

The Vision of Sir Launfal eBook

The Vision of Sir Launfal by James Russell Lowell

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A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

I.

Elmwood.

About half a mile from the Craigie House in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on the road leading to the old town of Watertown, is Elmwood, a spacious square house set amongst lilac and syringa bushes, and overtopped by elms. Pleasant fields are on either side, and from the windows one may look out on the Charles River winding its way among the marshes. The house itself is one of a group which before the war for independence belonged to Boston merchants and officers of the crown who refused to take the side of the revolutionary party. Tory Row was the name given to the broad winding road on which the houses stood. Great farms and gardens were attached to them, and some sign of their roomy ease still remains. The estates fell into the hands of various persons after the war, and in process of time Longfellow came to occupy Craigie House. Elmwood at that time was the property of the Reverend Charles Lowell, minister of the West Church in Boston, and when Longfellow thus became his neighbor, James Russell Lowell was a junior in Harvard College. He was born at Elmwood, February 22, 1819. Any one who will read *An Indian Summer Reverie* will discover how affectionately Lowell dwelt on the scenes of nature and life amidst which he grew up. Indeed, it would be a pleasant task to draw from the full storehouse of his poetry the golden phrases with which he characterizes the trees, meadows, brooks, flowers, birds, and human companions that were so near to him in his youth and so vivid in his recollection. In his prose works also a lively paper, *Cambridge Thirty Years Ago*, contains many reminiscences of his early life.

To know any one well it is needful to inquire into his ancestry, and two or three hints may be given of the currents that met in this poet. On his father's side he came from a succession of New England men who for the previous three generations had been in professional life. The Lowells traced their descent from Percival Lowell,—a name which survives in the family,—of Bristol, England, who settled in Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1639. The great-grandfather was a minister in Newburyport, one of those, as Dr. Hale says, "who preached sermons when young men went out to fight the French, and preached sermons again in memory of their death when they had been slain in battle." The grandfather was John Lowell, a member of the Constitutional Convention of Massachusetts in 1780. It was he who introduced into the Bill of Rights a phrase from the Bill of Rights of Virginia, "All men are created free and equal," with the purpose which it effected of setting free every man then held as a slave in Massachusetts. A son of John Lowell and brother of the Rev. Charles Lowell was Francis Cabot Lowell, who gave a great impetus to New England

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manufactures, and from whom the city of Lowell took its name. Another son, and thus also an uncle of the poet, was John Lowell, Jr., whose wise and far-sighted provision gave to Boston that powerful centre of intellectual influence, the Lowell Institute. Of the Rev. Charles Lowell, his son said, in a letter written in 1844, "He is Doctor Primrose in the comparative degree, the very simplest and charmingest of sexagenarians, and not without a great deal of the truest magnanimity." It was characteristic of Lowell thus to go to *The Vicar of Wakefield* for a portrait of his father. Dr. Lowell lived till 1861, when his son was forty-two.

[Illustration: Elmwood, Mr. Lowell's home in Cambridge.]

Mrs. Harriet Spence Lowell, the poet's mother, was of Scotch origin, a native of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. She is described as having "a great memory, an extraordinary aptitude for language, and a passionate fondness for ancient songs and ballads." It pleased her to fancy herself descended from the hero of one of the most famous ballads, Sir Patrick Spens, and at any rate she made a genuine link in the Poetic Succession. In a letter to his mother, written in 1837, Lowell says: "I am engaged in several poetical effusions, one of which I have dedicated to you, who have always been the patron and encourager of my youthful muse." The Russell in his name seems to intimate a strain of Jewish ancestry; at any rate Lowell took pride in the name on this account, for he was not slow to recognize the intellectual power of the Hebrew race. He was the youngest of a family of five, two daughters and three sons. An older brother who outlived him a short time, was the Rev. Robert Traill Spence Lowell, who wrote besides a novel, *The New Priest in Conception Bay*, which contains a delightful study of a Yankee, some poems, and a story of school-boy life.

Not long before his death, Lowell wrote to an English friend a description of Elmwood, and as he was very fond of the house in which he lived and died, it is agreeable to read words which strove to set it before the eyes of one who had never seen it. "'Tis a pleasant old house, just about twice as old as I am, four miles from Boston, in what was once the country and is now a populous suburb. But it still has some ten acres of open about it, and some fine old trees. When the worst comes to the worst (if I live so long) I shall still have four and a half acres left with the house, the rest belonging to my brothers and sisters or their heirs. It is a square house, with four rooms on a floor, like some houses of the Georgian era I have seen in English provincial towns, only they are of brick, and this is of wood. But it is solid with its heavy oaken beams, the spaces between which in the four outer walls are filled in with brick, though you mustn't fancy a brick-and-timber house, for outwardly it is sheathed with wood. Inside there is much wainscot (of deal) painted white



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in the fashion of the time when it was built. It is very sunny, the sun rising so as to shine (at an acute angle to be sure) through the northern windows, and going round the other three sides in the course of the day. There is a pretty staircase with the quaint old twisted banisters,—which they call balusters now; but mine are banisters. My library occupies two rooms opening into each other by arches at the sides of the ample chimneys. The trees I look out on are the earliest things I remember. There you have me in my new-old quarters. But you must not fancy a large house—rooms sixteen feet square, and on the ground floor, nine high. It was large, as things went here, when it was built, and has a certain air of amplitude about it as from some inward sense of dignity.” In an earlier letter he wrote: “Here I am in my garret. I slept here when I was a little curly-headed boy, and used to see visions between me and the ceiling, and dream the so often recurring dream of having the earth put into my hand like an orange. In it I used to be shut up without a lamp,—my mother saying that none of her children should be afraid of the dark,—to hide my head under the pillow, and then not be able to shut out the shapeless monsters that thronged around me, minted in my brain.... In winter my view is a wide one, taking in a part of Boston. I can see one long curve of the Charles and the wide fields between me and Cambridge, and the flat marshes beyond the river, smooth and silent with glittering snow. As the spring advances and one after another of our trees puts forth, the landscape is cut off from me piece by piece, till, by the end of May, I am closeted in a cool and rustling privacy of leaves.” In two of his papers especially, *My Garden Acquaintance* and *A Good Word for Winter*, has Lowell given glimpses of the out-door life in the midst of which he grew up.

II.

Education.

His acquaintance with books and his schooling began early. He learned his letters at a dame school. Mr. William Wells, an Englishman, opened a classical school in one of the spacious Tory Row houses near Elmwood, and, bringing with him English public school thoroughness and severity, gave the boy a drilling in Latin, which he must have made almost a native speech to judge by the ease with which he handled it afterward in mock heroics. Of course he went to Harvard College. He lived at his father’s house, more than a mile away from the college yard; but this could have been no great privation to him, for he had the freedom of his friends’ rooms, and he loved the open air. The Rev. Edward Everett Hale has given a sketch of their common life in college. “He was a little older than I,” he says, “and was one class in advance of me. My older brother, with whom I lived in college, and he were most intimate friends. He had no room within the college walls, and was a great deal with us.



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The fashion of Cambridge was then literary. Now the fashion of Cambridge runs to social problems, but then we were interested in literature. We read Byron and Shelley and Keats, and we began to read Tennyson and Browning. I first heard of Tennyson from Lowell, who had borrowed from Mr. Emerson the little first volume of Tennyson. We actually passed about Tennyson's poems in manuscript. Carlyle's essays were being printed at the time, and his *French Revolution*. In such a community—not two hundred and fifty students all told,—literary effort was, as I say, the fashion, and literary men, among whom Lowell was recognized from the very first, were special favorites. Indeed, there was that in him which made him a favorite everywhere.”

Lowell was but fifteen years old when he entered college in the class which graduated in 1838. He was a reader, as so many of his fellows were, and the letters which he wrote shortly after leaving college show how intent he had been on making acquaintance with the best things in literature. He began also to scribble verse, and he wrote both poems and essays for college magazines. His class chose him their poet for Class Day, and he wrote his poem; but he was careless about conforming to college regulations respecting attendance at morning prayers; and for this was suspended from college the last term of his last year, and not allowed to come back to read his poem. “I have heard in later years,” says Dr. Hale, “what I did not know then, that he rode down from Concord in a canvas-covered wagon, and peeped out through the chinks of the wagon to see the dancing around the tree. I fancy he received one or two visits from his friends in the wagon; but in those times it would have been treason to speak of this.” He was sent to Concord for his rustication, and so passed a few weeks of his youth amongst scenes dear to every lover of American letters.

III.

First venture.

After his graduation he set about the study of law, and for a short time even was a clerk in a counting-room; but his bent was strongly toward literature. There was at that time no magazine of commanding importance in America, and young men were given to starting magazines with enthusiasm and very little other capital. Such a one was the *Boston Miscellany*, launched by Nathan Hale, Lowell's college friend, and for this Lowell wrote gaily. It lived a year, and shortly after Lowell himself, with Robert Carter, essayed *The Pioneer* in 1843. It lived just three months; but in that time printed contributions by Lowell, Hawthorne, Whittier, Story, Poe, and Dr. Parsons,—a group which it would be hard to match in any of the little magazines that hop across the world's path to-day. Lowell had already collected, in 1841, the poems which he had written and sometimes contributed to periodicals into a volume entitled *A Year's Life*; but he retained

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very little of the contents in later editions of his poems. The book has a special interest, however, from its dedication in veiled phrase to Maria White. He became engaged to this lady in the fall of 1840, and the next twelve years of his life were profoundly affected by her influence. Herself a poet of delicate power, she brought into his life an intelligent sympathy with his work; it was, however, her strong moral enthusiasm, her lofty conception of purity and justice, which kindled his spirit and gave force and direction to a character which was ready to respond, and yet might otherwise have delayed active expression. They were not married until 1844; but they were not far apart in their homes, and during these years Lowell was making those early ventures in literature, and first raids upon political and moral evil, which foretold the direction of his later work, and gave some hint of its abundance.

About the time of his marriage, he published two books which, by their character, show pretty well the divided interest of his life. His bent from the beginning was more decidedly literary than that of any contemporary American poet. That is to say, the history and art of literature divided his interest with the production of literature, and he carried the unusual gift of a rare critical power, joined to hearty spontaneous creation. It may indeed be guessed that the keenness of judgment and incisiveness of wit which characterize his examination of literature sometimes interfered with his poetic power, and made him liable to question his art when he would rather have expressed it unchecked. One of the two books was a volume of poems; the other was a prose work, *Conversations on Some of the Old Poets*. He did not keep this book alive; but it is interesting as marking the enthusiasm of a young scholar treading a way then almost wholly neglected in America, and intimating a line of thought and study in which he afterward made most noteworthy venture. Another series of poems followed in 1848, and in the same year *The Vision of Sir Launfal*. Perhaps it was in reaction from the marked sentiment of his poetry that he issued now a *jeu d'esprit*, *A Fable for Critics*, in which he hit off, with a rough and ready wit, the characteristics of the writers of the day, not forgetting himself in these lines:

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



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This, of course, is but a half serious portrait of himself, and it touches but a single feature; others can say better that Lowell's ardent nature showed itself in the series of satirical poems which made him famous, *The Biglow Papers*, written in a spirit of indignation and fine scorn, when the Mexican War was causing many Americans to blush with shame at the use of the country by a class for its own ignoble ends. Lowell and his wife, who brought a fervid anti-slavery temper as part of her marriage portion, were both contributors to the *Liberty Bell*; and Lowell was a frequent contributor to the *Anti-Slavery Standard*, and was, indeed, for a while a corresponding editor. In June, 1846, there appeared one day in the *Boston Courier* a letter from Mr. Ezekiel Biglow of Jaalam to the editor, Hon. Joseph T. Buckingham, inclosing a poem of his son, Mr. Hosea Biglow. It was no new thing to seek to arrest the public attention with the vernacular applied to public affairs. Major Jack Downing and Sam Slick had been notable examples, and they had many imitators; but the reader who laughed over the racy narrative of the unlettered Ezekiel, and then took up Hosea's poem and caught the gust of Yankee wrath and humor blown fresh in his face, knew that he was in at the appearance of something new in American literature. The force which Lowell displayed in these satires made his book at once a powerful ally of an anti-slavery sentiment, which heretofore had been ridiculed.

IV.

VERSE AND PROSE.

A year in Europe, 1851-1852, with his wife, whose health was then precarious, stimulated his scholarly interests, and gave substance to his study of Dante and Italian literature. In October, 1853, his wife died; she had borne him three children: the first-born, Blanche, died in infancy; the second, Walter, also died young; the third, a daughter, Mrs. Burnett, survived her parents. In 1855 he was chosen successor to Longfellow as Smith Professor of the French and Spanish Languages and Literature, and Professor of Belles Lettres in Harvard College. He spent two years in Europe in further preparation for the duties of his office, and in 1857 was again established in Cambridge, and installed in his academic chair. He married, also, at this time Miss Frances Dunlap, of Portland, Maine.

Lowell was now in his thirty-ninth year. As a scholar, in his professional work, he had acquired a versatile knowledge of the Romance languages, and was an adept in old French and Provençal poetry; he had given a course of twelve lectures on English poetry before the Lowell Institute in Boston, which had made a strong impression on the community, and his work on the series of *British Poets* in connection with Professor Child, especially his biographical sketch of Keats, had been recognized as of a high order. In poetry he had published the volumes already mentioned.

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In general literature he had printed in magazines the papers which he afterward collected into his volume, *Fireside Travels*. Not long after he entered on his college duties, *The Atlantic Monthly* was started, and the editorship given to him. He held the office for a year or two only; but he continued to write for the magazine, and in 1862 he was associated with Mr. Charles Eliot Norton in the conduct of *The North American Review*, and continued in this charge for ten years. Much of his prose was contributed to this periodical. Any one reading the titles of the papers which comprise the volumes of his prose writings will readily see how much literature, and especially poetic literature, occupied his attention. Shakespeare, Dryden, Lessing, Rousseau, Dante, Spenser, Wordsworth, Milton, Keats, Carlyle, Percival, Thoreau, Swinburne, Chaucer, Emerson, Pope, Gray,—these are the principal subjects of his prose, and the range of topics indicates the catholicity of his taste.

