

E. is rather like Flaxman, lines strait and severe,  
And a colorless outline, but full, round, and clear;—  
To the men he thinks worthy he frankly accords  
The design of a white marble statue in words.

C. labors to get at the centre, and then  
Take a reckoning from there of his actions and men;

E. calmly assumes the said centre as granted,  
And, given himself, has whatever is wanted.

'He has imitators in scores, who omit  
No part of the man but his wisdom and wit,—  
Who go carefully o'er the sky-blue of his brain,  
And when he has skimmed it once, skim it again;  
If at all they resemble him, you may be sure  
it is

Because their shoals mirror his mists and obscurities,  
As a mud-puddle seems deep as heaven for a minute,  
While a cloud that floats o'er is reflected within it.

'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?

Besides, 't is no use, you'll not find e'en a  
core,—

— has picked up all the windfalls before.  
They might strip every tree, and E. never  
would catch 'em,

His Hesperides have no rude dragon to  
watch 'em;

When they send him a dishful, and ask him  
to try 'em,

He never suspects how the sly rogues came  
by 'em;

He wonders why 't is there are none such  
his trees on,  
And thinks 'em the best he has tasted this  
season.

'There is Bryant,<sup>1</sup> as quiet, as cool, and  
as dignified,

As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is  
ignified,

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 su-  
preme iceolation),

Your topmost Parnassus he may set his  
heel on,

But no warm applauses come, peal follow-  
ing peal on,—

He's too smooth and too polished to hang  
any zeal on:

Unqualified merits, I'll grant, if you  
choose, he has 'em,

But he lacks the one merit of kindling  
enthusiasm;

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

'He is very nice reading in summer,  
but *inter*

*Nos*, we don't want *extra* freezing in winter;  
Take him up in the depth of July, my ad-  
vice is,

<sup>1</sup> Compare three passages in *Lowell's Letters* (quoted by permission of Messrs. Harper and Brothers):—

'The Bryant is funny, and as fair as I could make it, immitigably just. Indeed I have endeavored to be so in all. . . . 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.' . . . *May 12, 1848*. See the whole passage, *Lowell's Letters*, vol. i, p. 131.

'I am quite sensible that I did not do Mr. Bryant justice in the "Fable." But there was no personal feeling in what I said—though I have regretted what I did say because it might seem personal. 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.' *January 11, 1855*; vol. i, p. 221.

'I am all the gladder I wrote my poem for Bryant's birthday ["On Board the Seventy-Six,"]—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.' *February 9, 1887*. See the whole letter (to Mr. Richard Watson Gilder), *Lowell's Letters*, vol. ii, p. 334.

When you feel an Egyptian devotion to  
ices.

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;

And his heart, in the midst of brick walls,  
or where'er it is,

Glows, softens, and thrills with the tender-  
est charities—

To you mortals that delve in this trade-  
ridden planet?

No, to old Berkshire's hills, with their  
limestone and granite.

If you're one who *in loco* (add *foco* here)  
*desipis*,

You will get of his outermost heart (as I  
guess) a piece;

But you'd get deeper down if you came as  
a precipice,

And would break the last seal of its in-  
wardest fountain,

If you only could palm yourself off for a  
mountain.

Mr. Quivis, or somebody quite as discerning,  
Some scholar who's hourly expecting his  
learning,

Calls B. the American Wordsworth; but  
Wordsworth

May be rated at more than your whole  
tuneful herd's worth.

No, don't be absurd, he's an excellent  
Bryant;

But, my friends, you'll endanger the life  
of your client,

By attempting to stretch him up into a  
giant:

If you choose to compare him, I think  
there are two per-

sons fit for a parallel—Thomson and  
Cowper;<sup>1</sup>

I don't mean exactly,—there's something  
of each,

There's T.'s love of nature, C.'s penchant  
to preach;

Just mix up their minds so that C.'s spice  
of craziness

Shall balance and neutralize T.'s turn for  
laziness,

And it gives you a brain cool, quite fric-  
tionless, quiet,

<sup>1</sup> To demonstrate quickly and easily how per-  
versely absurd 't is to sound this name *Cowper*,  
As people in general call him named *super*,  
I remark that he rhymes it himself with horse-  
trooper.

Whose internal police nips the buds of all  
riot,—

A brain like a permanent strait-jacket put  
on

The heart that strives vainly to burst off a  
button,—

A brain which, without being slow or me-  
chanic,

Does more than a larger less drilled, more  
volcanic;

He's a Cowper condensed, with no crazi-  
ness bitten,

And the advantage that Wordsworth be-  
fore him had written.

'But, my dear little bardlings, don't  
prick up your ears

Nor suppose I would rank you and Bryant  
as peers;

If I call him an iceberg, I don't mean to say  
There is nothing in that which is grand in  
its way;

He is almost the one of your poets that  
knows

How much grace, strength, and dignity lie  
in Repose;

If he sometimes fall short, he is too wise  
to mar

His thought's modest fulness by going too  
far;

'T would be well if your authors should all  
make a trial

Of what virtue there is in severe self-  
denial,

And measure their writings by Hesiod's  
staff,

Which teaches that all has less value than  
half.

