

Roundabout to Boston (from Literary Friends and Acquaintance) eBook

Roundabout to Boston (from Literary Friends and Acquaintance) by William Dean Howells

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ROUNDAABOUT TO BOSTON

During the four years of my life in Venice the literary intention was present with me at all times and in all places. I wrote many things in verse, which I sent to the magazines in every part of the English-speaking world, but they came unerringly back to me, except in three instances only, when they were kept by the editors who finally printed them. One of these pieces was published in the Atlantic Monthly; another in Harpers Magazine; the third was got into the New York Ledger through the kindness of Doctor Edward Everett Hale, who used I know not what mighty magic to that end. I had not yet met him; but he interested himself in my ballad as if it had been his own. His brother, Charles Hale, later Consul-General for Egypt, whom I saw almost every moment of the two visits he paid Venice in my time, had sent it to him, after copying it in his own large, fair hand, so that it could be read. He was not quite of that literary Boston which I so fondly remembered my glimpses of; he was rather of a journalistic and literary Boston which I had never known; but he was of Boston, after all. He had been in Lowell's classes at Harvard; he had often met Longfellow in Cambridge; he knew Doctor Holmes, of course; and he let me talk of my idols to my heart's content. I think he must have been amused by my raptures; most people would have been; but he was kind and patient, and he listened to me with a sweet intelligence which I shall always gratefully remember. He died too young, with his life's possibilities mainly unfulfilled; but none who knew him could fail to imagine them, or to love him for what he was.

I.

Besides those few pitiful successes, I had nothing but defeats in the sort of literature which I supposed was to be my calling, and the defeats threw me upon prose; for some sort of literary thing, if not one, then another, I must do if I lived; and I began to write those studies of Venetian life which afterwards became a book, and which I contributed as letters to the 'Boston Advertiser', after vainly offering them to more aesthetic periodicals. However, I do not imagine that it was a very smiling time for any literary endeavorer at home in the life-and-death civil war then waging. Some few young men arose who made themselves heard amid the din of arms even as far as Venice, but most of these were hushed long ago. I fancy Theodore Winthrop, who began to speak, as it were, from his soldier's grave, so soon did his death follow the earliest recognition by the public, and so many were his posthumous works, was chief of these; but there were others whom the present readers must make greater effort to remember. Forceythe Willson, who wrote *The Old Sergeant*, became known for the rare quality of his poetry; and now and then there came a poem from Aldrich, or Stedman, or Stoddard. The great new series of the 'Biglow

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Papers' gathered volume with the force they had from the beginning. The Autocrat was often in the pages of the Atlantic, where one often found Whittier and Emerson, with many a fresh name now faded. In Washington the Piatts were writing some of the most beautiful verse of the war, and Brownell was sounding his battle lyrics like so many trumpet blasts. The fiction which followed the war was yet all to come. Whatever was done in any kind had some hint of the war in it, inevitably; though in the very heart of it Longfellow was setting about his great version of Dante peacefully, prayerfully, as he has told in the noble sonnets which register the mood of his undertaking.

At Venice, if I was beyond the range of literary recognition I was in direct relations with one of our greatest literary men, who was again of that literary Boston which mainly represented American literature to me. The official chief of the consul at Venice was the United States Minister at Vienna, and in my time this minister was John Lothrop Motley, the historian. He was removed, later, by that Johnson administration which followed Lincoln's so forgottenly that I name it with a sense of something almost prehistoric. Among its worst errors was the attempted discredit of a man who had given lustre to our name by his work, and who was an ardent patriot as well as accomplished scholar. He visited Venice during my first year, which was the darkest period of the civil war, and I remember with what instant security, not to say severity, he rebuked my scarcely whispered misgivings of the end, when I ventured to ask him what he thought it would be. Austria had never recognized the Secessionists as belligerents, and in the complications with France and England there was little for our minister but to share the home indignation at the sympathy of those powers with the South. In Motley this was heightened by that feeling of astonishment, of wounded faith, which all Americans with English friendships experienced in those days, and which he, whose English friendships were many, experienced in peculiar degree.

