

BEAVER BROOK<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> The little mill stands in a valley between one of the spurs of Wellington Hill and the main summit, just on the edge of Waltham. It is surely one of the loveliest spots in the world. It is one of my lions, and if you will make me a visit this spring I will take you up to hear it roar, and I will show you 'the oaks'—the largest, I fancy, left in the country. (LOWELL, in a letter of January 5, 1849. Quoted by permission of Messrs. Harper and Brothers.)  
The poem was originally called 'The Mill.'

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

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

In that new childhood of the Earth  
Life of itself shall dance and play,  
Fresh blood in Time's shrunk veins make  
mirth,  
And labor meet delight half-way.<sup>1848.</sup>

1849.

## BIBLIOLATRES

BOWING thyself in dust before a Book,  
And thinking the great God is thine alone,  
O rash iconoclast, thou wilt not brook  
What gods the heathen carves in wood and  
stone,

As if the Shepherd who from the outer  
cold  
Leads all his shivering lambs to one sure  
fold  
Were careful for the fashion of his crook.

There is no broken reed so poor and base,  
No rush, the bending tilt of swamp-fly  
blue,  
But He therewith the ravening wolf can  
chase,<sup>10</sup>  
And guide his flock to springs and pastures  
new;

Through ways unlooked for, and through  
many lands,  
Far from the rich folds built with human  
hands,  
The gracious footprints of his love I trace.

And what art thou, own brother of the clod,  
That from his hand the crook wouldst  
snatch away  
And shake instead thy dry and sapless rod,  
To scare the sheep out of the wholesome  
day?

Yea, what art thou, blind, unconverted  
Jew,  
That with thy idol-volume's covers two<sup>20</sup>  
Wouldst make a jail to coop the living  
God?

Thou hear'st not well the mountain organ-  
tones

By prophet ears from Hor and Sinai caught,  
Thinking the cisterns of those Hebrew  
brains

Drew dry the springs of the All-knower's  
thought,

Nor shall thy lips be touched with living  
fire,

Who blow'st old altar-coals with sole de-  
sire

To weld anew the spirit's broken chains.

God is not dumb, that He should speak no  
more;

If thou hast wanderings in the wilder-  
ness<sup>30</sup>

And find'st not Sinai, 't is thy soul is poor;  
There towers the Mountain of the Voice no  
less,

Which whoso seeks shall find, but he who  
bends,

Intent on manna still and mortal ends,  
Sees it not, neither hears its thundered  
lore.

Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,  
And not on paper leaves nor leaves of  
stone;

Each age, each kindred, adds a verse to  
it,

Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan.  
While swings the sea, while mists the  
mountains shroud,<sup>40</sup>

While thunder's surges burst on cliffs of  
cloud,

Still at the prophets' feet the nations sit.<sup>1849.</sup>

THE FIRST SNOW-FALL<sup>1</sup>

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

Every pine and fir and hemlock  
Wore ermine too dear for an earl,

<sup>1</sup> See 'The Changeling' and 'She came and went.' In sending this poem to the *Standard* Lowell wrote: 'Print that as if you loved it. Let not a comma be blundered. Especially, I fear they will put *gleaming* for *gloaming* in the first line unless you look to it. May you never have the key which shall unlock the whole meaning of the poem to you!' (*Lowell's Letters*, Harper and Brothers, letter of December 22, 1849.)

And the poorest twig on the elm-tree  
Was ridged inch deep with pearl.

From sheds new-roofed with Carrara  
Came Chanticleer's muffled crow,<sup>10</sup>  
The stiff rails softened to swan's-down,  
And still fluttered down the snow.

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

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

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

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

I remembered the gradual patience  
That fell from that cloud like snow,<sup>30</sup>  
Flake by flake, healing and hiding  
The scar that renewed our woe.

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

Then, with eyes that saw not, I kissed  
her;

And she, kissing back, could not know  
That *my* kiss was given to her sister,  
Folded close under deepening snow.<sup>40</sup>  
1849. 1849.

## THE SINGING LEAVES

## A BALLAD

## I

'WHAT fairings will ye that I bring?'  
Said the King to his daughters three;  
'For I to Vanity Fair am bound,  
Now say what shall they be?'

Then up and spake the eldest daughter,  
That lady tall and grand:  
'Oh, bring me pearls and diamonds great,  
And gold rings for my hand.'

Thereafter spake the second daughter,  
That was both white and red:<sup>10</sup>  
'For me bring silks that will stand alone,  
And a gold comb for my head.'