'There is Whittier, whose swelling and  
vehement heart

Strains the strait-breasted drab of the  
Quaker apart,

And reveals the live Man, still supreme  
and erect,

Underneath the bemummifying wrappers of  
sect;

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,<sup>250</sup>  
 As my Pythoness erst sometimes erred  
 from not knowing  
 If 't were I or mere wind through her tripod  
 was blowing;  
 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,<sup>260</sup>  
 Not his best, though, for those are struck  
 off at white-heats  
 When the heart in his breast like a trip-  
 hammer beats,  
 And can ne'er be repeated again any more  
 Than they could have been carefully plot-  
 ted before:  
 Like old what's-his-name there at the bat-  
 tle of Hastings  
 (Who, however, gave more than mere  
 rhythmical bastings),  
 Our Quaker leads off metaphorical fights  
 For reform and whatever they call human  
 rights,  
 Both singing and striking in front of the war,  
 And hitting his foes with the mallet of  
 Thor;  
 Anne haec, one exclaims, on beholding his  
 knocks,<sup>270</sup>  
*Vestis filii tui*, O leather-clad Fox?  
 Can that be thy son, in the battle's mid din,  
 Preaching brotherly love and then driving  
 it in  
 To the brain of the tough old Goliath of sin,  
 With the smoothest of pebbles from Cas-  
 taly's spring  
 Impressed on his hard moral sense with a  
 sling?

'All honor and praise to the right-hearted  
 bard  
 Who was true to The Voice when such ser-  
 vice was hard,

Who himself was so free he dared sing for  
 the slave<sup>280</sup>  
 When to look but a protest in silence was  
 brave;  
 All honor and praise to the women and men  
 Who spoke out for the dumb and the  
 down-trodden then!  
 It needs not to name them, already for  
 each  
 I see History preparing the statue and  
 niche;  
 They were harsh, but shall *you* be so shocked  
 at hard words  
 Who have beaten your pruning-hooks up  
 into swords,  
 Whose rewards and hurrahs men are surer  
 to gain  
 By the reaping of men and of women than  
 grain?  
 Why should *you* stand aghast at their fierce  
 wordy war, if<sup>290</sup>  
 You scalp one another for Bank or for  
 Tariff?  
 Your calling them cut-throats and knaves  
 all day long  
 Does n't prove that the use of hard lan-  
 guage is wrong;  
 While the World's heart beats quicker to  
 think of such men  
 As signed Tyranny's doom with a bloody  
 steel-pen,  
 While on Fourth-of-July's beardless orators  
 fright one  
 With hints at Harmodius and Aristogeiton,  
 You need not look shy at your sisters and  
 brothers  
 Who stab with sharp words for the free-  
 dom of others;—  
 No, a wreath, twine a wreath for the loyal  
 and true<sup>300</sup>  
 Who, for sake of the many, dared stand  
 with the few,  
 Not of blood-spattered laurel for enemies  
 braved,  
 But of broad, peaceful oak-leaves for citi-  
 zens saved!

'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,<sup>310</sup>  
 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<sup>320</sup>  
 For making him fully and perfectly man.

'Here's Cooper, who's written six vol-  
 umes to show  
 He's as good as a lord: well, let's grant  
 that he's so;  
 If a person prefer that description of praise,  
 Why, a coronet's certainly cheaper than  
 bays;  
 But he need take no pains to convince us  
 he's not  
 (As his enemies say) the American Scott.  
 Choose any twelve men, and let C. read  
 aloud  
 That one of his novels of which he's most  
 proud,  
 And I'd lay any bet that, without ever  
 quitting<sup>330</sup>  
 Their box, they'd be all, to a man, for ac-  
 quitting.  
 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 Bumpo, daubed over with  
 red,  
 And his very Long Toms are the same  
 useful Nat,

Rigged up in duck pants and a sou'wester  
 hat  
 (Though once in a Coffin, a good chance  
 was found<sup>340</sup>  
 To have slipped the old fellow away under-  
 ground).  
 All his other men-figures are clothes upon  
 sticks,  
 The *dernière chemise* of a man in a fix  
 (As a captain besieged, when his garrison's  
 small,  
 Sets up caps upon poles to be seen o'er the  
 wall);  
 And the women he draws from one model  
 don't vary,  
 All sappy as maples and flat as a prairie.  
 When a character's wanted, he goes to the  
 task  
 As a cooper would do in composing a  
 cask;  
 He picks out the staves, of their qualities  
 heedful,<sup>350</sup>  
 Just hoops them together as tight as is  
 needful,  
 And, if the best fortune should crown the  
 attempt, he  
 Has made at the most something wooden  
 and empty.

'Don't suppose I would underrate Coop-  
 er's abilities;  
 If I thought you'd do that, I should feel  
 very ill at ease;  
 The men who have given to *one* character life  
 And objective existence are not very rife;  
 You may number them all, both prose-  
 writers and singers,  
 Without overrunning the bounds of your  
 fingers,  
 And Natty won't go to oblivion quicker<sup>360</sup>  
 Than Adams the Parson or Primrose the  
 vicar.