I drifted about with him in his gondola, and refreshed myself, long a-hungred for such talk, with his talk of literary life in London. Through some acquaintance I had made in Venice I was able to be of use to him in getting documents copied for him in the Venetian Archives, especially the Relations of the Venetian Ambassadors at different courts during the period and events he was studying. All such papers passed through my hands in transmission to the historian, though now I do not quite know why they need have done so; but perhaps he was willing to give me the pleasure of being a partner, however humble, in the enterprise. My recollection of him is of courtesy to a far younger man unqualified by patronage, and of a presence of singular dignity and grace. He was one of the handsomest men I ever saw, with beautiful eyes, a fine blond beard of modish cut, and a sensitive

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nose, straight and fine. He was altogether a figure of worldly splendor; and I had reason to know that he did not let the credit of our nation suffer at the most aristocratic court in Europe for want of a fit diplomatic costume, when some of our ministers were trying to make their office do its full effect upon all occasions in “the dress of an American gentleman.” The morning after his arrival Mr. Motley came to me with a handful of newspapers which, according to the Austrian custom at that day, had been opened in the Venetian post-office. He wished me to protest against this on his behalf as an infringement of his diplomatic extra-territoriality, and I proposed to go at once to the director of the post: I had myself suffered in the same way, and though I knew that a mere consul was helpless, I was willing to see the double-headed eagle trodden under foot by a Minister Plenipotentiary. Mr. Motley said that he would go with me, and we put off in his gondola to the post-office. The director received us with the utmost deference. He admitted the irregularity which the minister complained of, and declared that he had no choice but to open every foreign newspaper, to whomsoever addressed. He suggested, however, that if the minister made his appeal to the Lieutenant-Governor of Venice, Count Toggenburg would no doubt instantly order the exemption of his newspapers from the general rule.

Mr. Motley said he would give himself the pleasure of calling upon the Lieutenant-Governor, and “How fortunate,” he added, when we were got back into the gondola, “that I should have happened to bring my court dress with me!” I did not see the encounter of the high contending powers, but I know that it ended in a complete victory for our minister.

I had no further active relations of an official kind with Mr. Motley, except in the case of a naturalized American citizen, whose property was slowly but surely wasting away in the keeping of the Venetian courts. An order had at last been given for the surrender of the remnant to the owner; but the Lombardo-Venetian authorities insisted that this should be done through the United States Minister at Vienna, and Mr. Motley held as firmly that it must be done through the United States Consul at Venice. I could only report to him from time to time the unyielding attitude of the Civil Tribunal, and at last he consented, as he wrote, “to act officiously, not officially, in the matter,” and the hapless claimant got what was left of his estate.

I had a glimpse of the historian afterwards in Boston, but it was only for a moment, just before his appointment to England, where he was made to suffer for Sumner in his quarrel with Grant. That injustice crowned the injuries his country had done a most faithful patriot and high-spirited gentleman, whose fame as an historian once filled the ear of the English-speaking world. His books seemed to have been written in a spirit already no longer modern; and I did not find the greatest



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of them so moving as I expected when I came to it with all the ardor of my admiration for the historian. William the Silent seemed to me, by his worshipper's own showing, scarcely level with the popular movement which he did not so much direct as follow; but it is a good deal for a prince to be able even to follow his people; and it cannot be said that Motley does not fully recognize the greatness of the Dutch people, though he may see the Prince of Orange too large. The study of their character made at least a theoretical democrat of a scholar whose instincts were not perhaps democratic, and his sympathy with that brave little republic between the dikes strengthened him in his fealty to the great commonwealth between the oceans. I believe that so far as he was of any political tradition, he was of the old Boston Whig tradition; but when I met him at Venice he was in the glow of a generous pride in our war as a war against slavery. He spoke of the negroes and their simple-hearted, single-minded devotion to the Union cause in terms that an original abolitionist might have used, at a time when original abolitionists were not so many as they have since become.

For the rest, I fancy it was very well for us to be represented at Vienna in those days by an ideal democrat who was also a real swell, and who was not likely to discredit us socially when we so much needed to be well thought of in every way.

At a court where the family of Count Schmerling, the Prime Minister, could not be received for want of the requisite descents, it was well to have a minister who would not commit the mistake of inviting the First Society to meet the Second Society, as a former Envoy Extraordinary had done, with the effect of finding himself left entirely to the Second Society during the rest of his stay in Vienna.

II.