In these papers, when studying poetry, he was very alive to the personality of the poets, and it was the strong interest in humanity which led Lowell, when he was most diligent in the pursuit of literature, to apply himself also to history and politics. Several of his essays bear witness to this, such as *Witchcraft*, *New England Two Centuries Ago*, *A Great Public Character* (Josiah Quincy), *Abraham Lincoln*, and his great *Political Essays*. But the most remarkable of his writings of this order was the second series of *The Biglow Papers*, published during the war for the Union. In these, with the wit and fun of the earlier series, there was mingled a deeper strain of feeling and a larger tone of patriotism. The limitations of his style in these satires forbade the fullest expression of his thought and emotion; but afterward in a succession of poems, occasioned by the honors paid to student soldiers in Cambridge, the death of Agassiz, and the celebration of national anniversaries during the years 1875 and 1876, he sang in loftier, more ardent strains. The most famous of these poems was his noble Commemoration Ode.

V.

PUBLIC LIFE.

It was at the close of this period, when he had done incalculable service to the Republic, that Lowell was called on to represent the country, first in Madrid, where he was sent in 1877, and then in London, to which he was transferred in 1880. Eight years were thus spent by him in the foreign service of the country. He had a good knowledge of the Spanish language and literature when he went to Spain; but he at once took pains to make his knowledge fuller and his accent more perfect, so that he could have intimate relations with the best Spanish men of the time. In England he was at once a most welcome guest, and was in great demand as a public speaker. No one can read his dispatches from Madrid and London without being struck by his sagacity, his readiness

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in emergencies, his interest in and quick perception of the political situation in the country where he was resident, and his unerring knowledge as a man of the world. Above all, he was through and through an American, true to the principles which underlie American institutions. His address on *Democracy*, which he delivered in England, is one of the great statements of human liberty. A few years later, after his return to America, he gave another address to his own countrymen on *The Place of the Independent in Politics*. It was a noble defense of his own position, not without a trace of discouragement at the apparently sluggish movement in American self-government of recent years, but with that faith in the substance of his countrymen which gave him the right to use words of honest warning.

The public life of Mr. Lowell made him more of a figure before the world. He received honors from societies and universities; he was decorated by the highest honors which Harvard could pay officially; and Oxford and Cambridge, St. Andrews and Edinburgh and Bologna, gave gowns. He established warm personal relations with Englishmen, and, after his release from public office, he made several visits to England. There, too, was buried his wife, who died in 1885. The closing years of his life in his own country, though touched with domestic loneliness and diminished by growing physical infirmities that predicted his death, were rich also with the continued expression of his large personality. He delivered the public address in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of Harvard University; he gave a course of lectures on the Old English Dramatists before the Lowell Institute; he collected a volume of his poems; he wrote and spoke on public affairs; and, the year before his death, revised, rearranged, and carefully edited a definitive series of his writings in ten volumes. He died at Elmwood, August 12, 1891. Since his death three small volumes have been added to his collected writings, and Mr. Norton has published *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, in two volumes.

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Lowell was in his thirtieth year when he wrote and published *The Vision of Sir Launfal*. It appeared when he had just dashed off his *Fable for Critics*, and when he was in the thick of the anti-slavery fight, writing poetry and prose for *The Anti-Slavery Standard*, and sending out his witty *Biglow Papers*. He had married four years before, and was living in the homestead at Elmwood, walking in the country about, and full of eagerness at the prospect which lay before him. In a letter to his friend Charles F. Briggs, written in December, 1848, he says: "Last night ... I walked to Watertown over the snow, with the new moon before me and a sky exactly like that in Page's evening landscape. Orion was rising behind me, and, as



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I stood on the hill just before you enter the village, the stillness of the fields around me was delicious, broken only by the tinkle of a little brook which runs too swiftly for Frost to catch it. My picture of the brook in *Sir Launfal* was drawn from it. But why do I send you this description,—like the bones of a chicken I had picked? Simply because I was so happy as I stood there, and felt so sure of doing something that would justify my friends. But why do I not say that I have done something? I believe that I have done better than the world knows yet; but the past seems so little compared with the future.... I am the first poet who has endeavored to express the American Idea, and I shall be popular by and by.”

It is not very likely that Lowell was thinking of *Sir Launfal* when he wrote this last sentence, yet it is not straining language too far to say that when he took up an Arthurian story he had a different attitude toward the whole cycle of legends from that of Tennyson, who had lately been reviving the legends for the pleasure of English-reading people. The exuberance of the poet as he carols of June in the prelude to Part First is an expression of the joyous spring which was in the veins of the young American, glad in the sense of freedom and hope. As Tennyson threw into his retelling of Arthurian romance a moral sense, so Lowell, also a moralist in his poetic apprehension, made a parable of his tale, and, in the broadest interpretation of democracy, sang of the leveling of all ranks in a common divine humanity. There is a subterranean passage connecting the *Biglow Papers* with *Sir Launfal*; it is the holy zeal which attacks slavery issuing in this fable of a beautiful charity, Christ in the guise of a beggar.

The invention is a very simple one, and appears to have been suggested by Tennyson's *Sir Galahad*, though Lowell had no doubt read Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. The following is the note which accompanied *The Vision* when first published in 1848, and retained by Lowell in all subsequent editions:—

“According to the mythology of the Romancers, the San Greal, or Holy Grail, was the cup out of which Jesus Christ 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



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name to anything 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
Gives hope 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^[1]
Doth heaven with all its splendors lie; 10
Daily, with souls that cringe and plot,
We Sinais climb and know it not.

Over our manhood bend the skies;
Against our fallen and traitor lives
The great winds utter prophecies: 15
With our faint hearts the mountain strives;
Its arms outstretched, the druid wood
Waits with its benedicite;
And to our age's drowsy blood
Still shouts the inspiring sea. 20

Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us;
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,
The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us,
We bargain for the graves we lie in;

[Footnote 1: In allusion to Wordsworth's "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," in his ode, *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.]

At the Devil's booth are all things sold, 25
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,^[2]
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking:



'T is heaven alone that is given away,
'T is only God may be had for the asking; 30
No price is set on the lavish summer;
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, 35
And over it softly her warm ear lays:
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten;
Every clod feels a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers, 40
And, groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers;
The flush of life may well be seen
Thrilling back over hills and valleys;

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The cowslip startles in meadows green, 45
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,
And there's never a leaf nor 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, 50
And lets his illumined being o'errun
With the deluge of summer it receives;
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings;
He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest,— 55
In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best?

[Footnote 2: In the Middle Ages kings and noblemen had in their courts jesters to make sport for the company; as every one then wore a dress indicating his rank or occupation, so the jester wore a cap hung with bells. The fool of Shakespeare's plays is the king's jester at his best.]

Now is the high-tide of the year,
And whatever of life hath ebbed away
Comes flooding back with a ripply cheer,
Into every bare inlet and creek and bay; 60
Now the heart is so full that a drop overfills it,
We are happy now because God wills it;
No matter how barren the past may have been,
'Tis enough for us now that the leaves are green;
We sit in the warm shade and feel right well 65
How the sap creeps up and the blossoms swell;
We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing
That skies are clear and grass is growing;
The breeze comes whispering in our ear,
That dandelions are blossoming near, 70
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; 75
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; 80
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: 85
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 of the season's youth, 90
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? 95



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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, 100
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.” 105
Slowly Sir Launfal's eyes grew dim,
Slumber fell like a cloud on him,
And into his soul the vision flew.

II.

The crows flapped over by twos and threes,
In the pool drownd the cattle up to their knees, 110
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: 115
'Twas the proudest hall in the North Countree,
And never its gates might opened be,
Save to lord or lady of high degree;
Summer besieged it on every side,
But the churlish stone her assaults defied; 120
She could not scale the chilly wall,
Though around it for leagues her pavilions tall
Stretched left and right,
Over the hills and out of sight;
Green and broad was every tent, 125
And out of each a murmur went
Till the breeze fell off at night.



III.

The drawbridge dropped with a surly clang,
And through the dark arch a charger sprang,
Bearing Sir Launfal, the maiden knight, 130
In his gilded mail, that flamed so bright
It seemed the dark castle had gathered all
Those shafts the fierce sun had shot over its wall
In his siege of three hundred summers long,
And, binding them all in one blazing sheaf, 135
Had cast them forth: so, young and strong,
And lightsome as a locust-leaf,
Sir Launfal flashed forth in his unscarred mail,
To seek in all climes for the Holy Grail.

IV.

It was morning on hill and stream and tree, 140
And morning in the young knight's heart;
Only the castle moodily
Rebuffed the gifts of the sunshine free,
And gloomed by itself apart;
The season brimmed all other things up 145
Full as the rain fills the pitcher-plant's cup.



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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; 150 The sunshine went out of his soul with a
thrill, The flesh 'neath his armor 'gan shrink and crawl, And midway its leap his
heart stood still Like a frozen waterfall; For this man, so foul and bent of stature,
155 Raped harshly against his dainty nature, And seemed the one blot on the
summer morn,— So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.

VI.

The leper raised not the gold from the dust:
“Better to me the poor man’s crust, 160
Better the blessing of the poor,
Though I turn me empty from his door;
That is no true alms which the hand can hold;
He gives nothing but worthless gold
Who gives from a sense of duty; 165
But he who gives but a slender mite,
And gives to that which is out of sight,
That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty
Which runs through all and doth all unite,—
The hand cannot clasp the whole of his alms, 170
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,[3]
From the snow five thousand summers old; 175
On open wold and hill-top bleak
It had gathered all the cold,
And whirled it like sleet on the wanderer’s cheek;
It carried a shiver everywhere
From the unleafed boughs and pastures bare; 180
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 185



As the lashes of light that trim the stars;
He sculptured every summer delight
In his halls and chambers out of sight;
Sometimes his tinkling waters slipt
Down through a frost-leaved forest-crypt, 190
Long, sparkling aisles of steel-stemmed trees
Bending to counterfeit a breeze;
Sometimes the roof no fretwork knew
But silvery mosses that downward grew;
Sometimes it was carved in sharp relief 195
With quaint arabesques of ice-fern leaf;

[Footnote 3: Note the different moods that are indicated by the two preludes. The one is of June, the other of snow and winter. By these preludes the poet, like an organist, strikes a key which he holds in the subsequent parts.]



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[Illustration: As Sir Launfal Made Morn Through the Darksome Gate.]

Sometimes it was simply smooth and clear
For the gladness of heaven to shine through, and here
He had caught the nodding bulrush-tops
And hung them thickly with diamond-drops, 200
That crystallized the beams of moon and sun,
And made a star of every one:
No mortal builder's most rare device[4]
Could match this winter-palace of ice;
'Twas as if every image that mirrored lay 205
In his depths serene through the summer day,[5]
Each fleeting shadow of earth and sky,
Lest the happy model should be lost,
Had been mimicked in fairy masonry
By the elfin builders of the frost. 210

Within the hall are song and laughter,
The cheeks of Christmas grow red and jolly,
And sprouting is every corbel and rafter
With lightsome green of ivy and holly;
Through the deep gulf of the chimney wide 215
Wallows the Yule-log's roaring tide
The broad flame-pennons droop and flap
And belly and tug as a flag in the wind;
Like a locust shrills the imprisoned sap,
Hunted to death in its galleries blind; 220
And swift little troops of silent sparks,
Now pausing, now scattering away as in fear,
Go threading the soot-forest's tangled darks
Like herds of startled deer.
But the wind without was eager and sharp, 225
Of Sir Launfal's gray hair it makes a harp,
And rattles and wrings
The icy strings,
Singing, in dreary monotone,
A Christmas carol of its own, 230
Whose burden still, as he might guess,
Was—"Shelterless, shelterless, shelterless!"
The voice of the seneschal flared like a torch
As he shouted the wanderer away from the porch,
And he sat in the gateway and saw all night 235
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.

[Footnote 4: The Empress of Russia, Catherine II., in a magnificent freak, built a palace of ice, which was a nine-days' wonder. Cowper has given a poetical description of it in *The Task*, Book V. lines 131-176.]

[Footnote 5: The Yule-log was anciently a huge log burned at the feast of Juul (pronounced Yule) by our Scandinavian ancestors in honor of the god Thor. Juul-tid (Yule-time) corresponded in time to Christmas tide, and when Christian festivities took the place of pagan, many ceremonies remained. The great log, still called the Yule-log, was dragged in and burned in the fireplace after Thor had been forgotten.]



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PART SECOND.

I.

There was never a leaf on bush or tree, 240
The bare boughs rattled shudderingly;
The river was dumb and could not speak,
For the weaver Winter its shroud had spun,
A single crow on the tree-top bleak
From his shining feathers shed off the cold sun; 245
Again it was morning, but shrunk and cold,
As if her veins were sapless and old,
And she rose up decrepitley
For a last dim look at earth and sea.

II.

Sir Launfal turned from his own hard gate, 250
For another heir in his earldom sate;
An old, bent man, worn out and frail,
He came back from seeking the Holy Grail;
Little he recked of his earldom's loss,
No more on his surcoat was blazoned the cross, 255
But deep in his soul the sign he wore,
The badge of the suffering and the poor.

III.

Sir Launfal's raiment thin and spare
Was idle mail 'gainst the barbed air,
For it was just at the Christmas time; 260
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, 265
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, 270



And with its own self like an infant played,
And waved its signal of palms.

IV.

“For Christ’s sweet sake, I beg an alms;”—
The happy camels may reach the spring,
But Sir Launfal sees only the grewsome thing, 275
The leper, lank as the rain-blanchèd bone,
That cowers 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 280
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; 285
Mild Mary’s Son, acknowledge me;
Behold, through him, I give to Thee!”



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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 290
He had flung an alms to leprosie,
When he girt 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, 295
He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,
And gave the leper to eat and drink:
'T was a mouldy crust of coarse brown bread,
'T was water out of a wooden bowl,—
Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed, 300
And 't was red wine he drank with his thirsty soul.

