LOWELL'S OPINION OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

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LOWELL'S OPINION OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

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PREFACE

In writing about Lowell as a critic of his contemporaries, my problem has been mainly to cull from the many criticisms he wrote those which are pertinent to this essay, and to bring all the little things he said together in a coherent whole. My most important sources of material were the letters which Lowell wrote, and the biographies of him and of his contemporaries. In particular I found Scudder’s Lowell and Norton’s edition of Lowell’s Letters helpful. All references in this thesis to Lowell’s letters are made to this edition unless otherwise indicated.

I have tried to record not only the criticisms Lowell made, but also the reasons back of his opinions, when those reasons could be ascertained. Whether or not I wished to do so when I began to write, I do not remember, but I have to a certain degree analyzed Lowell’s character. I hope I have been just.

Instead of discussing in separate chapters the authors about whom Lowell wrote, I found it convenient to treat them in geographical groups, linked more or less closely together.

It is unfortunate that I should have had to leave the library at North Texas State Teachers College before finishing this essay. I have had to depend on the less well equipped Public Library of San Antonio, Texas, for some of
the material found in Chapter V, as I have indicated in footnote 13 of that chapter.

Lowell was first of all a person: gracious, witty, clever, sensitive, lovable—possessed of any number of charming qualities. The reader of the following inadequate study of his opinion of his contemporaries is advised to go to the man himself. A first-hand knowledge of his delightful letters, his poetry, and his critical essays will give the reader of Lowell far more satisfaction than any secondary study could possibly afford.

Betty Smith Terrell
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

James Russell Lowell, the "foremost man of letters in America" of his day, had many sides to his character. He was poet, critic, teacher, essayist, diplomat, and man of the world. The most charming of letter writers, he wrote voluminously throughout a long and busy life to his many friends, relatives, and acquaintances. Even had there been no other side to Lowell than this one, his letters would have earned him a place in the American literary scene, for they contain all the elements of his character mentioned above.

In this essay we are concerned chiefly with Lowell as a critic of his contemporaries. An exhaustive study of that phase of his character is impossible of attaining because of the wide scope of his interests and expressions. In order to keep this study within the necessary bounds, we must limit discussion chiefly to literary personages whose fame has survived in our national memory. I have included several English writers concerning whom Lowell had a good deal to say. That Lowell should think of American and English writers as closely related is not to be wondered at, considering "the

kindred blood of two great nations, joint heirs of the same noble language and of the genius that has given it a cosmopolitan significance."

No critic, however hard he may try, is ever completely free of his own limitations. Every piece of work he judges is colored by his own background, his own tastes, and his own preconceived standards. What were Lowell's limitations? First of all, he considered an author as a whole, and found it difficult to separate his literary from his personal self. And when he did not know a writer personally, he was apt to be influenced by the moral tone of his writings in rendering judgment. From a thistle you can expect only thistles, he seemed to say, and from a good vine sweet grapes and good wine. "Without earnest convictions, no great or sound literature is conceivable," he wrote on one occasion; and on another, "Moral supremacy is the only one that leaves monuments and not ruins behind it." Of the old writers he valued most Emerson, and after him, Longfellow. He never tired of praising their lives, and their works as an expression of their lives. Howells, of the younger generation of writers, crept

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2Lowell, in a letter to Sir Arthur Hodgson, Mayor of Stratford, October 17, 1887. See Howe, op. cit., p. 315.


4Howe, op. cit., Introduction, p. xii.

5See Chapters I and II
closest into Lowell's heart, as much because of his "conscience" and of his "earnest purpose and a hunger after excellence" as because of his style of writing. On the other hand Lowell never gave Poe quite his due as a writer after he learned some of his failings as a man.

There were instances, however, when Lowell rose above his "moralizing" to a more objective plane, at least for a time. On one such occasion Lowell had been taken to task by a minister for having sent that outrageous book, Leaves of Grass, to the library at Harvard. Lowell defended his actions in the following letter:

When I was editing the "Atlantic Monthly," I was in the habit of sending all the new books which came to me as editor, to the College Library. I suppose "Leaves of Grass" must have been one of them. It is a book I never looked into farther than to satisfy myself that it was a solemn humbug. Still, I think the business of a library is to have every book in it, and I should be sorry to have it supposed that I thought well of every volume I have sent to Gore Hall—nay, that I did not think ill of many of them. . . . Where shall the line be drawn? Would you have a library without Byron? or a Byron with his most characteristic work left out? For my own part I should like to see a bonfire made of a good deal of ancient and modern literature—but 'tis out of the question. 7

Lowell realized his own failings, if it can be called that, as early as 1848, when he wrote of himself in the Fable for Critics:

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6Letter to Andrew D. White, President of Cornell University, December 12, 1869.

The top of the hill he'll ne'er come nigh reaching
Till he learns the distinction 'twixt singing and preaching.\(^8\)

Being aware of one's own failings has not yet constituted
their cure, and Lowell continued to lump "lo moral" and "lo
artístico" together in his literary judgments.

Very closely connected with this tendency to consider a
man and his work as one was Lowell's allowing himself some-
times to be swayed by personal opinion when he should have
viewed a work objectively and dispassionately. There are
ample illustrations of this trait in his writings, and we
shall consider them when we study the individual authors.\(^9\)

A third thing which, while it may not have hampered
Lowell's critical faculty, certainly had a bearing on it, was
his devotion to the past—his own and that of his race. Old
friends, old associations, and time-tested literature held
his firmest affection. This does not mean that Lowell was
impervious to anything new. On the contrary, he went forth
joyously and energetically to meet every new experience.
Kreyt
\(^{10}\) Kreybork\(^{10}\) says that "Lowell came bounding" into the midst of
the other staid New Englanders.\(^10\) Glowing and alive to new
impressions though he was, Lowell's devotion to the old formed
the background and yardstick to his acceptance of the new.

\(^{8}\) James Russell Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 91.

\(^{9}\) See below, p. 91.

\(^{10}\) Kreyt
\(^{10}\) Kreybork, op. cit., p. 117.
Did Lowell's feeling for New England affect his impressions of various writers? We may assume the possibility. Howe says of Lowell:

His own strong sense of oneness with all that was indigenous and racy of the soil in New England survived every erosion of experience in other places. Very much a citizen of the world before his life ended, he remained very much also a citizen of his own town and time.¹¹

Let us look at some of Lowell's contemporaries. Thoreau, for example, while New England born and bred, was in reality of no time and place. He was bound by no ties with the life around him; his world was limitless. Howells, on the other hand, although not a New Englander, apparently had all the attributes and feelings which Lowell was accustomed to encounter among his own kind. Lowell found it difficult to be even just with Thoreau; for Howells he had only the highest praise. Emerson, a combination of the best New England qualities, as Lowell conceived them, and world-wide ideas, received the younger man's fullest love and admiration. Holmes, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, all examples of New England in their several ways, appealed to Lowell and satisfied his sense of what was right in a man and an author. The main point to be remembered in applying this measuring stick of Lowell's is that New England to him was more a state of mind than any actual territory.

An interesting sidelight on this characteristic

¹¹Howe, op. cit., p. 1.
is Lowell's wanting even the architecture of the Harvard buildings to conform to the New England ideal. When the members of the Harvard Corporation were considering erecting some new buildings, Lowell could not resist writing his views to his friend Judge Hoar:

The gambrel-roof . . . seems to me much prettier,—no, that is not the word—but more agreeable to the eye and more sedate, a thing to be considered in a College-building, than the Mansard which is so fashionable now, but which has a Chinese look. The gambrel gives quite as good chambers under the roof, and has a New England air—a great merit in my eyes.12

Lowell has been accused of being too pro-British.13 He did love Great Britain. That country was to him a second home, as it is to many other Americans, especially those who are literary minded. Nonetheless, Lowell loved America more deeply. He was proud of being an American, and was convinced that Americans are the "happiest and most civilized people on the face of the Earth."14 He was ever eager to prick into being a more complete American consciousness. He deplored the fact that many Americans aped too much English and Continental letters, fashions, and ways of thinking. The following passage illustrates admirably Lowell's contention:

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12 Letter to Judge E. R. Hoar, Nov. 18, 1862.


You are wrong and N. P. W. is right (as I think) in the main, in what he says about American society. There is as striking a want of external as of internal culture among our men. We ought to have produced the purest race of gentlemen in the world. But Europeans have laughed us into a nation of snobs. We are ashamed of our institutions. Our literature aims to convince Europe that America is as conservative and respectable as herself. I have often remarked that educated Americans have the least dignified bearing of any cultivated people. They all stoop in the shoulder, intellectually as well as physically. A nation of freemen, we alone of all others have the gait of slaves.  

In addition to the capacity for hard work, Lowell possessed an intuitive faculty which aided him greatly as a writer. This insight amounted almost to genius at times. How much Lowell relied upon it, and how much on careful and painstaking study perhaps not even he knew. It is certain that a good deal of his poetry would have been the better for a little more polishing, but his criticisms show that a great deal more work was expended on them.

Scouder mentions Lowell's having been "peculiarly dependent" upon the companionship of women, whom he enjoyed for their wit and sentiment as much as their intelligence. Many of his closest friends and most frequent correspondents were

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16 Kreyborg says of Lowell in this respect, "Foe's peer as a critic, he had not the Southerner's painstaking genius for revision." See History of American Poetry, p. 117.

17 H. E. Scouder, James Russell Lowell, II, 324.
women. That was natural, it seems to me, for the baby of a large family, especially since Lowell's early care was left almost exclusively to a beloved older sister. She taught him his first love of poetry. His first wife, Maria White Lowell, was of a poetic temperament, and fostered Lowell's already fixed desire to become a poet. It may be that women and poetry were thus linked in Lowell's mind. However, he did not confine his friendships to women. He was one of those fortunate men who had "troops of friends" of both sexes, and enjoyed to the fullest his associations with both. I should go farther, even, and say that I do not believe he was over-dependent on anyone for companionship. In a letter to his daughter on one occasion Lowell complained that John Holmes was too dependent on society and wanted it constantly, but that he himself could not live "without an occasional draught of solitude." 

When one first begins to study Lowell's writings he is impressed with the constant emphasis placed on masculinity. All the men whom Lowell appreciated most he described as being masculine or as producing masculine literature. The masculine quality is so much lauded as to raise the question: was there in his mind the recognition of a personal lack of that characteristic? This seems highly improbable in the light of what George William Curtis, one of Lowell's most

intimate friends, said of him:

[He has] the grace, charm, and courtesy of an established social order, blending with the masculine force and the creative energy of the Puritan spirit. 19

Possibly Lowell merely echoed the current style of description, and analyzed all truly creative spirit as springing from a common source which, for want of a better name, he referred to as "masculinity."

It would never do to omit some reference to a few of Lowell's minor peculiarities, such as his "detection of Jewish attributes in unexpected quarters," 20 his piling up words and synonyms and what amounted to entire sentences with colons and semicolons scattered among them, 21 and his lifelong impulsiveness. As he was at times aware, 22 Lowell was guilty of self-plagiarism, which stemmed from his falling so in love with certain of his own phrases that he used them over and over again. We can not blame him for liking his choice of words. No other writer in American literature has had a happier facility in using the right word, the telling phrase. Gleaned from a lifelong study of languages, Lowell's knowledge of words helped him give his friends a great deal of help. 23


20 Howe, op. cit., p. 328. 21 Kreymborg, op. cit., p. 117.

22 Letter to Nabel Burnett, July 26, 1888. See Howe, p. 323.

23 One such example is found in a letter to Henry James, September 9, 1878. See Howe, pp. 235–237.
Both heredity and environment formed Lowell to be a good critic. Born at beautiful Elmwood in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on February 22, 1819, Lowell came of a long line of outstanding men and women, noted for their intellectual force and moral beauty. His father, Dr. Charles Lowell, was a mild, conservative Unitarian minister, well loved by all who knew him. He was the seventh in line of descent from Percival Lowell (or Lowle), who came from Bristol, England and settled in Newbury, Massachusetts in 1639. In 1704 one of his descendants, John Lowell, was born. John was the first minister of Newburyport. His son, named John Lowell also, was born in 1743. A member of the Massachusetts Convention of 1780, he presumably was the author of that section of the Bill of Rights which abolished slavery in Massachusetts. He was a member of the Continental Congress in 1781, a judge of the Court of Appeals in 1782, and was made Chief Justice of the United States Court in 1801. That distinguished gentleman had two sons. One, Francis Cabot Lowell, organizer of the industries along the Merrimac River, gave his name to the city of Lowell, Massachusetts. The other son, Charles, who combined in his person all the wisdom and eloquence, gentleness and grace of his family, became James Russell Lowell’s father.24

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24 Forgoing material taken from information read in E. E. Brown’s Life of James Russell Lowell, pp. 1-13, and Scudder’s Lowell, I, 1-10. All biographical material on Lowell, unless otherwise specified, is taken from Scudder, who has written the most complete and the best biography of Lowell.
Lowell's mother, Harriet Brackett Spence, was descended from Robert Traill, who came to America from the Orkney Islands before the American Revolution, married, and left a daughter in America when he went back to Great Britain. That daughter was Mrs. Lowell's mother. Her father, Keith Spence, of Highland ancestry, was said to be a descendant of Sir Patrick Spens.25

The youngest of seven children, James Russell Lowell had an unusually happy childhood in historic Elmwood. His delight in all forms of beauty was fostered by his surroundings; his early interest in books found ample stimulus in his family and in his access to Dr. Lowell's library.

After attending a dame school, Lowell was sent as a day student to a boarding-school, kept by Mr. William Wells, where he was prepared for entrance to college. When he entered Harvard in 1834 he found himself in an atmosphere not much different from that of Mr. Wells' school, although he was allowed partial freedom.

Boyish and immature as he was,26 Lowell was beginning to find himself in a way, for he continued to read more and more widely, and even began to write a little. One of the most interesting experiences of his college days was his discovery of Landor.27 Another was his "rustication" in 1839 to Concord,

25 Scudder, op. cit., I, 11, 12.
26 Ibid., p. 30. 27 Ibid., p. 31.
because it gave him the opportunity of meeting Emerson and Thoreau. He referred many times in later life to the kindness Emerson showed him, a youth of nineteen.

The period following Lowell's graduation from Harvard was a restless one. He was undecided as to what he wanted to become. At last, settling on the law by a process of elimination, he began to study Blackstone. Finding it necessary to take his brother James' place in the counting room of a coal merchant, Lowell turned again to rhyming. After James' lame hand had healed, Lowell returned to Harvard, where he finished the law course. He received the degree of bachelor of laws in August, 1840, and soon thereafter entered the law offices of Charles Greely Loring in Boston.

His biographers ascribe the restless years between 1837 and 1840 to a violent and unhappy love affair which, fortunately, gave way to a deeper love and a happy engagement to Maria White in 1840.

Lowell published his first volume of poetry, A Year's Life, in January, 1841. He was a constant contributor, also, to the Southern Literary Messenger, although it could not pay him for his contributions. After his book came out he was asked to write for an annual to be published in Boston. Both the opportunity of having his poetry published with that of Hawthorne, Emerson, Bryant, and Halleck, and of receiving five dollars a page for it elated Lowell. He contributed, during this period, to the Arcturus, The Boston Miscellany,
Graham's Magazine, and the Democratic Review. In 1842 he
and Robert Carter established The Pioneer, a monthly liter-
ary and critical magazine, which was to last for only three
numbers and to plunge its founders into a morass of debt.
Part of the blame for the failure of the magazine may be laid
to Lowell's being in New York during a good part of that time
in order to have his eyes treated, and part to the lack of
experience of the young editors.

A second volume, Poems, was issued in 1843, dated 1844.
Following it, Lowell worked on a book, Conversations on Some
of the Old Poets, which was supposed to be published before
he and Maria White could be married. As soon as his part of
the book was done, however, Lowell and Miss White were married,
on December 26, 1844. The book was not published until Jan-
uary, 1845.

Immediately after their marriage the Lowells went to
Philadelphia, where they spent the winter, a concession to
Mrs. Lowell's health. There they lived happily until June in
a little third-story room, "quite low enough to be an at-
tic,"28 on their combined literary earnings. Lowell wrote
editorials for the Pennsylvania Freeman and articles for his
friend Briggs' The Broadway Journal. Mrs. Lowell translated
German verses for the Journal. Lowell's connection with that
magazine was a short one, because he was too fiery an abolition-
ist, under his wife's zealous inspiration, and his feeling

28 Scouder, op. cit., I, 155.
against the annexation of Texas was too strong, to permit of his curbing his pen to the pace Briggs desired.

Lowell's "more exclusively literary work" during the winter of 1845 was published in Graham's Magazine. Most of his contributions were poems. In February, 1845, there appeared his extremely laudatory biographical and critical sketch of Poe. His liking for Poe did not last long; in June he wrote as his conclusive opinion that Poe was lacking in character.

By the middle of June the young Lowells had established themselves at Elmwood with Lowell's mother, father, and sister. Lowell wished to settle himself to a really great work, especially something that would aid the cause of abolitionism. He found it difficult to do more than write occasional verse, however. In September of 1845 Mrs. Lowell's father died suddenly. Expectations of receiving $20,000 or more from his estate were not realized, and the Lowells had to forego for the present the rosy plans they had made for travel and life abroad. On the last day of December their first child, Blanche, was born. Lowell's delight in her, and his deep sorrow at her death fourteen months later, found expression in many poems. Likewise his consolation in the birth of a second child, Mabel, in September, 1847, was commemorated in poetic form.

Lowell identified himself with the abolitionists for two years as one of the chief contributors to the Anti-Slavery
Standard. His sense of proportion keeping him from overzealous participation, he grew little by little unacceptable to the more radical members until his position with the paper was terminated. The connection with the Standard did not change Lowell's independence in politics, and the experience did help him a great deal. He was able, under its stimulus, to write the "Biglow Papers." He also developed more fully his critical powers. During this time Lowell wrote two of his most famous long poems: A Fable for Critics, printed first in October, 1848, and the "Vision of Sir Launfal," published December 17, 1848.

After ending his connection with the Standard, Lowell continued to write poems and articles, and to live a full life with his family and friends at Elmwood. Three events changed his tranquil course of existence. The death of their third child, Rose, in February, 1850, reminded the Lowells tragically of the loss of little Blanche. On March 20 of that same year Lowell's mother died, after having been mentally ill for years. The only happy event was the birth of the Lowells' fourth child, Walter, on December 22, 1850.

The trying times served to crystallize the desire of the Lowells for the long-planned trip to Europe. Selling some land, they secured enough money for their stay abroad, and sailed in the spring of 1851. The fifteen months in Europe were spent mainly in Italy, where little Walter died. A trip through Switzerland, Germany, Provence, France, England,
Scotland, and Wales followed the Italian stay, and on October 30, 1852, the Lowells sailed again for home. Mrs. Lowell never seemed well after the return from Europe. She died October 27, 1853.