One of my consular colleagues under Motley was another historian, of no such popularity, indeed, nor even of such success, but perhaps not of inferior powers. This was Richard Hildreth, at Trieste, the author of one of the sincerest if not the truest histories of the United States, according to the testimony both of his liking and his misliking critics. I have never read his history, and I speak of it only at second hand; but I had read, before I met him, his novel of 'Archy Moore, or The White Slave', which left an indelible impression of his imaginative verity upon me. The impression is still so deep that after the lapse of nearly forty years since I saw the book, I have no misgiving in speaking of it as a powerful piece of realism. It treated passionately, intensely, though with a superficial coldness, of wrongs now so remote from us in the abolition of slavery that it is useless to hope it will ever be generally read hereafter, but it can safely be praised to any one who wishes to study that bygone condition, and the literature which grew out of it. I fancy



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it did not lack recognition in its time, altogether, for I used to see it in Italian and French translations on the bookstalls. I believe neither his history nor his novel brought the author more gain than fame. He had worn himself out on a newspaper when he got his appointment at Trieste, and I saw him in the shadow of the cloud that was wholly to darken him before he died. He was a tall thin man, absent, silent: already a phantom of himself, but with a scholarly serenity and dignity amidst the ruin, when the worst came.

I first saw him at the pretty villa where he lived in the suburbs of Trieste, and where I passed several days, and I remember him always reading, reading, reading. He could with difficulty be roused from his book by some strenuous appeal from his family to his conscience as a host. The last night he sat with *Paradise Lost* in his hand, and nothing could win him from it till he had finished it. Then he rose to go to bed. Would not he bid his parting guest good-bye? The idea of farewell perhaps dimly penetrated to him. He responded without looking round,

“They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way,”

and so left the room.

I had earlier had some dealings with him as a fellow-consul concerning a deserter from an American ship whom I inherited from my predecessor at Venice. The man had already been four or five months in prison, and he was in a fair way to end his life there; for it is our law that a deserting sailor must be kept in the consul's custody till some vessel of our flag arrives, when the consul can oblige the master to take the deserter and let him work his passage home. Such a vessel rarely came to Venice even in times of peace, and in times of war there was no hope of any. So I got leave of the consul at Trieste to transfer my captive to that port, where now and then an American ship did touch. The flag determines the nationality of the sailor, and this unhappy wretch was theoretically our fellow-citizen; but when he got to Trieste he made a clean breast of it to the consul. He confessed that when he shipped under our flag he was a deserter from a British regiment at Malta; and he begged piteously not to be sent home to America, where he had never been in his life, nor ever wished to be. He wished to be sent back to his regiment at Malta, and to whatever fate awaited him there. The case certainly had its embarrassments; but the American consul contrived to let our presumptive compatriot slip into the keeping of the British consul, who promptly shipped him to Malta. In view of the strained relations between England and America at that time this was a piece of masterly diplomacy.



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Besides my old Ohio-time friend Moncure D. Conway, who paid us a visit, and in his immediate relations with literary Boston seemed to bring the mountain to Mahomet, I saw no one else more literary than Henry Ward Beecher. He was passing through Venice on his way to those efforts in England in behalf of the Union which had a certain great effect at the time; and in the tiny parlor of our apartment on the Grand Canal, I can still see him sitting athletic, almost pugilistic, of presence, with his strong face, but kind, framed in long hair that swept above his massive forehead, and fell to the level of his humorously smiling mouth. His eyes quaintly gleamed at the things we told him of our life in the strange place; but he only partly relaxed from his strenuous pose, and the hands that lay upon his knees were clinched. Afterwards, as he passed our balcony in a gondola, he lifted the brave red fez he was wearing (many people wore the fez for one caprice or another) and saluted our eagle and us: we were often on the balcony behind the shield to attest the authenticity of the American eagle.

III.