[Illustration: So he Mused, as he sat, of a sunnier clime.]

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, 305
Shining and tall and fair and straight
As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful Gate,—
Himself the Gate whereby men can
Enter the temple of God in Man.

VIII.

His words were shed softer than leaves from the pine, 310
And they fell on Sir Launfal as snows on the brine,
That 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! 315
In many climes, without avail,
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;
Behold, it is here,—this cup which thou
Didst fill at the streamlet for Me but now;



This crust is My body broken for thee, 320
This water His blood that died on the tree;
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,
In whatso we share with another's need:
Not what we give, but what we share,—
For the gift without the giver is bare; 325
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,—
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and Me.”

IX.

Sir Launfal awoke as from a swoond:—
“The Grail in my castle here is found!
Hang my idle armor up on the wall, 330
Let it be the spider's banquet-hall;
He must be fenced with stronger mail
Who would seek and find the Holy Grail.”

X.



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The castle gate stands open now,
And the wanderer is welcome to the hall 335
As the hangbird is to the elm-tree bough;
No longer scowl the turrets tall,
The Summer's long siege at last is o'er;
When the first poor outcast went in at the door,
She entered with him in disguise, 340
And mastered the fortress by surprise;
There is no spot she loves so well on ground,
She lingers and smiles there the whole year round;
The meanest serf on Sir Launfal's land
Has hall and bower at his command; 345
And there's no poor man in the North Countree
But is lord of the earldom as much as he.

ODE RECITED AT THE HARVARD COMMEMORATION.

[On the 21st of July, 1865, Harvard University welcomed back those of its students and graduates who had fought in the war for the Union. By exercises in the church and at the festival which followed, the services of the dead and the living were commemorated. It was on this occasion that Mr. Lowell recited the following ode.]

I.

Weak-winged is song,
Nor aims at that clear-ethered height
Whither the brave deed climbs for light:
We seem to do them wrong,
Bringing our robin's-leaf to deck their hearse 5
Who in warm life-blood wrote their nobler verse,
Our trivial song to honor those who come
With ears attuned to strenuous trump and drum,
And shaped in squadron-strophes their desire,
Live battle-odes whose lines were steel and fire: 10
Yet sometimes feathered words are strong,
A gracious memory to buoy up and save
From Lethe's dreamless ooze, the common grave
Of the unventurous throng.

**II.**

To-day our Reverend Mother welcomes back 15
Her wisest Scholars, those who understood
The deeper teaching of her mystic tome,
And offered their fresh lives to make it good:
No lore of Greece or Rome,
No science peddling with the names of things, 20
Or reading stars to find inglorious fates,
Can lift our life with wings
Far from Death's idle gulf that for the many waits,
And lengthen out our dates
With that clear fame whose memory sings 25
In manly hearts to come, and nerves them and dilates:
Nor such thy teaching, Mother of us all!
Not such the trumpet-call
Of thy diviner mood,
That could thy sons entice 30
From happy homes and toils, the fruitful nest
Of those half-virtues which the world calls best,
Into War's tumult rude;
But rather far that stern device
The sponsors chose that round thy cradle stood 35
In the dim, unventured wood,
The VERITAS that lurks beneath[6]
The letter's unprolific sheath,
Life of whate'er makes life worth living,
Seed-grain of high emprise, immortal food, 40
One heavenly thing whereof earth hath the giving.



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III.

Many loved Truth, and lavished life's best oil
Amid the dust of books to find her,
Content at last, for guerdon of their toil,
With the cast mantle she hath left behind her. 45
Many in sad faith sought for her,
Many with crossed hands sighed for her;
But these, our brothers, fought for her,
At life's dear peril wrought for her,
So loved her that they died for her, 50
Tasting the raptured fleetness
Of her divine completeness
Their higher instinct knew
Those love her best who to themselves are true,
And what they dare to dream of, dare to do; 55
They followed her and found her
Where all may hope to find,
Not in the ashes of the burnt-out mind,
But beautiful, with danger's sweetness round her.
Where faith made whole with deed 60
Breathes its awakening breath
Into the lifeless creed,
They saw her plumed and mailed,
With sweet, stern face unveiled,
And all-repaying eyes, look proud on them in death. 65

[Footnote 6: An early emblem of Harvard College was a shield with Veritas (truth) upon three open books. This device is still used.]

IV.

Our slender life runs rippling by, and glides
Into the silent hollow of the past;
What is there that abides
To make the next age better for the last?
Is earth too poor to give us 70
Something to live for here that shall outlive us?
Some more substantial boon
Than such as flows and ebbs with Fortune's fickle moon?
The little that we see
From doubt is never free; 75



The little that we do
Is but half-nobly true;
With our laborious hiving
What men call treasure, and the gods call dross,
Life seems a jest of Fate's contriving, 80
Only secure in every one's conniving,
A long account of nothings paid with loss,
Where we poor puppets, jerked by unseen wires,
After our little hour of strut and rave,
With all our pasteboard passions and desires, 85
Loves, hates, ambitions, and immortal fires,
Are tossed pell-mell together in the grave.
But stay! no age was e'er degenerate,
Unless men held it at too cheap a rate,
For in our likeness still we shape our fate. 90
Ah, there is something here
Unfathomed by the cynic's sneer,
Something that gives our feeble light
A high immunity from Night,
Something that leaps life's narrow bars 95
To claim its birthright with the hosts of heaven;



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A seed of sunshine that doth leaven
Our earthly dulness with the beams of stars,
And glorify our clay
With light from fountains elder than the Day; 100
A conscience more divine than we,
A gladness fed with secret tears,
A vexing, forward-reaching sense
Of some more noble permanence;
A light across the sea, 105
Which haunts the soul and will not let it be,
Still glimmering from the heights of undegenerate years.

V.

Whither leads the path
To ampler fates that leads?
Not down through flowery meads, 110
To reap an aftermath
Of youth's vainglorious weeds;
But up the steep, amid the wrath
And shock of deadly-hostile creeds,
Where the world's best hope and stay 115
By battle's flashes gropes a desperate way,
And every turf the fierce foot clings to bleeds.
Peace hath her not ignoble wreath,
Ere yet the sharp, decisive word
Light the black lips of cannon, and the sword 120
Dreams in its easeful sheath;
But some day the live coal behind the thought,
Whether from Baal's stone obscene,
Or from the shrine serene
Of God's pure altar brought, 125
Bursts up in flame; the war of tongue and pen
Learns with what deadly purpose it was fraught,
And, helpless in the fiery passion caught,
Shakes all the pillared state with shock of men:
Some day the soft Ideal that we wooed 130
Confronts us fiercely, foe-beset, pursued,
And cries reproachful: "Was it, then, my praise,



And not myself was loved? Prove now thy truth;
I claim of thee the promise of thy youth;
Give me thy life, or cower in empty phrase, 135
The victim of thy genius, not its mate!"
Life may be given in many ways,
And loyalty to Truth be sealed
As bravely in the closet as the field,
So bountiful is Fate; 140
But then to stand beside her,
When craven churls deride her,
To front a lie in arms and not to yield,
This shows, methinks, God's plan
And measure of a stalwart man, 145
Limbed like the old heroic breeds,
Who stands self-poised on manhood's solid earth;
Not forced to frame excuses for his birth,
Fed from within with all the strength he needs.

VI.

Such was he, our Martyr-Chief, 150
Whom late the Nation he had led,
With ashes on her head,
Wept with the passion of an angry grief:
Forgive me, if from present things I turn
To speak what in my heart will beat and burn, 155



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And hang my wreath on his world-honored urn.
Nature, they say, doth dote,
And cannot make a man
Save on some worn-out plan,
Repeating us by rote: 160
For him her Old-World moulds aside she threw,
And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
Of the unexhausted West,
With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true. 165
How beautiful to see
Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
Who loved his charge, but never loved to lead;
One whose meek flock the people joyed to be,
Not lured by any cheat of birth, 170
But by his clear-grained human worth,
And brave old wisdom of sincerity!
They knew that outward grace is dust;
They could not choose but trust
In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill, 175
And supple-tempered will
That bent like perfect steel to spring again and thrust.
His was no lonely mountain-peak of mind,
Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy bars,
A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors blind; 180
Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined,
Fruitful and friendly for all human-kind,
Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of loftiest stars.
Nothing of Europe here,
Or, then, of Europe fronting mornward still, 185
Ere any names of Serf and Peer
Could Nature's equal scheme deface
And thwart her genial will;
Here was a type of the true elder race,
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face. 190
I praise him not; it were too late;
And some innate weakness there must be
In him who condescends to victory
Such as the Present gives, and cannot wait,
Safe in himself as in a fate. 195



So always firmly he:
He knew to bide his time,
And can his fame abide,
Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
Till the wise years decide. 200
Great captains, with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes;
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame, 205
The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.

VII.



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Long as man's hope insatiate can discern
Or only guess some more inspiring goal 210
Outside of Self, enduring as the pole,
Along whose course the flying axles burn
Of spirits bravely-pitched, earth's manlier brood;
Long as below we cannot find
The meed that stills the inexorable mind; 215
So long this faith to some ideal Good,
Under whatever mortal name it masks,
Freedom, Law, Country, this ethereal mood
That thanks the Fates for their severer tasks,
Feeling its challenged pulses leap, 220
While others skulk in subterfuges cheap,
And, set in Danger's van, has all the boon it asks,
Shall win man's praise and woman's love,
Shall be a wisdom that we set above
All other skills and gifts to culture dear, 225
A virtue round whose forehead we enwreath
Laurels that with a living passion breathe
When other crowns grow, while we twine them, sear.
What brings us thronging these high rites to pay,
And seal these hours the noblest of our year, 230
Save that our brothers found this better way?

VIII.

We sit here in the Promised Land
That flows with Freedom's honey and milk;
But 't was they won it, sword in hand,
Making the nettle danger soft for us as silk.[7] 235
We welcome back our bravest and our best;—
Ah me! not all! some come not with the rest,
Who went forth brave and bright as any here!
I strive to mix some gladness with my strain,
But the sad strings complain, 240
And will not please the ear:
I sweep them for a paeon, but they wane
Again and yet again
Into a dirge, and die away in pain.
In these brave ranks I only see the gaps, 245
Thinking of dear ones whom the dumb turf wraps,
Dark to the triumph which they died to gain:
Fittier may others greet the living,



For me the past is unforgiving;
I with uncovered head 250
Salute the sacred dead,
Who went, and who return not.—Say not so!
'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay,[8]
But the high faith that failed not by the way;
Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave;[9] 255
No bar of endless night exiles the brave;
And to the saner mind
We rather seem the dead that stayed behind.
Blow, trumpets, all your exultations blow!
For never shall their aureoled presence lack: 260
I see them muster in a gleaming row,
With ever-youthful brows that nobler show;
We find in our dull road their shining track;
In every nobler mood

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We feel the orient of their spirit glow, 265
Part of our life's unalterable good,
Of all our saintlier aspiration;
They come transfigured back,
Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,
Beautiful evermore, and with the rays 270
Of morn on their white Shields of Expectation!

[Footnote 7: See Shakespeare, *King Henry IV. Pt. I* Act II Sc. 3. "Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."]

[Footnote 8: See the *Book of Numbers*, chapter xiii.]

[Footnote 9: Compare Gray's line in *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."]

IX.

But is there hope to save
Even this ethereal essence from the grave?
What ever 'scaped Oblivion's subtle wrong
Save a few clarion names, or golden threads of song 275
Before my musing eye
The mighty ones of old sweep by,
Disvoiced now and insubstantial things,
As noisy once as we; poor ghosts of kings,
Shadows of empire wholly gone to dust, 280
And many races, nameless long ago,
To darkness driven by that imperious gust
Of ever-rushing Time that here doth blow:
O visionary world, condition strange,
Where naught abiding is but only Change, 285
Where the deep-bolted stars themselves still shift and range!
Shall we to more continuance make pretence?
Renown builds tombs; a life-estate is Wit;
And, bit by bit,
The cunning years steal all from us but woe: 290
Leaves are we, whose decays no harvest sow.
But, when we vanish hence,



Shall they lie forceless in the dark below,
Save to make green their little length of sods,
Or deepen pansies for a year or two, 295
Who now to us are shining-sweet as gods?
Was dying all they had the skill to do?
That were not fruitless: but the Soul resents
Such short-lived service, as if blind events
Ruled without her, or earth could so endure; 300
She claims a more divine investiture
Of longer tenure than Fame's airy rents;
Whate'er she touches doth her nature share;
Her inspiration haunts the ennobled air,
Gives eyes to mountains blind,
Ears to the deaf earth, voices to the wind, 305
And her clear trump sings succor everywhere
By lonely bivouacs to the wakeful mind,
For soul inherits all that soul could dare:
Yea, Manhood hath a wider span
And larger privilege of life than man. 310
The single deed, the private sacrifice,
So radiant now through proudly-hidden tears,
Is covered up ere long from mortal eyes
With thoughtless drift of the deciduous years;
But that high privilege that makes all men peers,



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315

That leap of heart whereby a people rise
Up to a noble anger's height,
And, flamed on by the Fates, not shrink, but grow more bright,
That swift validity in noble veins,
Of choosing danger and disdaining shame, 320
Of being set on flame
By the pure fire that flies all contact base,
But wraps its chosen with angelic might,
These are imperishable gains,
Sure as the sun, medicinal as light, 325
These hold great futures in their lusty reins
And certify to earth a new imperial race.

X.

Who now shall sneer?
Who dare again to say we trace
Our lines to a plebeian race? 330
Roundhead and Cavalier!
Dumb are those names erewhile in battle loud;
Dream-footed as the shadow of a cloud,
They flit across the ear:
That is best blood that hath most iron in 't. 335
To edge resolve with, pouring without stint
For what makes manhood dear.
Tell us not of Plantagenets,
Hapsburgs, and Guelfs, whose thin bloods crawl
Down from some victor in a border-brawl! 340
How poor their outworn coronets,
Matched with one leaf of that plain civic wreath
Our brave for honor's blazon shall bequeath,
Through whose desert a rescued Nation sets
Her heel on treason, and the trumpet hears 345
Shout victory, tingling Europe's sullen ears
With vain resentments and more vain regrets!