After the first sharp desolation of bereavement was over, Lowell seemed to put behind him all but occasional flashes of restlessness. He had drunk deeply of sorrow, and the draught steadied him. He apparently had found himself, and his course "could now be reasonably calculated."29

A series of twelve lectures on English poetry at the Lowell Institute were so good that they earned Lowell the position of professor of languages in Harvard College, a post Longfellow had occupied for eighteen years and now wished to give up in order to devote himself exclusively to poetry. Lowell was given a year in which to go to Europe for the study which he felt necessary before beginning his career as teacher. Most of 1855-1856 he spent in Germany, with an occasional trip to Italy, France, and England. In August, 1856, he returned, ready for work.

During the time he had been away his daughter had been left exclusively in the care of her governess, Miss Frances Dunlap. Miss Dunlap's once wealthy family had lost most of its money; so taking care of Mabel proved to be a highly satisfactory solution of her problem as well as Lowell's.

29 Scudder, op. cit., I, 370.
Lowell's friendship with Miss Dunlap grew steadily deeper and more affectionate. In fact, even before he went to Europe for his year's study, Lowell was more than half in love with her. After teaching one year, Lowell married Miss Dunlap, in September, 1857.

The Atlantic Monthly, with Lowell as editor, was begun in 1857. In some respects Lowell did not treat his editorship as seriously as other men might have, for he was often very lax in writing to his contributors. But in the matter of reviews and criticism he was overconscientious. In a letter to Richard Grant White, June 10, 1858, he wrote:

I find so few people whom I can trust to write a review. Personal motives of one kind or another are always sure to peep out. I think I have gained one good from the fearful bore of reading manuscripts; it is gradually making me as impartial as a chemical test. . . .

In 1859 Mr. Phillips, the publisher of the Atlantic Monthly, died, leaving his business affairs in bad shape. His firm could not continue in business. After various solutions had been discussed, the firm of Ticknor and Fields bought the magazine. Some time later Lowell resigned the editorship of the Atlantic to Mr. Fields.

Most of Lowell's writing during the time he was connected with the Atlantic and also during the dark years of the Civil

30Perris Greenslet says of Lowell that he "revised all copy for each number, often very minutely and subtilely." See James Russell Lowell, p. 140.

31Scudder, op. cit., I, 452.
War was of a political character. Nearly all of his work written during the War was printed, not in the Atlantic monthly, but in the North American Review, of which he was an editor.

We pass over the next few years which, although rich in warm, human content, were poor enough in biographical details. The year 1872 marked the beginning of many changes. On April 2 Mabel Lowell was married to Edward Burnett, and went to Southboro to live. Lowell's sister Rebecca, who, like her mother, suffered from a mental derangement, died in May. This left Lowell and his wife alone at Elmwood, Dr. Charles Lowell having died in 1860. The Lowells did not tarry there long. Renting Elmwood to Mr. Aldrich, and resigning his professorship, Lowell sailed on July 9 with Mrs. Lowell for Europe.

Two years of rest and leisurely travel softened Lowell's determination not to teach again, and when he was offered his old post in 1874 he accepted it, returning to Cambridge in time to settle himself again at Elmwood and become acquainted with his then year-old grandson before classes began in the fall.

After one or two occasions of false hopes, Lowell was offered the post of minister to Austria. He refused it and the Berlin post, but accepted the one to Spain in 1877. He was so successful in Spain that he was offered the ministry to England in 1880. Much pleased with the offer, Lowell accepted the place on condition that two months' leave be
granted him. Mrs. Lowell had been very ill with typhus fever, and could not travel at that time. Granted the delay, Lowell went alone to England, presented his credentials to the queen, and returned to Spain. He was soon able to move his wife to England.

The years spent in England were happy and profitable ones, darkened only at the end by the death on February 19, 1885, of Mrs. Lowell, who had suffered at intervals recurrence of her old malady. A change of presidents resulted in Lowell's being supplanted by a Democrat in June of that year. The lonely poet returned to the United States to his daughter's home in Southboro, Massachusetts, for he could not bear the associations connected with his own home. Until 1889 he spent his summers in England, which had become almost as much home to him as his own country. In the fall of 1889 he returned at last to Elmwood, for his daughter and her children had arranged to make their home with him there.

During the last two years of his life Lowell was a semi-invalid. Racked with pain though he often was, he wrote occasional poems, kept in touch with his friends by means of letters, and even prepared a uniform edition of his writings. He died at Elmwood on August 12, 1891.

With the objectiveness which the years bring we have traced the outline of Lowell's life and learning, his habits of thought, and the bearing they had on his criticisms. Now let us see what his contemporaries thought of him as a critic
of themselves. The result is rather disconcerting: Lowell was considered, first and foremost, as a poet and writer of cultured essays. His critical ability was recognized and commented on, but almost wholly with regard to writers long dead. Men knew and enjoyed his "thumb nail sketches" of various writers as expressed in *A Fable for Critics* and in his letters. They respected the sketches as being just and penetrating, and cleverly executed, but regarded them not so much as serious criticisms as personal feelings about the writers mentioned. Poe, for instance, charged Lowell with malevolence in the treatment of him in the *Fable.*\(^{32}\) During much of Lowell's lifetime, at least, men were too near his personality and his "accomplished versatility,"\(^{33}\) to perceive the lasting quality of his criticisms of his contemporaries.

By 1882 the *Fable* was far enough in the past to permit a just evaluation of it. Francis H. Underwood writes with regard to the characterizations in the *Fable*:

> ... it is surprising to see how the poet anticipated the taste of the coming generation, and how sound and appreciative, according to present standards, his judgments are.\(^{34}\)

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32\(E. C. Stedman, *Poets of America*, p. 325.\)

33\(Norman Foerster, in *American Criticism*, p. 150 writes: "Lowell stood forth among his contemporaries because of his accomplished versatility rather than because of high attainment."\)

34\(F. H. Underwood, *James Russell Lowell*, p. 34.\)
One of the best estimates of Lowell as a critic was written by E. C. Stedman in 1885. He says:

His literary satire, *A Fable for Critics*, was a tilt at the bards of Griswold's Parnassus,—a piece of uneven merit, but far from being open to the charge—that of malevolence—which Poe brought against it. The estimate of Poe is not unfair, and other sketches—such as those of Bryant, Hawthorne, Whittier, and Dwight—are deftly made. Nor could one put a surer finger upon Lowell's shortcomings than his own in the lines upon himself. ... Lowell's scrutiny is sure, and his tests are apt and instant. He is a detective to be dreaded by pretenders. ... His essay on Carlyle, undertaken at a time when few ventured to dispute the old Horsemann's autocracy, is, on the whole, as just as it is independent; that on Lincoln could only have been written by one whose convictions rendered him prophetic. ... It is true that his verdicts are not always such as we agree with, nor do they always agree among themselves. Being a poet, he is prone to express his immediate feeling without submitting it to the principles that, in fact, govern his final judgment. ... He possibly overrates Clough. ... He has touched very lightly, once and again, on Emerson, but with precision and truth. His analysis of Thoreau is sharply criticized as being narrow, but it did expose the defective side of a unique character, and, all things considered, is the subtlest of his minor reviews.

Stedman sums up as his opinion, and it may be considered as the opinion which many of Lowell's other contemporaries had reached, that Lowell was the age's "most brilliant and learned critic." 37

Modern writers are apt to agree with Stedman's estimate.


Ashley H. Thorndike's statement sums up in general the present-day opinion, although some may not agree as to the thoroughness of Lowell's work:

Not only Lowell's thoroughness and accuracy, wit and common sense, but his very freedom from the bides of propaganda and from the desire for novelty give his criticism an enduring sanity, a sanity which is happily united with a rich and discriminating sympathy. 38

CHAPTER II

THE CONCORD GROUP

The natural core of the Concord group was Emerson, whose boundless vitality and all-embracing intellect, coupled with sweet-spirited tolerance of others' faults and understanding of their difficulties, fitted him particularly well to be the center of any society in which he found himself. In that group where, according to Henry James, introspection played almost the part of a social resource, transcendentalism found its exponents. Little understood outside a small group of devotees, and, indeed, not formulated by them into a written creed, the transcendental philosophy, including in itself "the wisdom of the Orient and the speculations of Germany," along with forthright Yankee "vision," formed the "quickest inspiration of our down-East thinkers."²

Into that rarefied atmosphere Lowell was introduced in 1838 when, a lad of nineteen, almost ready to graduate from Harvard College, he was suspended from classes for a time because of his conduct. The things he did which were so serious then are laughable now: failure to wear the kind of

¹As reported in E. C. Stedman, Poets of America, p. 156.
²Ibid., pp. 51-52.
coat required, and absence from chapel services. Lowell took his suspension philosophically enough, although his letters show that he was bored, and fulfilled his duties of reciting to Mr. Barzillai Frost faithfully.

During the time he was in Concord Lowell met both Thoreau and Emerson. It was not the first time Lowell had seen Emerson, for the latter had delivered the Phi Beta Kappa address during Lowell's junior year. A little wary of his doctrine, Lowell nonetheless enjoyed and appreciated the kind hospitality of the older man. When his friends charged him with being ungrateful, because some of the lines of his class poem were critical of Emerson, Lowell wrote, September 1, 1838, to Concord, explaining his reasons for writing as he did, and enclosing a copy of the poem so that Emerson might judge for himself. The acquittal so manfully asked for was freely given.

Lowell's association with Maria White did much to raise his estimation of Emerson, for she looked to Emerson as to a guide and teacher. Lowell followed her example, and by 1848 he was ready to give Emerson, "the American he revered most," first place in A Fable for Critics. Kreymborg calls Lowell's treatment of Emerson the "best attack ever launched at the

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4Ibid., pp. 58-60.
bard's dual strength and weakness, "5 and offers the following lines in substantiation:

'Tis refreshing to old-fashioned people like me
To meet such a primitive Pagan as he,
In whose mind all creation is duly respected
As parts of himself—just a little projected;
And who's willing to worship the stars and the sun,
A convert to—nothing but Emerson.6

A great deal of praise has been heaped on Lowell for two other parts of his characterization of Emerson in the Fable. One was his discovery that whatever of prose Emerson wrote turned out to be poetic after all.7 The other was his splendid and penetrating discussion of the differences between Carlyle and Emerson.8 C. F. Briggs, to whom Lowell had given the manuscript of the Fable, declared that the "character of Emerson was the best thing of the kind" he had ever seen.9

6 Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 44.
7 In a letter to James R. Thayer, December 24, 1883, and in one to C. W. Holmes, December 29, 1884, Lowell told of some conversations with Emerson on Emerson's deficiencies as a poet. Lowell had come to the conclusion that while Emerson was sensitive to what was poetical, and was musical enough in single verses, he valued the "solid meaning of thought" so much more than the "subtle meaning of style" that he was insensible to what makes a poem. Emerson had confessed to Lowell that he was unable to tell the difference between a good verse and a bad one. See Lowell, Letters, II, 275-276, 291-292.
8 Kreymborg, op. cit., p. 119, says that the comparison between Emerson and Carlyle is "literary portraiture of the first order."
9 Scouder, op. cit., I, 240.
Scudder, years later, analyzing the Fable, agreed with Briggs and others who said the same thing:

The lightning flashes which disclose the inherent and lasting qualities of Emerson, Hawthorne, Cooper, Holmes, Whittier, Bryant, Longfellow are all witnesses to the penetration and clear intelligence which Lowell possessed. It must not be forgotten that Lowell, himself only just past the period of youth, was writing of men whose reputation is secure enough now, but who were at that time not wholly discriminated by the general public from a number of mediocrities who crowded about them. . . .

Lowell's relations with Emerson had come to be very pleasant and mutually helpful. In December, 1850, Emerson, writing to Hawthorne about a new magazine that was projected by Mr. George Bradburn, said he had recommended Lowell as an aid to any new review. Apparently nothing came of the plan, but Emerson's good will toward Lowell and his interest in him had been manifested once again. When Lowell was interested in Putnam's Monthly, in 1852, Emerson was among those who promised to contribute.

The two men were companions in another way from 1857 on. In that year the Adirondack Club, with Stillman, Emerson, Lowell, Jeffries Wyman, E. R. Hoar, Dr. Howe, Binney, Woodman, Agassiz, and John Holmes as members, was formed. Doubtless the freedom and unconventionality of life in the open helped to cement the already deep friendship between Lowell and Emerson, as well as the others.

Ibid., p. 254.
On May 5, 1857, a dinner party was arranged at which were present, among others, Longfellow, Holmes, Emerson, and Lowell. It was for the purpose of organizing a new magazine, The Atlantic Monthly. Lowell was chosen editor, and the others agreed to contribute articles and poems to the new venture. During the summer material was gathered for the first number. The articles were to be unsigned, but Lowell was of the opinion that Emerson's work would be recognized, nevertheless, since his personality bloomed from every page.\textsuperscript{11}

In the first number Emerson's "Illusions" and four poems, "The Romany Girl," "The Chartist's Complaint," "Days," and "Brahma" appeared. Lowell was much taken with "Days," although one line of "Brahma," "When me they fly, I am the wings," attracted him strongly. In it, he wrote, "you have crammed meaning with an hydraulic press." He did not hesitate to dispute with Emerson the meanings of several words, although he left the final decision about their inclusion to the author.\textsuperscript{12}

Lowell spoke often of Emerson's ability to inspire other people. This he attributed to the masculine quality of Emerson's mind, saying that Thoreau was the "most remarkable of pistillate plants kindled to fruitage by the Emersonian

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 414. \textsuperscript{12}Ibid., pp. 414-416.
pollen. Lowell credited Emerson with being the one who cut the cable binding America socially and intellectually to English thought, and with giving to young writers the "mental and moral nudge" needed to inspire them. According to Lowell, Emerson helped plagiarists, both of words and ideas, to some of their best efforts, and then praised them for their writings.

Closely connected with what Lowell had to say of Emersonian inspiration are the many references to Emerson's language. Some of the descriptive terms Lowell applied to his friend's choice of words are unusually fine: "rich words like gold trophy nails in temples," "choice, pithy language," "a true eye for a fine, telling phrase," "diction so rich and homely it is like homespun cloth-of-gold," "delicious limpidness of phrase," and "the structure of his prose . . . as nobly metrical as the King James version of the Old Testament." In Lowell's judgment, no man ever had a greater command of the English language than Emerson. He thought that Emerson's instinct for the best word was infallible, and marveled that the poet was discriminating enough to sift out of an entire book one word to add to his collection.

Holmes's essay on Emerson helped Lowell to come to a

13 Lowell, Complete Writings, II, 136, 139, 393, 395, 403.
14 Ibid., pp. 137, 401.
15 Ibid., pp. 401, 402.
definite conclusion about one quality of Emerson's verse: that while it showed no sensuous passion, at least it had spiritual and intellectual passion "enough and to spare—a paler flame, but quite as intense in its way." At times Lowell suspected in Emerson's writings a "certain thinness and vagueness of quality," but found that it was offset by the "lively color and toughness of character" which Emerson's "masculine fibre" gave to the writings. At other times he found Emerson's verses to be as "perfect as a Greek fragment (despite the archaism of a disyllabic fire) . . . ." In a letter to C. E. Norton, July 18, 1867, Lowell paid Emerson a supreme tribute in a loving way that was a revelation in itself, disclosing the comradeship that existed between the two men. He wrote:

Emerson's oration was more disjointed than usual, even with him. It began nowhere and ended everywhere, and yet, as always with that divine man, it left you feeling that something beautiful had passed that way—something more beautiful than anything else, like the rising and setting of stars. Every possible criticism might have been made of it but one—that it was not noble. There was a tone in it that awakened all elevating associations. He boggled, he lost his place, he had to put on his glasses; but it was as if a creature from some fairer world had lost his way in our fogs, and it was our fault, not his. It was chaotic, but it was all such stuff as stars are made of and you couldn't help feeling that


18 Lowell, Complete Writings, II, 402.

19 Ibid., I, 355.
if you waited awhile, all that was nebulous would be whirled into planets, and would assume the mathematical gravity of system. All through it I felt something in me that cried "Ha, ha, to the sound of the trumpets!"

Emerson loved Lowell, too, but his attitude did not always carry with it so much unstinted admiration as did the younger man's. At times no one could have admired Lowell more. After reading the poem, "The Washers of the Shroud," Emerson wrote in his diary, January 17, 1862:

We will not again disparage America now that we have seen what men it will bear. What a certificate of good elements in the soil, climate, and institutions is Lowell, whose admirable verses I have just read.

In December, 1869, Emerson wrote again in his journal, "I have been reading some of Lowell's new poems in which he shows unexpected advance on himself, but perhaps most in technical skill and courage."

Whatever Emerson's feelings toward Lowell and his poetry may have been, Lowell, during the greater part of his life, seemed to feel for the older man a mental kinship lightly touched with awe. It was as if he realized that Emerson was a being apart, and loved and reverenced him accordingly.

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20 Letters, I, 393-394.

21 Kreyberg, op. cit., p. 80, says of Emerson that "for his Cambridge friends, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, he had little enthusiasm."

22 Scudder, op. cit., II, 33, footnote 1.

23 Ibid., p. 121.
Let us turn now to another member of the Concord group, Emerson's good friend and disciple, Henry David Thoreau.

E. W. Emerson, one of Thoreau's staunch defenders, thinks Lowell was too much influenced by village opinion when he met Thoreau in Concord in 1858. The townspeople did not understand the sage of Walden, who was known to go out to tea, and to carry home with him pies from his mother's larder at a time when he was preaching the simple life. 24 E. R. Hoar, one of Lowell's most intimate Concord friends, did not like Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, at least, believed that his dislike influenced Lowell. Emerson is said to have remarked to Ellery Channing: "Longfellow and Lowell have not appreciated Thoreau as a thinker and writer; and Judge Hoar has confirmed them in their skepticism." 25

It seems to me, however, that if Lowell's dislike of Thoreau had been based on no stronger foundation than a friend's opinion it would not have withstood the pressure of a better loved friend's liking and admiration for Thoreau. I refer, of course, to Emerson, whom Lowell loved above any other literary man of America, and who entertained feelings of highest regard for Thoreau.