Before I left Venice, however, there came a turn in my literary luck, and from the hand I could most have wished to reverse the adverse wheel of fortune. I had labored out with great pains a paper on recent Italian comedy, which I sent to Lowell, then with his friend Professor Norton jointly editor of the North American Review; and he took it and wrote me one of his loveliest letters about it, consoling me in an instant for all the defeat I had undergone, and making it sweet and worthy to have lived through that misery. It is one of the hard conditions of this state that while we can mostly make out to let people taste the last drop of bitterness and ill-will that is in us, our love and gratitude are only semi-articulate at the best, and usually altogether tongue-tied. As often as I tried afterwards to tell Lowell of the benediction, the salvation, his letter was to me, I failed. But perhaps he would not have understood, if I had spoken out all that was in me with the fulness I could have given a resentment. His message came after years of thwarted endeavor, and reinstated me in the belief that I could still do something in literature. To be sure, the letters in the Advertiser had begun to make their impression; among the first great pleasures they brought me was a recognition from my diplomatic chief at Vienna; but I valued my admission to the North American peculiarly because it was Lowell let me in, and because I felt that in his charge it must be the place of highest honor. He spoke of the pay for my article, in his letter, and asked me where he should send it, and I answered, to my father-in-law, who put it in his savings-bank, where he lived, in Brattleboro, Vermont. There it remained, and I forgot all about it, so that when his affairs were settled some years later and I was notified that there was a sum to my credit in the bank, I said, with the confidence I have nearly always felt when wrong, that I had no money there. The proof of my error was sent me in a check, and then I bethought me of the pay for "Recent Italian Comedy."



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It was not a day when I could really afford to forget money due me, but then it was not a great deal of money. The Review was as poor as it was proud, and I had two dollars a printed page for my paper. But this was more than I got from the Advertiser, which gave me five dollars a column for my letters, printed in a type so fine that the money, when translated from greenbacks into gold at a discount of \$2.80, must have been about a dollar a thousand words. However, I was richly content with that, and would gladly have let them have the letters for nothing.

Before I left Venice I had made my sketches into a book, which I sent on to Messrs. Trubner & Co., in London. They had consented to look at it to oblige my friend Conway, who during his sojourn with us in Venice, before his settlement in London, had been forced to listen to some of it. They answered me in due time that they would publish an edition of a thousand, at half profits, if I could get some American house to take five hundred copies. When I stopped in London I had so little hope of being able to do this that I asked the Trubners if I might, without losing their offer, try to get some other London house to publish my book. They said Yes, almost joyously; and I began to take my manuscript about. At most places they would not look at me or it, and they nowhere consented to read it. The house promptest in refusing to consider it afterwards pirated one of my novels, and with some expressions of good intention in that direction, never paid me anything for it; though I believe the English still think that this sort of behavior was peculiar to the American publisher in the old buccaneering times. I was glad to go back to the Trubners with my book, and on my way across the Atlantic I met a publisher who finally agreed to take those five hundred copies. This was Mr. M. M. Hurd, of Hurd & Houghton, a house then newly established in New York and Cambridge. We played ring-toss and shuffleboard together, and became of a friendship which lasts to this day. But it was not till some months later, when I saw him in New York, that he consented to publish my book. I remember how he said, with an air of vague misgiving, and an effect of trying to justify himself in an imprudence, that it was not a great matter anyway. I perceived that he had no faith in it, and to tell the truth I had not much myself. But the book had an instant success, and it has gone on from edition to edition ever since. There was just then the interest of a not wholly generous surprise at American things among the English. Our success in putting down the great Confederate rebellion had caught the fancy of our cousins, and I think it was to this mood of theirs that I owed largely the kindness they showed my book. There were long and cordial reviews in all the great London journals, which I used to carry about with me like love-letters; when I tried to show them to other people, I could not understand their coldness concerning them.



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At Boston, where we landed on our return home, there was a moment when it seemed as if my small destiny might be linked at once with that of the city which later became my home. I ran into the office of the Advertiser to ask what had become of some sketches of Italian travel I had sent the paper, and the managing editor made me promise not to take a place anywhere before I had heard from him. I gladly promised, but I did not hear from him, and when I returned to Boston a fortnight later, I found that a fatal partner had refused to agree with him in engaging me upon the paper. They even gave me back half a dozen unprinted letters of mine, and I published them in the Nation, of New York, and afterwards in the book called Italian Journeys.

But after I had encountered fortune in this frowning disguise, I had a most joyful little visit with Lowell, which made me forget there was anything in the world but the delight and glory of sitting with him in his study at Elmwood and hearing him talk. It must have been my freshness from Italy which made him talk chiefly of his own happy days in the land which so sympathetically greets all its lovers fellow-citizens. At any rate he would talk of hardly anything else, and he talked late into the night, and early into the morning. About two o'clock, when all the house was still, he lighted a candle, and went down into the cellar, and came back with certain bottles under his arms. I had not a very learned palate in those days (or in these, for that matter), but I knew enough of wine to understand that these bottles had been chosen upon that principle which Longfellow put in verse, and used to repeat with a humorous lifting of the eyebrows and hollowing of the voice:

“If you have a friend to dine,
Give him your best wine;
If you have two,
The second-best will do.”