XI.

Not in anger, not in pride,
Pure from passion's mixture rude,
Ever to base earth allied, 350
But with far-heard gratitude,
Still with heart and voice renewed,
To heroes living and dear martyrs dead,
The strain should close that consecrates our brave.
Lift the heart and lift the head! 355
Lofty be its mood and grave,
Not without a martial ring,
Not without a prouder tread
And a peal of exultation:
Little right has he to sing 360
Through whose heart in such an hour
Beats no march of conscious power,
Sweeps no tumult of elation!
'Tis no Man we celebrate,
By his country's victories great, 365
A hero half, and half the whim of Fate,
But the pith and marrow of a Nation
Drawing force from all her men,
Highest, humblest, weakest, all,
For her time of need, and then 370
Pulsing it again through them,
Till the basest can no longer cower,
Feeling his soul spring up



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divinely tall,

Touched but in passing by her mantle-hem.

Come back, then, noble pride, for 'tis her dower! 375

How could poet ever tower,

If his passions, hopes, and fears,

If his triumphs and his tears,

Kept not measure with his people?

Boom, cannon, boom to all the winds and waves! 380

Clash out, glad bells, from every rocking steeple!

Banners, advance with triumph, bend your staves!

And from every mountain-peak

Let beacon-fire to answering beacon speak,

Katahdin tell Monadnock, Whiteface he, 385

And so leap on in light from sea to sea,

Till the glad news be sent

Across a kindling continent,

Making earth feel more firm and air breathe braver:

“Be proud! for she is saved, and all have helped to save her! 390

She that lifts up the manhood of the poor,

She of the open soul and open door,

With room about her hearth for all mankind!

The fire is dreadful in her eyes no more;

From her bold front the helm she doth unbind, 395

Sends all her handmaid armies back to spin,

And bids her navies, that so lately hurled

Their crashing battle, hold their thunders in,

Swimming like birds of calm along the unharmed shore.

No challenge sends she to the elder world, 400

That looked askance and hated; a light scorn

Plays o'er her mouth, as round her mighty knees

She calls her children back, and waits the morn

Of nobler day, enthroned between her subject seas.”

XII.

Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release! 405

Thy God, in these distempered days,

Hath taught thee the sure wisdom of His ways,

And through thine enemies hath wrought thy peace!

Bow down in prayer and praise!

No poorest in thy borders but may now 410



Lift to the juster skies a man's enfranchised brow,
O Beautiful! my Country! ours once more!
Smoothing thy gold of war-dishevelled hair
O'er such sweet brows as never other wore,
 And letting thy set lips, 415
 Freed from wrath's pale eclipse,
The rosy edges of their smile lay bare,
What words divine of lover or of poet
Could tell our love and make thee know it,
Among the Nations bright beyond compare? 420
 What were our lives without thee?
 What all our lives to save thee?
 We reckon not what we gave thee;
 We will not dare to doubt thee,
But ask whatever else, and we will dare! 425

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ON BOARD THE '76.

WRITTEN FOR MR. BRYANT'S SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY.

NOVEMBER 3, 1864.

[After the disastrous battle of Bull Run, Congress authorized the creation of an army of 500,000, and the expenditure of \$500,000,000. The affair of the Trent had partially indicated the temper of the English government, and the people of the United States were thoroughly roused to a sense of the great task which lay before them. Mr. Bryant, at this time, not only gave strong support to the Union through his paper *The Evening Post* of New York, but wrote two lyrics which had a profound effect. One of these, entitled *Not Yet*, was addressed to those of the Old World who were secretly or openly desiring the downfall of the republic. The other, *Our Country's Call*, was a thrilling appeal for recruits. It is to this time and these two poems that Mr. Lowell refers in the lines that follow.]

Our ship lay tumbling in an angry sea,
Her rudder gone, her mainmast o'er the side;
Her scuppers, from the waves' clutch staggering free,
Trailed threads of priceless crimson through the tide;
Sails, shrouds, and spars with pirate cannon torn, 5
We lay, awaiting morn.

Awaiting morn, such morn as mocks despair;
And she that bare the promise of the world
Within her sides, now hopeless, helmless, bare,
At random o'er the wildering waters hurled; 10
The reek of battle drifting slow alee
Not sullener than we.

Morn came at last to peer into our woe,
When lo, a sail! Now surely help was nigh;
The red cross flames aloft, Christ's pledge; but no,[10] 15
Her black guns grinning hate, she rushes by
And hails us:—"Gains the leak! Ay, so we thought!
Sink, then, with curses fraught!"

I leaned against my gun still angry-hot,
And my lids tingled with the tears held back; 20
This scorn methought was crueller than shot:
The manly death-grip in the battle-wrack,
Yard-arm to yard-arm, were more friendly far
Than such fear-smothered war.



There our foe wallowed, like a wounded brute 25
The fiercer for his hurt. What now were best?
Once more tug bravely at the peril's root,
Though death came with it? Or evade the test
If right or wrong in this God's world of ours
Be leagued with higher powers? 30

Some, faintly loyal, felt their pulses lag
With the slow beat that doubts and then despairs;
Some, caitiff, would have struck the starry flag
That knits us with our past, and makes us heirs
Of deeds high-hearted as were ever done 35
'Neath the all-seeing sun.



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[Footnote 10: The red cross is the British flag.]

But there was one, the Singer of our crew,
Upon whose head Age waved his peaceful sign,
But whose red heart's-blood no surrender knew;
And couchant under brows of massive line, 40
The eyes, like guns beneath a parapet,
Watched, charged with lightnings yet.

The voices of the hills did his obey;
The torrents flashed and tumbled in his song;
He brought our native fields from far away, 45
Or set us 'mid the innumerable throng
Of dateless woods, or where we heard the calm
Old homestead's evening psalm.

But now he sang of faith to things unseen,
Of freedom's birthright given to us in trust; 50
And words of doughty cheer he spoke between,
That made all earthly fortune seem as dust,
Matched with that duty, old as Time and new,
Of being brave and true.

We, listening, learned what makes the might of words,— 55
Manhood to back them, constant as a star;
His voice rammed home our cannon, edged our swords,
And sent our boarders shouting; shroud and spar
Heard him and stiffened; the sails heard, and wooed
The winds with loftier mood. 60

In our dark hours he manned our guns again;
Remanned ourselves from his own manhood's stores;
Pride, honor, country, throbbled through all his strain:
And shall we praise? God's praise was his before;
And on our futile laurels he looks down, 65
Himself our bravest crown.

AN INDIAN-SUMMER REVERIE.

[When Mr. Lowell wrote this poem he was living at Elmwood in Cambridge, at that time quite remote from town influences,—Cambridge itself being scarcely more than a village,—but now rapidly losing its rustic surroundings. The Charles River flowed near by, then a limpid stream, untroubled by factories or sewage. It is a tidal river and not far



from Elmwood winds through broad salt marshes. Mr. Longfellow's old home is a short stroll nearer town, and the two poets exchanged pleasant shots, as may be seen by Lowell's *To H.W.L.*, and Longfellow's *The Herons of Elmwood*. In *Under the Willows* Mr. Lowell has, as it were, indulged in another reverie at a later period of his life, among the same familiar surroundings.]

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



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No more the landscape holds its wealth apart,
Making me poorer in my poverty,
 But mingles with my senses and my heart; 10
My own projected spirit seems to me
 In her own reverie the world to steep;
'Tis she that waves to sympathetic sleep,
Moving, as she is moved, each field and hill and tree.

 How fuse and mix, with what unfelt degrees, 15
Clasped by the faint horizon's languid arms,
 Each into each, the hazy distances!
The softened season all the landscape charms;
 Those hills, my native village that embay,
 In waves of dreamier purple roll away, 20
And floating in mirage seem all the glimmering farms.

 Far distant sounds the hidden chickadee
Close at my side; far distant sound the leaves;
 The fields seem fields of dream, where Memory
Wanders like gleaning Ruth; and as the sheaves 25
 Of wheat and barley wavered in the eye
 Of Boaz as the maiden's glow went by,
So tremble and seem remote all things the sense receives.

 The cock's shrill trump that tells of scattered corn,
Passed breezily on by all his flapping mates, 30
 Faint and more faint, from barn to barn is borne,
Southward, perhaps to far Magellan's Straits;
 Dimly I catch the throb of distant flails;
 Silently overhead the hen-hawk sails, 34
With watchful, measuring eye, and for his quarry waits.

 The sobered robin, hunger-silent now,
Seeks cedar-berries blue, his autumn cheer;
 The squirrel, on the shingly shagbark's bough,
Now saws, now lists with downward eye and ear,
 Then drops his nut, and, with a chipping bound, 40
 Whisks to his winding fastness underground;
The clouds like swans drift down the streaming atmosphere.

 O'er yon bare knoll the pointed cedar shadows
Drowse on the crisp, gray moss; the ploughman's call
 Creeps faint as smoke from black, fresh-furrowed meadows; 45
The single crow a single caw lets fall;



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

The birch, most shy and ladylike of trees, 50
Her poverty, as best she may, retrieves,
And hints at her foregone gentilities
With some saved relics of her wealth of leaves;
The swamp-oak, with his royal purple on,
Glares red as blood across the sinking sun, 55
As one who prouder to a falling fortune cleaves.



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He looks a sachem, in red blanket wrapt,
Who, 'mid some council of the sad-garbed whites,
Erect and stern, in his own memories lapt,
With distant eye broods over other sights, 60
Sees the hushed wood the city's flare replace,
The wounded turf heal o'er the railway's trace,
And roams the savage Past of his undwindled rights.

The red-oak, softer-grained, yields all for lost,
And, with his crumpled foliage stiff and dry, 65
After the first betrayal of the frost,
Rebuffs the kiss of the relenting sky;
The chestnuts, lavish of their long-hid gold,
To the faint Summer, beggared now and old, 69
Pour back the sunshine hoarded 'neath her favoring eye.

The ash her purple drops forgivingly
And sadly, breaking not the general hush;
The maple-swamps glow like a sunset sea,
Each leaf a ripple with its separate flush;
All round the wood's edge creeps the skirting blaze 75
Of bushes low, as when, on cloudy days,
Ere the rain falls, the cautious farmer burns his brush.

O'er yon low wall, which guards one unkempt zone,
Where vines and weeds and scrub-oaks intertwine
Safe from the plough, whose rough, discordant stone 80
Is massed to one soft gray by lichens fine,
The tangled blackberry, crossed and recrossed, weaves
A prickly network of ensanguined leaves;
Hard by, with coral beads, the prim black-alders shine.

Pillaring with flame this crumbling boundary, 85
Whose loose blocks topple 'neath the ploughboy's foot,
Who, with each sense shut fast except the eye,
Creeps close and scares the jay he hoped to shoot,
The woodbine up the elm's straight stem aspires,
Coiling it, harmless, with autumnal fires; 90
In the ivy's paler blaze the martyr oak stands mute.

Below, the Charles—a stripe of nether sky,
Now hid by rounded apple-trees between,
Whose gaps the misplaced sail sweeps bellying by,
Now flickering golden through a woodland screen, 95



Then spreading out, at his next turn beyond,
A silver circle like an inland pond—
Slips seaward silently through marshes purple and green.

Dear marshes! vain to him the gift of sight
Who cannot in their various incomes share, 100
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, 104
For Nature with cheap means still works her wonders rare.



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In Spring they lie one broad expanse of green,
O'er which the light winds run with glimmering feet:
Here, yellower stripes track out the creek unseen,
There, darker growths o'er hidden ditches meet;
And purpler stains show where the blossoms crowd, 110
As if the silent shadow of a cloud
Hung there becalmed, with the next breath to fleet.

All round, upon the river's slippery edge,
Witching to deeper calm the drowsy tide,
Whispers and leans the breeze-entangling sedge; 115
Through emerald glooms the lingering waters slide,
Or, sometimes wavering, throw back the sun,
And the stiff banks in eddies melt and run
Of dimpling light, and with the current seem to glide.

In Summer 'tis a blithesome sight to see, 120
As, step by step, with measured swing, they pass,
The wide-ranked mowers wading to the knee,
Their sharp scythes panting through the thick-set grass;
Then, stretched beneath a rick's shade in a ring,
Their nooning take, while one begins to sing 125
A stave that droops and dies 'neath the close sky of brass.

Meanwhile that devil-may-care, the bobolink,
Remembering duty, in mid-quaver stops
Just ere he sweeps o'er rapture's tremulous brink,
And 'twixt the winrows most demurely drops, 130
A decorous bird of business, who provides
For his brown mate and fledglings six besides,
And looks from right to left, a farmer 'mid his crops.

Another change subdues them in the Fall,
But saddens not; they still show merrier tints, 135
Though sober russet seems to cover all;
When the first sunshine through their dewdrops glints.
Look how the yellow clearness, streamed across,
Redeems with rarer hues the season's loss, 139
As Dawn's feet there had touched and left their rosy prints.

Or come when sunset gives its freshened zest,
Lean o'er the bridge and let the ruddy thrill,
While the shorn sun swells down the hazy west,
Glow opposite;—the marshes drink their fill



And swoon with purple veins, then slowly fade 145
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, 150
While firmer ice the eager boy awaits,
Trying each buckle and strap beside the fire,
And until bedtime plays with his desire,
Twenty times putting on and off his new-bought skates;—



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Then, every morn, the river's banks shine bright 155
With smooth plate-armor, treacherous and frail,
By the frost's clinking hammers forged at night,
'Gainst which the lances of the sun prevail,
Giving a pretty emblem of the day
When guiltier arms in light shall melt away, 160
And states shall move free-limbed, loosed from war's cramping mail.

And now those waterfalls the ebbing river
Twice every day creates on either side
Tinkle, as through their fresh-sparred grots they shiver
In grass-arched channels to the sun denied; 165
High flaps in sparkling blue the far-heard crow,
The silvered flats gleam frostily below,
Suddenly drops the gull and breaks the glassy tide.