Aside from one or two comments in letters, Lowell wrote

24 E. W. Emerson, Emerson in Concord, p. 115.

nothing about Thoreau until 1847, when the Massachusetts Quarterly, a liberal review, entrusted A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers to Lowell for criticism. Since this essay is not available, I have had to depend on Austin Warren's analysis of it. He says:

To summarize Lowell's first full-length study of Thoreau: his virtues in A Week, are his omniscient and sympathetic chronicling of birds and beasts, his spontaneity, and his prose style; his defects are his lack of the sense for the organic whole, and his obscurity, especially in his poetry. Disproportionate preoccupation with himself is just intimated, and the charge that the writer is derivative from Emerson also appears only by intimation in two or three places, as where we are told that Thoreau sometimes makes his rivers "run Emerson." The review is on the whole friendly, but by no means unqualifiedly so: Lowell is judge rather than champion.26

A Fable for Critics was completed and published the following year, and although Thoreau was not mentioned by name in it, little doubt exists that he was the one referred to in these lines:

There comes _________, for instance; to see him's rare sport, Tread in Emerson's tracks with legs painfully short; How he jumps, how he strains, and gets red in the face, To keep step with the mystagogue's natural pace! He follows as close as a stick to a rocket, His fingers exploring the prophet's each pocket. Fie, for shame, brother bard; with good fruit of your own, Can't you let Neighbor Emerson's orchards alone?27

Years later, when Lowell was chosen to be editor of the new Atlantic Monthly, he was interested in securing some

27 Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 46.
articles from Thoreau. In a letter to Emerson, September 14, 1857, Lowell asked, "How about Mr. Thoreau?" Again on November 19 he wrote Emerson, asking him to try to secure something of Thoreau's for the magazine. Warren thinks it "significant of the relations between Lowell and Thoreau that the former should write to Emerson as intermediary, rather than direct." Lowell's second plea to Emerson brought results, and Thoreau's "Chesuncook" was secured in 1858. Thoreau was not pleased with Lowell's editing of "Chesuncook," and refused to let the magazine have any more of his essays while the latter was editor. Sanborn, writing of this incident, says:

[Thoreau] refused to send his manuscripts to be docked and mutilated by J. R. Lowell, the first editor of the "Atlantic." In his "Chesuncook," eulogizing the pine tree of the Maine woods, he had written, "It is as immortal as I am, and perchance will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still." What he meant by this is hard to say; but Lowell struck it out, exercising a similar discretion to that which Emerson had used in omitting portions of Thoreau's "Winter Walk" in the "Dial." But the author objected to Lowell's excision, and would send nothing more to that editor, whom probably he had come to dislike for other sins of commission or omission—as in the admission of Charles Norton's wholly inadequate notice of John Brown, in 1860.

Lowell apparently meant no personal slight in editing

28 Scudder, op. cit., I, 415. 29 Ibid., p. 417.
30 Warren, op. cit., p. 452.
Thoreau's manuscript as he did. As we have seen, he "revised all copy for each number," often criticizing "contributors of far more contemporary prestige than Thoreau." Among those whose contributions he questioned without incurring enmity were Emerson, for his use of the word "daysman," and Whittier, for his rhymes. It has been suggested that Lowell deleted Thoreau's passage in order not to offend any more than necessary the religious sensibilities of some readers, who already had complained of part of Holmes' "Professor at the Breakfast Table." Thoreau, incensed perhaps by Lowell's treatment of him in the review of A Week, and by the allusions in the Fable, may have been oversensitive, and found ill will where none was meant.

Lowell's final estimate of Thoreau was written in 1865, three years after the latter's death. Apparently Lowell meant that critical essay to be his "definitive pronouncement on its subject," because he "never reprinted his earlier review of A Week." Critics have never been able to agree on Lowell's fairness of judgment, just as they never have agreed

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32 See footnote 30, Chapter I, p. 17.
33 Warren, op. cit., p. 453.
34 Scudder, op. cit., I, 418. Emerson corrected the word to "drover."
37 Warren, op. cit., p. 453.
on Thoreau's place in American literature. E. W. Emerson, for example, takes Lowell to task reproachfully for his lack of generosity toward a brave and upright man who was "incapable of conscious imitation." He censures Lowell for leaving Thoreau under the "imputations of indolence and selfishness," and accuses him of having rendered a very superficial criticism. 38 Stedman, on the other hand, says of Lowell:

His analysis of Thoreau is sharply criticized as being narrow, but it did expose the defective side of a unique character, and, all things considered, is the subtlest of his minor reviews. 39

The essay under discussion, "Thoreau's Letters," was published in the *North American Review* for October, 1865. One of a group which included "Carlyle" in 1866, "Percival" and "Lessing" in 1867, the essay was an indictment of sentimentalism, an attitude toward life which Lowell deplored. The essay was a rambling, discursive affair, in which Lowell again praised Thoreau's prose style, and again condemned his lack of architectonic ability. Going farther in the vein just hinted at in his review of *A Week*, Lowell accused Thoreau of being an egotist. He charged him with wishing to have his defects and weaknesses of character accepted as "virtues peculiar to himself." Attacking Thoreau's naturalism, Lowell affirmed that man is a social creature. Thoreau, he said,

needed to be with other men more, in order to see "how many fine qualities are common to the race." Finally, Lowell disagreed completely with Thoreau's ideas of originality, since he believed that a person who strives consciously to be original is incapable of becoming so, and at last finds himself loving not so much the "true" as the "out-of-the-way."  

Warren concludes a detailed analysis of Lowell's essay by saying:

Few errors of fact in his essay have yet been pointed out by Thoreau's apologists. There is no essential conflict between it and Emerson's longer essay, almost entirely biographical. . . . Lowell's point of view may be attacked or disregarded, but it may hardly be taken as superseded.  

There seems little doubt that Lowell's opinion of Thoreau was accepted by many if not most of his contemporaries as being the right one, for the "Thoreau cult" did not begin until about twenty years after Lowell's essay was published. That the opinion was also a fair one from Lowell's point of view can hardly be doubted. By 1865 he had attained calmness of judgment, and an extensive practice in criticism that was unequaled by any of his associates. A fair judgment may or may not be the right one; every reader of Thoreau must determine the truth for himself.

Lowell's opinion of another member of the Concord group

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41 Warren, op. cit., p. 461.
may not have been so unbiased. In 1845 Margaret Fuller, editor of the Dial, to which Lowell sometimes contributed, wrote of him:

His interest in the moral questions of the day has supplied the want of vitality in himself; his great facility at versification has enabled him to fill the ear with a copious stream of pleasant sound. But his verse is stereotyped; his thoughts sound no depth, and posterity will not remember him.\(^{42}\)

Doubtless such a condemnation made Lowell feel both hurt and indignant. Yet the following year, in a letter to Charles F. Briggs, he wrote, "You are too hard on S. M. F."\(^{43}\) Lowell's letter referred to a series of satires which Briggs had written for the New York Evening Mirror and published under the name of Fernando Mendez Pinto.

When he began to write the Fable, Lowell told Briggs about it, adding that the poem was to be a gift to him. At first he thought it better to say nothing about Miss Fuller, "though she offer so fair a target," because of the unkind things she had said about him. "I shall revenge myself amply upon her by writing better," Lowell wrote. "She is a very foolish, conceited woman, who has got together a great deal of information, but not enough knowledge to save her from being ill-tempered."\(^{44}\) Mrs. Lowell wished him to include her,

\(^{42}\)Scouder, op. cit., I, 244, footnote 1.


\(^{44}\)Scouder, op. cit., p. 245.
however, and Briggs urged him not to leave her out lest she accuse him of doing it to spite her.

Lowell decided to write about Margaret Fuller. On May 12 he again wrote to Briggs:

In Longfellow's case I have attempted no characterization. The same (in a degree) may be said of S. M. F. With her I have been perfectly good humored, but I have a fancy that what I say will stick uncomfortably. . . . After S. M. F. I make a short digression on bores in general which has some drollery in it.45

The last sentence serves to identify, if such identification were needed, the lines about Miss Fuller. Her name was not mentioned in the Fable, a fact which gave reason to doubt that "Miranda" could have been meant for her. Francis H. Underwood, writing in 1882, says:

The character of "Miranda" has been supposed by some to be intended as a caricature of Margaret Fuller. If this were true, it would be an instance of unusual severity. . . . Miss Fuller never minced her words, and she always scorned the shelter of sex; but, though she had some traits that drew upon her as much censure as compliment, it is not at all probable that "Miranda" was drawn for her. . . . "Miranda" is undoubtedly an imaginary female literary bore.46

Miss Fuller's champions were not inclined to be so generous. T. W. Higginson goes into detail to show that Lowell's charge of vanity was not strictly true,47 and accuses Lowell of

personal malice and desire for revenge. He admits that Lowell was not alone in his feeling toward Margaret Fuller: her career as a critic encountered "the sincere opposition and even hostility of many readers," especially on account of her attitude toward Longfellow and Lowell. Higginson admits, further, that Margaret Fuller "did less than justice to them both," but there was "no trace of personal rancor or grievance in either case."49

Higginson concludes by saying:

It would be hardly possible, in these milder days, for such a criticism to call out the kind of retaliation that is to be found in the "Fable for Critics." But that was a period . . . of great literary truculence. . . . Lowell, probably, also thought that, in the case of Margaret Fuller, he was immolating the good-natured Longfellow's literary enemies with his own.50

Lowell's "perfectly good humored" lines about Margaret Fuller were a scathing denunciation of her transcendentalism, conceit, and habit of boring people.51 He did try to recall four lines, apparently because of "better knowledge which led him to revise his judgment,"52 before they were printed. He was too late, and the following lines still remain in the Fable:

There is one thing she owns in her own single right,

48 Ibid., p. 216. 49 Ibid., p. 292. 50 Ibid., p. 298.
51 Fable for Critics, pp. 71-73. See above, p. 38, for proof that Lowell meant "Miranda" for Margaret Fuller.
52 Scudder, op. cit., I, 247.
It is native and genuine—namely, her spite; Though, when acting as censor, she privately blows A censor of vanity 'neath her own nose.53

I think we must conclude that Miss Fuller's portrait is one of those "bitten in with a little acid." Lowell never expressed any desire to amend it, however, as he did Bryant's characterization; so it must be considered his real opinion of Margaret Fuller.

There was one member of the Concord group whom everyone seemed to love, and delighted to look after: Amos Bronson Alcott. He was a very impractical man, but his spirit was so pure, and his conversation so sublime, that his company was sought for eagerly.54 Lowell evidently caught the essence of Alcott's unchanging personality in the little that he said of him. In a letter to C. E. Norton, March 11, 1888, Lowell wrote:

Yesterday I received a certain amount of self-satisfaction in a foolish way. I had been reading about Alcott, and was reminded that forty years ago I wrote something about him myself. I read it, and found that though I could now amend it here and there, I had said gayly pretty much what people are saying seriously now.55

He referred to the second part of his poem, "Studies for Two Heads," which describes Alcott from both a physical and a spiritual standpoint.

53 Table for Critics, p. 72.
Alcott, Lowell wrote, had a "pure, trembling-tender face,"—"a speaking face." He was a wonderful speaker, whose words tranquilized, softened, and modulated joy or sorrow to "one subdued, subduing glow," obliterating all differences of creeds and systems. Highly impractical, Alcott was habitually dragged "from speech's eminence" by the dull facts of everyday life: "unkinged by foolish bread and butter." Lowell found it "painfully bewildering" to see Alcott caught by circumstances: he seemed an angel with "clipt wings," tied to a mortal wife and children. Possessed of a spirit as "remote and elevated as Jove," his nature satirizing others by shame and dwarfing their practicality, Alcott was an "omen of a fairer race," with plans for "man's larger destiny." Lowell thought that Alcott was like Plato and should have lived with him. 56

Lowell warned us not to smile at his picture of Alcott, reminding us that not all of bravery and wisdom lie in deeds. He considered that Alcott was sowing the seeds for a more ample future, and that it would be our fault if no harvest resulted. He reverenced in Alcott his complete surrender to Beauty, perhaps regretting, as he very often said when writing to his friends, the fact that he himself had had to be more practical, and, prevented from giving himself wholly to his Muse, had been unable to become the poet he might have been.

Lowell's picture of Alcott in the *Fable for Critics* is very much like that in "Studies for Two Heads." In the former, however, he brought out more specifically that Alcott's genius lay in his ability to express great thoughts in speech only, and not in writing:

While he talks he is great, but goes out like a taper, if you shut him up closely with pen, ink, and paper;

In this, as in all things, a lamb among men, he goes to sure death when he goes to his pen.57

Both Lowell and Alcott were inclined to be idealistic, although Lowell had, with all his idealism, a very definite realistic tendency, and both men were scholars, well grounded in the classical languages. With such identity of interests and aptitudes, Lowell could hardly fail to have a sympathetic admiration for Alcott, and a tolerance of his failings.

57. *A Fable for Critics*, p. 48.
CHAPTER III

FOUR MEMBERS OF THE MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY

At about the same time that the Atlantic Monthly was established, a new club came into being. It had its beginnings in "a trio, or a quartette, consisting of Emerson and two or three of his admirers," who dined together occasionally at the Parker House in Boston. This nucleus "gathered others to itself and grew into a club as Rome grew into a city, almost without knowing it."¹ The Saturday Club thus formed was called by outsiders "The Mutual Admiration Society." The membership varied throughout the years, but the main group consisted of Emerson, Holmes, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, Motley, Whipple, Whittier, Professors Agassiz and Peirce, J. S. Dwight, Governor Andrew, Richard H. Dana, Jr., and Charles Sumner.

If we are to believe what the members of the Club wrote of it, it was a monthly feast of poetry, good talk, and warm friendship. Years after the Club was begun, when he was minister to England, Lowell wrote from busy London, "I have never seen society, on the whole, so good as I used to meet at our Saturday Club."²

¹O. W. Holmes, as reported in John T. Morse, Jr., Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes, I, 241.
²See Morse, p. 245.
Not enough is known of Lowell's opinions of the members to take up all of them, even if they were important enough from a literary viewpoint to include. Emerson we have already considered. In this chapter, then, we shall limit discussion to Holmes, Longfellow, Whittier, and Hawthorne.

Lowell made as "a condition precedent" to his becoming editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* that Oliver Wendell Holmes should be the "first contributor to be engaged." Holmes at that time was a member of the staff of the Harvard Medical School, and had done no purely literary writing for years. His fame as a ready wit and interesting talker, coupled with his former ability as a poet, no doubt made Lowell sure that Holmes had only to set his thoughts down on paper to earn his place in American literature. Lowell was right in his estimate of Holmes' ability. Twenty-two years later, on December 4, 1879, Holmes wrote to Lowell, telling him of a breakfast which the publishers of the *Atlantic Monthly* had given in his honor:

I spoke of you as having been the cause of my writing *The Autocrat* by what you said to me when *The Atlantic* was started, and that any pleasure my writings had given, and my own enjoyment of the immediate occasion, they owed to you in addition to your own noble contribution to our literature.

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4Lowell, in his *Complete Works*, XIII, 131, says that even after ten years Harvard still echoed with Holmes' fame, poetry, and wit.
... It is perfectly true that but for these
kind and confident words of yours I might not
have taken up my pen in serious earnest. 5

In spite of ten years' difference in their ages, Lowell
and Holmes were the best of friends and good neighbors. In
1848, when Lowell portrayed Holmes' essential qualities as a
poet in the Fable for Critics, Holmes wrote to him:

I think I understand you, and I know you
understand me. . . . I am only too well pleased
that such an old-fashioned squaretoes as my-
self has done anything which pleased you. . . .
Hoping that you will live a great many years to
whack pretension, to praise without jealouy,
to separate the sham from the real . . . 6

Lowell had said of Holmes in the Fable:

There's Holmes, who is matchless among you for wit;

......

In long poems it is painful sometimes, and invites
A thought of the way the new Telegraph writes,
Which pricks down its little sharp sentences spitefully
As if you got more than you'd title to rightfully,

......

He has perfect away of what I call a sham metre,
But many admire it, the English pentameter,
And Campbell, I think, wrote most commonly worse,
With less nerve, swing, and fire in the same kind of verse,

5 See Morse, op. cit., II, 124.

6 Ibid., p. 108. Holmes' letter to Lowell, written Novem-
ber 10, 1848, is justly famous for its description of the
Fable: "But I think it is capital—crammed full and rammed
down hard—powder (lots of it)—and shot—slugs—bullets—
very little wadding, and that is guncotton—all crowded into
a rusty looking sort of a blunderbuss barrel as it were—
capped with a percussion preface—and cocked with a title-
page as apropos as a wink to a joke. . . . There is a vast
deal of fun in it—plenty of good jokes,—but better than that,
there is a force and delicacy of mental diagnosis (to speak
professionally) that really surprised me. Carlyle and Emmer-
son, for instance—the distinctions are subtle enough for
Duns Scotus, yet not fantastic." See Morse, p. 107.
Nor e'er achieved aught in't so worthy of praise
As the tribute of Holmes to the grand Marseillaise.

His are just the fine hands, too, to weave you a lyric
Full of fancy, fun, feeling, or spiced with satiric
In measure so kindly, you doubt if the toes
That are trodden upon are your own or your foes?.

Many of Lowell's criticisms of Holmes' writings were expressed in letters. On December 19, 1858, Lowell thanked Holmes for the "Autocrat." Holmes evidently had been afraid that he had run out of material, for Lowell wrote:

... "Run out" indeed!—who has been suggesting the danger of that to you? I hope you will continue to run out in the style of the first "Professor." ... You have been holding in all this while ... and are now getting your second wind. I like the new Professor better than the old Autocrat. You have filled no ten pages so wholly to my liking as in the January number. I have just read it and am delighted with it. The "Old Boston" is an inspiration. You have never been so wise and witty as in this last number.

In a letter to J. T. Fields, December 20, 1858, Lowell said, "Your January Atlantic was excellent. C. W. H. never wrote more to my mind, so genial, so playfully tender."

In the opinion of John T. Morse, Jr., The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table could have been written only in New England, and by a New Englander. As we have seen, Lowell revered New England and appreciated the "flavor" of New England

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7 Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 90.
8 Lowell, Letters. I, 288, 289. This passage and some of the following ones are long, but must be quoted entirely if their full meaning is not to be lost.
9 Ibid., p. 13. 10 Morse, op. cit., I, 209.
in the authors he liked best. When he wrote to Holmes on December 28, 1884, complimenting him on his essay on Emerson, he said:

You, more than anybody else, have the literary traditions of New England in your blood and brain. It was this special flavor that pleased my palate as I read . . . You have never written better than in some of the genially critical parts. There are admirable things in the chapter about Emerson's poetry, many that made me slap my thigh with emphatic enjoyment. . . . Your wind is firm to the end.11

In the same letter Lowell thanked Holmes for helping him come to a conclusion about Emerson's verse. He had been undecided as to how to characterize it until he read Holmes' article. He concluded the letter by saying, "The first number of your new portfolio whets my appetite."12

When Holmes visited England two years later, Lowell wrote to his daughter, telling her of it. Holmes, he said, was enjoying himself immensely, and was taking a keen interest in everything. He looked at everything, Lowell wrote, with the "freshness of genius," and everyone was charmed with him, as was only natural.13

11Lowell, Letters, II, 291. Just before Holmes began work on his "Emerson," he wrote to Lowell, August 29, 1883: "I remember your early characterization of him, and of Carlyle, in the Fable for Critics, but when I get back to Boston I shall look out for all you have said about him and his followers in your various Essays, expecting to find my best conclusions anticipated." See Morse, op. cit., I, 132.