As we sat in their mellow afterglow, Lowell spoke to me of my own life and prospects, wisely and truly, as he always spoke. He said that it was enough for a man who had stuff in him to be known to two or three people, for they would not suffer him to be forgotten, and it would rest with himself to get on. I told him that though I had not given up my place at Venice, I was not going back, if I could find anything to do at home, and I was now on my way to Ohio, where I should try my best to find something; at the worst, I could turn to my trade of printer. He did not think it need ever come to that; and he said that he believed I should have an advantage with readers, if not with editors, in hailing from the West; I should be more of a novelty. I knew very well that even in my own West I should not have this advantage unless I appeared there with an Eastern imprint, but I could not wish to urge my misgiving against his faith. Was I not already richly successful? What better thing personally could befall me, if I lived forever after on milk and honey, than to be sitting there with my hero, my master, and having him talk to me as if we were equal in deed and in fame?

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The cat-bird called in the syringa thicket at his door, before we said the good-night which was good morning, using the sweet Italian words, and bidding each other the 'Dorma bene' which has the quality of a benediction. He held my hand, and looked into my eyes with the sunny kindness which never failed me, worthy or unworthy; and I went away to bed. But not to sleep; only to dream such dreams as fill the heart of youth when the recognition of its endeavor has come from the achievement it holds highest and best.

IV.

I found nothing to do in Ohio; some places that I heard of proved impossible one way or another, in Columbus and Cleveland, and Cincinnati; there was always the fatal partner; and after three weeks I was again in the East. I came to New York, resolved to fight my way in, somewhere, and I did not rest a moment before I began the fight.

My notion was that which afterwards became Bartley Hubbard's. "Get a basis," said the softening cynic of the Saturday Press, when I advised with him, among other acquaintances. "Get a salaried place, something regular on some paper, and then you can easily make up the rest." But it was a month before I achieved this vantage, and then I got it in a quarter where I had not looked for it. I wrote editorials on European and literary topics for different papers, but mostly for the Times, and they paid me well and more than well; but I was nowhere offered a basis, though once I got so far towards it as to secure a personal interview with the editor-in-chief, who made me feel that I had seldom met so busy a man. He praised some work of mine that he had read in his paper, but I was never recalled to his presence; and now I think he judged rightly that I should not be a lastingly good journalist. My point of view was artistic; I wanted time to prepare my effects.

There was another and clearer prospect opened to me on a literary paper, then newly come to the light, but long since gone out in the dark. Here again my work was taken, and liked so much that I was offered the basis (at twenty dollars a week) that I desired; I was even assigned to a desk where I should write in the office; and the next morning I came joyfully down to Spruce Street to occupy it. But I was met at the door by one of the editors, who said lightly, as if it were a trifling affair, "Well, we've concluded to waive the idea of an engagement," and once more my bright hopes of a basis dispersed themselves. I said, with what calm I could, that they must do what they thought best, and I went on skirmishing baselessly about for this and the other papers which had been buying my material.

I had begun printing in the 'Nation' those letters about my Italian journeys left over from the Boston Advertiser; they had been liked in the office, and one day the editor astonished and delighted me by asking how I would fancy giving up outside work to come there and write only for the 'Nation'. We averaged my gains from all sources at

forty dollars a week, and I had my basis as unexpectedly as if I had dropped upon it from the skies.



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This must have been some time in November, and the next three or four months were as happy a time for me as I have ever known. I kept on printing my Italian material in the Nation; I wrote criticisms for it (not very good criticisms, I think now), and I amused myself very much with the treatment of social phases and events in a department which grew up under my hand. My associations personally were of the most agreeable kind. I worked with joy, with ardor, and I liked so much to be there, in that place and in that company, that I hated to have each day come to an end.

I believed that my lines were cast in New York for good and all; and I renewed my relations with the literary friends I had made before going abroad. I often stopped, on my way up town, at an apartment the Stoddards had in Lafayette Place, or near it; I saw Stedman, and reasoned high, to my heart's content, of literary things with them and him.