But crowned in turn by vying seasons three,
Their winter halo hath a fuller ring; 170
This glory seems to rest immovably,—
The others were too fleet and vanishing;
When the hid tide is at its highest flow,
O'er marsh and stream one breathless trance of snow 174
With brooding fulness awes and hushes everything.

The sunshine seems blown off by the bleak wind,
As pale as formal candles lit by day;
Gropes to the sea the river dumb and blind;
The brown ricks, snow-thatched by the storm in play,
Show pearly breakers combing o'er their lee, 180
White crests as of some just enchanted sea,
Checked in their maddest leap and hanging poised midway.

But when the eastern blow, with rain aslant,
From mid-sea's prairies green and rolling plains
Drives in his wallowing herds of billows gaunt, 185
And the roused Charles remembers in his veins
Old Ocean's blood and snaps his gyves of frost,
That tyrannous silence on the shores is tost
In dreary wreck, and crumbling desolation reigns.

Edgewise or flat, in Druid-like device, 190
With leaden pools between or gullies bare,
The blocks lie strewn, a bleak Stonehenge of ice;
No life, no sound, to break the grim despair,



Save sullen plunge, as through the sedges stiff
Down crackles riverward some thaw-sapped cliff, 195
Or when the close-wedged fields of ice crunch here and there.

But let me turn from fancy-pictured scenes
To that whose pastoral calm before me lies:
Here nothing harsh or rugged intervenes;
The early evening with her misty dyes 200
Smooths off the ravelled edges of the nigh,
Relieves the distant with her cooler sky,
And tones the landscape down, and soothes the wearied eyes.



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There gleams my native village, dear to me,
 Though higher change's waves each day are seen, 205
 Whelming fields famed in boyhood's history,
 Sanding with houses the diminished green;
 There, in red brick, which softening time defies,
 Stand square and stiff the Muses' factories;— 209
 How with my life knit up is every well-known scene!

Flow on, dear river! not alone you flow
 To outward sight, and through your marshes wind;
 Fed from the mystic springs of long-ago,
 Your twin flows silent through my world of mind;
 Grow dim, dear marshes, in the evening's gray! 215
 Before my inner sight ye stretch away,
 And will forever, though these fleshly eyes grow blind.

Beyond the hillock's house-bespotted swell,
 Where Gothic chapels house the horse and chaise,
 Where quiet cits in Grecian temples dwell, 220
 Where Coptic tombs resound with prayer and praise,
 Where dust and mud the equal year divide,
 There gentle Allston lived, and wrought, and died,[11]
 Transfiguring street and shop with his illumined gaze.

[Footnote 11: In *Cambridge Thirty Years Ago*, which treats in prose of much the same period as this poem reproduces, Mr. Lowell has given more in detail his recollections of Washington Allston, the painter. The whole paper may be read as a prose counterpart to this poem. It is published in *Fireside Travels*.]

Virgilium vidi tantum,—I have seen[12] 225
 But as a boy, who looks alike on all,
 That misty hair, that fine Undine-like mien,[13]
 Tremulous as down to feeling's faintest call;—
 Ah, dear old homestead! count it to thy fame
 That thither many times the Painter came;— 230
 One elm yet bears his name, a feathery tree and tall.

Swiftly the present fades in memory's glow,—
 Our only sure possession is the past;
 The village blacksmith died a month ago,[14]
 And dim to me the forge's roaring blast; 235
 Soon fire-new mediaevals we shall see
 Oust the black smithy from its chestnut-tree,
 And that hewn down, perhaps, the bee-hive green and vast.



How many times, prouder than king on throne,
Loosed from the village school-dame's A's and B's, 240
Panting have I the creaky bellows blown,
And watched the pent volcano's red increase,
Then paused to see the ponderous sledge, brought down
By that hard arm voluminous and brown, 224
From the white iron swarm its golden vanishing bees.

[Footnote 12: *Virgilium vidi tantum*, I barely saw Virgil, a Latin phrase applied to one who has merely had a glimpse of a great man.]



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[Footnote 13: Undine is the heroine of a romantic tale by Baron De la Motte Fouque. She is represented as a water-nymph who wins a human soul only by a union with mortality which brings pain and sorrow.]

[Footnote 14: The village blacksmith of Longfellow's well-known poem. The prophecy came true as regards the hewing-down of the chestnut-tree which was cut down in 1876.]

Dear native town! whose choking elms each year
 With eddying dust before their time turn gray,
 Pining for rain,—to me thy dust is dear;
 It glorifies the eve of summer day,
 And when the westering sun half sunken burns, 250
 The mote-thick air to deepest orange turns,
 The westward horseman rides through clouds of gold away,

So palpable, I've seen those unshorn few,
 The six old willows at the causey's end
 (Such trees Paul Potter never dreamed nor drew), 255
 Through this dry mist their checkering shadows send,
 Striped, here and there, with many a long-drawn thread,
 Where streamed through leafy chinks the trembling red,
 Past which, in one bright trail, the hangbird's flashes blend.

Yes, dearer for thy dust than all that e'er, 260
 Beneath the awarded crown of victory,
 Gilded the blown Olympic charioteer;
 Though lightly prized the ribboned parchments three,
 Yet *collegisse juvat*, I am glad[15]
 That here what colleging was mine I had,— 265
 It linked another tie, dear native town, with thee!

[Footnote 15: *Collegisse juvat*. Horace in his first ode says, *Curriculo pulverem Olympicum Collegisse juvat*; that is: *It's a pleasure to have collected the dust of Olympus on your carriage-wheels*. Mr. Lowell, helping himself to the words, says, "It's a pleasure to have been at college;" for college in its first meaning is a *collection* of men, as in the phrase "The college of cardinals.]"

Nearer art thou than simply native earth,
 My dust with thine concedes a deeper tie;
 A closer claim thy soil may well put forth,
 Something of kindred more than sympathy; 270
 For in thy bounds I reverently laid away



That blinding anguish of forsaken clay,
That title I seemed to have in earth and sea and sky,

That portion of my life more choice to me
(Though brief, yet in itself so round and whole)[16] 275
Than all the imperfect residue can be;—
The Artist saw his statue of the soul
Was perfect; so, with one regretful stroke,
The earthen model into fragments broke, 279
And without her the impoverished seasons roll.



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THE FIRST SNOW-FALL.

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

Every pine and fir and hemlock 5
Wore ermine too dear for an earl,
And the poorest twig on the elm-tree
Was ridged inch-deep with pearl.

[Footnote 16: The volume containing this poem was reverently dedicated "To the ever fresh and happy memory of our little Blanche."]

From sheds new-roofed with Carrara[17]
Came Chanticleer's muffled crow, 10
The stiff rails were softened to swan's-down,
And still fluttered down the snow.

I stood and watched by the window
The noiseless work of the sky,
And the sudden flurries of snow-birds, 15
Like brown leaves whirling by.

I thought of a mound in sweet Auburn
Where a little headstone stood;
How the flakes were folding it gently,
As did robins the babes in the wood. 20

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

Again I looked at the snow-fall, 25
And thought of the leaden sky
That arched o'er our first great sorrow,
When that mound was heaped so high.

I remembered the gradual patience
That fell from that cloud like snow, 30
Flake by flake, healing and hiding
The scar of our deep-plunged woe.



And again to the child I whispered,
“The snow that husheth all,
Darling, the merciful Father 35
Alone can make it fall!”

[Footnote 17: The marble of Carrara, Italy, is noted for its purity.]

Then, with eyes that saw not, I kissed her;
And she, kissing back, could not know
That *my* kiss was given to her sister,
Folded close under deepening snow. 40

THE OAK.

What gnarled stretch, what depth of shade, is his!
There needs no crown to mark the forest's king;
How in his leaves outshines full summer's bliss!
Sun, storm, rain, dew, to him their tribute bring,
Which he with such benignant royalty 5
Accepts, as overpayeth what is lent;
All nature seems his vassal proud to be,
And cunning only for his ornament.



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How towers he, too, amid the billowed snows,
An unquelled exile from the summer's throne, 10
Whose plain, uncinctured front more kingly shows,
Now that the obscuring courtier leaves are flown.
His boughs make music of the winter air,
Jewelled with sleet, like some cathedral front
Where clinging snow-flakes with quaint art repair 15
The dints and furrows of time's envious brunt.

How doth his patient strength the rude March wind
Persuade to seem glad breaths of summer breeze,
And win the soil that fain would be unkind,
To swell his revenues with proud increase! 20
He is the gem; and all the landscape wide
(So doth his grandeur isolate the sense)
Seems but the setting, worthless all beside,
An empty socket, were he fallen thence.

So, from oft converse with life's wintry gales, 25
Should man learn how to clasp with tougher roots
The inspiring earth; how otherwise avails
The leaf-creating sap that sunward shoots?
So every year that falls with noiseless flake
Should fill old scars up on the stormward side, 30
And make hoar age revered for age's sake,
Not for traditions of youth's leafy pride.

So, from the pinched soil of a churlish fate,
True hearts compel the sap of sturdier growth,
So between earth and heaven stand simply great, 35
That these shall seem but their attendants both;
For nature's forces with obedient zeal
Wait on the rooted faith and oaken will;
As quickly the pretender's cheat they feel,
And turn mad Pucks to flout and mock him still.[18] 40

Lord! all Thy works are lessons; each contains
Some emblem of man's all-containing soul;
Shall he make fruitless all Thy glorious pains,
Delving within Thy grace an eyeless mole?
Make me the least of thy Dodona-grove,[19] 45
Cause me some message of thy truth to bring,
Speak but a word to me, nor let thy love
Among my boughs disdain to perch and sing.



[Footnote 18: See Shakspeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.]

[Footnote 19: A grove of oaks at Dodona, in ancient Greece, was the seat of a famous oracle.]

PROMETHEUS.

[The classic legend of Prometheus underwent various changes in successive periods of Greek thought. In its main outline the story is the same: that Prometheus, whose name signifies Forethought, stole fire from Zeus, or Jupiter, or Jove, and gave it as a gift to man. For this, the angry god bound him upon Mount Caucasus, and decreed that a vulture should prey upon his liver, destroying every day what was renewed in the night. The struggle of man's thought to free itself from the tyranny of fear and superstition and all monsters of the imagination is illustrated in the myth. The myth is one which has been a favorite with modern poets, as witness Goethe, Shelley, Mrs. Browning, and Longfellow.]



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One after one the stars have risen and set,
Sparkling upon the hoarfrost on my chain:
The Bear, that prowled all night about the fold
Of the North-Star, hath shrunk into his den,
Scared by the blithesome footsteps of the Dawn, 5
Whose blushing smile floods all the Orient;
And now bright Lucifer grows less and less,
Into the heaven's blue quiet deep-withdrawn.
Sunless and starless all, the desert sky
Arches above me, empty as this heart 10
For ages hath been empty of all joy,
Except to brood upon its silent hope,
As o'er its hope of day the sky doth now.
All night have I heard voices: deeper yet
The deep low breathing of the silence grew. 15
While all about, muffled in awe, there stood
Shadows, or forms, or both, clear-felt at heart,
But, when I turned to front them, far along
Only a shudder through the midnight ran,
And the dense stillness walled me closer round. 20
But still I heard them wander up and down
That solitude, and flappings of dusk wings
Did mingle with them, whether of those hags
Let slip upon me once from Hades deep,
Or of yet direr torments, if such be, 25
I could but guess; and then toward me came
A shape as of a woman: very pale
It was, and calm; its cold eyes did not move,
And mine moved not, but only stared on them.
Their fixed awe went through my brain like ice; 30
A skeleton hand seemed clutching at my heart,
And a sharp chill, as if a dank night fog
Suddenly closed me in, was all I felt:
And then, methought, I heard a freezing sigh,
A long, deep, shivering sigh, as from blue lips 35
Stiffening in death, close to mine ear. I thought
Some doom was close upon me, and I looked
And saw the red moon through the heavy mist,
Just setting, and it seemed as it were falling,
Or reeling to its fall, so dim and dead 40
And palsy-struck it looked. Then all sounds merged
Into the rising surges of the pines,
Which, leagues below me, clothing the gaunt loins



Of ancient Caucasus with hairy strength,
Sent up a murmur in the morning wind, 45
Sad as the wail that from the populous earth
All day and night to high Olympus soars,
Fit incense to thy wicked throne, O Jove!

Thy hated name is tossed once more in scorn
From off my lips, for I will tell thy doom. 50
And are these tears? Nay, do not triumph, Jove!
They are wrung from me but by the agonies
Of prophecy, like those sparse



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drops which fall

From clouds in travail of the lightning, when
The great wave of the storm high-curved and black 55
Rolls steadily onward to its thunderous break.
Why art thou made a god of, thou poor type
Of anger, and revenge, and cunning force?
True Power was never born of brutish strength,
Nor sweet Truth suckled at the shaggy dugs 60
Of that old she-wolf. Are thy thunder-bolts,
That quell the darkness for a space, so strong
As the prevailing patience of meek Light,
Who, with the invincible tenderness of peace,
Wins it to be a portion of herself? 65
Why art thou made a god of, thou, who hast
The never-sleeping terror at thy heart,
That birthright of all tyrants, worse to bear
Than this thy ravening bird on which I smile?
Thou swear'st to free me, if I will unfold 70
What kind of doom it is whose omen flits
Across thy heart, as o'er a troop of doves
The fearful shadow of the kite. What need
To know that truth whose knowledge cannot save?
Evil its errand hath, as well as Good; 75
When thine is finished, thou art known no more:
There is a higher purity than thou,
And higher purity is greater strength;
Thy nature is thy doom, at which thy heart
Trembles behind the thick wall of thy might. 80
Let man but hope, and thou art straightway chilled
With thought of that drear silence and deep night
Which, like a dream, shall swallow thee and thine:
Let man but will, and thou art god no more,
More capable of ruin than the gold 85
And ivory that image thee on earth.
He who hurled down the monstrous Titan-brood[20]
Blinded with lightnings, with rough thunders stunned,
Is weaker than a simple human thought.
My slender voice can shake thee, as the breeze, 90
That seems but apt to stir a maiden's hair,
Sways huge Oceanus from pole to pole;
For I am still Prometheus, and foreknow



In my wise heart the end and doom of all.