Then came the turn of the least daughter,  
That was whiter than thistle-down,  
And among the gold of her blithesome hair  
Dim shone the golden crown.

'There came a bird this morning,  
And sang 'neath my bower eaves,  
Till I dreamed, as his music made me,  
"Ask thou for the Singing Leaves."<sup>20</sup>

Then the brow of the King swelled crimson  
With a flush of angry scorn:  
'Well have ye spoken, my two eldest,  
And chosen as ye were born;

'But she, like a thing of peasant race,  
That is happy binding the sheaves;<sup>30</sup>  
Then he saw her dead mother in her  
face,  
And said, 'Thou shalt have thy leaves.'

## II

He mounted and rode three days and nights  
Till he came to Vanity Fair,<sup>30</sup>  
And 't was easy to buy the gems and the  
silk,  
But no Singing Leaves were there.

Then deep in the greenwood rode he,  
And asked of every tree,  
'Oh, if you have ever a Singing Leaf,  
I pray you give it me!'

But the trees all kept their counsel,  
And never a word said they,  
Only there sighed from the pine-tops  
A music of seas far away.<sup>40</sup>

Only the pattering aspen  
Made a sound of growing rain,  
That fell ever faster and faster,  
Then faltered to silence again.

'Oh, where shall I find a little foot-page  
That would win both hose and shoon,

And will bring to me the Singing Leaves  
If they grow under the moon?'

Then lightly turned him Walter the page,  
By the stirrup as he ran:<sup>50</sup>  
'Now pledge you me the truesome word  
Of a king and gentleman,

'That you will give me the first, first thing  
You meet at your castle-gate,  
And the Princess shall get the Singing  
Leaves,  
Or mine be a traitor's fate.'

The King's head dropt upon his breast  
A moment, as it might be;  
'T will be my dog, he thought, and said,  
'My faith I plight to thee.'<sup>60</sup>

Then Walter took from next his heart  
A packet small and thin,  
'Now give you this to the Princess Anne,  
The Singing Leaves are therein.'

## III

As the King rode in at his castle-gate,  
A maiden to meet him ran,  
And 'Welcome, father!' she laughed and  
cried  
Together, the Princess Anne.

'Lo, here the Singing Leaves,' quoth he,  
'And woe, but they cost me dear!'<sup>70</sup>  
She took the packet, and the smile  
Deepened down beneath the tear.

It deepened down till it reached her heart,  
And then gushed up again,  
And lighted her tears as the sudden sun  
Transfigures the summer rain.

And the first Leaf, when it was opened,  
Sang: 'I am Walter the page,  
And the songs I sing 'neath thy window  
Are my only heritage.'<sup>80</sup>

And the second Leaf sang: 'But in the  
land  
That is neither on earth nor sea,  
My lute and I are lords of more  
Than thrice this kingdom's fee.'

And the third Leaf sang, 'Be mine! Be  
mine!'  
And ever it sang, 'Be mine!'

Then sweeter it sang and ever sweeter,  
And said, 'I am thine, thine, thine!'

At the first Leaf she grew pale enough,  
At the second she turned aside,<sup>90</sup>  
At the third, 't was as if a lily flushed  
With a rose's red heart's tide.

'Good counsel gave the bird,' said she,  
'I have my hope thrice o'er,  
For they sing to my very heart,' she said,  
'And it sings to them evermore.'

She brought to him her beauty and truth,  
But and broad earldoms three,  
And he made her queen of the broader lands  
He held of his lute in fee.<sup>100</sup>  
1854.

## WITHOUT AND WITHIN

My coachman, in the moonlight there,  
Looks through the side-light of the door;  
I hear him with his brethren swear,  
As I could do, — but only more.

Flattening his nose against the pane,  
He envies me my brilliant lot,  
Breathes on his aching fists in vain,  
And dooms me to a place more hot.

He sees me in to supper go,  
A silken wonder by my side,<sup>10</sup>  
Bare arms, bare shoulders, and a row  
Of flounces, for the door too wide.

He thinks how happy is my arm  
'Neath its white-gloved and jewelled  
load;  
And wishes me some dreadful harm,  
Hearing the merry corks explode.

Meanwhile I inly curse the bore  
Of hunting still the same old coon,  
And envy him, outside the door,  
In golden quiets of the moon.<sup>20</sup>

The winter wind is not so cold  
As the bright smile he sees me win,  
Nor the host's oldest wine so old  
As our poor gabble sour and thin.

I envy him the ungyved prance  
With which his freezing feet he warms,

And drag my lady's-chains and dance  
The galley-slave of dreary forms.