With the winter Bayard Taylor came on from his home in Kennett and took an apartment in East Twelfth Street, and once a week Mrs. Taylor and he received all their friends there, with a simple and charming hospitality. There was another house which we much resorted to—the house of James Lorimer Graham, afterwards Consul-General at Florence, where he died. I had made his acquaintance at Venice three years before, and I came in for my share of that love for literary men which all their perversities could not extinguish in him. It was a veritable passion, which I used to think he could not have felt so deeply if he had been a literary man himself. There were delightful dinners at his house, where the wit of the Stoddards shone, and Taylor beamed with joyous good-fellowship and overflowed with invention; and Huntington, long Paris correspondent of the Tribune, humorously tried to talk himself into the resolution of spending the rest of his life in his own country. There was one evening when C. P. Cranch, always of a most pensive presence and aspect, sang the most killingly comic songs; and there was another evening when, after we all went into the library, something tragical happened. Edwin Booth was of our number, a gentle, rather silent person in company, or with at least little social initiative, who, as his fate would, went up to the cast of a huge hand that lay upon one of the shelves. “Whose hand is this, Lorry?” he asked our host, as he took it up and turned it over in both his own hands. Graham feigned not to hear, and Booth asked again, “whose hand is this?” Then there was nothing for Graham but to say, “It’s Lincoln’s hand,” and the man for whom it meant such unspeakable things put it softly down without a word.

V.

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It was one of the disappointments of a time which was nearly all joy that I did not then meet a man who meant hardly less than Lowell himself for me. George William Curtis was during my first winter in New York away on one of the long lecturing rounds to which he gave so many of his winters, and I did not see him till seven years afterwards, at Mr. Norton's in Cambridge. He then characteristically spent most of the evening in discussing an obscure point in Browning's poem of 'My Last Duchess'. I have long forgotten what the point was, but not the charm of Curtis's personality, his fine presence, his benign politeness, his almost deferential tolerance of difference in opinion. Afterwards I saw him again and again in Boston and New York, but always with a sense of something elusive in his graciousness, for which something in me must have been to blame. Cold, he was not, even to the youth that in those days was apt to shiver in any but the higher temperatures, and yet I felt that I made no advance in his kindness towards anything like the friendship I knew in the Cambridge men. Perhaps I was so thoroughly attuned to their mood that I could not be put in unison with another; and perhaps in Curtis there was really not the material of much intimacy.

He had the potentiality of publicity in the sort of welcome he gave equally to all men; and if I asked more I was not reasonable. Yet he was never far from any man of goodwill, and he was the intimate of multitudes whose several existence he never dreamt of. In this sort he had become my friend when he made his first great speech on the Kansas question in 1855, which will seem as remote to the young men of this day as the Thermopylae question to which he likened it. I was his admirer, his lover, his worshipper before that for the things he had done in literature, for the 'Howadji' books, and for the lovely fantasies of 'Prue and I', and for the sound-hearted satire of the 'Potiphar Papers', and now suddenly I learnt that this brilliant and graceful talent, this travelled and accomplished gentleman, this star of society who had dazzled me with his splendor far off in my Western village obscurity, was a man with the heart to feel the wrongs of men so little friended then as to be denied all the rights of men. I do not remember any passage of the speech, or any word of it, but I remember the joy, the pride with which the soul of youth recognizes in the greatness it has honored the goodness it may love. Mere politicians might be pro-slavery or anti-slavery without touching me very much, but here was the citizen of a world far greater than theirs, a light of the universal republic of letters, who was willing and eager to stand or fall with the just cause, and that was all in all to me. His country was my country, and his kindred my kindred, and nothing could have kept me from following after him.