Yes, I am still Prometheus, wiser grown 95
By years of solitude,—that holds apart
The past and future, giving the soul room
To search into itself,—and long commune
With this eternal silence;—more a god,
In my long-suffering and strength to meet 100
With equal front the direst shafts of fate,
Than thou in thy faint-hearted despotism,
Girt with thy baby-toys of force and wrath.
Yes, I am that Prometheus who brought down
The light to man, which thou, in selfish fear, 105

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Hadst to thyself usurped,—his by sole right,
For Man hath right to all save Tyranny,—
And which shall free him yet from thy frail throne.
Tyrants are but the spawn of Ignorance,
Begotten by the slaves they trample on, 110
Who, could they win a glimmer of the light,
And see that Tyranny is always weakness,
Or Fear with its own bosom ill at ease,
Would laugh away in scorn the sand-wove chain
Which their own blindness feigned for adamant. 115
Wrong ever builds on quicksands, but the Right
To the firm centre lays its moveless base.
The tyrant trembles, if the air but stirs
The innocent ringlets of a child's free hair,
And crouches, when the thought of some great spirit, 120
With world-wide murmur, like a rising gale,
Over men's hearts, as over standing corn,
Rushes, and bends them to its own strong will.
So shall some thought of mine yet circle earth,
And puff away thy crumbling altars, Jove! 125

[Footnote 20: That is, Jove himself.]

And, wouldst thou know of my supreme revenge,
Poor tyrant, even now dethroned in heart,
Realmless in soul, as tyrants ever are,
Listen! and tell me if this bitter peak,
This never-glutted vulture, and these chains 130
Shrink not before it; for it shall befit
A sorrow-taught, unconquered Titan-heart.
Men, when their death is on them, seem to stand
On a precipitous crag that overhangs
The abyss of doom, and in that depth to see, 135
As in a glass, the features dim and vast
Of things to come, the shadows, as it seems,
Of what had been. Death ever fronts the wise;
Not fearfully, but with clear promises
Of larger life, on whose broad vans upborne, 140
Their outlook widens, and they see beyond
The horizon of the present and the past,



Even to the very source and end of things.
Such am I now: immortal woe hath made
My heart a seer, and my soul a judge 145
Between the substance and the shadow of Truth.
The sure supremeness of the Beautiful,
By all the martyrdoms made doubly sure
Of such as I am, this is my revenge,
Which of my wrongs builds a triumphal arch, 150
Through which I see a sceptre and a throne.
The pipings of glad shepherds on the hills,
Tending the flocks no more to bleed for thee,—
The songs of maidens pressing with white feet
The vintage on thine altars poured no more,— 155
The murmurous bliss of lovers, underneath
Dim grapevine bowers, whose rosy bunches press

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Not half so closely their warm cheeks, unpaled
By thoughts of thy brute lust,—the hive-like hum
Of peaceful commonwealths, where sunburnt Toil 160
Reaps for itself the rich earth made its own
By its own labor, lightened with glad hymns
To an omnipotence which thy mad bolts
Would cope with as a spark with the vast sea,—
Even the spirit of free love and peace, 165
Duty's sure recompense through life and death,—
These are such harvests as all master-spirits
Reap, haply not on earth, but reap no less
Because the sheaves are bound by hands not theirs;
These are the bloodless daggers wherewithal 170
They stab fallen tyrants, this their high revenge:
For their best part of life on earth is when,
Long after death, prisoned and pent no more,
Their thoughts, their wild dreams even, have become
Part of the necessary air men breathe: 175
When, like the moon, herself behind a cloud,
They shed down light before us on life's sea,
That cheers us to steer onward still in hope.
Earth with her twining memories ivies o'er
Their holy sepulchres; the chainless sea, 180
In tempest or wide calm, repeats their thoughts;
The lightning and the thunder, all free things,
Have legends of them for the ears of men.
All other glories are as falling stars,
But universal Nature watches theirs: 185
Such strength is won by love of human-kind.

Not that I feel that hunger after fame,
Which souls of a half-greatness are beset with;
But that the memory of noble deeds
Cries shame upon the idle and the vile, 190
And keeps the heart of Man forever up
To the heroic level of old time.
To be forgot at first is little pain
To a heart conscious of such high intent
As must be deathless on the lips of men; 195
But, having been a name, to sink and be



A something which the world can do without,
Which, having been or not, would never change
The lightest pulse of fate,—this is indeed
A cup of bitterness the worst to taste, 200
And this thy heart shall empty to the dregs.
Endless despair shall be thy Caucasus,
And memory thy vulture; thou wilt find
Oblivion far lonelier than this peak,—
Behold thy destiny! Thou think'st it much 205
That I should brave thee, miserable god!
But I have braved a mightier than thou.
Even the tempting of this soaring heart,
Which might have made me, scarcely less than thou,
A god among my brethren weak



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and blind,— 210

Scarce less than thou, a pitiable thing
To be down-trodden into darkness soon.
But now I am above thee, for thou art
The bungling workmanship of fear, the block
That awes the swart Barbarian; but I 215
Am what myself have made,—a nature wise
With finding in itself the types of all,—
With watching from the dim verge of the time
What things to be are visible in the gleams
Thrown forward on them from the luminous past,— 220
Wise with the history of its own frail heart,
With reverence and with sorrow, and with love,
Broad as the world, for freedom and for man.

Thou and all strength shall crumble, except Love,
By whom, and for whose glory, ye shall cease: 225
And, when thou art but a dim moaning heard
From out the pitiless gloom of Chaos, I
Shall be a power and a memory,
A name to fright all tyrants with, a light
Unsetting as the pole-star, a great voice 230
Heard in the breathless pauses of the fight
By truth and freedom ever waged with wrong,
Clear as a silver trumpet, to awake
Huge echoes that from age to age live on
In kindred spirits, giving them a sense 235
Of boundless power from boundless suffering wrung:
And many a glazing eye shall smile to see
The memory of my triumph (for to meet
Wrong with endurance, and to overcome
The present with a heart that looks beyond, 240
Are triumph), like a prophet eagle, perch
Upon the sacred banner of the Right.
Evil springs up, and flowers, and bears no seed,
And feeds the green earth with its swift decay,
Leaving it richer for the growth of truth; 245
But Good, once put in action or in thought,
Like a strong oak, doth from its boughs shed down
The ripe germs of a forest. Thou, weak god,
Shalt fade and be forgotten! but this soul,
Fresh-living still in the serene abyss, 250



In every heaving shall partake, that grows
From heart to heart among the sons of men,—
As the ominous hum before the earthquake runs
Far through the AEgean from roused isle to isle,—
Foreboding wreck to palaces and shrines, 255
And mighty rents in many a cavernous error
That darkens the free light to man:—This heart,
Unscarred by thy grim vulture, as the truth
Grows but more lovely 'neath the beaks and claws
Of Harpies blind that fain would soil it, shall 260
In all the throbbing exultations share
That wait on freedom's triumphs, and in all

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The glorious agonies of martyr-spirits,—
Sharp lightning-throes to split the jagged clouds
That veil the future, showing them the end,— 265
Pain's thorny crown for constancy and truth,
Girding the temples like a wreath of stars.
This is a thought, that, like the fabled laurel,
Makes my faith thunder-proof; and thy dread bolts
Fall on me like the silent flakes of snow 270
On the hoar brows of aged Caucasus:
But, O thought far more blissful, they can rend
This cloud of flesh, and make my soul a star!

Unleash thy crouching thunders now, O Jove!
Free this high heart, which, a poor captive long, 275
Doth knock to be let forth, this heart which still,
In its invincible manhood, overtops
Thy puny godship, as this mountain doth
The pines that moss its roots. Oh, even now,
While from my peak of suffering I look down, 280
Beholding with a far-spread gush of hope
The sunrise of that Beauty, in whose face,
Shone all around with love, no man shall look
But straightway like a god he is uplift
Unto the throne long empty for his sake, 285
And clearly oft foreshadowed in wide dreams
By his free inward nature, which nor thou,
Nor any anarch after thee, can bind
From working its great doom,—now, now set free
This essence, not to die, but to become 290
Part of that awful Presence which doth haunt
The palaces of tyrants, to hunt off,
With its grim eyes and fearful whisperings
And hideous sense of utter loneliness,
All hope of safety, all desire of peace, 295
All but the loathed forefeeling of blank death,—
Part of that spirit which doth ever brood
In patient calm on the unpilfered nest
Of man's deep heart, till mighty thoughts grow fledged
To sail with darkening shadow o'er the world, 300
Filling with dread such souls as dare not trust



In the unfailing energy of Good,
Until they swoop, and their pale quarry make
Of some o'erbloated wrong,—that spirit which
Scatters great hopes in the seed-field of man, 305
Like acorns among grain, to grow and be
A roof for freedom in all coming time!
But no, this cannot be; for ages yet,
In solitude unbroken, shall I hear
The angry Caspian to the Euxine shout, 310
And Euxine answer with a muffled roar,
On either side storming the giant walls
Of Caucasus with leagues of climbing foam
(Less, from my height, than flakes of downy snow),
That draw back baffled but to hurl again, 315

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Snatched up in wrath and horrible turmoil,
Mountain on mountain, as the Titans erst,
My brethren, scaling the high seat of Jove,
Heaved Pelion upon Ossa's shoulders broad
In vain emprise. The moon will come and go 320
With her monotonous vicissitude;
Once beautiful, when I was free to walk
Among my fellows, and to interchange
The influence benign of loving eyes,
But now by aged use grown wearisome;— 325
False thought! most false! for how could I endure
These crawling centuries of lonely woe
Unshamed by weak complaining, but for thee,
Loneliest, save me, of all created things,
Mild-eyed Astarte, my best comforter,[21] 330
With thy pale smile of sad benignity?

[Footnote 21: Daughter of Heaven and Earth, and symbol of Nature.]

Year after year will pass away and seem
To me, in mine eternal agony,
But as the shadows of dumb summer clouds,
Which I have watched so often darkening o'er 335
The vast Sarmatian plain, league-wide at first,
But, with still swiftness, lessening on and on
Till cloud and shadow meet and mingle where
The gray horizon fades into the sky,
Far, far to northward. Yes, for ages yet 340
Must I lie here upon my altar huge,
A sacrifice for man. Sorrow will be,
As it hath been, his portion; endless doom,
While the immortal with the mortal linked
Dreams of its wings and pines for what it dreams, 345
With upward yearn unceasing. Better so:
For wisdom is meek sorrow's patient child,
And empire over self, and all the deep
Strong charities that make men seem like gods;
And love, that makes them be gods, from her breasts 350
Sucks in the milk that makes mankind one blood.
Good never comes unmixed, or so it seems,



Having two faces, as some images
Are carved, of foolish gods; one face is ill;
But one heart lies beneath, and that is good, 355
As are all hearts, when we explore their depths.
Therefore, great heart, bear up! thou art but type
Of what all lofty spirits endure, that fain
Would win men back to strength and peace through love:
Each hath his lonely peak, and on each heart 360
Envy, or scorn, or hatred, tears lifelong
With vulture beak; yet the high soul is left;
And faith, which is but hope grown wise; and love
And patience, which at last shall overcome.

TO W.L. GARRISON.



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“Some time afterward, it was reported to me by the city officers that they had ferreted out the paper and its editor; that his office was an obscure hole, his only visible auxiliary a negro boy, and his supporters a few very insignificant persons of all colors.”—*Letter of H.G. Otis.*

In a small chamber, friendless and unseen,
Toiled o'er his types one poor, unlearned young man;
The place was dark, unfurnished, and mean;—
Yet there the freedom of a race began.

Help came but slowly; surely no man yet 5
Put lever to the heavy world with less:[22]
What need of help? He knew how types were set,
He had a dauntless spirit, and a press.

Such earnest natures are the fiery pith,
The compact nucleus, round which systems grow! 10
Mass after mass becomes inspired therewith,
And whirls impregnate with the central glow,

O Truth! O Freedom! how are ye still born
In the rude stable, in the manger nursed!
What humble hands unbar those gates of morn 15
Through which the splendors of the New Day burst.

What! shall one monk, scarce known beyond his cell,
Front Rome's far-reaching bolts, and scorn her frown?
Brave Luther answered YES; that thunder's swell
Rocked Europe, and discharmed the triple crown. 20

[Footnote 22: Archimedes, a great philosopher of antiquity, used to say, “Only give me a place to stand on, and I will move the world with my lever.”]

Whatever can be known of earth we know,
Sneered Europe's wise men, in their snail-shells curled;
No! said one man in Genoa, and that No
Out of the dark created this New World.

Who is it will not dare himself to trust? 25
Who is it hath not strength to stand alone?
Who is it thwarts and bilks the inward MUST?
He and his works, like sand, from earth are blown?



Men of a thousand shifts and wiles, look here!
See one straightforward conscience put in pawn 30
To win a world; see the obedient sphere
By bravery's simple gravitation drawn!

Shall we not heed the lesson taught of old,
And by the Present's lips repeated still,
In our own single manhood to be bold, 35
Fortressed in conscience and impregnable will?

We stride the river daily at its spring,
Nor, in our childish thoughtlessness, foresee,
What myriad vassal streams shall tribute bring,
How like an equal it shall greet the sea. 40

O small beginnings, ye are great and strong,
Based on a faithful heart and weariless brain!
Ye build the future fair, ye conquer wrong,
Ye earn the crown, and wear it not in vain.



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WENDELL PHILLIPS.

He stood upon the world's broad threshold; wide
The din of battle and of slaughter rose;
He saw God stand upon the weaker side,
That sank in seeming loss before its foes:
Many there were who made great haste and sold
Unto the cunning enemy their swords,
He scorned their gifts of fame, and power, and gold,
And, underneath their soft and flowery words,
Heard the cold serpent hiss; therefore he went
And humbly joined him to the weaker part,
Fanatic named, and fool, yet well content
So he could be the nearer to God's heart,
And feel its solemn pulses sending blood
Through all the widespread veins of endless good.