Oh, could he have my share of din,  
And I his quiet! — past a doubt<sup>30</sup>  
'T would still be one man bored within,  
And just another bored without.

Nay, when, once paid my mortal fee,  
Some idler on my headstone grim  
Traces the moss-blurred name, will he  
Think me the happier, or I him?<sup>1854.</sup>

AUF WIEDERSEHEN<sup>1</sup>

SUMMER

THE little gate was reached at last,  
Half hid in lilacs down the lane;  
She pushed it wide, and, as she past,  
A wistful look she backward cast,  
And said, — 'Auf wiedersehen!'

With hand on latch, a vision white  
Lingered reluctant, and again  
Half doubting if she did aright,  
Soft as the dews that fell that night,  
She said, — 'Auf wiedersehen!'

The lamp's clear gleam flits up the  
stair;  
I linger in delicious pain;  
Ah, in that chamber, whose rich air  
To breathe in thought I scarcely dare,  
Thinks she, — 'Auf wiedersehen?' . . .

'T is thirteen years; once more I press  
The turf that silences the lane;  
I hear the rustle of her dress,  
I smell the lilacs, and — ah, yes,  
I hear 'Auf wiedersehen!'

Sweet piece of bashful maiden art!  
The English words had seemed too  
fain,  
But these — they drew us heart to heart,  
Yet held us tenderly apart;  
She said, 'Auf wiedersehen!'<sup>1854.</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Lowell died October 27, 1853. See Longfellow's 'The Two Angels,' Scudder's *Life of Lowell*, vol. i, pp. 356-362, and *The Poems of Maria White Lowell*.

## PALINODE

## AUTUMN

STILL thirteen years: 't is autumn now  
On field and hill, in heart and brain;  
The naked trees at evening song;  
The leaf to the forsaken bough  
Sighs not, — 'Auf wiedersehen!'

Two watched yon oriole's pendent dome,  
That now is void, and dank with rain,  
And one, — oh, hope more frail than foam!  
The bird to his deserted home  
Sings not, — 'Auf wiedersehen!'

The loath gate swings with rusty creak;  
Once, parting there, we played at pain;  
There came a parting, when the weak  
And fading lips essayed to speak  
Vainly, — 'Auf wiedersehen!'

Somewhere is comfort, somewhere faith,  
Though thou in outer dark remain;  
One sweet sad voice ennobs death,  
And still, for eighteen centuries saith  
Softly, — 'Auf wiedersehen!'

If earth another grave must bear,  
Yet heaven hath won a sweeter strain,  
And something whispers my despair,  
That, from an orient chamber there,  
Floats down, 'Auf wiedersehen!'

1854.

THE WIND-HARP<sup>1</sup>

I TREASURE in secret some long, fine hair  
Of tenderest brown, but so inwardly  
golden  
I half used to fancy the sunshine there,  
So shy, so shifting, so waywardly rare,  
Was only caught for the moment and  
holden

<sup>1</sup> It is dreary enough sometimes, for a mountain-peak on whose snow your foot makes the first mortal print is not so lonely as a room full of happy faces from which one is missing forever. This was originally the fifth stanza of 'The Windharp.' —

O tress! that so oft in my heart hast lain,  
Rocked to rest within rest by its thankful beating,  
Say, which is harder — to bear the pain  
Of laughter and light, or to wait in vain  
'Neath the unleafed tree the impossible meeting?  
If Death's lips be icy, Life gives, iwis,  
Some kisses more clay-cold and darkening than his!

(LOWELL, in a letter of December 7, 1854.)

While I could say *Dearest!* and kiss it,  
and then  
In pity let go to the summer again.

I twisted this magic in gossamer strings  
Over a wind-harp's Delphian hollow;  
Then called to the idle breeze that swings  
All day in the pine-tops, and clings, and  
sings

'Mid the musical leaves, and said, 'Oh,  
follow  
The will of those tears that deepen my  
words,  
And fly to my window to waken these  
chords.'

So they trembled to life, and, doubtfully  
Feeling their way to my sense, sang,  
'Say whether

They sit all day by the greenwood tree,  
The lover and loved, as it wont to be,  
When we —' But grief conquered, and  
all together

They swelled such weird murmur as haunts  
a shore  
Of some planet dispeopled, — 'Never-  
more!'

Then from deep in the past, as seemed to  
me,

The strings gathered sorrow and sang  
forsaken,

'One lover still waits 'neath the green-  
wood tree,  
But 't is dark,' and they shuddered, 'where  
lieth she

Dark and cold! Forever must one be  
taken?'

