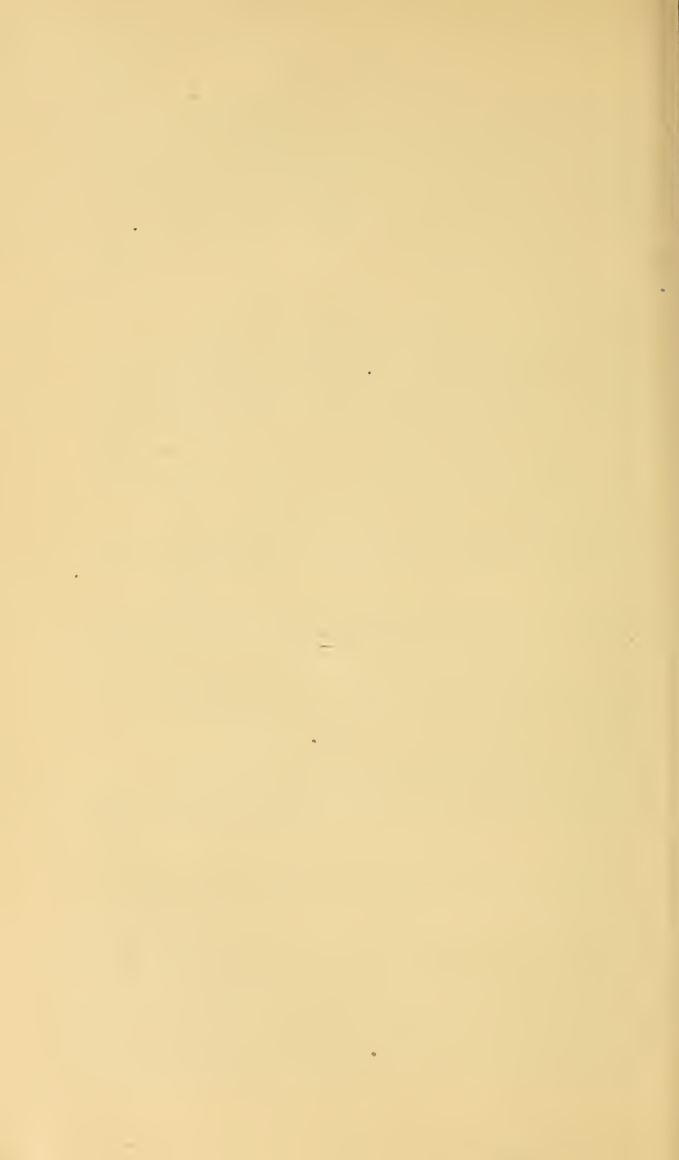
7. **Ovid** (43 B.C.—18 A.D.). One of the most popular of Roman poets. The reference is here to one of his *Metamorphoses*, a series of poems describing the transformations of nymphs and youths as a punishment or to protect them. There are three cases where nymphs are changed to trees. Daphne, being pursued by Apollo, who wishes to embrace her, is changed into a laurel. The mourning sisters of Phaeton, who strove to drive the chariot of Apollo, are changed into poplars; and Dryope, who incautiously plucked a branch of the lotos-tree for her infant son, is herself changed into a lotos.

Upon the brink of some wood-nestled lakelet,
Thy foliage, like the tresses of a Dryad,
Dripping about 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 Dryad. 5

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 keep-
ing. 10

Thou art to me like my beloved maiden,
So frankly coy, so full of trembly confidences ;
Thy shadow scarce seems shade, thy pattering leaf-
lets
Sprinkle their gathered sunshine o'er my senses,
And Nature gives me all her summer confidences. 15

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. 20



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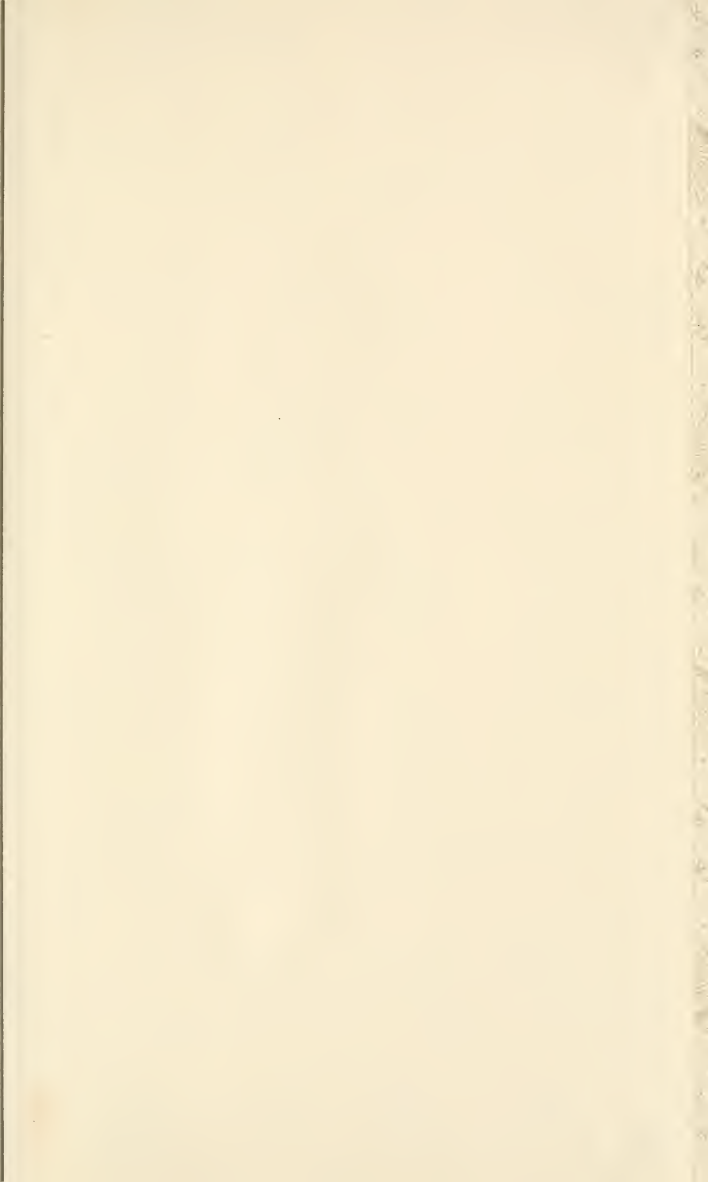
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