Lowell's poem, "To Holmes—On His Seventy-Fifth Birthday," began by emphasizing the similar backgrounds and tastes enjoyed by the two men. Then he praised Holmes' writing in these words:

And still your winged brood sing on
   To all who love our English speech.
   . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
The shape alert, the wit at will,
The phrase that stuck, but never stung.
Master alike in speech and song
   Of fame's great antiseptic—Style,
You with the classic few belong
   Who tempered wisdom with a smile. 14

The following year, December 22, 1885, in an essay, "Books and Libraries," Lowell asserted that Boston would keep her literary supremacy "till she and all the world lose Holmes." 15

Such scraps of thought show us how much Lowell appreciated Holmes as a man and as a writer. We know that it is to Lowell that we owe most of Holmes' best writing—a boon indeed.

Holmes referred to his inspiration from Lowell more than once while Lowell was alive. After the latter's death Holmes wrote, in a letter to C. E. Norton, October 17, 1891, that in 1857, recognizing Lowell's literary experience and wisdom, he had been willing to try his hand again with the "Autocrat." He believed in himself, he said, because Lowell believed in him. 16

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15Ibid., VII, 100.
Longfellow and Lowell were not intimate friends until after 1847. Before that time their friendship was very casual. There was nothing of intimacy indicated in Lowell's elation at being asked to write for a Boston annual edited by "Longfellow, Felton, Hillard, and that set." Lowell was happy merely because his volume, A Year's Life, published in 1841, had achieved sufficient recognition for him to be "sought after." The anti-slavery question brought the two men a little closer together, when in the short-lived Pioneer, Lowell reviewed Longfellow's "Poems on Slavery." There was still, however, nothing personal in their relationship, as was evidenced by the following letter from Lowell to Poe, written June 27, 1844:

Forster is a friend of some of the Longfellow clique here, which perhaps accounts for his putting Longfellow at the top of our Parnassus. These kinds of arrangements do very well, however, for the present.  

At that time Lowell did not regard Longfellow as the "assured head of the American Parnassus."  

Their real friendship apparently began when Longfellow called on Lowell on October 29, 1846, to talk about the slavery question. The next recorded visit was on December 22, 1847. Longfellow's Journal for that day says: "Lowell's new

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17 As reported in Souder, op. cit., I, 93.
19 Ibid., p. 193.
volume of Poems published today. Called to see him." Two
days later Longfellow wrote:

Passed the evening in reading Lowell.
Some of the poems are very striking, often
soaring into the sublime; for example, "To
the Past," "On the Present Crisis," "Extreme
Unction." 20

In that way their friendship progressed.

While he was working on A Fable for Critics, during
March, 1848, Lowell spent an evening with Longfellow. 21 On
June 15 Lowell read the completed poem to Longfellow, who
wrote of it in his Journal: "Passed an hour or two with Low-
well, who read to me his satire on American authors; full of
fun, and with very true portraits, as seen from that side." 22
It would seem, from that statement, the meaning of which is
not entirely clear, that Longfellow agreed with Lowell's
portraiture of his contemporaries, although he did not care
for all the poetry of the Fable.

In his portrait of Longfellow, Lowell said, he had at-
ttempted no characterization. 23 Nonetheless, he was able to
picture Longfellow as all his friends knew him: sweet, kind,
fair, and "elegantly forceful." 24 Lowell referred to what

20 See Samuel Longfellow, Life of Henry Wadsworth Long-
fellow, II, 103.
21 Higginson, op. cit., p. 163.
23 Scouther, op. cit., I, 245.
24 Lowell, A Fable for Critics, pp. 78, 79.
has come to be known as the "Longfellow war" when he began

Longfellow's part in the Fable:

.......

Messieurs Mathews and Poe,
You mustn't fling mud-balls at Longfellow so,
Does it make a man worse that his character's such
As to make his friends love him (as you think) too much?
Why, there is not a bard at this moment alive
More willing than he that his fellows should thrive;
While you are abusing him thus, even now
He would help either one of you out of a slough.25

The "war," which will be discussed more fully in the
chapter on Poe, resulted from some bitter and unfounded
charges of plagiarism brought against Longfellow by Poe, first
in the Evening Mirror, and later in the Broadway Journal,
three or four years before the Fable was written. Lowell, as
well as Longfellow's other friends, protested the charges
indignantly, and was "deeply offended" by Poe's "grossness
and vulgarity" in his treatment of Longfellow.26

Lowell's feeling for Longfellow, because they had been
friends and neighbors for many years, may have been more per-
sonal than literary, but he admired the older poet's ability
very much. Lowell thought Longfellow a wise man and a

25George E. Woodberry, in his The Life of Edgar Allan
Poe, p. 131, says: "That Poe was sincere in his opinions,
though he enforced them rudely and with the malicious plea-
ure of an envious rival, there can be little question; that
Longfellow never pilfered from Poe, and that in the uncon-
scious adaptations natural to a poet of culture he never imi-
tated him, there can be no doubt at all. In the elusive
search for motives in the case, it is best to remain content
with Longfellow's charitable opinion: 'The harshness of his
criticisms I have never attributed to anything but the irri-
tation of a sensitive nature, chafed by some indefinite sense
of wrong.'"

26Scudder, op. cit., I, 164.
scholar: not a pedant, but a scholar in the "range of ac-
quirement and the flavor that comes of it." In connec-
tion with his scholarship, Longfellow's Journal for October
25, 1865, is interesting:

Lowell, Norton, and myself had the first
meeting of our Dante Club. We read the XXV
Purgatorio; and then had a little supper. We
are to meet every Wednesday evening at my house. 28

Longfellow, by all reports one of the best Dante scholars of
his time, and perhaps best fitted to make a translation of
the Inferno, felt a little unsure of himself. He consulted
with Lowell and Norton about every line, and they discussed
at length doubtful passages and difficult translations. It
may have been because he felt himself in a sense a collabo-
rator that Lowell had very little to say of the completed
work. He did say, however, that he thought it "not the best
possible but the best probable." 29

Of Longfellow's Evangeline, Lowell wrote in the Fable:

Had Theocritus written in English, not Greek,
I believe that his exquisite sense would scarce change
a line
In that rare, tender, virgin-like pastoral Evangeline.
That's not ancient nor modern, its place is apart
Where time has no sway, in the realm of pure Art,

27 Lowell, in a letter to J. B. Thayer, October__, 1867. See Letters, I, 398.
'T is a shrine of retreat from Earth's hubbub and strife
As quiet and chaste as the author's own life.30

Lowell read Tales of a Wayside Inn with the "heartiest
admiration," finding the introduction "masterly" in its
clarity, simplicity, and strength. After finishing the Tales,
Lowell remarked: "I don't wonder the public are hungrier
and thirstier for his verse than for that of all the rest of
us put together."31

In a letter written October 3, 1860, Lowell commended
Longfellow for his "Ultima Thule," saying that reading it
gave him a pang of pleasurable homesickness. "I cannot praise
it better," he wrote, "than by saying it's like you from the
first line to the last. Never was your hand firmer."32 In
the same letter Lowell assured Longfellow that he was sure of
a welcome in every port.

Lowell rejoiced in Longfellow's great fame in Europe.
While he was minister to Spain, Lowell wrote Longfellow of
the commotion that arose when his name was proposed for mem-
bership in la Real Academia Española. Each member wanted to
be the one to second the proposal.33 From London Lowell wrote
that to know Longfellow was "to be somebody," and to be his

30Lowell, Fable for Critics, p. 79.
31Letter to J. T. Fields, November 30, 1863. See Letters,
I, 334.
32Letter to Longfellow; Ibid., II, 282.
33Letter dated November 17, 1877; Ibid., p. 203.
neighbor—"it is as good as knowing a lord." 34 Lowell was happy to report such good things to Longfellow, because he always regarded his friends' success and happiness as his own.

Longfellow was the first American to be commemorated in Westminster Abbey because of literary attainments. When the commemoration ceremony was held, on March 2, 1884, Lowell was asked to respond to Lord Granville's speech. A newspaper account of the events says that after thanking Lord Granville, Lowell said:

Nearly forty years ago I had occasion, in speaking of Mr. Longfellow, to suggest an analogy between him and the English poet Gray; and I have never since seen any reason to modify or change that opinion. There are certain very marked analogies between them, I think. In the first place, there is the same love of a certain subdued splendor, not inconsistent with transparency of diction; there is the same power of absorbing and assimilating the beauties of other literature without loss of originality; and above all there is that genius, that sympathy with universal sentiments and the power of expressing them so that they come home to everybody, both high and low, which characterize both poets. 35

Lowell continued by saying that Longfellow's poems possessed the distinction which simplicity gives, and that some of his sonnets were the most beautiful and perfect in the English language. Longfellow's mind, he said, always moved straight toward its object. Lowell concluded his address by

34 Lowell, in a letter to C. E. Norton, the friend to whom he wrote a great many of the comments which make up his opinion of various writers, August 11, 1855. See Letters, I, 240.

35 See Higginson, op. cit., p. 252.
saying that he never had known a more beautiful character: Longfellow in every way did honor to America. 36

Lowell predicted lasting fame for Longfellow, 37 saying also that he was destined to live "till men weary of Collins and Gray." 38 It seems likely that Lowell's prediction will continue to come true. It is certain that he had much more insight into the lasting qualities of contemporary poetry than Professor Andrews Norton, who, when asked to make a list of authors whose works he thought would live, omitted Longfellow's name entirely from the initial roster of fifty-four names. He placed Longfellow first on the supplementary list of twenty-four authors. 39

Let us consider a third member of the Saturday Club: Hawthorne. There was always good feeling between Hawthorne and Lowell. The former, in his "Hall of Fantasy," characterized Lowell as "the poet of the generation that now enters upon the stage." 40 Because of that recognition and because he really looked upon Hawthorne as an excellent writer, Lowell asked Hawthorne to write for his magazine, The Pioneer.

36 Ibid., p. 254.


38 Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 79.

39 Higginson, op. cit., p. 192. This list, written January 7, 1845, gave Emerson the fifty-third place. The supplementary list placed Hawthorne second.

40 See Scudder, op. cit., I, 117.
Five years later, in *A Fable for Critics*, Lowell summed up excellently Hawthorne's character and work in these lines:

There is Hawthorne, with genius so shrinking and rare
That you hardly at first see the strength that is there;
A frame so robust, with a nature so sweet,
So earnest, so graceful, so lithe and so fleet,
Is worth a descent from Olympus to meet;
'T is as if a rough oak that for ages had stood,
With his gnarled bony branches like ribs of the wood,
Should bloom, after cycles of struggle and scathe,
With a single anemone trembly and rathe;
His strength is so tender, his wildness so meek,
That a suitable parallel sets one to seek,—
He's a John Bunyan Fouqué, a Puritan Tieck;
When Nature was shaping him, clay was not granted
For making so full-sized a man as she wanted,
So, to fill out her model, a little she spared
From some finer-grained stuff for a woman prepared,
And she could not have hit a more excellent plan
For making him fully and perfectly man.41

When Hawthorne lost his position in the Salem Custom House, Lowell and his other friends did all they could to help him. On January 13, 1850, Lowell wrote to Evert Duyckinck, telling him that Hawthorne's friends in Cambridge had raised funds for him, and asking Duyckinck to do what he could in New York. The money which was collected was sent anonymously to Hawthorne, through George S. Hillard. Hawthorne received the help gratefully, and, after *The Scarlet Letter* brought him fame and prosperity, refunded the money with interest.42

On April 24, 1851, Lowell wrote to Hawthorne:

I have been so delighted with "The House of the Seven Gables" that I cannot help sitting down

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41 *Fable*, p. 64.  
42 *Scouder, op. cit.*, I, 283-286.
to tell you so. I thought I could not forgive you if you wrote anything better than "The Scarlet Letter," but I cannot help believing it a great triumph that you should have been able to deepen and widen the impression made by such a book as that. It seems to me that the "House" is the most valuable contribution to New England history that has been made. 43

Lowell, wishing only the best for the Atlantic Monthly after its beginning in 1857, requested something from Hawthorne. In a letter to Emerson, July 18, 1859, he wrote: "If you should see Hawthorne before I do, will you put in a good word for the Atlantic. He brings home a honey-bag, I hear." 44 Even after he gave up the editorship of the Atlantic Lowell read the magazine eagerly, and did not fail to express his opinion of the articles it contained. In a letter to Hawthorne, February 26, 1862, he wrote:

We are all hungry for you again. 45 Let me tell you . . . how much I liked your latest papers in the Atlantic. They are as good as can be. But don't let them turn you aside from your proper work. You owe us your English romance. . . . I can hardly say which of your romances I like best—but you have never, to my mind, shown more brains than in the "Faun."

It is a pure delight to me to admire any man's work as heartily as I do your's, and I want something more to admire. You are of the few men in these later generations whose works are going

43 As reported in Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife, II, 391.

44 See Howe, op. cit., p. 97.

45 Lowell may have referred to Hawthorne's frequent absences from the Saturday Club. The bond between the members of the Saturday Club was so strong that the absence of one of them was felt keenly by the others.
to keep, so make as many of them as you honestly can for the credit of our side of the water.\footnote{46}

In his essays Lowell made passing reference to Hawthorne and his work. In "Thoreau," for example (1885), Lowell wrote the following comment:

The Puritanism of the past found its unwilling poet in Hawthorne, the rarest creative imagination of the century, the rarest in some ideal respects since Shakespeare.\footnote{47}

In his discussion of Swinburne's "Tragedies," Lowell brought out the difference between Fate as pictured by the Greeks—a force operating from without—and Fate as conceived by modern writers—an inward working of "some vice of character or hereditary predisposition." Hawthorne, whom Lowell called "the most profoundly ideal genius of these latter days," returned constantly, more or less directly, to that theme. His "Marble Faun," Lowell wrote, illustrated "that invasion of the aesthetic by the moral which has confused art by dividing its allegiance . . ."\footnote{48} In a letter to Miss Norton, June 12, 1860, Lowell rejoiced that Hawthorne had been pleased with his analysis of the "Faun."\footnote{49}

\footnote{46}{See Howe, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 103, 104.}
\footnote{47}{Lowell, \textit{Works}, II, 136.}
\footnote{48}{Essay dated 1866; \textit{ibid.}, II, 163.}
\footnote{49}{Lowell, \textit{Letters}, I, 302. This letter would indicate that Lowell had told Hawthorne what he thought of the "Faun" before he wrote the 1886 essay. It is likely that Lowell merely repeated in his essay what he had told Hawthorne six years before.}
Lowell referred to Arthur Dimmesdale, of The Scarlet Letter, in two different essays. In "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists" (1867), Dimmesdale was taken as an admirable illustration of that class of persons whose "religious sentiment is strong and whose moral nature is weak." Dimmesdale's mounting the pillory at night seemed to Lowell, as he says in the "Introductory" to "The Old English Dramatists" (published posthumously, 1892), "the deepest thrust of what may be called the metaphysical imagination since Shakespeare." From time to time Lowell dallied with the thought of writing Hawthorne's life. He was asked to do it, and really meant to, but with characteristic procrastination never got around to it.

After Hawthorne's death Lowell wrote to Howells, July 28, 1864: "Only think of losing Hawthorne! I cannot stomach it." In a letter to J. T. Fields, September 7, 1868, Lowell asked who wrote the article on Hawthorne in the Atlantic. He said he found it interesting, and, on the whole, adequate. He concluded by saying:

But it was good, and I love so to see him praised as he deserves. I don't think people have any kind of true notion yet what a master

50Lowell, Works, IV, 211. 51Ibid., VIII, 194.
53Ibid., I, 338.
he was, God rest his soul! Shakespeare, I am sure, was glad to see him on the other side.\textsuperscript{54}

The last member of the Saturday Club to be studied in this chapter is Whittier, whom Lowell knew well, if not intimately, over a period of years. He began to be associated with Whittier in 1842 when, in a letter written in October, he asked the Quaker poet for a poem to be included in the first number of the Pioneer. Whittier complied by sending the poem, "To a Friend, on her Return from Europe."\textsuperscript{55}

Lowell took advantage of his brief position as editor of the Pioneer to "fly the flag of anti-slavery." In his notice of Longfellow's "Poems on Slavery," he paid tribute to the earlier abolitionists: Garrison, Maria Child, Follen, and Whittier. Of Whittier Lowell wrote:

\ldots the fiery Loermer of this spiritual warfare, who, Scaevola-like, has sacrificed on the altar of duty that right hand which might have made him acknowledged as the most passionate lyrist of his time.\textsuperscript{56}

Two years later Lowell was still in the ranks of the abolitionists, and his association with their staunchest poet continued. Whittier and Lowell exchanged several letters. In one of them, written March 21, 1844, Lowell begged Whittier

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., I, 404.

\textsuperscript{55} Samuel T. Pickard, Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier, I, 289.

\textsuperscript{56} See Scudder, op. cit., I, 105. Urged by his idealism, yet restrained by his common sense, Lowell strove to do what he could for abolitionism without becoming a bitter partisan.
for a poem on "Texas: Voice of New England." He urged
Whittier "to cry aloud and spare not against the cursed
Texas plot." The poem was published in the Courier for
April 17, 1844. When he submitted it to the editor, Lowell
accompanied it by a preface which he himself had written.
In the preface Lowell praised Whittier as "faithful to the
Muses' trust." His fearless poem, Lowell said, was "in
every way worthy of our truly New England poet."

In the Fable for Critics, Lowell praised Whittier more
as an anti-slavery man than as a writer, but he did not fail
to analyze correctly his poetry:

There was ne'er a man born who had more of the swing
Of the true lyric bard and all that kind of thing;
And his failures arise (though he seem not to know it)
From the very same cause that has made him a poet,—
A fervor of mind which knows no separation
'Twixt simple excitement and pure inspiration,

Let his mind once get head in its favorite direction
And the torrent of verse bursts the dams of reflection,
While, borne with the rush of the metre along,
The poet may chance to go right or go wrong,
Content with the whirl and delirium of song;
Then his grammar's not always correct, nor his rhymes,
And he's prone to repeat his own lyrics sometimes,
Not his best, though, for those are struck off at white-
heats

When the heart in his breast like a trip-hammer beats,

57 See Pickard, op. cit., I, 297.

58 Lowell was fond of emphasizing Whittier's "New Eng-
landism." On August 14, 1837, he had written to G. B. Loring
about Whittier: "I shall always like him the better for
'sticking up' for old New England." See Letters, I, 20, for
only one of the many times Lowell mentioned New England in
the way that showed how truly devoted he was to her customs,
poets, climate, and architecture.
And can ne'er be repeated again any more
Then they could have been carefully plotted before. 59

Whittier was glad to be asked to contribute to the
Atlantic Monthly when it was begun in 1857. As Scudder says,
it gave him a medium for the publication of his purely litera-
erary poems, and helped the public realize that he was cap-
able of producing other than reform writings. The remunera-
tion also came at a time when it was most welcome. 60

Lowell printed "Tritemius" in the first number of the
Atlantic and "Skipper Ireson's Ride" in the second. He com-
plained a little of some of the rhymes in "Tritemius," but
found that no one else had been bothered by them. For "Skip-
per Ireson's Ride," whose provincialism delighted him, Lowell
suggested one or two changes. Whittier allowed them grace-
fully. 61

While he was working on the second series of his "Biglow
Papers," in 1866, Lowell wrote a long introduction justifying
his use of the rustic New England form of speech. In connec-
tion with that work he began a letter which he did not finish.
In it he wrote:

I grant that Whittier is no authority—
though I suspect he is right in rhyming for the

59Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 58.
60Scudder, op. cit., I, 417.
61Ibid., p. 413; also Pickard, op. cit., II, 407-409,
and George Rice Carpenter, John Greenleaf Whittier, p. 233.
ear and not for the eye, as used to be the fashion. So long as we don't pronounce ar-
rums Hibernice, wht shouldn't he rhyme it with psalms? Not that I would.62

Always a lover of Nature himself, Lowell appreciated the same quality in Whittier. In an essay, "A Good Word for Winter," written in 1870, Lowell declared that he found "Snow-
Bound" delightful, even though Whittier did "vapor a little about digging out paths."63 In a tribute to Whittier on his seventy-fifth birthday Lowell said that Nature and Whittier expressed each other, and that the Quaker poet made her fa-
miliar to all.64

The last letter Lowell wrote to Whittier was penned on December 16, 1890, one day before the latter's eighty-third birthday. In it he thanked Whittier for his poem, "Captain's Well," which had been published in the New York Ledger. "It seemed to me in your happiest vein," he wrote,"—a vein peculiarly your own."65

Lowell was not the only member of the Saturday Club who expressed his opinion of the other members. There was al-
ways the most friendly spirit of "give and take" among all of them. Each one felt free to criticize his friends' writings, and the criticism apparently was always gratefully received.