'There is one thing in Cooper I like,  
 too, and that is  
 That on manners he lectures his country-  
 men gratis;  
 Not precisely so either, because, for a  
 rarity,  
 He is paid for his tickets in unpopularity.  
 Now he may overcharge his American pic-  
 tures,  
 But you'll grant there's a good deal of  
 truth in his strictures;  
 And I honor the man who is willing to sink



Half his present repute for the freedom to think,  
 And, when he has thought, be his cause strong or weak,  
 Will risk t'other half for the freedom to speak,  
 Caring naught for what vengeance the mob has in store,  
 Let that mob be the upper ten thousand or lower.

'There are truths you Americans need to be told,  
 And it never 'll refute them to swagger and scold;  
 John Bull, looking o'er the Atlantic, in choler  
 At your aptness for trade, says you worship the dollar;  
 But to scorn such eye-dollar-try's what very few do,  
 And John goes to that church as often as you do.  
 No matter what John says, don't try to outrow him,  
 'T is enough to go quietly on and outgrow him;  
 Like most fathers, Bull hates to see Number One  
 Displacing himself in the mind of his son,  
 And detests the same faults in himself he'd neglected  
 When he sees them again in his child's glass reflected;  
 To love one another you're too like by half;  
 If he is a bull, you're a pretty stout calf,  
 And tear your own pasture for naught but to show  
 What a nice pair of horns you're beginning to grow.

'There are one or two things I should just like to hint,  
 For you don't often get the truth told you in print;  
 The most of you (this is what strikes all beholders)  
 Have a mental and physical stoop in the shoulders;  
 Though you ought to be free as the winds and the waves,  
 You've the gait and the manners of runaway slaves;  
 Though you brag of your New World, you don't half believe in it;

And as much of the Old as is possible weave in it;  
 Your goddess of freedom, a tight, buxom girl,  
 With lips like a cherry and teeth like a pearl,  
 With eyes bold as Herè's, and hair floating free,  
 And full of the sun as the spray of the sea,  
 Who can sing at a husking or romp at a shearing,  
 Who can trip through the forests alone without fearing,  
 Who can drive home the cows with a song through the grass,  
 Keeps glancing aside into Europe's cracked glass,  
 Hides her red hands in gloves, pinches up her lithe waist,  
 And makes herself wretched with transmarine taste;  
 She loses her fresh country charm when she takes  
 Any mirror except her own rivers and lakes.

'You steal Englishmen's books and think Englishmen's thought,  
 With their salt on her tail your wild eagle is caught;  
 Your literature suits its each whisper and motion  
 To what will be thought of it over the ocean;  
 The cast clothes of Europe your statesmanship tries  
 And mumbles again the old blarneys and lies;—  
 Forget Europe wholly, your veins throb with blood,  
 To which the dull current in hers is but mud;  
 Let her sneer, let her say your experiment fails,  
 In her voice there's a tremble e'en now while she rails,  
 And your shore will soon be in the nature of things  
 Covered thick with gilt drift-wood of cast-away kings,  
 Where alone, as it were in a Longfellow's Waif,  
 Her fugitive pieces will find themselves safe.  
 O my friends, thank your god, if you have one, that he

'Twixt the Old World and you set the gulf of a sea;  
 Be strong-backed, brown-handed, upright as your pines,  
 By the scale of a hemisphere shape your designs,  
 Be true to yourselves and this new nineteenth age,  
 As a statue by Powers, or a picture by Page,  
 Plough, sail, forge, build, carve, paint, make all over new,  
 To your own New-World instincts contrive to be true,  
 Keep your ears open wide to the Future's first call,  
 Be whatever you will, but yourselves first of all,  
 Stand fronting the dawn on Toil's heaven-sealing peaks,  
 And become my new race of more practical Greeks.'

Here Miranda<sup>1</sup> came up, and said, 'Phœbus! you know  
 That the Infinite Soul has its infinite woe,  
 As I ought to know, having lived cheek by jowl,  
 Since the day I was born, with the Infinite Soul;  
 I myself introduced, I myself, I alone,  
 To my Land's better life authors solely my own,  
 Who the sad heart of earth on their shoulders have taken,  
 Whose works sound a depth by Life's quiet unshaken,  
 Such as Shakespeare, for instance, the Bible, and Bacon,  
 Not to mention my own works; Time's nadir is fleet,  
 And, as for myself, I'm quite out of conceit'—

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Fuller. Lowell wrote to Briggs, March 26, 1848: 'I think I shall say nothing about Margaret Fuller (though she offer so fair a target), because she has done me an ill-natured turn. I shall revenge myself amply upon her by writing better. 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. However, the temptation may be too strong for me. It certainly would have been if she had never said anything about me. Even Maria thinks I ought to give her a line or two.' (*Lowell's Letters*, vol. i, p. 128. Quoted by permission of Messrs. Harper and Brothers.) See *Margaret Fuller's Papers on Literature and Art*, or *Greenleaf's Lowell*, p. 63; and Poe's review of the *Fable for Critics*, in his *Works*, vol. xiii, pp. 165-175.