MR. HOSEA BIGLOW TO THE EDITOR OF THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY.

[When the Mexican war was under discussion, Mr. Lowell began the publication in a Boston newspaper of satirical poems, written in the Yankee dialect, and purporting to come for the most part from one Hosea Biglow. The poems were the sharpest political darts that were fired at the time, and when the verses were collected and set forth, with a paraphernalia of introductions and notes professedly prepared by an old-fashioned, scholarly parson, Rev. Homer Wilbur, the book gave Mr. Lowell a distinct place as a wit and satirist, and was read with delight in England and America after the circumstance which called it out had become a matter of history and no longer of politics.]

When the war for the Union broke out, Mr. Lowell took up the same strain and contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* a second series of *Biglow Papers*, and just before the close of the war, published the poem that follows.]

DEAR SIR,—Your letter come to han'
Requestin' me to please be funny;
But I ain't made upon a plan
That knows wut's comin', gall or honey:
Ther' 's times the world does look so queer, 5
Odd fancies come afore I call 'em;
An' then agin, for half a year,
No preacher 'thout a call 's more solemn.

You're 'n want o' sunthin' light an' cute,
Rattlin' an' shrewd an' kin' o' jingleish, 10



An' wish, pervidin' it 'ould suit,
I'd take an' citify my English.
I *ken* write long-tailed, ef I please,—
But when I'm jokin', no, I thankee;
Then, 'fore I know it, my idees 15
Run helter-skelter into Yankee.

Sence I begun to scribble rhyme,
I tell ye wut, I hain't ben foolin';
The parson's books, life, death, an' time
Hev took some trouble with my schoolin'; 20
Nor th' airth don't git put out with me,
Thet love her 'z though she wuz a woman;
Why, th' ain't a bird upon the tree
But half forgives my bein' human.



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An' yit I love th' unhighschoolled way 25
Ol' farmers hed when I wuz younger;
Their talk wuz meatier, an' 'ould stay,
While book-froth seems to whet your hunger;
For puttin' in a downright lick
'Twixt Humbug's eyes, ther' 's few can match it. 30
An' then it helves my thoughts ez slick
Ez stret-grained hickory doos a hetchet.

But when I can't, I can't, thet's all,
For Natur' won't put up with gullin';
Idees you hev to shove an' haul 35
Like a druv pig ain't wuth a mullein:
Live thoughts ain't sent for; thru all rifts
O' sense they pour an' resh ye onwards,
Like rivers when south-lyin' drifts
Feel thet th' old airth's a-wheelin' sunwards. 40

Time wuz, the rhymes come crowdin' thick
Ez office-seekers arter 'lection,
An' into ary place 'ould stick
Without no bother nor objection;
But sence the war my thoughts hang back 45
Ez though I wanted to enlist 'em,
An' subs'tutes—*they* don't never lack,
But then they'll slope afore you've mist 'em.

Nothin' don't seem like wut it wuz;
I can't see wut there is to hender, 50
An' yit my brains jes' go buzz, buzz,
Like bumblebees agin a winder;
'Fore these times come, in all airth's row,
Ther' wuz one quiet place, my head in,
Where I could hide an' think,—but now 55
It's all one teeter, hopin', dreadin'.

Where's Peace? I start, some clear-blown night,
When gaunt stone walls grow numb an' number,
An', creakin' 'cross the snow-crus' white,
Walk the col' starlight into summer; 60
Up grows the moon, an' swell by swell
Thru the pale pasturs silvers dimmer
Than the last smile thet strives to tell
O' love gone heavenward in its shimmer.



I hev ben gladder o' sech things, 65
Than cocks o' spring or bees o' clover,
They filled my heart with livin' springs,
But now they seem to freeze 'em over;
Sights innercent ez babes on knee,
Peaceful ez eyes o' pastur'd cattle, 70
Jes' coz they be so, seem to me
To rile me more with thoughts o' battle.

In-doors an' out by spells I try;
Ma'am Natur' keeps her spin-wheel goin',
But leaves my natur' stiff and dry 75
Ez fiel's o' clover arter mowin';
An' her jes' keepin' on the same,
Calmer 'n a clock, an' never carin',
An' findin' nary thing to blame,
Is wus than ef she took to swearin'. 80



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Snow-flakes come whisperin' on the pane,
The charm makes blazin' logs so pleasant,
But I can't hark to wut they're say'n',
With Grant or Sherman ollers present;
The chimbleys shudder in the gale, 85
Thet lulls, then suddin takes to flappin'
Like a shot hawk, but all's ez stale
To me ez so much sperit rappin'.

Under the yaller-pines I house,
When sunshine makes 'em all sweet-scented, 90
An' hear among their furry boughs
The baskin' west-wind purr contented,
While 'way o'erhead, ez sweet an' low
Ez distant bells thet ring for meetin',
The wedged wil' geese their bugles blow, 95
Further an' further South retreatin'.

Or up the slippery knob I strain
An' see a hundred hills like islan's
Lift their blue woods in broken chain
Out o' the sea o' snowy silence; 100
The farm-smokes, sweetes' sight on airth,
Slow thru the winter air a-shrinkin'
Seem kin' o' sad, an' roun' the hearth
Of empty places set me thinkin'.

Beaver roars hoarse with meltin' snows,[23] 105
An' rattles di'mon's from his granite;
Time wuz, he snatched away my prose,
An' into psalms or satires ran it;
But he, nor all the rest thet once
Started my blood to country-dances, 110
Can't set me goin' more 'n a dunce
Thet hain't no use for dreams an' fancies.

[Footnote 23: Beaver Brook, a tributary of the Charles.]

Rat-tat-tat-tattle thru the street
I hear the drummers makin' riot,
An' I set thinkin' o' the feet 115
Thet follered once an' now are quiet,—
White feet ez snowdrops innercent,
Thet never knowed the paths o' Satan,



Whose comin' step ther' 's ears thet won't,
No, not lifelong, leave off awaitin'. 120

Why, hain't I held 'em on my knee?
Didn't I love to see 'em growin',
Three likely lads ez wal could be,
Hahnsome an' brave an' not tu knowin'?
I set an' look into the blaze 125
Whose natur', jes' like theirn, keeps climbin',
Ez long 'z it lives, in shinin' ways,
An' half despise myself for rhymin'.

Wut's words to them whose faith an' truth
On War's red techstone rang true metal, 130
Who ventered life an' love an' youth
For the gret prize o' death in battle?
To him who, deadly hurt, agen
Flashed on afore the charge's thunder,
Tippin' with fire the bolt of men 135
Thet rived the Rebel line asunder?



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'T ain't right to hev the young go fust,
All throbbin' full o' gifts an' graces,
Leavin' life's paupers dry ez dust
To try an' make b'lieve fill their places: 140
Nothin' but tells us wut we miss,
Ther' 's gaps our lives can't never fay in,
An' *thet* world seems so fur from this
Lef' for us loafers to grow gray in!

My eyes cloud up for rain; my mouth 145
Will take to twitchin' roun' the corners;
I pity mothers, tu, down South,
For all they sot among the scornors:
I'd sooner take my chance to stan'
At Jedgment where your meanest slave is, 150
Than at God's bar hol' up a han'
Ez drippin' red ez yourn, Jeff Davis!

Come, Peace! not like a mourner bowed
For honor lost an' dear ones wasted,
But proud, to meet a people proud, 155
With eyes that tell o' triumph tasted!
Come, with han' grippin' on the hilt,
An' step thet proves ye Victory's daughter!
Longin' for you, our sperits wilt
Like shipwrecked men's on raf's for water. 160

Come, while our country feels the lift
Of a gret instinct shoutin' forwards,
An' knows thet freedom ain't a gift
Thet tarries long in han's o' cowards!
Come, sech ez mothers prayed for, when 165
They kissed their cross with lips thet quivered,
An' bring fair wages for brave men,
A nation saved, a race delivered!

VILLA FRANCA.

[The battles of Magenta and Solferino, in the early summer of 1859, had given promise of a complete emancipation of Italy from the Austrian supremacy, when Napoleon III., who was acting in alliance with Victor Emmanuel, king of Sardinia, held a meeting with the emperor Francis Joseph of Austria at Villa Franca, and agreed to terms which were very far from including the unification of Italy. There was a general distrust of Napoleon,



and the war continued with the final result of a united Italy. In the poem which follows Mr. Lowell gives expression to his want of faith in the French emperor.]

Wait a little: do we not wait?
Louis Napoleon is not Fate,
Francis Joseph is not Time;
There's One hath swifter feet than Crime;
Cannon-parliaments settle naught; 5
Venice is Austria's,—whose is Thought?
Minie is good, but, spite of change,
Gutenberg's gun has the longest range.
Spin, spin, Clotho, spin![24]
Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever! 10
In the shadow, year out, year in,
The silent headsman waits forever.



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[Footnote 24: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos were the three Fates of the ancient mythology; Clotho spun the thread of human destiny, Lachesis twisted it, and Atropos with shears severed it.]

Wait, we say; our years are long;
Men are weak, but Man is strong;
Since the stars first curved their rings, 15
We have looked on many things;
Great wars come and great wars go,
Wolf-tracks light on polar snow;
We shall see him come and gone,
This second-hand Napoleon. 20
Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
In the shadow, year out, year in,
The silent headsman waits forever.

We saw the elder Corsican, 25
And Clotho muttered as she span,
While crowned lackeys bore the train,
Of the pinchbeck Charlemagne:
"Sister, stint not length of thread!
Sister, stay the scissors dread! 30
On Saint Helen's granite bleak,
Hark, the vulture whets his beak!"
Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
In the shadow, year out, year in, 35
The silent headsman waits forever.

The Bonapartes, we know their bees
That wade in honey red to the knees:
Their patent reaper, its sheaves sleep sound
In dreamless garners underground: 40
We know false glory's spendthrift race
Pawning nations for feathers and lace;
It may be short, it may be long,
"Tis reckoning-day!" sneers unpaid Wrong.
Spin, spin, Clotho, spin! 45
Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
In the shadow, year out, year in,
The silent headsman waits forever.



The Cock that wears the Eagle's skin
Can promise what he ne'er could win; 50
Slavery reaped for fine words sown,
System for all, and rights for none,
Despots atop, a wild clan below,
Such is the Gaul from long ago;
Wash the black from the Ethiop's face, 55
Wash the past out of man or race!
Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
In the shadow, year out, year in,
The silent headsman waits forever. 60

'Neath Gregory's throne a spider swings,[25]
And snares the people for the kings;
"Luther is dead; old quarrels pass;
The stake's black scars are healed with grass;"
So dreamers prate; did man e'er live 65
Saw priest or woman yet forgive;

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But Luther's broom is left, and eyes
Peep o'er their creeds to where it lies.
Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever! 70
In the shadow, year out, year in,
The silent headsman waits forever.

[Footnote 25: There was more than one Pope Gregory, but Gregory VII in the eleventh century brought the papacy to its supreme power, when kings humbled themselves before the Pope.]

Smooth sails the ship of either realm,
Kaiser and Jesuit at the helm;
We look down the depths, and mark 75
Silent workers in the dark
Building slow the sharp-tusked reefs,
Old instincts hardening to new beliefs;
Patience a little; learn to wait;
Hours are long on the clock of Fate. 80
Spin, spin, Clotho, spin!
Lachesis, twist! and, Atropos, sever!
Darkness is strong, and so is Sin,
But only God endures forever!

THE NIGHTINGALE IN THE STUDY.

"Come forth!" my catbird calls to me,
"And hear me sing a cavatina
That, in this old familiar tree,
Shall hang a garden of Alcina.

"These buttercups shall brim with wine 5
Beyond all Lesbian juice or Massic;
May not New England be divine?
My ode to ripening summer classic?

"Or, if to me you will not hark,
By Beaver Brook a thrush is ringing 10



Till all the alder-coverts dark
Seem sunshine-dappled with his singing.

“Come out beneath the unmastered sky,
With its emancipating spaces,
And learn to sing as well as I, 15
Without premeditated graces.

“What boot your many-volumed gains,
Those withered leaves forever turning,
To win, at best, for all your pains,
A nature mummy-wrapt in learning? 20

“The leaves wherein true wisdom lies
On living trees the sun are drinking;
Those white clouds, drowsing through the skies,
Grew not so beautiful by thinking.

“Come out! with me the oriole cries, 25
Escape the demon that pursues you!
And, hark, the cuckoo weatherwise,
Still hiding, farther onward woos you.”

“Alas, dear friend, that, all my days,
Has poured from thy syringa thicket 30
The quaintly discontinuous lays
To which I hold a season-ticket,—

“A season-ticket cheaply bought
With a dessert of pilfered berries,
And who so oft my soul has caught 35
With morn and evening voluntaries,—



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“Deem me not faithless, if all day
Among my dusty books I linger,
No pipe, like thee, for June to play
With fancy-led, half-conscious finger. 40

“A bird is singing in my brain
And bubbling o’er with mingled fancies,
Gay, tragic, rapt, right heart of Spain
Fed with the sap of old romances.

“I ask no ampler skies than those 45
His magic music rears above me,
No falsers friends, no truer foes,—
And does not Dona Clara love me?

“Cloaked shapes, a twanging of guitars,
A rush of feet, and rapiers clashing, 50
Then silence deep with breathless stars,
And overhead a white hand flashing.

“O music of all moods and climes,
Vengeful, forgiving, sensuous, saintly,
Where still, between the Christian chimes, 55
The moorish cymbal tinkles faintly!

“O life borne lightly in the hand,
For friend or foe with grace Castilian!
O valley safe in Fancy’s land,
Not tramped to mud yet by the million! 60

“Bird of to-day, thy songs are stale
To his, my singer of all weathers,
My Calderon, my nightingale,
My Arab soul in Spanish feathers.

“Ah, friend, these singers dead so long, 65
And still, God knows, in purgatory,
Give its best sweetness to all song,
To Nature’s self her better glory.”

ALADDIN.