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62 See Scudder, op. cit., I, 103. The name of the person to whom he was writing and the date are not given.
63 Lowell, Works, I, 355. 64 Ibid., XIII, 144.
65 See Scudder, op. cit., II, 400.
It is my opinion that the excellence of some of Lowell's criticisms and the cleverness of some of his predictions are due in great measure to the discussions that went on in the Club. I think it likely that through talking and listening he was able to sift the chaff from his opinions and let only the good wheat remain. We must give him credit, however, for intuitive genius, because his Fable for Critics was written several years before the Saturday Club came into existence.
CHAPTER IV

POE

"Letter friendships" are apt to be as unstable and short lived as the paper which serves them as a medium of correspondence. It is so easy to picture ourselves in a letter as we wish we were, rather than as we are, that we sometimes make ourselves out to be more noble than a normal acquaintance would show us to be. Lowell's friendship with Poe—almost his entire knowledge of him—depended upon the sympathy engendered through correspondence. Therefore, in order to trace Lowell's early opinion of Poe, and the changes it underwent, we must turn to the letters the two men wrote to and about each other.

Poe, writing to Lowell on November 16, 1842, asked whether some arrangement might not be made for him to contribute to the Pioneer, which Lowell and Robert Carter proposed to establish. Poe wrote:

That your success will be marked and permanent I will not doubt. At all events, I most sincerely wish you well: for no man in America has excited in me so much admiration—and, therefore, none so much of respect and esteem—as the author of "Rosaline."1

Lowell's reply, written three days later, showed his appreciation of such a delicate compliment by an author whose works he admired. Poe's letter, he said, assured him of "the friendship and approbation of almost the only fearless American critic." He had been intending to write Poe, he continued, and, with one exception, he was giving him carte blanche in whatever he wanted to write for the Pioneer:

I do not wish an article like that of yours on [Rufus] Dawes, who, although I think with you that he is a bad poet, has yet I doubt not tender feelings as a man which I should be chary of wounding.²

Lowell offered Poe ten dollars an article, promising to pay more when he was able. He emphasized the fact that he held himself personally responsible to his contributors.

Poe sent "The Tell-Tale Heart" for the first number of the Pioneer. The tale had been rejected by N. T. Tuckerman, editor of the Boston Miscellany, but Lowell liked it and was glad to get it for his magazine.

In a letter written February 4, 1843, Poe complimented Lowell warmly on his first number, and thanked him for what had been said of himself in it. Poe said that he liked the Pioneer, and was gratified at the coincidence of opinion and taste, evidenced in the arrangement of the initial number of the magazine, that existed between the two men. He confided that he had dreams of establishing a magazine of his own. If

²Ibid., p. 345.
he should ever have the opportunity of setting one up, he said, he wanted as permanent contributors Hawthorne, Neal, and Lowell. 3

On March 24, 1843, Lowell wrote Poe that the Pioneer had failed, but that he soon would send him the money he owed him for "The Tell-Tale Heart." A postscript to the letter added: "I hear you have become an editor. Is it true? I hope so; if it were only to keep our criticism in a little better trim." 4

Poe's answer, three days later, was in the highest degree cordial and consoling. He expressed sympathy about the Pioneer, and hoped things were not so dark as they seemed. He continued:

Its decease, just now, would be a most severe blow to the good cause—the cause of a Pure Taste. I have looked upon your Magazine, from its outset, as the best in America, and have lost no opportunity of expressing the opinion. Hereewith I send a paper, "The Phil. Sat. Museum," in which I have said a few words on the topic. 5

Poe answered Lowell's postscript by saying that while he was not yet an editor he soon would be, of a magazine which he planned to call The Stylus. He told Lowell that he wanted a poem from him, but would not ask for one until Lowell's eyes were healed. He asked Lowell to get Hawthorne to contribute to The Stylus, and concluded his long letter by asking permission to do a sketch of Lowell's life. 6

3 Ibid., pp. 348-350. 4 Ibid., II, 30.
5 Ibid., p. 21. 6 Ibid.
Lowell answered Poe's letter on April 17, 1843, in this way: Hawthorne had promised an article, Poe might use whatever photograph of Lowell he liked with the biographical sketch, and Lowell would send a poem and some data for the biography soon. The conclusion of that letter showed clearly the friendly esteem in which Lowell held Poe at that time: "Take my best love in exchange for your ready sympathy and use me always as you may have occasion as your affectionate friend." 7

A letter from Lowell to Poe, written May 8, 1843, contains the first reference I have found to Lowell's biographical sketch of Poe, which was finally published in February, 1845. It would be interesting to know who first suggested that Poe send the data to Lowell. This question also tantalizes: why did Lowell wait so long (a year) to begin writing the sketch? Was it because of the amount of other work he had on hand—or was he unable to find a publisher at that time—or was he perhaps a little afraid of his own enthusiasm about a man he had never met? It is easy, sometimes, to say more effusive things in letters than one really feels, and Lowell may have hesitated to write for publication what he had written to Poe.

In the May 8 letter Lowell said:

I forgot to thank you for the biographical

7Ibid., p. 24.
sketch of your own eventful life which you sent me. Your early poems display a maturity which astonished me & I recollect no individual (& I believe I have all the poetry that was ever written) whose early poems were anything like as good. Shelley is nearest, perhaps.

I have greater hopes of your "Stylus" than I had of my own magazine, for I think you understand editing vastly better than I shall for many years yet—and you have more of that quality—which is the Siamese twin brother of genius—industry—than I. 8

Poe acknowledged receipt of Lowell's poem, which he called "truly beautiful," in a letter written June 20, 1843. "Should you ever pay a visit to Philadelphia," he wrote, "you will remember that there is no one in America whom I would rather hold by the hand than yourself." 9

Poe wrote to Lowell again on September 13, saying that it grieved him to have to ask for the ten dollars Lowell owed him, but that he was in dire necessity. On October 19 Poe wrote, thanking Lowell for the five dollars he had sent him and the other five dollars which Carter had paid. 10 He

8 Ibid., p. 27. 9 Ibid., p. 34.

10 In a letter to George E. Woodberry, March 12, 1884, Lowell referred to the matter. Apparently some question had arisen as to whether he had ever paid Poe for his contribution to the Pioneer. Lowell wrote: "His mother-in-law I used to see after his death—a rather ordinary and uncultivated woman. I believe I helped her as well as I could in those days when I was earning my bread with my pen. If I had not paid Poe, by the way, she would certainly have reminded me of it and I should have paid her. I have no recollection that I ever did." See Howe, New Letters of James Russell Lowell, p. 275, for the complete story of Lowell's aid to Poe's mother-in-law after Poe's death.
rejoiced that Lowell's eyesight had been regained, and said that he was looking forward to Lowell's new book. From complimenting Lowell, Poe turned to a vitriolic assault on Longfellow's originality.\footnote{Woodberry, op. cit., II, 45-46.}

Whether or not Lowell then resented the attack on Longfellow we do not know. There was no indication of such resentment in the letter he wrote on March 6, 1844, wanting Poe to lecture in Boston because he wished to hear independent criticism.\footnote{Ibid., p. 69.}

Poe thanked Lowell on May 28, 1844, for offering to write a sketch of his life for Graham's Magazine. "You will do me justice," he wrote.\footnote{Ibid.} Lowell asked, on June 27, for a letter which would serve as a "spiritual autobiography" of Poe.\footnote{Ibid., p. 88.} Poe sent the letter, a mixture of fact and fancy which revealed nothing so much as that Poe had a rather exaggerated opinion of himself, on July 2.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 90-95.} On September 27 Lowell mailed the completed biography to Poe for his approval.\footnote{Ibid., p. 100.} Poe acknowledged it and thanked Lowell for the things he said of him on October 28.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 103-106.}

The beginning of the end of their letter friendship occurred on December 12, 1844, when Lowell wrote Poe a letter
of introduction to Charles F. Briggs, one of Lowell's good friends, who was going to start a literary weekly in New York. Out of that letter grew Poe's association with Briggs, who at first admired and later despised him, and his connection with the Broadway Journal, which Poe was to use as a medium for airing his envious dislike of Longfellow. Briggs' first letters to Lowell were all amiable enthusiasm for the Southerner. On January 6, 1845, Briggs wrote: "I like Poe exceedingly well; Mr. Griswold has told me shocking bad stories about him, which his whole demeanor contradicts." On January 27 Briggs wrote again:

I have always strangely misunderstood Poe, from thinking him one of the Graham and Godoy species, but I find him as different as possible. I think that you will like him well when you come to know him personally.

Lowell, in the meantime, was beginning to smart under Poe's lash, but he tried to be fair with Poe, and not let personal issues interfere with his literary judgments. On January 16, 1845, he wrote to Briggs:

The article upon Miss Barrett is extremely well written, I suppose by Poe. It is a good telling article, though I do not agree with it in its conclusion. From a paragraph I saw yesterday in the "Tribune" I find that Poe has been at me in the "Mirror." He has at least the chief element of a critic—a disregard of persons. He will be a very valuable contributor to you.

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Poe, during this time, was engaged in trying to prove that Longfellow and one or two other writers were plagiarists. For some unaccountable reason he reserved his bitterest attacks for Longfellow. Briggs, in letters written March 8, March 16, and March 19, explained to Lowell, who had protested against Poe's injustice, that while he did not endorse what Poe was saying, and really thought he was "riding plagiarism to death," he approved of the publicity the affair was giving the *Journal*. In the March 19 letter he argued:

As he has dealt more severely by me and my friend Aldrich than anybody else I do not think that anybody has any right to complain of his thumps. I think that you are too sensitive in regard to Longfellow; I really do not see that he has said anything offensive about him. . . . Poe has indeed a very high admiration for Longfellow, and so he will say before he is done. For my own part I did not use to think well of Poe, but my love for you and implicit confidence in your judgment led me to abandon all my prejudices against him when I read your account of him. . . . But you will think better of him when you meet him.22

Briggs referred in that letter to Lowell's biographical and critical sketch of Poe, which appeared in *Graham's Magazine* for February, 1845. In that sketch Lowell spoke without hesitation of Poe's genius, while at the same time he called attention to his ruthlessness:

Mr. Poe is at once the most discriminating, philosophical, and fearless critic upon imaginative works who has written in America. It may

be that we should qualify our remarks a little, and say that he might be, rather than that he always is, for he seems sometimes to mistake his phial of prussic acid for his inkstand. ... Mr. Poe has that indescribable something which men have agreed to call genius.\(^{23}\)

Before Poe left Philadelphia for New York he had given himself over to drinking to such an extent that he had lost many friends. In New York he was usually abstemious. Some reverses of fortune, real or fancied, caused him to begin drinking again, and when, late in May, Lowell called on him for the first time, he found Poe, as Mrs. Clemm later insisted tearfully, "not himself." Lowell, writing about the incident to Mr. Woodberry, on March 12, 1884, said:

I saw Poe only once. ... His manner was rather formal, even pompous, but I have the impression he was a little soggy with drink—not tipsy—but as if he had been holding his head under a pump to cool it.\(^{24}\)

It is said that Poe was also disappointed in the meeting with Lowell. He had expected Lowell to be a much more noble looking person than he was.\(^{25}\)

On June 29 Briggs wrote Lowell that Poe had returned to his old habit of drinking. He confessed that while he was impressed at first with Poe's seeming independence of judgment

\(^{23}\) Sdudder, op. cit., I, 162.

\(^{24}\) Woodberry, op. cit., II, 137. Mrs. Clemm told Briggs that Poe was tipsy when Lowell called.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 138.
and appearance of learning, he had found out in time that Poe was selfish and pretentious. 26 Briggs continued in the same vein on July 16. He was especially contemptuous of Poe's having gained a reputation for erudition without knowing anything of the languages from which he quoted. 27

Briggs had been having more and more trouble with the arrogant Poe during the late spring and early summer months of 1845. When on August 21 Lowell wrote him the following letter, Briggs was ready to agree most heartily. Lowell wrote:

Poe, I am afraid, is wholly lacking in that element of manhood which, for want of a better name, we call character. It is something quite distinct from genius,—though all great geniuses are endowed with it. . . . As I prognosticated, I have made Poe my enemy by doing him a service. In the last B. J. he has accused me of plagiarism, and misquoted Wordsworth to sustain his charge. . . . My metaphor was drawn from some old Greek or Roman story which was in my mind, and which Poe, who makes such a scholar of himself, ought to have known. . . . Poe wishes to kick down the ladder by which he rose. 28

Except the little that he wrote of Poe in the Fable for Critics, Lowell made no more public comments and very few references in letters to the Southerner. The portion in the Fable, which, Stedman cautiously says, "is not unfair," 29 is one of the most famous characterizations in the entire poem:

There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge,
Who talks like a book of iambs and pentameters,
In a way to make people of common sense damn metres,
Who has written some things quite the best of their kind,
But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind.30

Poe, in a letter written February 14, 1849, showed his
resentment of the treatment accorded him in the Fable. In
that letter he asked a Mr. Thomas for a well-written satire
for his magazine, not "such a dish of skimmed-milk-and-water
as Lowell's." He went on to characterize the Fable as "mis-
erably weak on the whole," with one or two good, but not
original, things in it. He said he had sent a review of it
to the Southern Literary Messenger, and only hoped it would
be printed. "Lowell is a ranting abolitionist," he concluded,
"and deserves a good using up."31

Lowell has been accused of being hard on Poe. Yet he
was kind to Poe, and praised his work while Emerson was
dubbing him the "jingle-man." So much that is contradic-
tory has been written about Poe it is difficult to know what
conclusion we should reach. On the whole, however, I should
say that Lowell's opinion of Poe as a writer and as a man
seems to be justified by the facts available.

30Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 78.
31Woodberry, op. cit., II, 298.
CHAPTER V

THE NEW YORK GROUP

Only the thinnest of threads holds this group together. Washington Irving, the only native New Yorker among them, was really a world citizen; William Cullen Bryant was by birth and associations more of New England than of New York;1 James Fenimore Cooper, born in New York State, was of here, there, and everywhere. Walt Whitman, born at Huntington, Long Island, seems to me the most typical of New York, because his poems suggest the swarming movement of a great city. However, the four men did a good part of their important writing in New York, and for the purposes of this study may be grouped together.

Much has been made of Lowell's treatment of Bryant in the Fable for Critics. Many people take for granted that Lowell wrote what he did in a spirit of revenge for Bryant's accusing him of plagiarism.2 According to what Lowell wrote to G. F. Briggs on May 12, 1848, that was not the case. In his letter Lowell said:

Bryant is funny, and as fair as I could make it, immitigably just. . . . I am glad I did B. before I

1Scudder, op. cit., I, 420.

2Lowell's poem, "To the Past," had the same title and similar treatment to one which Bryant had written.
got your letter. The only verses I shall add regarding him are some complimentary ones, which I left for a happier mood after I had written the comic part. I steal from him indeed! ... When I steal I shall go to a specie-vault, not to a till.3

The sketch of Bryant, which Stedman calls deftly made,4 painted a cold, austere genius, whose one point of warmth was in his devotion to Nature:

There is Bryant, as quiet, as cool, and as dignified,
As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is ignifed,
Save when by reflection 't is kindled o' nights
With a semblance of flame by the chill Northern Lights.
He may rank (Griswold says so) first bard of your nation
(There's no doubt that he stands in supreme ice-olation),

If he stir you at all, it is just, on my soul,
Like being stirred up with the very North Pole.

But, deduct all you can, there's enough that's right good in him,
He has a true soul for field, river, and wood in him.5

More mature judgment made Lowell regret having written what he had of Bryant, perhaps because, like so many of the other portraits in the Fable, Bryant's played up so well the aloof side of his personality that the reader was apt to forget the lines which Lowell left "for a happier mood." At any rate, in a letter to W. J. Stillman, written January 11, 1855, Lowell admitted that he had not done Bryant justice in the Fable. He denied that there had been any personal feeling in what he had said, but regretted having said it because it

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3Lowell, Letters, I, 131.
4Stedman, op. cit., p. 325.
5Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 55.
might have seemed personal. Lowell continued: "I am now asked to write a review of his poems for the North American. If I do, I shall try to do him justice." 6

I have found no statement of Bryant's which indicated that he might have felt the sting of Lowell's words in the Fable. In fact, the only reference which Bryant made to Lowell after 1848 seems to be what he said of the younger man at the Century Club's celebration of his own seventieth birthday, on November 3, 1864. In his speech of acceptance Bryant mentioned, among other authors, "him to whose wit we owe the 'Biglow Papers,' who has made a lowly flower of the wayside as classical as the rose of Anacreon." 7

Lowell was unable to attend the celebration, but he sent some verses in honor of the occasion. The poem, "On Board the Seventy-Six," made ample atonement for the earlier verses:

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

But now he sang of faith to things unseen,
Of freedom's birthright given to us in trust,
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.

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6Lowell, Letters, I, 221.

7As reported by John Bigelow, William Cullen Bryant, p. 223.
We, listening, learned what makes the might of words,—
Manhood to back them, constant as a star;
And shall we praise? God's praise was his before;
And on our futile laurels he looks down,
Himself our bravest crown.  

In a letter to J. T. Fields, December 20, 1868, Lowell wrote that he did not understand how Bryant held out so long, but that it was pleasant to see him renewing his youth "in that fine poem about the trees." Bryant was one man whom Lowell would honor by planting a tree on his grave, because of the closeness of the old poet to nature.  