'Quite out of conceit! I'm enchanted to hear it,'  
 Cried Apollo aside. 'Who'd have thought she was near it?  
 To be sure, one is apt to exhaust those commodities  
 One uses too fast, yet in this case as odd it is  
 As if Neptune should say to his turbot's and whittings,  
 "I'm as much out of salt as Miranda's own writings"  
 (Which, as she in her own happy manner has said,  
 Sound a depth, for 't is one of the functions of lead).  
 She often has asked me if I could not find A place somewhere near me that suited her mind;  
 I know but a single one vacant, which she, With her rare talent that way, would fit to a T.  
 And it would not imply any pause or cessation  
 In the work she esteems her peculiar vocation, —  
 She may enter on duty to-day, if she chooses,  
 And remain Tiring-woman for life to the Muses.'

'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,  
 Who— But hey-day! What's this? Messieurs Mathews and Poe,  
 You must n'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;  
 You may say that he's smooth and all that  
 till you're hoarse,  
 But remember that elegance also is force;  
 After polishing granite as much as you  
 will,  
 The heart keeps its tough old persistency  
 still;  
 Deduct all you can, *that* still keeps you at  
 bay;  
 Why, he'll live till men weary of Collins  
 and Gray.  
 I'm not over-fond of Greek metres in Eng-  
 lish,  
 To me rhyme's a gain, so it be not too jin-  
 glish,  
 And your modern hexameter verses are no  
 more  
 Like Greek ones than sleek Mr. Pope is  
 like Homer;  
 As the roar of the sea to the coo of a pigeon  
 is,  
 So, compared to your moderns, sounds old  
 Melesigenes;  
 I may be too partial, the reason, perhaps,  
 o't is  
 That I've heard the old blind man recite  
 his own rhapsodies,  
 And my ear with that music impregnate  
 may be,  
 Like the poor exiled shell with the soul of  
 the sea,  
 Or as one can't bear Strauss when his na-  
 ture is cloven  
 To its deeps within deeps by the stroke of  
 Beethoven;  
 But, set that aside, and 't is truth that I  
 speak,  
 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,  
 'T is a shrine of retreat from Earth's hub-  
 bub and strife  
 As quiet and chaste as the author's own  
 life.

'What! Irving? thrice welcome, warm  
 heart and fine brain,  
 You bring back the happiest spirit from  
 Spain,  
 And the gravest sweet humor, that ever  
 were there  
 Since Cervantes met death in his gentle  
 despair;  
 Nay, don't be embarrassed, nor look so be-  
 seeching,  
 I sha'n't run directly against my own  
 preaching,  
 And, having just laughed at their Raphaels  
 and Dantes,  
 Go to setting you up beside matchless Cer-  
 vantes;  
 But allow me to speak what I honestly  
 feel, —  
 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 re-  
 main,  
 Let it stand out of doors till a soul it re-  
 ceives  
 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.'

Here, 'Forgive me, Apollo,' I cried,  
 'while I pour  
 My heart out to my birthplace:<sup>1</sup> O loved  
 more and more  
 Dear Baystate, from whose rocky bosom  
 thy sons  
 Should suck milk, strong-will-giving, brave,  
 such as runs

<sup>1</sup> 'The only passage in "A Fable for Critics" which he [later] dwelt upon with genuine delight was his apostrophe to Massachusetts, and that is almost out of key with the rest of the poem.' (Scudder's *Life of Lowell*, vol. 1, p. 266.) The passage should now be read as an apostrophe to America rather than to Massachusetts. It is far more true of the West than of New England, and of America as a whole than of any section.

In the veins of old Graylock — who is it  
 that dares  
 Call thee pedler, a soul wrapped in bank-  
 books and shares?  
 It is false! She's a Poet! I see, as I  
 write,  
 Along the far railroad the steam-snake  
 glide white,  
 The cataract-throb of her mill-hearts I  
 hear,  
 The swift strokes of trip-hammers weary  
 my ear,  
 Sledges ring upon anvils, through logs the  
 saw screams,  
 Blocks swing to their place, beetles drive  
 home the beams: —  
 It is songs such as these that she croons to  
 the din  
 Of her fast-flying shuttles, year out and  
 year in,  
 While from earth's farthest corner there  
 comes not a breeze  
 But wafts her the buzz of her gold-glean-  
 ing bees:  
 What though those horn hands have as yet  
 found small time  
 For painting and sculpture and music and  
 rhyme?  
 These will come in due order; the need  
 that pressed sorest  
 Was to vanquish the seasons, the ocean, the  
 forest,  
 To bridle and harness the rivers, the  
 steam,  
 Making those whirl her mill-wheels, this  
 tug in her team,  
 To vassalize old tyrant Winter, and  
 make  
 Him delve surlily for her on river and  
 lake; —  
 When this New World was parted, she  
 strove not to shirk  
 Her lot in the heirdom, the tough, silent  
 Work,  
 The hero-share ever from Herakles down  
 To Odin, the Earth's iron sceptre and  
 crown:  
 Yes, thou dear, noble Mother! if ever  
 men's praise  
 Could be claimed for creating heroical  
 lays,  
 Thou hast won it; if ever the laurel  
 divine  
 Crowned the Maker and Builder, that glory  
 is thine!