When I was a beggarly boy,
And lived in a cellar damp,



I had not a friend nor a toy,
But I had Aladdin's lamp;
When I could not sleep for cold, 5
I had fire enough in my brain,
And builded with roofs of gold
My beautiful castles in Spain!

Since then I have toiled day and night,
I have money and power good store, 10
But, I'd give all my lamps of silver bright
For the one that is mine no more;
Take, Fortune, whatever you choose,
You gave, and may snatch again;
I have nothing 't would pain me to lose, 15
For I own no more castles in Spain!

BEAVER BROOK.

Hushed with broad sunlight lies the hill,
And, minuting the long day's loss,
The cedar's shadow, slow and still,
Creeps o'er its dial of gray moss.

Warm noon brims full the valley's cup, 5
The aspen's leaves are scarce astir;
Only the little mill sends up
Its busy, never-ceasing burr.

Climbing the loose-piled wall that hems
The road along the mill-pond's brink, 10
From 'neath the arching barberry-stems,
My footstep scares the shy chewink.



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Beneath a bony buttonwood
The mill's red door lets forth the din;
The whitened miller, dust-imbued, 15
Flits past the square of dark within.

No mountain torrent's strength is here;
Sweet Beaver, child of forest still,[26]
Heaps its small pitcher to the ear,
And gently waits the miller's will. 20

Swift slips Undine along the race
Unheard, and then, with flashing bound,
Floods the dull wheel with light and grace,
And, laughing, hunts the loath drudge round.

The miller dreams not at what cost 25
The quivering millstones hum and whirl,
Nor how for every turn are tost
Armfuls of diamond and of pearl.

But Summer cleared my happier eyes
With drops of some celestial juice, 30
To see how Beauty underlies,
Forevermore each form of use.

And more; methought I saw that flood,
Which now so dull and darkling steals,
Thick, here and there, with human blood, 35
To turn the world's laborious wheels.

[Footnote 26: Beaver Brook was within walking distance of the poet's home. See *The Nightingale in the Study*.]

No more than doth the miller there,
Shut in our several cells, do we
Know with what waste of beauty rare
Moves every day's machinery. 40

Surely the wiser time shall come
When this fine overplus of might,
No longer sullen, slow, and dumb,
Shall leap to music and to light.



In that new childhood of the Earth 45
Life of itself shall dance and play,
Fresh blood in Time's shrunk veins make mirth,
And labor meet delight half way.

THE SHEPHERD OF KING ADMETUS.

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

Upon an empty tortoise-shell 5
He stretched some chords, and drew
Music that made men's bosoms swell
Fearless, or brimmed their eyes with dew.

Then King Admetus, one who had
Pure taste by right divine, 10
Decreed his singing not too bad
To hear between the cups of wine:

And so, well pleased with being soothed
Into a sweet half-sleep,
Three times his kingly beard he smoothed, 15
And made him viceroy o'er his sheep.

His words were simple words enough,
And yet he used them so,
That what in other mouths was rough
In his seemed musical and low. 20



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

They knew not how he learned at all, 25
For idly, hour by hour,
He sat and watched the dead leaves fall,
Or mused upon a common flower.

It seemed the loveliness of things
Did teach him all their use, 30
For, in mere weeds, and stones, and springs,
He found a healing power profuse.

Men granted that his speech was wise,
But, when a glance they caught
Of his slim grace and woman's eyes, 35
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. 40

And day by day more holy grew
Each spot where he had trod,
Till after-poets only knew
Their first-born brother as a god.

THE PRESENT CRISIS.

[In the year 1844, which is the date of the following poem, the question of the annexation of Texas was pending, and it was made an issue of the presidential campaign then taking place. The anti-slavery party feared and opposed annexation, on account of the added strength which it would give to slavery, and the South desired it for the same reason.]

When a deed is done for Freedom, through the broad earth's aching breast
Runs a thrill of joy prophetic, trembling on from east to west,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels the soul within him climb
To the awful verge of manhood, as the energy sublime
Of a century bursts full-blossomed on the thorny stem of Time. 5



Through the walls of hut and palace shoots the instantaneous throe,
When the travail of the Ages wrings earth's systems to and fro;
At the birth of each new Era, with a recognizing start,
Nation wildly looks at nation, standing with mute lips apart,
And glad Truth's yet mightier man-child leaps beneath the Future's heart. 10

So the Evil's triumph sendeth, with a terror and a chill,
Under continent to continent, the sense of coming ill,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels his sympathies with God
In hot tear-drops ebbing earthward, to be drunk up by the sod,
Till a corpse crawls round unburied, delving in the nobler clod. 15

For mankind are one in spirit, and an instinct bears along,
Round the earth's electric circle, the swift flash of right or wrong;[27]
Whether conscious or unconscious, yet Humanity's vast frame
Through its ocean-sundered fibres feels the gush of joy or shame;—
In the gain or loss of one race all the rest have equal claim. 20

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[Footnote 27: This figure has special force from the fact that Morse's telegraph was first put in operation a few months before the writing of this poem.]

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light. 25

Hast thou chosen, O my people, on whose party thou shall stand,
Ere the Doom from its worn sandals shakes the dust against our land?
Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet 'tis Truth alone is strong,
And, albeit she wander outcast now, I see around her throng[28]
Troops of beautiful, tall angels, to enshield her from all wrong. 30

Backward look across the ages and the beacon-moments see,
That, like peaks of some sunk continent, jut through Oblivion's sea;
Not an ear in court or market for the low foreboding cry
Of those Crises, God's stern winnowers, from whose feet earth's chaff
must fly;
Never shows the choice momentous till the judgment hath passed by. 35

[Footnote 28: Compare:— "Truth crushed to earth shall rise again, The eternal years of God are hers." BRYANT.]

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word;[29]
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own. 40

We see dimly in the Present what is small and what is great,
Slow of faith how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of fate,
But the soul is still oracular; amid the market's din,
List the ominous stern whisper from the Delphic cave within,—
"They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin." 45

[Footnote 29: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."]

Slavery, the earth-born Cyclops, fellest of the giant brood,
Sons of brutish Force and Darkness, who have drenched the earth with blood,
Famished in his self-made desert, blinded by our purer day,



Gropes in yet unblasted regions for his miserable prey;—
Shall we guide his gory fingers where our helpless children play?[30] 50

Then to side with Truth is noble when we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands aside,
Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,
And the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied. 55

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Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes,—they were souls that stood alone,
While the men they agonized for hurled the contumelious stone,
Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith divine,
By one man's plain truth to manhood and to God's supreme design. 60

[Footnote 30: For the full story of Cyclops, which runs in suggestive phrase through these five lines, see the ninth book of the *Odyssey*. The translation by G.H. Palmer will be found especially satisfactory.]

By the light of burning heretics Christ's bleeding feet I track,
Toiling up new Calvaries ever with the cross that turns not back,
And these mounts of anguish number how each generation learned
One new word of that grand *Credo* which in prophet-hearts hath burned[31]
Since the first man stood God-conquered with his face to heaven upturned. 65

For Humanity sweeps onward: where to-day the martyr stands,
On the morrow crouches Judas with the silver in his hands;
Far in front the cross stands ready and the crackling fagots burn,
While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent awe return
To glean up the scattered ashes into History's golden urn. 70

'Tis as easy to be heroes as to sit the idle slaves
Of a legendary virtue carved upon our fathers' graves,
Worshippers of light ancestral make the present light a crime;—
Was the *Mayflower* launched by cowards, steered by men behind their time?
Turn those tracks toward Past or Future, that make *Plymouth Rock* sublime? 75

[Footnote 31: The creed is so named from the first word in the Latin form, *credo*, I believe.]

They were men of present valor, stalwart old iconoclasts,
Unconvinced by axe or gibbet that all virtue was the Past's;
But we make their truth our falsehood, thinking that hath made us free,
Hoarding it in mouldy parchments, while our tender spirits flee
The rude grasp of that great Impulse which drove them across the sea. 80

They have rights who dare maintain them; we are traitors to our sires,
Smothering in their holy ashes Freedom's new-lit altar-fires;
Shall we make their creed our jailer? Shall we, in our haste to slay,
From the tombs of the old prophets steal the funeral lamps away
To light up the martyr-fagots round the prophets of to-day? 85



New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth;
Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires! we ourselves must Pilgrims be.
Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate winter sea,
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key. 90



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AL FRESCO.

The dandelions and buttercups
Gild all the lawn; the drowsy bee
Stumbles among the clover-tops,
And summer sweetens all but me:
Away, unfruitful lore of books, 5
For whose vain idiom we reject
The soul's more native dialect,
Aliens among the birds and brooks,
Dull to interpret or conceive
What gospels lost the woods retrieve! 10
Away, ye critics, city-bred,
Who springes set of thus and so,
And in the first man's footsteps tread,
Like those who toil through drifted snow!
Away, my poets, whose sweet spell[32] 15
Can make a garden of a cell!
I need ye not, for I to-day
Will make one long sweet verse of play.

[Footnote 32: There is a delightful pair of poems by Wordsworth, *Expostulation and Reply*, and *The Tables Turned*, which show how another poet treats books and nature.]

Snap, chord of manhood's tenser strain!
To-day I will be a boy again; 20
The mind's pursuing element,
Like a bow slackened and unbent,
In some dark corner shall be leant.
The robin sings, as of old, from the limb!
The catbird croons in the lilac bush! 25
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 30
Of the lily, and scattered the sacred floor
With haste-dropt gold from shrine to door;
There, as of yore,
The rich, milk-tingeing buttercup
Its tiny polished urn holds up, 35
Filled with ripe summer to the edge,
The sun in his own wine to pledge;



And our tall elm, this hundredth year
Doge of our leafy Venice here,
Who, with an annual ring, doth wed 40
The blue Adriatic overhead,
Shadows with his palatial mass
The deep canals of flowing grass.

O unestranged birds and bees!
O face of Nature always true! 45
O never-unsympathizing trees!
O never-rejecting roof of blue,
Whose rash disherison never falls
On us unthinking prodigals,
Yet who convictest all our ill, 50
So grand and unappeasable!
Methinks my heart from each of these
Plucks part of childhood back again,
Long there imprisoned, as the breeze
Doth every hidden odor seize 55

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Of wood and water, hill and plain;
Once more am I admitted peer
In the upper house of Nature here,
And feel through all my pulses run
The royal blood of breeze and sun. 60

Upon these elm-arched solitudes
No hum of neighbor toil intrudes;
The only hammer that I hear
Is wielded by the woodpecker,
The single noisy calling his 65
In all our leaf-hid Sybaris;
The good old time, close-hidden here,
Persists, a loyal cavalier,
While Roundheads prim, with point of fox,
Probe wainscot-chink and empty box; 70
Here no hoarse-voiced iconoclast
Insults thy statues, royal Past;
Myself too prone the axe to wield,
I touch the silver side of the shield
With lance reversed, and challenge peace, 75
A willing convert of the trees.

How chanced it that so long I tost
A cable's length from this rich coast,
With foolish anchors hugging close
The beckoning weeds and lazy ooze, 80
Nor had the wit to wreck before
On this enchanted island's shore,
Whither the current of the sea,
With wiser drift, persuaded me?

O, might we but of such rare days 85
Build up the spirit's dwelling-place!
A temple of so Parian stone
Would brook a marble god alone,
The statue of a perfect life,
Far-shrined from earth's bestaining strife. 90
Alas! though such felicity
In our vext world here may not be,



Yet, as sometimes the peasant's hut
Shows stones which old religion cut
With text inspired, or mystic sign 95
Of the Eternal and Divine,
Torn from the consecration deep
Of some fallen nunnery's mossy sleep,
So, from the ruins of this day
Crumbling in golden dust away, 100
The soul one gracious block may draw,
Carved with some fragment of the law,
Which, set in life's prosaic wall,
Old benedictions may recall,
And lure some nunlike thoughts to take 105
Their dwelling here for memory's sake.

THE FOOT-PATH.

It mounts athwart the windy hill
Through fallow slopes of upland bare,
And Fancy climbs with foot-fall still
Its narrowing curves that end in air.

By day, a warmer-hearted blue 5
Stoops softly to that topmost swell;
Its thread-like windings seem a clew
To gracious climes where all is well.



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By night, far yonder, I surmise
An ampler world than clips my ken, 10
Where the great stars of happier skies
Commingle nobler fates of men.

I look and long, then haste me home,
Still master of my secret rare;
Once tried, the path would end in Rome, 15
But now it leads me everywhere.

Forever to the new it guides,
From former good, old overmuch;
What Nature for her poets hides,
'Tis wiser to divine than clutch. 20

The bird I list hath never come
Within the scope of mortal ear;
My prying step would make him dumb,
And the fair tree, his shelter, sear.

Behind the hill, behind the sky, 25
Behind my inmost thought, he sings;
No feet avail; to hear it nigh,
The song itself must lend the wings.

Sing on, sweet bird, close hid, and raise
Those angel stairways in my brain, 30
That climb from these low-vaulted days
To spacious sunshines far from pain.

Sing when thou wilt, enchantment fleet,
I leave thy covert haunt untrod,
And envy Science not her feat 35
To make a twice-told tale of God.

They said the fairies tript no more,
And long ago that Pan was dead;
'Twas but that fools preferred to bore
Earth's rind inch-deep for truth instead. 40

Pan leaps and pipes all summer long,
The fairies dance each full-mooned night,
Would we but doff our lenses strong,
And trust our wiser eyes' delight.



City of Elf-land, just without 45
Our seeing, marvel ever new,
Glimpsed in fair weather, a sweet doubt
Sketched-in, mirage-like, on the blue.

I build thee in yon sunset cloud,
Whose edge allures to climb the height; 50
I hear thy drowned bells, inly-loud,
From still pools dusk with dreams of night.

Thy gates are shut to hardiest will,
Thy countersign of long-lost speech,—
Those fountained courts, those chambers still, 55
Fronting Time's far East, who shall reach?

I know not, and will never pry,
But trust our human heart for all;
Wonders that from the seeker fly
Into an open sense may fall. 60

Hide in thine own soul, and surprise
The password of the unwary elves;
Seek it, thou canst not bribe their spies;
Unsought, they whisper it themselves.



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