Many years later, still rather uneasy about what he had said of Bryant in the Fable, Lowell wrote to R. W. Gilder that he was glad he had written a poem for Bryant's birthday:  

[It was] a kind of palinode to what I said of him in the "Fable for Critics," which has something of youth's infallibility in it, or at any rate of youth's irresponsibility. Besides, I wrote it (slapdash in less than a week, I think) with no notion of publication.  

On November 28, 1887, Lowell was called on to preside at an Authors' Reading for the benefit of the Copyright League. In his introduction he traced the course of American literature, with especial attention to the contributions of

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8Ibid., p. 228.  
10Ibid., p. 333. The letter was written February 9, 1887. Lowell apparently had forgotten much of what went on while he was writing the Fable. He had promised the Fable to Briggs before it was finished, so that he might have whatever money its publication might bring. See Scudder, op. cit., I, 244.
his own contemporaries. Among other poems he mentioned Bryant's "To a Waterfowl," whose "immortal flight... will be followed by many a delighted eye long after ours shall have been darkened."\(^{11}\)

Considering the amount of writing he did, and the number of comments he made in letters on his contemporaries, Lowell had very little to say about Bryant. What he said in the Fable, with the exception of the lines about Bryant's coldness, Lowell repeated from time to time. His final, considered opinion was that of nearly all other critics: Bryant's poetry, while reserved and mostly unemotional, revealed genius of no mean order; in portraying nature Bryant was indeed "first bard of the nation."

If Lowell said little of Bryant, he said even less of Cooper and Irving. His characterization of them, however, was just and incisive. In the Fable for Critics, for instance, Lowell drew a complete and good picture of both of them. Cooper, he said, was always very businesslike in creating his characters: he tied together all the necessary qualities, like a cooper making a barrel, and so, even if exceptionally fortunate, was able to make only something wooden and empty. Lowell did not underrate Cooper, but admired him for creating at least one new character, and for showing himself to be a brave man in risking his literary reputation by lecturing his

\(^{11}\)Ibid., II, 365.
fellow Americans on their bad manners.\textsuperscript{12} Lowell's portrayal of Cooper's characteristics was good:

He has drawn you one character, though, that is new, 
One wildflower he's plucked that is wet with the dew 
Of this fresh Western world, and the thing not to mince, 
He has done naught but copy it ill ever since; 
His Indians, with proper respect be it said, 
Are just Natty Bumppo, daubed over with red, 
And his very Long Toms are the same useful Nat, 
Rigged up in duck pants and a sou'wester hat.\textsuperscript{13}

Lowell's characterization of Irving revealed the hearty admiration which he always felt for the older man. In the Fable Lowell welcomed to Apollo's court the "warm heart and fine brain," the happy spirit, and the "gravest sweet humor" that Spain had known since Cervantes' time.\textsuperscript{14} The recipe Lowell wrote for making an Irving is typical of his mode of expression at that period:

To a true poet—heart add the fun of Dick Steele, 
Throw in all of Addison, minus the chill, 
With the whole of that partnership's stock and good-will, 
Mix well, and while stirring, hum o'er, as a spell, 
The fine old English Gentleman, simmer it well, 
Sweeten just to your own private liking, then strain, 
That only the finest and clearest remain, 
Let it stand out of doors till a soul it receives 
From the warm lazy sun loitering down through green leaves, 
And you'll find a choice nature, not wholly deserving 
A name either English or Yankee,—just Irving.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12}In the lines immediately following, Lowell wrote against Americans' idolatry and imitation of English thought and ways. 

\textsuperscript{13}Since, in the library to which I now have access, there is no copy of the Fable which I have used until now, further reference to that poem will be made from the Cambridge Edition of Lowell's Complete Poetical Works. See p. 135 for the above. 

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Tbid.}, p. 142. 

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Tbid.}
Nearly forty years later, at the Authors' Reading to which we have referred before,\textsuperscript{16} Lowell mentioned both Irving and Cooper again. Irving, he said, realized early in life the poverty of American writings, and satirized it in his "Knickerbocker." Loving the ancient, and feeling the lack of it in our American newness, Irving first tried to create "an artificial antiquity" to replace it. Failing in that, he looked to the old world for the atmosphere and themes which would be more sympathetic with his "dainty and carefully shaded phrase."\textsuperscript{17} Lowell credited Irving, the link between the Old World and the New, with having taught us the "everliving charm of style, most invaluable and most difficult of lessons."\textsuperscript{18}

In the same address, Lowell called Cooper our first "radically American author," who, in spite of the defects of style resulting from "half-culture," redeemed his first failure by turning to subjects near at hand. Cooper found in the "New Man of the New World" a new and fresh subject for art. Lowell concluded his short comment by saying, "I open upon my boyhood when I chance on a page of his best."\textsuperscript{19}

That Lowell, usually so clever at predicting his contemporaries' lasting qualities, should have ignored Walt Whitman's claim to fame is rather unusual, especially in view of

\textsuperscript{16}See above, p. 79. \textsuperscript{17}See Scudder, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 363. \textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 364. \textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}. 
the very strong praise accorded Whitman by Emerson. It might be explained by the fact that Whitman's poetry was the logical outgrowth of transcendentalism, for which Lowell had almost no sympathy. 20 For another thing, Lowell believed in basing the roots of the present in the past, and Whitman's ideas were too far advanced, and his expression of them too new, to appeal to Lowell. As a consequence, Lowell took no real notice of Whitman, and expressed his opinion of Whitman's work on two occasions only. 21

Lowell knew little of Whitman's work. When he was editor of the Atlantic Monthly, Lowell sent Leaves of Grass to the library of Harvard College. He did no more than glance at the book—just enough to satisfy himself that "it was a solemn humbug." 22 When he was censured for having placed Leaves of Grass where it could corrupt young minds, Lowell answered his accuser, the Reverend W. L. Gage, by saying that he believed a library should have every book in it. 23 He continued: "As for the evil influence of this particular book, I doubt if so much harm is done by downright animality as by a more refined sensuousness." 24 Lowell thanked Mr. Gage for

21 I have found only two instances.
22 Howe, op. cit., p. 115.
23 See above, p. 3.
calling his attention to a part of the book about which he had known nothing, and promised, "I will take care to keep it out of the way of the students,"—a queer ending for a letter so bravely liberal!

In a letter to C. E. Norton, written October 12, 1855, Lowell had mentioned Whitman:

I remember him of old; he used to write for the Democratic Review under O'Sullivan. He used to do stories then, à la Hawthorne. No, no, the kind of thing you describe won't do. When a man aims at originality he acknowledges himself consciously unoriginal, a want of self-respect which does not often go along with the capacity for great things. The great fellows have always let the stream of their activity flow quietly—if one splashes in it he may make a sparkle, but he muddies it, too, and the good folks down below (I mean posterity) will have none of it.

Lowell was not entirely right in his estimate of Whitman. Although opinion is still divided as to his greatness, many of the "good folks down below" have given Whitman and his poetry a welcome which was sadly lacking in his own time.

25 ibid. 26 Lowell's one compliment to Whitman.
CHAPTER VI

HOWELLS AND JAMES

Someone has said that Lowell served as the link between the older group of writers,—Emerson, Holmes, Longfellow, and others,—and the younger group,—William Dean Howells, Henry James, Bret Harte, and their contemporaries. That was easily possible, since Lowell was the youngest member of the "old" group, and since his connection with the Atlantic Monthly brought him in contact with a great number of other writers. It is interesting to note the opinions Lowell voiced of his younger contemporaries; to see how he felt himself at once their comrade-in-arms and mentor.

Since Lowell wrote most about the writings of Howells and James, and was on a more familiar footing with them than with some of the other young authors, we shall study only his opinion of them in this chapter.

I think Lowell must have come to feel towards Howells much as he would have felt toward his son, if he had lived. The growth of this feeling was gradual, and can best be seen by examining Lowell's letters to and about Howells in chronological order.

The first mention which Lowell made of Howells was on August 5, 1860, in a letter recommending him to Hawthorne as
"a fine young fellow" who has "more in him than any of our younger fellows in the way of rhyme."\textsuperscript{1} Less than half a year later Lowell wrote to Howells himself that he was "a man of sense as well as genius."\textsuperscript{2} Four years later Lowell admonished Howells to keep on cultivating himself, because he was "as good as Heine," and had enough in him to "do honor to our literature."\textsuperscript{3} In the same letter Lowell praised Howells' Venetian letters, saying that they were charming and admirable, and calling them the most careful and picturesque study he had ever seen on any part of Italy. On November 2, 1865, he complimented Howells on his "articles," which he did not name, declaring that they were "altogether good."\textsuperscript{4}

At various times Lowell mentioned only casually a few of Howells' essays and articles. On July 27, 1868, for example, in a letter to Howells himself, he called the article on Curtis a "delicate piece of writing ... remarkable for its nice turns, even for you."\textsuperscript{5} Of Howells' "Gnädenhutten" Lowell wrote to J. T. Fields, on December 20, 1868, that "barring a turn of phrase here and there" it was as good a thing as Fields had ever printed, because it had the "uncommon merit" of being interesting. He complimented highly, in

\textsuperscript{1}Lowell, Letters, I, 305.  
\textsuperscript{2}Letter dated December 1, 1860. Ibid., p. 307.  
\textsuperscript{3}Letter dated July 28, 1864. Ibid., p. 338.  
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 350.  
\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 404.
the same letter, Howells' notice of one of Longfellow's books, saying that the review was a "masterpiece of delicate handling" in its fairness and "kindly discretion" in revealing all the book's good points.6

The 1869 letters show that Lowell's liking for Howells and his work increased ever more rapidly. On May 12 Lowell wrote gleefully to Howells of a compliment from Miss Norton on Howells' "My Doorstep Acquaintance."7 On September 22 Lowell wrote what I consider to be his highest praise of Howells, and the most forceful prediction he made about his young friend. He did not name the essay about which he was writing, but praised it highly:

I find it delightful, full of those delicate touches which the elect pause over and the multitude find out by and by—the test of good writing and the warrant of a reputation worth having. As Gray said of the romances of Cebillon fils, I should like to lie on a sofa all day long and read such essays... What you write gives me a real pleasure, as it ought; for I have always prized in you the ideal element, not merely in your thought, but in your way of putting it.

And one of these days, my boy, you will give us a little volume that we will set on our shelves, with James Howell on one side of him and Charles Lamb on the other—not to keep him warm, but for the pleasure they will take in rubbing shoulders with him... It's true, and I hope it will please you to read it as much as it does me to write it. Nobody comes near you in your own line. Your Madonna would make the fortune of any essay—or that pathetic bit there in the grave-yard—or your shop of decayed gentilities—or fifty other things. I do not speak of the tone, of the light here and shade there that tickle me.8

6Ibid., II, 13, 14. 7Ibid., II, 32.
8Ibid., II, 44, 45.
On December 12, 1869, Lowell wrote to Andrew D. White, president of Cornell University, telling him of a course of lectures on Modern Italian Literature which Howells had prepared for a Harvard College course. Assuring President White that they would be good, "for all he does is so, and he has a conscience," Lowell begged that Howells be asked to deliver the lectures at Ithaca. Lowell concluded his letter by saying: "He is almost the only one of our younger authors in whom I have faith, for almost alone of them he has an earnest purpose and a hunger after excellence."9

I find no more correspondence between Lowell and Howells until August 9, 1876, when Lowell told the younger man he believed honestly that he would "last" as a writer.10

On May 2, 1879, Lowell told Howells he found the "Lady of the Aroostook" so delightful that he was impatient for more stories of that kind. He enjoyed the sly bit of satire, and fell completely in love with the heroine.11

In 1882, while Lowell was minister to England, Howells wrote him a discouraged letter. His writings were not earning him either the place or the money he had hoped they would, and so he was considering teaching. Drawing from his own experience, Lowell wrote on December 21, insisting that Howells not turn professor if he could live without it, but

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10Lowell, Letters, II, 179. 11Ibid., p. 240.
devote himself to writing. He encouraged Howells by saying that everyone in England was reading his books.\textsuperscript{12}

Relations between the two men continued to be extremely cordial. Howells felt that in Lowell he had a friend to whom he could turn always for advice, and Lowell appreciated the trust. Around 1886 Howells asked Lowell's opinion of the preliminary sketch of a new story, "The Minister's Charge," which he was planning. After the story was published, it entertained Lowell so thoroughly that he was able to forget eighteen hours in a Pullman, and the loss of his only "wearable-in-Boston" hat. Although he inserted a few corrections, Lowell said he liked the story better than any other of Howells' he had read.\textsuperscript{13}

Once, after seeing in the papers a good many "unworthy flings" at Howells, because of his defense of some men who had been hanged, Lowell wrote his friend that he "felt them indignantly," although he knew that Howells would not feel them "more than an honest man should." He declared that Howells was one of the chief honors of their literature, and that his praises were dear to everyone. He reminded Howells that although he did not share some of the younger man's opinions, or sympathize with some of his judgments, he liked a man better for saying what he thought. Lowell ended the

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., pp. 269-270.

\textsuperscript{13}Letter dated February 2, 1886. Ibid., pp. 306-307.
letter, written January 10, 1890, by saying:

Though I thought those Chicago ruffians well hanged, I specially honored your courage in saying what you did about them. You can't make me any fonder of you, but I am sure you will make me prouder of you. 14

In February of that same year Lowell discussed with Howells the latter's new book, A Hazard of New Fortunes. Wishing to "put on record" his liking, Lowell wrote on February 17 that he was really delighted with the book. The characters he thought "excellently varied, discriminated and antithesized." He liked the deep moral in the book all the more since it was not "rammed down his throat." 15

Referring to Howells as "one of the most delightful of modern authors," 16 Lowell from time to time praised many of his writings in particular, and all of them in general. Even about something which Howells wrote of him, Lowell asked on April 15, 1891: "How could you doubt that I should like anything you wrote—even about myself?" 17

We have traced through letters Lowell's great liking for Howells, a liking that expressed itself in many ways: Lowell missed the younger man when he was away, 18 he said he had rather have Howells fond of him than to write the best essay

14 Ibid., p. 394. 15 Howe, op. cit., p. 335.
16 Lowell, Complete Writings, VII, 100.
18 Letter to Fields, December 20, 1868. Ibid., II, 14.
Montaigne ever conceived, and, as we have seen, he praised Howells' writings in the most extravagant terms. While Howells undoubtedly was a very estimable young man, and gave promise of becoming an excellent writer, I think that much, perhaps most, of Lowell's praise of him was personal rather than critical. Lowell himself must have realized this, because after praising something Howells had written, he said: "... for when my heart is warm towards anyone I like all about him, and that is why I am so bad (or so good) a critic."

So far History has agreed with Lowell's characterization of Howells' "great charm, felicity of style, and charity of spirit" as typified in his essays, sketches, autobiographical writings, and novels. It has not, however, afforded him a rank equal or superior to that of Lamb. The most natural conclusion, then, is to assume that Lowell, hungering for a son, and feeling a great deal of mental and idealistic kinship with Howells, fell under the spell of his charm and thought him greater than he was.

Lowell's opinion of James, so far as I can find, was expressed entirely through correspondence. The two men were

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19 In this letter to Howells, no date other than 1869 is given. However, in the collection of letters it is placed between one written January 8 and one written March 23. Ibid., II, 19.

20 Ibid.

21 G. F. Reynolds and Garland Greeyer, **Facts and Backgrounds of Literature**, p. 311.
almost certainly friends of long standing, because young James' father was one of the intimate Cambridge group to which Lowell belonged. Lowell's letters to young James were a blend of easy comradeship and the jocose familiarity with which men treat their friends' sons. From them I have taken only that part which discusses James' novels and short stories.

On March 4, 1876, Lowell wrote James that he had read one of his stories over again in a French Review, and had found it "even cleverer in French than in American."22

Two years later he wrote James a long letter acknowledging one of James' books which he had received. He had read it from beginning to end with great satisfaction, Lowell said, and thought it an "excellent book full of delicate appreciations and sane criticism, and above all interesting."23 Then he made several word criticisms which seem worthwhile, and which indicate how much interest he felt in seeing James write well. Of one of James' stories in the Atlantic Lowell wrote: "It is a most happy conception and the characters admirably drawn."24 He took James to task, however, for one of his characters, whom James had pictured to be more ignorant of Europe than Lowell thought he should be.

22 Howe, op. cit., p. 217.
24 Ibid., p. 236.
The entire letter was the friendly sort of thing any author might write to another one, ignoring completely the difference in years between the two.

Lowell was obliged, fifteen days later, to explain to James that he had meant no more criticism than the specific instances he had mentioned in the September 9 letter:

> Did I say you had "overdone" it? If I did, I intended no general application but to confine it to the particular instances I mentioned. On the contrary . . . I laughed and shivered at once. My only regret is that you didn't make it longer. It is admirable. 25

In the same letter Lowell complimented James on the architectonic ability his stories showed—a quality always dear to Lowell's heart. James' stories, in Lowell's words, always gave evidence of "a definite conception and marks of design." 26

One of Lowell's favorite remarks, in spite of the fact that he was one of the best and most prolific of letter writers one could wish, was that he could not write letters when he was engaged in any other kind of literary work. As a result, he admired very much other authors who could write letters with ease. In a letter written May 8, 1879, he praised James' letter-writing ability, adding, "You must write easily, for you are read with pleasure and the two generally go together." 27

25 Ibid., p. 238.  
26 Ibid.  
27 Ibid., p. 241.
of James' stories, Lowell boasted, "Let John Bull show me anything of his own make comparable with yours in its kind."  

On May 27, 1884, Lowell wrote again to James, comparing him to a Chinese juggler in his ability to keep several stories at a time going well. He called the stories "very good," but, as was his custom, inserted a word criticism or two. Two years later, on November 30, 1886, Lowell wrote that he was very angry with some English reviewers who had not liked James' *Princess Casamassima*. He continued:

> You have grown steadily ever since I knew you and have conceived more original characters and situations than all the English school put together—I mean the moderns. . . . You are an artist, my dear boy.  

We notice an interesting trait of Lowell's in his next quoted letter to James, written January 26, 1889. Lowell often expressed the idea, when speaking with his friends, that everyone had some Jewish blood in his veins. While discussing James' "Tragic Muse," which he found the best thing James had ever written, Lowell remarked: "And moreover haven't you put some Jewish blood in your heroine's veins? All roads lead to Jerusalem at last!"

Lowell had occasion to mention the "Tragic Muse" again on August 27, when he expressed his great pleasure in reading James' "London Life." He liked it, as he did all James wrote, but was not so well pleased with

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it as with the earlier story.\footnote{Ibid., p. 330.} James, Lowell said, was doing work of "extraordinary excellence and truer to the life than any of 'em." Lowell continued:

This is a good deal for me to say, who, as you know, am partial to romance and like to get in my novels just what I don't get in life. ... Your husband (in "London Life") ... is disgustingly good. He pervades the page like a foul smell.\footnote{Ibid., p. 330.}

Lowell wrote James other letters after that one, but they were almost purely personal, and, as such, have no place in this study.