Thy songs are right epic, they tell how this  
 rude  
 Rock-rib of our earth here was tamed and  
 subdued;  
 Thou hast written them plain on the face  
 of the planet  
 In brave, deathless letters of iron and  
 granite;  
 Thou hast printed them deep for all time;  
 they are set  
 From the same runic type-fount and alpha-  
 bet  
 With thy stout Berkshire hills and the  
 arms of thy Bay, —  
 They are staves from the burly old May-  
 flower lay.  
 If the drones of the Old World, in queru-  
 lous ease,  
 Ask thy Art and thy Letters, point proudly  
 to these,  
 Or, if they deny these are Letters and  
 Art,  
 Toil on with the same old invincible  
 heart;  
 Thou art rearing the pedestal broad-based  
 and grand  
 Whereon the fair shapes of the Artist shall  
 stand,  
 And creating, through labors undaunted  
 and long,  
 The theme for all Sculpture and Painting  
 and Song!

'But my good mother Baystate wants no  
 praise of mine,  
 She learned from *her* mother a precept di-  
 vine  
 About something that butters no parsnips,  
 her *forte*  
 In another direction lies, work is her  
 sport  
 (Though she'll curtsey and set her cap  
 straight, that she will,  
 If you talk about Plymouth and red Bun-  
 ker's hill).  
 Dear, notable goodwife! by this time of  
 night,  
 Her hearth is swept neatly, her fire burning  
 bright,  
 And she sits in a chair (of home plan and  
 make) rocking,  
 Musing much, all the while, as she darns on  
 a stocking,  
 Whether turkeys will come pretty high  
 next Thanksgiving,



Whether flour 'll be so dear, for, as sure  
as she's living,  
She will use rye-and-injun then, whether  
the pig  
By this time ain't got pretty tolerable  
big,  
And whether to sell it outright will be  
best,  
Or to smoke hams and shoulders and salt  
down the rest, —  
At this minute, she'd swop all my verses,  
ah, cruel!  
For the last patent stove that is saving of  
fuel;  
So I'll just let Apollo go on, for his  
phiz  
Shows I've kept him awaiting too long as  
it is.<sup>590</sup>

'If our friend, there, who seems a re-  
porter, is done  
With his burst of emotion, why, I will go  
on,  
Said Apollo; some smiled, and, indeed, I  
must own  
There was something sarcastic, perhaps, in  
his tone: —

'There's Holmes, who is matchless  
among you for wit;  
A Leyden-jar always full-charged, from  
which flit  
The electrical tingles of hit after hit;  
In long poems 't is painful sometimes, and  
invites  
A thought of the way the new Telegraph  
writes,  
Which pricks down its little sharp sentences  
spitefully<sup>600</sup>  
As if you got more than you'd title to  
rightfully,  
And you find yourself hoping its wild father  
Lightning  
Would flame in for a second and give you a  
fright'ning.  
He has perfect sway of what I call a sham  
metre,  
But many admire it, the English pentame-  
ter,  
And Campbell, I think, wrote most com-  
monly worse,  
With less nerve, swing, and fire in the same  
kind of verse,

Nor e'er achieved aught in 't so worthy of  
praise  
As the tribute of Holmes to the grand  
*Marseillaise*.  
You went crazy last year over Bulwer's  
New Timon; —<sup>610</sup>  
Why, if B., to the day of his dying, should  
rhyme on,  
Heaping verses on verses and tomes upon  
tomes,  
He could ne'er reach the best point and  
vigor of Holmes.  
His are just the fine hands, too, to weave  
you a lyric  
Full of fancy, fun, feeling, or spiced with  
satiric  
In a measure so kindly you doubt if the  
toes  
That are trodden upon are your own or  
your foes'.

'There is Lowell, who's striving Par-  
nassus to climb  
With a whole bale of *isms* tied together  
with rhyme,  
He might get on alone, spite of brambles  
and boulders,<sup>620</sup>  
But he can't with that bundle he has on his  
shoulders,  
The top of the hill he will ne'er come nigh  
reaching  
Till he learns the distinction 'twixt singing  
and preaching;  
His lyre has some chords that would ring  
pretty well,  
But he'd rather by half make a drum of  
the shell,  
And rattle away till he's old as Methusa-  
lem,  
At the head of a march to the last new  
Jerusalem.'

Here Miranda came up and began, 'As  
to that —'  
Apollo at once seized his gloves, cane, and  
hat,  
And, seeing the place getting rapidly  
cleared,<sup>630</sup>  
I too snatched my notes and forthwith  
disappeared.

1847-48.

1848.