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His whole life taught the lesson that the world is well lost whenever the world is wrong; but never, I think, did any life teach this so sweetly, so winningly. The wrong world itself might have been entreated by him to be right, for he was one of the few reformers who have not in some measure mixed their love of man with hate of men; his quarrel was with error, and not with the persons who were in it. He was so gently steadfast in his opinions that no one ever thought of him as a fanatic, though many who held his opinions were assailed as fanatics, and suffered the shame if they did not win the palm of martyrdom. In early life he was a communist, and then when he came out of Brook Farm into the world which he was so well fitted to adorn, and which would so gladly have kept him all its own, he became an abolitionist in the very teeth of the world which abhorred abolitionists. He was a believer in the cause of women's rights, which has no picturesqueness, and which chiefly appeals to the sense of humor in the men who never dreamt of laughing at him. The man who was in the last degree amiable was to the last degree unyielding where conscience was concerned; the soul which was so tender had no weakness in it; his lenity was the divination of a finer justice. His honesty made all men trust him when they doubted his opinions; his good sense made them doubt their own opinions, when they had as little question of their own honesty.

I should not find it easy to speak of him as a man of letters only, for humanity was above the humanities with him, and we all know how he turned from the fairest career in literature to tread the thorny path of politics because he believed that duty led the way, and that good citizens were needed more than good romancers. No doubt they are, and yet it must always be a keen regret with the men of my generation who witnessed with such rapture the early proofs of his talent, that he could not have devoted it wholly to the beautiful, and let others look after the true. Now that I have said this I am half ashamed of it, for I know well enough that what he did was best; but if my regret is mean, I will let it remain, for it is faithful to the mood which many have been in concerning him.

There can be no dispute, I am sure, as to the value of some of the results he achieved in that other path. He did indeed create anew for us the type of good-citizenship, well-nigh effaced in a sordid and selfish time, and of an honest politician and a pure-minded journalist. He never really forsook literature, and the world of actual interests and experiences afforded him outlooks and perspectives, without which aesthetic endeavor is self-limited and purblind. He was a great man of letters, he was a great orator, he was a great political journalist, he was a great citizen, he was a great philanthropist. But that last word with its conventional application scarcely describes the brave and gentle friend of men that he was. He

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was one that helped others by all that he did, and said, and was, and the circle of his use was as wide as his fame. There are other great men, plenty of them, common great men, whom we know as names and powers, and whom we willingly let the ages have when they die, for, living or dead, they are alike remote from us. They have never been with us where we live; but this great man was the neighbor, the contemporary, and the friend of all who read him or heard him; and even in the swift forgetting of this electrical age the stamp of his personality will not be effaced from their minds or hearts.

VI.

Of those evenings at the Taylors' in New York, I can recall best the one which was most significant for me, and even fatefully significant. Mr. and Mrs. Fields were there, from Boston, and I renewed all the pleasure of my earlier meetings with them. At the end Fields said, mockingly, "Don't despise Boston!" and I answered, as we shook hands, "Few are worthy to live in Boston." It was New-Year's eve, and that night it came on to snow so heavily that my horse-car could hardly plough its way up to Forty-seventh Street through the drifts. The next day, and the next, I wrote at home, because it was so hard to get down-town. The third day I reached the office and found a letter on my desk from Fields, asking how I should like to come to Boston and be his assistant on the 'Atlantic Monthly'. I submitted the matter at once to my chief on the 'Nation', and with his frank goodwill I talked it over with Mr. Osgood, of Ticknor & Fields, who was to see me further about it if I wished, when he came to New York; and then I went to Boston to see Mr. Fields concerning details. I was to sift all the manuscripts and correspond with contributors; I was to do the literary proof-reading of the magazine; and I was to write the four or five pages of book-notices, which were then printed at the end of the periodical in finer type; and I was to have forty dollars a week. I said that I was getting that already for less work, and then Mr. Fields offered me ten dollars more. Upon these terms we closed, and on the 1st of March, which was my twenty-ninth birthday, I went to Boston and began my work. I had not decided to accept the place without advising with Lowell; he counselled the step, and gave me some shrewd and useful suggestions. The whole affair was conducted by Fields with his unfailing tact and kindness, but it could not be kept from me that the qualification I had as practical printer for the work was most valued, if not the most valued, and that as proof-reader I was expected to make it avail on the side of economy. Somewhere in life's feast the course of humble-pie must always come in; and if I did not wholly relish this, bit of it, I dare say it was good for me, and I digested it perfectly.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:



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Act officiously, not officially

Confidence I have nearly always felt when wrong

George William Curtis

Give him your best wine

Longfellow

Love and gratitude are only semi-articulate at the best

Made all men trust him when they doubted his opinions

Motley

Quarrel was with error, and not with the persons who were in it

The world is well lost whenever the world is wrong

Women's rights