We are left with a feeling that Lowell tried to pass on to younger hands the torch that had been entrusted him when we read the honest criticism and generous praise he wrote to and of Howells and James. He applied to them the same standards of writing and conduct which he had used with such happy results in his youth, when he was writing the \textit{Fable for Critics}, but with less success. Our picture of Lowell would not be complete, however, if we were to fail to include what he said when he was old.
CHAPTER VII

BRITISH WRITERS

Walter Savage Landor, born in 1775, was sufficiently long lived to be called a contemporary of Lowell.1 In most ways the two men were utterly different, yet Lowell's interest in Landor, aroused while he was still an undergraduate at Harvard, lasted, with variations and some diminution, for many years.

In 1868, when introducing some letters of Landor's which had been intrusted to him by a friend, Miss Mary Boyle, for publication, Lowell wrote of his early experience with him:

I was first directed to Landor's works by hearing how much store Emerson set by them. I grew acquainted with them fifty years ago in one of those arched alcoves in the old college library in Harvard Hall, which so pleasantly secluded without wholly isolating the student... There, with my book lying at ease and in the expansion of intimacy on the broad window-shelf, shifting my cell from north to south with the season, I made friendships that have lasted me for life.2

Lowell went on to say that although Landor was in many ways beyond him as a student, he "loved the company he brought, making persons for me of what before had been futile names."3 As a youngster Lowell was charmed by Landor's "stately

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1Landor died in 1884, at the age of eighty-nine.
3Lowell, Complete Works, VIII, 54.
eloquence" and good breeding; he thought him a "wholesome sedative for adolescent years." Enthusiastically, he thought that if Plato had written in English he would have written as Landor did. Lowell's final verdict as a young man seems to have been: "Here was a man who knew what literature was, who had assimilated what was best in it, and himself produced or reproduced it."4

That condition of affairs did not last. As Lowell's "own judgment gradually affirmed itself," he was driven to "some abatement of hitherto unqualified admiration."5

But let us leave the Introduction of 1888 to look into an earlier article on Landor, which Lowell wrote in 1848. Scudder says of this article that it was "quite exclusively an examination of the genius of a writer for whom he had long had a great admiration."6 Intended for the June number of the Massachusetts Quarterly Review, it was deferred until December because of the illness of Lowell's child, and because "work on the 'Biglow Papers' drove other things out of his head."7 It contained some excellent criticism of Landor's Imaginary Conversations, criticism which is especially interesting to a student of Lowell, since he himself had tried that form of composition in 1844.8 Although the passage is

4Ibid., p. 55. 5Ibid., p. 55.
6Scudder, op. cit., I, 294.
7Ibid., p. 295. 8Ibid., p. 135.
long, it seems worthwhile to quote it in its entirety:

Of his "Imaginary Conversations" we may generally say that they would be better defined as dialogues between the imaginations of the persons introduced than between the persons themselves. There is something in all men and women who deserve the much-abused title of individuals, which we call their character, something finer than the man or woman, and yet which is the man or woman nevertheless. We feel it in whatever they say or do, but it is better than their speech or deed, and can be conceived of apart from these. It is his own conceptions of the characters of different personages that Landor brings in as interlocutors. Between Shakespeare's historical and ideal personages we perceive no difference in point of reality. They are alike historical to us. We allow him to substitute his Richard for the Richard of history, and we suspect that these are few who doubt whether Caliban ever existed. Whatever Hamlet and Caesar say we feel to be theirs, though we know it to be Shakespeare's. Whatever Landor puts into the mouth of Pericles and Michael Angelo and Tell, we know to be his, though we can conceive that it might have been theirs. Don Quixote would never have attacked any puppets of his. The hand which jerked the wires, and the mouth which uttered the speeches would have been too clearly visible.\(^3\)

Lowell saw Landor once, in the late summer of 1852.\(^4\)

It was a memorable day for the American poet, because he felt almost as if he were seeing an "ancient in Elysium." It was with some trepidation and a little doubt of his welcome, because of what he had written three years before, that Lowell

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 294. Scudder says of the form of Lowell's Conversations that it "was not that of a true conversation; it is far removed from such excellent exemplars as the 'Imaginary Conversations' of Landor. . . . it had but little of the graceful fencing which brings the talkers closer and closer to the heart of a subject, till one makes the final thrust that disarms his antagonist. No; it was simply a device to secure flexibility and discursiveness, and is talk run mad." Ibid., p. 135.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 345.
went with Kenyon to Bath, to see the old man. He was at once reassured, however, by the "unaffected heartiness" of Landor's greeting.

Even after the lapse of thirty-six years, Lowell remembered that he had felt himself in the presence of a man—in whom "even Carlyle had found something royal."  Although Landor was then seventy-eight, he was still erect and vigorous; his pose was alert, and he had an "air of the arena" about him. During the interview, Lowell recalled a few things he had heard of Landor's terrible temper, and reflected that Landor was always extreme in whatever he did.

One interesting observation which Lowell made was that Landor's memory had a great deal of imagination, especially when the subject related to himself. 12

The men talked a little of Landor's brother and his poetry. Landor was always very generous when speaking of his brother. Indeed, Lowell found that whenever his talk turned, "as it often would," to the men or books he especially liked, it "rose to a passionate appreciation of them." Lowell added: "Even upon indifferent matters he commonly spoke with heat, as if he had been contradicted, or hoped he might be." 13

Lowell spent several pages more describing Landor's collection of paintings, "nearly all . . . aggressively bad."

11 Lowell, Complete Works, VIII, 63.
12 Ibid., p. 65.  
13 Ibid.
and telling of Landor's satisfaction at Lowell's seeing a resemblance between him and Milton in a portrait.

Two years after Landor's death Lowell had occasion to mention him in connection with a subject then uppermost in his mind. He had just finished writing an article on Swinburne, in which he set forth his ideas about "that aspect of poetry which ignores the distinction of time." As Scudder says, he devoted the larger part of his paper to a "demonstration of the truth that the result of all such endeavors [that is, of the possibility of reënacting antiquity in poetry] is to produce the artificial and not the artistic." At about that time, in a letter to Mr. Stedman, written in answer to a letter of Stedman's, thanking him for a review of his poem "Alice of Monmouth" and asking his opinion of another poem on the antique theme, Lowell repeated his ideas:

I will answer frankly that I did not like Alektryon, and don't think him at all to be compared to his sister Alice,—a strutting fellow that wants to make me believe he can crow in Ancient Greek. Alice is Christian, modern, American, and that's why I like her. I don't believe in these modern antiques—no, not in Landor, not in Swinburne, not in any of 'em. They are all wrong. It's like writing Latin verses—the material you work in is dead.

We come again to the "Introduction" of 1888. While Lowell was in England in the summer of 1888, his friend, Miss Mary Boyle, had given him some letters of Landor's for publication. Lowell wrote to Mr. Gilder, telling him that he

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14Scudder, op. cit., II, 32.  
15Ibid., p. 93.
planned to preface them with an introduction of his own if Mr. Gilder would publish the paper in the Century. It is clear that he was interested not so much in writing about Landor as in helping his old friend.\textsuperscript{16} Completing the paper, Lowell sent it to Mr. Gilder on December 23, 1886. With it went a note:

I send you a Christmas gift. I have made more of it than I expected, but you may eat only the plums if you like and give to the poor the pudding in which I have hidden them. The letters, thank heaven, are better than I thought. The last (on Powers's death) is charming.\textsuperscript{17}

Scudder characterizes the paper, which did not appear for a year, as "a most agreeable compound of criticism and personal reminiscence, and contains what Lowell rarely ventured on in his printed work, but now and then in his letters with real success—the portraiture of a man."\textsuperscript{18}

We have already referred extensively to the article. Now let us see how the parts blend into the whole, and complete our picture of Landor as Lowell saw him. The entire "Introduction" occupied only fifteen pages. The first page and a half was devoted to the explanation of Lowell's browsing habits mentioned before. On the following page Lowell told us what he liked of Landor when he was a young man; then in two and a half pages he qualified that liking:

I began to be not quite sure whether the

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 343. \textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 342, 343. \textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 344.
balance of his sentences, each so admirable by itself, did not grow wearisome in continuous reading,—whether it did not hamper his freedom of movement, as when a man posits a pole upon his chin.19

Lowell excused Landor somewhat by saying, "But there is always something over-passionate in the recoil of the young man from the idols of the boy."20 He still concluded, however, that Landor's humor was "horse-play," that he was often trivial and slow, and that he did not know how to be light without levity or heavy without heaviness, or familiar without loss of dignity and respect. Landor had said that he liked Nature best, then Art; Lowell was inclined to believe the opposite, because he found no spontaneity in Landor. Indeed, he felt that Landor was too often content to think himself original because of his extravagance. The reserve of Landor's better style was the more remarkable because he made "spoiled children of all his defects of character."21

After one page of saying the "Conversations" were really more imaginary than Landor had intended, Lowell devoted another page to semi-complimentary remarks, such as that Landor was great, and individual, and that though not wise, he yet had uttered "through the mask of his interlocutors" more wisdom than anyone else except Shakespeare, in an English "so

19Lowell, Complete Works, VIII, 55. 20Ibid., p. 56.

21Ibid., p. 57; cf. what he said of Thoreau in Volume II, p. 140.
pure, so harmonious, and so stirringly sonorous that he might almost seem to have added new stops to the organ which Milton found sufficient for his needs."22 Not a critic, Landor has said excellent things about books, even though his statements are not always just; not a great thinker, he has had great thoughts; not a poet, he has written perfect lines.

Lowell summed up Landor's politics in one paragraph, concluding that while generally extravagant, he sometimes made wise statements. He devoted another paragraph to a little poem he had written ten or twelve years before, which still expressed his opinion of Landor:

A villa fair, with many a devious walk
Darkened with deathless laurels from the sun,
Ample for troops of friends in mutual talk,
Green chartreuse for the reverie of one:
Fixed here in marble, Rome and Athens gleam;
Here is Arcadia, here Elysium too;
Anon an English voice disturbs our dream,
And Landor's self can Landor's spell undo.23

After a final page of semi-critical analysis of Landor, Lowell passed into a seven-page description of Landor as a person, illustrating his talk with anecdotes of his 1852 visit. Each anecdote served to portray some trait of Landor's: his furies of temper, his lively imagination about himself, his generosity toward the writings of others, and his pride—in a supposed resemblance to Milton, in his self-chosen ancestry, in having a sea-shell from Wordsworth—all exhibited in what amounted almost to a monologue.

22Ibid., p. 59.  
23Ibid., p. 60.
Taken as a whole, the "Introduction" is a picture of a man—a picture so clearly delineated that we are sure we should recognize Landor wherever we might meet him.

Very little can be said of Lowell's personal relationship with Tennyson. We know that in his youth Lowell corresponded with the English poet, because of what he wrote to Evert A. Duyckinck, editor of the "poetical department" of the journal *Arcturus*, on December 5, 1841:

In your "News Gong" I see that you suggest a reprint of Tennyson. I wish you would say in your next that he is about to reprint a new and correct edition of his poems with many new ones which will appear in a few months. I think it would be a pity to reprint his poems at all—for he is poor and that would deprive him of what little profit he might make by their sale in this country—especially would it be wrong to reprint an incorrect edition. (Moxon will be his publisher.)

I do not wish you to state your authority for this—but you may depend on it, for my authority is the poet himself. I have the great satisfaction of thinking that the publication is in some measure owing to myself, for it was by my means that he was written about it, and he says that his "American friends" are the chief cause of his reprinting.34

Lowell met Tennyson in 1880, when he was transferred from Madrid to London as American minister. Overwhelmed with invitations from the very day of his arrival, Lowell had the opportunity of meeting many people. After a few days he wrote:

I lunched with Tennyson yesterday. He is getting old and looks seedy. I am going in to take a pipe with him the first free evening. Pipes have more

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34 See Souder, op. cit., I, 96, 97.
thawing power than anything else.\textsuperscript{25} We are free to conjecture that Lowell met Tennyson at lunch or at home several times after that, but that the divine spark of sympathy did not flash between them. As we shall see later, Lowell's youthful passion for Tennyson did not survive; nor did a mature admiration take its place.

According to Scudder and Greenslet, Lowell owed Tennyson the debt which any young poet is sure to owe another whose works he has read and loved. In Lowell's first volume, \textit{A Year's Life}, Scudder says, the "disciple" is evident, and "Lowell . . . unmistakably owned himself an ardent lover of Keats and to a less degree of Tennyson."\textsuperscript{26} During his impressionable youth Lowell felt the influence of Keats and Tennyson more than that of Shakespeare or Marlowe, but always in a general way.\textsuperscript{27}

Greenslet sees in Lowell's "The Present Crisis," written in December, 1844, an echo of the "long reverberations of 'Locksley Hall,'"\textsuperscript{28} and Scudder believes that Tennyson's "Sir Galahad" may have suggested the fable of Lowell's "The Vision of Sir Launfal." He indicates also the similarity that exists in that both Tennyson's cycle of legends and Lowell's tale contain a moral. He points out, however, that Lowell's attitude was much different from that of Tennyson.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., II, 261. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{26}Ibid., I, 94.
\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., II, 38. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{28}Greenslet, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{29}Scudder, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 268.
Judging from the criticism which Lowell made later of Tennyson's Arthurian tales, I should say that Souther is right in claiming that Lowell's attitude toward the legends was different from that of Tennyson. In a letter to C. E. Norton, December 4, 1872, Lowell wrote:

Emerson had left me Tennyson's book; so last night I took it to bed with me and finished it at a gulp—reading like a naughty boy till half-past one. The contrast between his pomp and my old rhymer's simplicity was very curious and even instructive. There are very fine childish things in Tennyson's poem and fine manly things, too, as it seems to me, but I conceive the theory to be wrong. I have the same feeling (I am not wholly sure of its justice) that I have when I see these modern-medieval pictures. I am defrauded; I do not see reality, but a masquerade. The costumes are all that is genuine, and the people inside them are sham—which, I take it, is just the reverse of what ought to be. One special criticism I should make on Tennyson's new Idyls, and that is that the similes are so often dragged in by the hair. They seem to be taken (à la Tom Moore) from note-books, and not suggested by the quickened sense of association in the glow of composition. Sometimes it almost seems as if the verses were made for the similes, instead of being the creating of a wave that heightened as it rolls.31

There is more to the letter, to which we shall refer again. Let us go back from 1872 to 1865 and 1866, when it first appeared that Lowell had outgrown most of the youthful enthusiasm he had felt for Tennyson. In 1865, in, of all places, a political essay, Lowell wrote: "Tennyson's knights are cloudy, gigantic, of no age or country, like the heroes of Ossian. They are creatures without stomachs."32 That

30 The author of "Fergus," a real Arthurian romance.
statement was part of Lowell's often-repeated protest against sentimentalism, especially that which endeavored to reproduce the flavor of antiquity in modern poetry, or that which used delicate imagery and a profusion of words to hide a paucity of thought. Lowell believed that no great poetry could come out of a country which lacked a strong popular sentiment, such as periods of great political stress bring out. In 1886, in an essay on Swinburne's "Tragedies," Lowell devoted more thought to that idea than he did to the tragedies themselves. English poetry, he said, was passing through a period of mere art without any intense convictions to back it, and so was becoming more "mannered and artificial." Lowell thought that Browning, although he was by far the "richest nature of the time," was becoming more difficult to understand with every poem he wrote; and Tennyson's "dainty trick" was being imitated by a whole generation of "versifiers." Swinburne's "Chastelard, a Tragedy," was merely a copy-book exercise, and an example of the "physically intense school" to which Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh" belonged. Both poems sought to "torture language instead of wooing it to confess the secret of its witchcraft." Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon," however, was better. It was a true poem, and exhibited great facility in assimilating the style of the ancients, although it, also, was stiff and artificial.

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\(^{33}\) Ibid., II, 158. \(^{34}\) Ibid., II, 160. \(^{35}\) Ibid., II, 165.
Lowell continued his discussion at length, including several other contemporary writers. He criticized Longfellow, for example, for "taking refuge among the red men," and Tennyson for immersing himself in the "Cambro-Breton cyclus of Arthur," declaring that it was impossible that such themes should be so real to the present generation as the "semi-fabulous stories of their own ancestors" were to the Greeks. 36

Yet we cannot say that in his maturity and old age Lowell failed to appreciate Tennyson's good points. The letter to which we have referred before went on to say:

However, I am not going to forget the lovely things that Tennyson has written, and I think they give him rather hard measure now. However, it is the natural recoil of a too rapid fame. . . . Tennyson, to be sure, has been childish petulant; but what have these whipper-snappers . . . done that can be named with some things of his? He has been the greatest artist in words since Gray—and remember how Gray holds his own with little fuel, but real fire. He had the secret of the inconsumable oil, and so, I fancy, has Tennyson. 37

In 1875, in his essay on "Wordsworth," Lowell, discussing the Elizabethans, made the following complimentary statement about Tennyson:

Shelley, Tennyson, and Browning have shown that the simple paths of their music was not irrecoverable, even if the artless poignancy of their phrase be gone beyond recall. 38

In my opinion Lowell was just in his estimate of Tennyson. He took toward the English poet the attitude that might

38 Lowell, Complete Works, V, 191.
have been expected in one who knew literature as thoroughly as Lowell did, and who was far enough away from the personality of the writer to judge him on his work alone. That factor was an important one in Lowell's case, for, as we have seen, he was very apt to be influenced by a man's personal character.

Lowell so often compared the writings of Dickens and Thackeray that we shall consider the two men together in estimating Lowell's opinion of them. We find our first comparison in a letter which Lowell wrote to Briggs on May 12, 1848. Near the end of that long, rambling letter, Lowell wrote:

I wish to have room to say how much I have been pleased with Thackeray's "Vanity Fair." He has not Dickens's talents as a caricaturist, but he draws with more truth. Dickens can take a character to pieces and make us laugh immoderately at the comic parts of it—or he takes only the comic part, as boys take the honeybag of the bee, destroying the whole insect to get at it. But Thackeray can put a character together. He has more constructive power. D. is a satirizer, T. a satirist. I don't think D. ever made anything equal to Becky Sharp. Rawdon Crawley, too, is admirable; so in truth are all the characters in their way, except Amelia, who is nothing in particular.