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL<sup>1</sup>PRELUDE TO PART FIRST<sup>2</sup>

OVER his keys the musing organist,  
Beginning doubtfully and far away,  
First lets his fingers wander as they list,  
And builds a bridge from Dreamland for  
his lay:  
Then, as the touch of his loved instrument  
Gives hope and fervor, nearer draws his  
theme,  
First guessed by faint auroral flushes sent  
Along the wavering vista of his dream.  
Not only around our infancy  
Doth heaven with all its splendors lie;<sup>3</sup> 10  
Daily, with souls that cringe and plot,  
We Sinais climb and know it not.<sup>4</sup>

Over our manhood bend the skies;  
Against our fallen and traitor lives  
The great winds utter prophecies;  
With our faint hearts the mountain  
strives;  
Its arms outstretched, the druid wood  
Waits with its benedictite;

<sup>1</sup> According to the mythology of the Romancers, the San Greal, or Holy Grail, was the cup out of which Jesus partook of the Last Supper with his disciples. It was brought into England by Joseph of Arimathea, and remained there, an object of pilgrimage and adoration, for many years in the keeping of his lineal descendants. It was incumbent upon those who had charge of it to be chaste in thought, word, and deed; but one of the keepers having broken this condition, the Holy Grail disappeared. From that time it was a favorite enterprise of the knights of Arthur's court to go in search of it. Sir Galahad was at last successful in finding it, as may be read in the seventeenth book of the Romance of King Arthur. Tennyson has made Sir Galahad the subject of one of the most exquisite of his poems.

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

<sup>2</sup> Holmes begins a poem of welcome to Lowell on his return from England: —

This is your month, the month of 'perfect days.'

June was indeed Lowell's month. Not only in the famous passage of this 'Prelude,' but in 'Under the Willows' (originally called 'A June Idyl'), 'Al Fresco' (originally 'A Day in June'), 'Sunthin' in the Pastoral Line' of the *Biglow Papers*, and 'The Nightingale in the Study,' he has made it peculiarly his own.

<sup>3</sup> Heaven lies about us in our Infancy! (WORDS- WORTH, in the fifth stanza of the 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality.')

<sup>4</sup> See Lowell's letter, of Sunday, September 3, 1848, to his friend C. F. Briggs.

And to our age's drowsy blood  
Still shouts the inspiring sea.<sup>20</sup>

Earth gets its price for what Earth gives  
us;  
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die  
in,  
The priest hath his fee who comes and  
shrives us,  
We bargain for the graves we lie in;  
At the devil's booth are all things sold,  
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of  
gold;  
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,  
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's task-  
ing:  
'T is heaven alone that is given away,  
'T is only God may be had for the ask-  
ing;<sup>30</sup>  
No price is set on the lavish summer;  
June may be had by the poorest comer.

And what is so rare as a day in June?  
Then, if ever, come perfect days;  
Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune,  
And over it softly her warm ear lays;  
Whether we look, or whether we listen,  
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten;  
Every clod feels a stir of might,  
An instinct within it that reaches and  
towers,<sup>40</sup>  
And, groping blindly above it for light,  
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers;  
The flush of life may well be seen  
Thrilling back over hills and valleys;  
The cowslip startles in meadows green,  
The buttercup catches the sun in its  
chalice,

And there's never a leaf nor a blade too  
mean  
To be some happy creature's palace;  
The little bird sits at his door in the sun,  
Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,<sup>50</sup>  
And lets his illumined being o'errun  
With the deluge of summer it receives;  
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,  
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters  
and sings;  
He sings to the wide world, and she to her  
nest, —  
In the nice ear of Nature which song is the  
best?



Now is the high-tide of the year,  
 And whatever of life hath ebbed away  
 Comes flooding back with a ripply cheer,  
 Into every bare inlet and creek and  
 bay;  
 Now the heart is so full that a drop over-  
 fills it,  
 We are happy now because God wills it;  
 No matter how barren the past may have  
 been,  
 'T is enough for us now that the leaves are  
 green;  
 We sit in the warm shade and feel right  
 well  
 How the sap creeps up and the blossoms  
 swell;  
 We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help  
 knowing  
 That skies are clear and grass is grow-  
 ing;  
 The breeze comes whispering in our ear,  
 That dandelions are blossoming near,  
 That maize has sprouted, that streams  
 are flowing,  
 That the river is bluer than the sky,  
 That the robin is plastering his house hard  
 by;  
 And if the breeze kept the good news  
 back,  
 For other couriers we should not lack;  
 We could guess it all by yon heifer's  
 lowing,—  
 And hark! how clear bold chanticleer,  
 Warmed with the new wine of the year,  
 Tells all in his lusty crowing!

Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how; so  
 Everything is happy now,  
 Everything is upward striving;  
 'T is as easy now for the heart to be  
 true  
 As for grass to be green or skies to be  
 blue,—  
 'T is the natural way of living:  
 Who knows whither the clouds have fled?  
 In the unscarred heaven they leave no  
 wake;  
 And the eyes forget the tears they have  
 shed,  
 The heart forgets its sorrow and ache;  
 The soul partakes the season's youth,  
 And the sulphurous rifts of passion and  
 woe  
 Lie deep 'neath a silence pure and smooth,  
 Like burnt-out craters healed with snow.

What wonder if Sir Launfal now  
 Remembered the keeping of his vow?