In another letter to Briggs, written February 15, 1854, Lowell complained of Dickens that in his books he haled the world into police court, as it were, to judge it and pass sentence upon it. Thackeray's way was another and better one,

39See Scudder, op. cit., I, 297.
because in his books the reader hears the world talking, "entirely unconscious of being overheard." 40

That was after Lowell met Thackeray. 41 In 1851, hoping to benefit Mrs. Lowell's health, the young couple decided to finance a Wanderjahr by selling some land which they owned. Then they set sail for Europe. Most of their first year abroad was spent in Italy, where they lost their only son. 42 In the spring of 1852 they left Italy, and after a brief trip through Switzerland, Germany, Provence, and France, they arrived in England in the late summer. There they made many friends, and saw a good bit of the country. Greenslet tells of their voyage homeward in this way:

In October, 1852, they sailed for Boston, with two such congenial shipmates as Thackeray, who was going over to lecture, and Arthur Hugh Clough, who was about to seek his fortune in the new world. Despite this exceptional company, the monotony of sea-travel coming after his brisk visit in England made him dull and disinclined to converse; he notes that he was "driven to five meals a day for mental occupation." 43

The visit of the two Englishmen furnished the occasion for many festivities in Cambridge and Boston, and we may

40 Lowell, Letters, I, 211.
41 I think he had not met Dickens at that time, although he might have. Dickens made a trip to the United States in 1842.
42 Greenslet, op. cit., p. 98.
43 Ibid., p. 100. In an essay written in 1854 Lowell said: "Who less likely to come to their wit's end than W. M. T. and A. R. C.? Yet I have seen them driven to five meals a day for mental occupation." See Complete Works, I, 123.
suppose that Lowell and Thackeray became very good friends. Their friendship was more strongly cemented during the summer of 1855, while Lowell was in London. There is no mention of Lowell's having met Dickens during his 1855 visit to England, doubtless because Dickens was on the Continent, where he spent much time during the years between 1844 and 1858.

Before taking up what Lowell said of Dickens, let us examine briefly those things which he wrote of Thackeray after 1855. In 1864, the year after Thackeray's death, Lowell had occasion to discuss the way historians present historical figures. He questioned whether Thackeray was right in his method: that of presenting them stripped of all illusion, but did not necessarily defend the opposite way. In 1866 Lowell said that Thackeray was a "good observer." In that same year, referring to Carlyle, Lowell wrote that he had "as little sense of justice as Thackeray allowed to women." Those are all off-hand characterizations, but they help out our picture of Lowell's opinion of Thackeray: a realist, perhaps too much so, and a keen student, although not always just.

44 Scouder, op. cit., I, 346.
45 Greenslet, op. cit., p. 112.
46 Lowell, Complete Works, VI, 150.
47 Ibid., p. 379. 48 Ibid., II, 98.
In an essay on Rousseau, written in 1867, Lowell lamented that Thackeray had written so little poetry: "This [sentiment] is the delightful staple of the poets of social life like Horace and Beranger, or Thackeray, when he too rarely played with verse."\(^{49}\)

The last comment upon Thackeray which we note is one which Lowell wrote in 1870, in an essay on Chaucer. Lowell admired the quiet unconcern with which Chaucer said his best things, and considered that quality peculiar to him among English poets, "though Goldsmith, Addison, and Thackeray have approached it in prose."\(^{50}\)

Without commenting yet upon those judgments, let us see what Lowell had to say of Dickens. We have already seen that Lowell was concerned with Dickens' power to make us laugh.\(^{51}\) In a letter to Briggs, written November 13, 1847, Lowell tried to explain his idea of Dickens' humor by saying that Dickens seemed to him for the most part "to be rather a sketcher of humoristic characters (characters in themselves humorous, and as such noted by him) than himself a humorist."\(^{52}\)

The subject of Dickens' characters came to Lowell's mind again and again, as it always does to one who reads him. Lowell wrote on August 7, 1861 to C. E. Norton that he was reading "Great Expectations," and that he liked it very much.

\(^{49}\)Ibid., IV, 196.  \(^{50}\)Ibid., II, 258.

\(^{51}\)See above, p. 109.  \(^{52}\)Lowell, Letters, I, 118.
The characters, though, seemed to him unreal, as if Dickens had made them as the Chinese do distorted wooden images. He thought Dickens picked out the "crookedest and knottiest roots of temperament or accidental distortion," and then cut a figure to match. Lowell liked the "fine touches of nature" in the book, though he dreaded finding a melodramatic end to it. 53

Whatever he might have thought of Dickens' humor and his characters at that time, however, Lowell appreciated him thoroughly. In a letter to J. T. Fields, March 5, 1868, he asked for tickets to Dickens' readings, saying that Dickens was a "man of genius," "delightful, simple, sweet, and natural." 54

Sometime later, in a letter to Norton, Lowell wrote that he was just then getting around to David Copperfield. He said he did not wonder that David Copperfield was Dickens' favorite child, for the book was "amazingly well done" as far as he had read. 55

We may conclude that Lowell's opinion of both Thackeray and Dickens, as expressed in the very little that he wrote about them, has turned out to be the "long range" view, even though it differed a great deal in some respects from that entertained by some of their other contemporary critics. 56

53 Ibid., p. 312. 54 Ibid., I, 400.
56 See Norman Foerster, op. cit., p. 56.
Lowell's earliest written opinion of Carlyle was contained in the Glass Poem, which he composed in Concord while he was suspended from classes. Scudder quotes some of the lines, which show that Lowell, in spite of his youth, had got to the bottom of Carlyle:

Hail too, great drummer in the mental march,  
Teufelsdröckh! worthy a triumphal arch,  
Who send'st forth prose encumbered with jackboots,  
To hobble round and pick up raw recruits,  
And, able both to battle and to teach,  
Mountest thy silent kettledrum to preach,  
Great conqueror of the English language, hail!  
How Caledonia's goddess must turn pale  
To hear the German-Craseo-Latin flung  
In Revolutions from a Scottish tongue.  

After the celebrated comparison of Carlyle with Emerson in A Fable for Critics, in which Carlyle's rugged burliness is well brought out, we find Lowell writing no more about him until 1864, although he burlesqued him cleverly in one of the "notices" of an "independent press" in the "Biglow Papers," written during the years 1846 to 1848. In 1864, in an essay on the causes of the "rebellion," Lowell remarked:

Style will find readers and shape convictions,  
while mere truth only gathers dust on the shelf.  
.  
.  
. Our conception of scenes and men is outlined and colored for us by the pictorial imagination of Carlyle.

We infer then, and our conviction is strengthened some sixty

57 Scudder, op. cit., I, 57.
58 Lowell, A Fable for Critics, p. 45.
59 Scudder, op. cit., I, 283.
60 Lowell, Complete Works, VI, 149.
pages later, when Lowell commented upon the "exaggerated
notion of the power of some exceptional characters upon
events which Carlyle has made fashionable," that Carlyle was
more forceful than truthful at times, and that the opinions
he shaped were not always what they should be.61

Lowell's political convictions, which were very strong,
were still aroused the following year, and Carlyle was still
the object of his denunciations when he wrote: "We should not
forget that reaction against the softening and humanizing
effect of modern civilization, led by such men as Carlyle."62
After the strain occasioned by the Civil War was over Lowell
was able to calm his feelings toward Carlyle.

In a letter to Leslie Stephen, July 31, 1871, Lowell
spoke of the essay he wrote on Carlyle in 1866. He said he
was harder on him than he meant to be, because he was fighting
against a "secret partiality."63 Scouder advances the theory
that Lowell was harder on Carlyle than he meant to be because
he was judging his own youth in the essay, and condemning
some of the things which had been characteristic of himself
in those days. During his college days Lowell had read Car-
lyle "with gusto," and had been very much devoted to his "Mis-
cellanies." Scouder says that Lowell was aware of having

61Ibid., p. 211.
62Ibid., p. 307. Lowell was very much upset that Carlyle
should see in the Civil War only the "burning of a dirty chim-
ney."
63Lowell, Letters, II, 74.
outlived his early enthusiasm for Carlyle, and in spite of his admiration for the great critic, his point of view had changed. He had "come into more complete possession of his own judgment." 64

We turn to Lowell's essay to see what that judgment was. Out of the forty-seven pages, the first eight are given over to a rambling discussion of those qualities that insure lasting fame to a poet, prefaced by a sentence which gives us the clue as to why Lowell is concerned with the problem:

A feeling of comical sadness is likely to come over the mind of any middle-aged man who sets himself to recollecting the names of different authors that have been famous, and the number of contemporary immortals whose end he has seen since coming to manhood. 65

We are made to feel at once that Lowell was writing from a queer feeling of disillusionment, and we follow eagerly the next pages, curious, with him, to know what qualities in a poet do stand the test of time and a changing world. Little by little he revealed the necessary elements: the ability to entertain, an idea of art (combination and arrangement), imagination, wisdom, wit, sense, judgment, and a "brooding patience."

Lowell's discussion of many men gave way at last to his first mention of Carlyle, who, he said, had been before the world so long that "we may feel toward him something of the

64 Scudder, op. cit., II, 69.

65 Lowell, Complete Works, II, 53.
unprejudice of posterity."

Lowell said that Carlyle had contributed no new ideas to the world for many years, and so it was possible to estimate his place as a writer and thinker.66 After that introduction, if we may call it so, Lowell spent thirteen pages in telling us what he had come to believe of Carlyle, before mentioning the particular "hero," Frederick the Great, about whom the paper was written. Lowell believed that in the earliest writings of any imaginative author one may find his outstanding characteristics. That was especially true of Goethe, Carlyle's master, and it was true of Carlyle as well. All of Carlyle's early work showed a great appreciation of the brave and beautiful, and a scorn of cowardly compromise, which was at the same time tempered with sympathy for human frailty. Little by little, however, the humorous side of Carlyle gained ground, until it ended in cynicism. That defect was not noticed so much in his critical essays, because they were set within limits which kept Carlyle's "natural extravagance" within bounds. Lowell considered that the great merit of those essays lay in the fact that Carlyle based his criticism on wide reading, and was not afraid to draw real, not contemporary, conclusions. Their defect was a tendency to confound "the moral with the aesthetic standard."67

Quoting Goethe, "The worthy Germans have persuaded themselves that the essence of true humor is formlessness,"

66Ibid., p. 61. 67Ibid., p. 66.
Lowell lamented Carlyle's humor and his lack of form or rhythm, concluding that Carlyle, with his vigorous conceptional imagination and complete mastery of language might have become a poet in the highest sense if he had not lacked the "plastic imagination, the shaping faculty." 68

With a hint of apology in his tone Lowell wrote that while it is much more pleasant to thank an author for what he gives us than to blame him for what he cannot give, sometimes critics must blame, especially when the writer in question sets himself up as a teacher of moral and political philosophy, and begins to compound the very social panaceas he once preached against. He found the reason for Carlyle's change to be that nature had not fitted him out as an artist, and therefore he lacked the ideal which would have lifted him up and made him seek harmony rather than discord.

Carlyle was unwilling, Lowell said, to see any good in any cure except his own, and he was too impatient of results to let nature take its course in bettering the race. He was, Lowell said aptly, "for calling down fire from Heaven whenever he cannot readily lay his hand on the match-box." 69

Part of his irritability Lowell laid to the account of his having taught school in his youth; unfortunately, Lowell thought, Carlyle's "pedagogic birch" had grown to the "taller

68 Lowell, Complete Works, II, 68.
69 Ibid., p. 71.
proportions and more ominous aspect of a gallows."70 Apropos of nothing, he added that, like a man who uses stimulants, Carlyle's hero worship demanded stronger and stronger heroes, until at last only "types of remorseless Force" satisfied him.

Having at last mentioned Frederick the Second, Lowell spent two more pages in repeating that Carlyle had done nothing but repeat himself since "Sartor Resartus," and that his cynicism had gone on expanding, fed by his disappointment in not finding a "world altogether heroic." Throughout nine pages Lowell explained fully why Carlyle, who had so much of the epic poet in him, could not be a historian; then he returned, for four pages, to a mingled treatment of Carlyle's early promise and his later tendency to repeat himself more and more vehemently. For seven pages he lamented Carlyle's choice of Frederick as a hero; then he took two pages to come to the following conclusion about "The History of Friedrich II called Frederick the Great":

It has the one prime merit of being the work of a man who has every quality of a great poet except that supreme one of rhythm, which shapes both matter and manner to harmonious proportion, and that where it is good, it is good as only genius knows how to be.71

The last two pages of the essay are devoted to a masterly summing up of everything that was said in the first forty-five pages, and we are made to wonder why anyone as capable as Lowell was allowed himself to criticize in others his own strikingly exhibited faults.

70 Ibid., p. 73. 71 Ibid., p. 98.
Writing to Thomas Hughes, October 20, 1884, Lowell said:

I am in the midst of Froude—two new volumes of Carlyle. Very interesting I find them, and him more problematic than ever, but fine on the whole. A kind of sentimental Ajax Furens. I don't think that sincerity towards his hero justifies Froude in printing Carlyle's diatribes (result of dyspepsia mainly)—about Gladstone, for example. In a world where there is so much unavoidable pain, why add to the avoidable?  

To C. E. Norton, in a letter dated July 35, 1886, Lowell wrote that Carlyle was a man of genius. That complimentary attitude he maintained in another letter, in which he said he had been reading Carlyle's Early Letters with great interest. The letters, Lowell concluded, made Carlyle more agreeable, and confirmed Lowell's opinion that Carlyle was "most thoroughly of a piece." In the Letters Carlyle was "all man"; a "fine character," "manly and helpful to the core." Such statements, while they appear to be contradictory to the casual reader, merely express what Lowell said from the beginning: Carlyle had many grave faults, but he had his good points too, and in those he was supreme.

Lowell was more completely the critic when he wrote about British authors than when he discussed his American contemporaries. In both cases his standard of criticism was the same, but when he spoke of American writers his more intimate knowledge of them as individuals got in his way. The picture

73Ibid., p. 315.
74To C. E. Norton, November 22, 1886. See Letters, II, 320.
he gave us of the British writers mentioned in this chapter is the one which time has proved true in the main, and we are justified in believing that this is the true measure of his power of critical appraisal.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The casual reader of Lowell often forgets that he was, in addition to being one of America's major nineteenth-century poets, a critic accepted in his own time as an important interpreter of what was good in literature. Lowell's contributions to critical literature which were most noted during his lifetime were studies of writers who antedated him usually by many years. In recent years, however, we have come to appreciate more and more his comments on his contemporaries. Offhand though they often were, they exhibited strikingly the lasting quality of his criticism. The purpose of this essay has been to study Lowell as a critic of his contemporaries—to find out what he said of them and why, and to see how his opinions compare with those of present-day critics.

In the first two chapters I set forth what I have found to be the bases upon which Lowell judged his contemporaries, and his opinion of Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Alcott, four members of the Concord group of writers. In the next chapter I discussed what Lowell thought of four dear friends and fellow members of the Saturday Club: Holmes, Longfellow, Hawthorne, and Whittier. Poe, in a chapter to himself (because his memory is as lonely and set apart as was
the man), precedes the study of a loosely connected group of New York writers, Irving, Cooper, Bryant, and Whitman. I considered only Howells and James of the younger set of authors, since they were closest to Lowell, and he said more about them than about any others of that group. The chapter following is devoted to these British writers: Landor, Tennyson, Dickens, Thackeray, and Carlyle, with passing reference to Swinburne, Browning, and Mrs. Browning.

To review briefly the content of the foregoing chapters, Lowell's analysis of Emerson was that he was a noble and lovable character whose writings were notable more as a revelation of himself than as works of poetic art, although in single verses he was "musical enough." Thoreau's life violated Lowell's sense of fitness, and his writings lacked the form which Lowell considered necessary. When he confined himself to his own portrayal of nature, however, Thoreau showed true mastery of his subject. Lowell thought Margaret Fuller a vain and conceited bore. He said of Alcott what everyone thought—that he was highly impractical, but noble and sweet spirited, and that while he was a splendid talker he could not write.

Lowell, the one responsible for Holmes' having "taken up his pen in serious earnest," loved Holmes for being wise, witty, genial, and tender, both in himself and in his writings. Longfellow was another whose poetry was merely a reflection of his life: it was strong, sweet, fair, and simple. Hawthorne's work was characterized by brains, a rare creative
imagination, and delicate strength. Whittier, a true lyric poet, was apt to "let himself go," from the standpoint of grammar and meter, when he was in the full rush of composition. Nevertheless, he was a man of genius, especially when writing about nature.

Lowell considered Poe to be a genius for the most part, and a fearless critic, but utterly lacking in character.

To sum up Lowell's opinion of the New York group, Bryant was austere and reserved in his poetry, but he had a "true soul" for nature; Irving, the link between the Old World and the New, had a warm heart, a happy spirit, grave sweet humor, and a fine brain; Cooper was methodical to the point of dullness in his writing, but he did give us one truly American and original character; Whitman was guilty of grossness and "animality" and of seeking to be original--faults which Lowell could not forgive.

Lowell liked everything about Howells and his writings, but most of all his conscience and his "hunger after excellence." James' work also pleased Lowell very much, especially since it showed marked form and design.

Lowell's opinion of the British writers revealed best his ability to criticize contemporary literature. He said that Landor, while not a critic, had said excellent things about books; not a great thinker, he had had great thoughts; not a poet, he had written perfect lines--all in pure, harmonious English. Lowell's youthful admiration for Tennyson
did not survive, yet, even as he criticized him for his sentimentalism, Lowell gave him credit for the good things he had written. Lowell appreciated Dickens' great talent as a caricaturist, and thought him good at portraying characters, though they often seemed rather unreal and distorted. He said that Thackeray had more constructive power than Dickens, however, because he was more realistic, and a keener observer than the latter. Carlyle, another writer for whom Lowell's early enthusiasm did not last, lacked form and had grown more cynical with the years. He had a vigorous conceptive imagination and complete mastery of language, but lacked the "shaping faculty" which would have made him a great epic poet. Nevertheless, he was a genius, "all man," and an integrated personality.

The most important things, however, which have emerged from the foregoing study of Lowell's opinion of his contemporaries are not the opinions themselves so much as the bases upon which they were founded and the enduring quality with which they were endowed.

Lowell was himself the strongest foundation for his beliefs. His ancestry, made up as it was of scholars, ministers, and seers, passed on to him a desire for the best; his home life and his formal schooling taught him how to find the best; and his own ambitions and choices led him surely along the path for which nature and training had fitted him. Those things in himself which fitted him so admirably to become a
critic were these: a steady devotion to the past, from which he was able to draw analogies and comparisons, and upon whose literature he was permitted to stand firm; a love for New England, with all it represented in the way of dignity, liberty, and individualism; a devotion to England, her ideals and her poets, surpassed only by his love for America and all that was truly American; an intuitive sense, unequaled in other American critics, that was balanced by good Yankee common sense; idealism; sympathetic understanding of others; and a rare independence of judgment developed by many years of experience as an editor.

Lowell enjoyed and depended upon his comradeship with other writers, and no man had more friends than he. Yet he was capable of depending upon himself for companionship, and did not hesitate to disagree on literary matters even with the persons whose opinions he valued most. His friendship with Emerson, for example, did not affect his opinion of Thoreau or of Whitman, nor did his own growing dislike of Poe keep him from admiring Poe's capacity for independent criticism.

The result of all the factors just mentioned was Lowell the critic, who, in spite of his own literary failings, deserves the title of America's first and best literary critic, because he "whacked pretension, praised without jealousy, and separated the sham from the real."
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