## PART FIRST

## I

'My golden spurs now bring to me,  
 And bring to me my richest mail,  
 For to-morrow I go over land and sea  
 In search of the Holy Grail;  
 Shall never a bed for me be spread,  
 Nor shall a pillow be under my head,  
 Till I begin my vow to keep;  
 Here on the rushes will I sleep,  
 And perchance there may come a vision  
 true  
 Ere day create the world anew.'  
 Slowly Sir Launfal's eyes grew dim,  
 Slumber fell like a cloud on him,  
 And into his soul the vision flew.

## II

The crows flapped over by twos and threes,  
 In the pool drowsed the cattle up to their  
 knees,  
 The little birds sang as if it were  
 The one day of summer in all the year,  
 And the very leaves seemed to sing on the  
 trees:  
 The castle alone in the landscape lay  
 Like an outpost of winter, dull and gray:  
 'T was the proudest hall in the North  
 Countree,  
 And never its gates might opened be,  
 Save to lord or lady of high degree;  
 Summer besieged it on every side,  
 But the churlish stone her assaults defied;  
 She could not scale the chilly wall,  
 Though around it for leagues her pavilions  
 tall  
 Stretched left and right,  
 Over the hills and out of sight;  
 Green and broad was every tent,  
 And out of each a murmur went  
 Till the breeze fell off at night.

## III

The drawbridge dropped with a surly clang,  
 And through the dark arch a charger sprang,  
 Bearing Sir Launfal, the maiden knight,  
 In his gilded mail, that flamed so bright  
 It seemed the dark castle had gathered all  
 Those shafts the fierce sun had shot over  
 its wall

In his siege of three hundred summers  
 long,  
 And, binding them all in one blazing sheaf,  
 Had cast them forth: so, young and  
 strong,  
 And lightsome as a locust-leaf,  
 Sir Launfal flashed forth in his maiden  
 mail,  
 To seek in all climes for the Holy Grail.

## IV

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

## V

As Sir Launfal made morn through the  
 darksome gate,  
 He was 'ware of a leper, crouched by the  
 same,  
 Who begged with his hand and moaned as  
 he sate;  
 And a loathing over Sir Launfal came;  
 The sunshine went out of his soul with a  
 thrill,  
 The flesh 'neath his armor 'gan shrink  
 and crawl,  
 And midway its leap his heart stood still  
 Like a frozen waterfall;  
 For this man, so foul and bent of stature,  
 Rapped harshly against his dainty nature,  
 And seemed the one blot on the summer  
 morn,—  
 So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.

## VI

The leper raised not the gold from the  
 dust:  
 'Better to me the poor man's crust,  
 Better the blessing of the poor,  
 Though I turn me empty from his door;  
 That is no true alms which the hand can  
 hold;  
 He gives only the worthless gold  
 Who gives from a sense of duty;  
 But he who gives but a slender mite,  
 And gives to that which is out of sight,  
 That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty  
 Which runs through all and doth all  
 unite,—

The hand cannot clasp the whole of his  
 alms,  
 The heart outstretches its eager palms,  
 For a god goes with it and makes it store  
 To the soul that was starving in darkness  
 before.'

PRELUDE TO PART SECOND<sup>1</sup>

DOWN swept the chill wind from the moun-  
 tain peak,  
 From the snow five thousand summers  
 old;  
 On open wold and hilltop bleak  
 It had gathered all the cold,  
 And whirled it like sleet on the wanderer's  
 cheek;  
 It carried a shiver everywhere  
 From the unleafed boughs and pastures  
 bare;  
 The little brook heard it and built a roof  
 'neath which he could house him, winter-  
 proof;  
 All night by the white stars' frosty gleams  
 He groined his arches and matched his  
 beams;  
 Slender and clear were his crystal spars  
 As the lashes of light that trim the stars:  
 He sculptured every summer delight  
 In his halls and chambers out of sight;  
 Sometimes his tinkling waters slipt  
 Down through a frost-leaved forest-crypt,  
 Long, sparkling aisles of steel-stemmed  
 trees  
 Bending to counterfeit a breeze;  
 Sometimes the roof no fretwork knew  
 But silvery mosses that downward grew;  
 Sometimes it was carved in sharp relief  
 With quaint arabesques of ice-fern leaf;  
 Sometimes it was simply smooth and clear  
 For the gladness of heaven to shine  
 through, and here

<sup>1</sup> Last night . . . I walked to Watertown over the snow with the new moon before me and a sky exactly like that in Page's evening landscape. Orion was rising behind me, and, as I stood on the hill just before you enter the village, the stillness of the fields around me was delicious, broken only by the tinkle of a little brook which runs too swiftly for Frost to catch it. My picture of the brook in *Sir Launfal* was drawn from it. But why do I send you this description—like the bones of a chicken I had picked? Simply because I was so happy as I stood there, and felt so sure of doing something that would justify my friends. (LOWELL, to Briggs, in a letter of December, 1848, just after the publication of *Sir Launfal*. Quoted by permission of Messrs. Harper and Brothers.)



He had caught the nodding bulrush-tops  
 And hung them thickly with diamond  
 drops,  
 That crystallled the beams of moon and  
 sun,  
 And made a star of every one:  
 No mortal builder's most rare device  
 Could match this winter-palace of ice;  
 'T was as if every image that mirrored  
 lay  
 In his depths serene through the summer  
 day,  
 Each fleeting shadow of earth and sky,  
 Lest the happy model should be lost,  
 Had been mimicked in fairy masonry  
 By the elfin builders of the frost. 210

Within the hall are song and laughter,  
 The cheeks of Christmas glow red and  
 jolly,  
 And sprouting is every corbel and rafter  
 With lightsome green of ivy and holly;  
 Through the deep gulf of the chimney  
 wide  
 Wallows the Yule-log's roaring tide;  
 The broad flame-pennons droop and flap  
 And belly and tug as a flag in the wind;  
 Like a locust shrills the imprisoned sap,  
 Hunted to death in its galleries blind; 220  
 And swift little troops of silent sparks,  
 Now pausing, now scattering away as in  
 fear,  
 Go threading the soot-forest's tangled darks  
 Like herds of startled deer.

But the wind without was eager and sharp,  
 Of Sir Launfal's gray hair it makes a harp,  
 And rattles and wrings  
 The icy strings,  
 Singing, in dreary monotone,  
 A Christmas carol of its own, 230  
 Whose burden still, as he might guess,  
 Was 'Shelterless, shelterless, shelter-  
 less!'

The voice of the seneschal flared like a  
 torch  
 As he shouted the wanderer away from the  
 porch,  
 And he sat in the gateway and saw all  
 night  
 The great hall-fire, so cheery and bold,  
 Through the window-slits of the castle  
 old,  
 Build out its piers of ruddy light  
 Against the drift of the cold.

## PART SECOND

## I

THERE was never a leaf on bush or tree,  
 The bare boughs rattled shudderingly; 241  
 The river was dumb and could not speak,  
 For the weaver Winter its shroud had  
 spun;  
 A single crow on the tree-top bleak  
 From his shining feathers shed off the  
 cold sun;  
 Again it was morning, but shrunk and cold,  
 As if her veins were sapless and old,  
 And she rose up decrepity  
 For a last dim look at earth and sea.

## II

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

## III

Sir Launfal's raiment thin and spare  
 Was idle mail 'gainst the barbèd air,  
 For it was just at the Christmas time; 260  
 So he mused, as he sat, of a sunnier clime,  
 And sought for a shelter from cold and  
 snow  
 In the light and warmth of long-ago;  
 He sees the snake-like caravan crawl  
 O'er the edge of the desert, black and  
 small,  
 Then nearer and nearer, till, one by one,  
 He can count the camels in the sun,  
 As over the red-hot sands they pass  
 To where, in its slender necklace of grass,  
 The little spring laughed and leapt in the  
 shade, 270  
 And with its own self like an infant played,  
 And waved its signal of palms.

## IV

'For Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms;'  
 The happy camels may reach the spring,  
 But Sir Launfal sees only the grewsome  
 thing,  
 The leper, lank as the rain-blanchèd bone,  
 That covers beside him, a thing as lone

And white as the ice-isles of Northern  
 seas  
 In the desolate horror of his disease.

## V

And Sir Launfal said, 'I behold in thee 280  
 An image of Him who died on the tree;  
 Thou also hast had thy crown of thorns,  
 Thou also hast had the world's buffets and  
 scorn,  
 And to thy life were not denied  
 The wounds in the hands and feet and side:  
 Mild Mary's Son, acknowledge me;  
 Behold, through him, I give to thee!'

## VI

Then the soul of the leper stood up in his  
 eyes  
 And looked at Sir Launfal, and straight-  
 way he  
 Remembered in what a haughtier guise 290  
 He had flung an alms to leprosie,  
 When he girt his young life up in gilded  
 mail  
 And set forth in search of the Holy Grail.  
 The heart within him was ashes and dust;  
 He parted in twain his single crust,  
 He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,  
 And gave the leper to eat and drink,  
 'T was a mouldy crust of coarse brown  
 bread,  
 'T was water out of a wooden bowl, —  
 Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper  
 fed, 300  
 And 't was red wine he drank with his  
 thirsty soul.

## VII

As Sir Launfal mused with a downcast  
 face,  
 A light shone round about the place;  
 The leper no longer crouched at his side,  
 But stood before him glorified,  
 Shining and tall and fair and straight  
 As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful  
 Gate, —  
 Himself the Gate whereby men can  
 Enter the temple of God in Man.

## VIII

His words were shed softer than leaves  
 from the pine, 310  
 And they fell on Sir Launfal as snows on  
 the brine,

That mingle their softness and quiet in  
 one  
 With the shaggy unrest they float down  
 upon;  
 And the voice that was softer than silence  
 said,  
 'Lo, it is I, be not afraid!  
 In many climes, without avail,  
 Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy  
 Grail;  
 Behold, it is here, — this cup which thou  
 Didst fill at the streamlet for me but  
 now;  
 This crust is my body broken for thee; 320  
 This water his blood that died on the  
 tree;  
 The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,  
 In whatso we share with another's need;  
 Not what we give, but what we share,  
 For the gift without the giver is bare;  
 Who gives himself with his alms feeds  
 three,  
 Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me.'

## IX

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

## X

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