But I groaned, 'O harp of all ruth bereft,  
This Scripture is sadder, — "the other  
left"!''

There murmured, as if one strove to speak,  
And tears came instead; then the sad  
tones wandered

And faltered among the uncertain chords  
In a troubled doubt between sorrow and  
words;

At last with themselves they questioned  
and pondered,  
'Hereafter? — who knoweth?' and so they  
sighed

Down the long steps that lead to silence  
and died.

1854.

1854.

AFTER THE BURIAL<sup>1</sup>

YES, faith is a goodly anchor;  
When skies are sweet as a psalm,  
At the bows it lolls so stalwart,  
In its bluff, broad-shouldered calm.

And when over breakers to leeward  
The tattered surges are hurled,  
It may keep our head to the tempest,  
With its grip on the base of the world.

But, after the shipwreck, tell me  
What help in its iron thews,  
Still true to the broken hawser,  
Deep down among sea-weed and ooze?

In the breaking gulfs of sorrow,  
When the helpless feet stretch out  
And find in the deeps of darkness  
No footing so solid as doubt,

Then better one spar of Memory,  
One broken plank of the Past,

<sup>1</sup> A threefold sorrow has here found for itself a single expression. Part of the poem was written in 1850, after the death of Lowell's third daughter, Rose, only six months and a half old. 'I shall never forget,' he said at this time, 'the feeling I had when little Blanche's coffin was brought into the house. It was refreshed again lately. But for Rose I would have no funeral. . . . She was a lovely child — we think the loveliest of our three. She was more like Blanche than Mabel. . . . Her illness lasted a week, but I never had any hope, so that she died to me the first day the doctor came. She was very beautiful — fair, with large dark-gray eyes and fine features. . . . Dear little child! she had never spoken, only smiled.' There follow, in Lowell's letter, six stanzas of this poem, in an earlier form. Into it is interwoven the memory of his oldest child, Blanche, especially perhaps in the last stanza. 'After Blanche was buried' says Scudder in his *Life of Lowell*, 'her father took her tiny shoes, the only ones she had ever worn, and hung them in his chamber. There they stayed till his own death.' But it was the death of Lowell's wife that gave to the poem its real intensity. The second to fourth stanzas, and the seventh to twelfth, were written in a mood which made Lowell say later: 'Something broke my life in two, and I cannot piece it together again. . . . I hope you may never have reason to like "After the Burial" better than you do.'

The same interweaving is found in 'Under the Willows,' of which Lowell says: 'Something more than half of it was written more than twenty years ago, on the death of our eldest daughter; but when I came to complete it, that other death, which broke my life in two, would come in against my will.'

Lowell said of this poem later, 'A living verse can only be made of a living experience — and that our own. One of my most personal poems, "After the Burial," has roused strange echoes in men who assured me they were generally insensible to poetry. After all, the only stuff a solitary man has to spin is himself.' (The extracts from *Lowell's Letters* are quoted by permission of Messrs. Harper and Brothers.)

That our human heart may cling to,  
Though hopeless of shore at last!

20

To the spirit its splendid conjectures,  
To the flesh its sweet despair,  
Its tears o'er the thin-worn locket  
With its anguish of deathless hair!

Immortal? I feel it and know it,  
Who doubts it of such as she?  
But that is the pang's very secret, —  
Immortal away from me.

There's a narrow ridge in the graveyard  
Would scarce stay a child in his race,  
But to me and my thought it is wider  
Than the star-sown vague of Space.

30

Your logic, my friend, is perfect,  
Your moral most drearily true;  
But, since the earth clashed on *her* coffin,  
I keep hearing that, and not you.

Console if you will, I can bear it;  
'T is a well-meant alms of breath;  
But not all the preaching since Adam  
Has made Death other than Death.

40

It is pagan; but wait till you feel it, —  
That jar of our earth, that dull shock  
When the ploughshare of deeper passion  
Tears down to our primitive rock.

Communion in spirit! Forgive me,  
But I, who am earthly and weak,  
Would give all my incomes from dream-  
land  
For a touch of her hand on my cheek.

That little shoe in the corner,  
So worn and wrinkled and brown,  
With its emptiness confutes you,  
And argues your wisdom down.

50

1850, 1854, 1868. 1868.

## L'ENVOI

TO THE MUSE<sup>1</sup>

WHITHER? Albeit I follow fast,  
In all life's circuit I but find,

<sup>1</sup> Passed an hour with Lowell this morning. He read me a poem, 'The Muse,' — very beautiful. It reminded me of Emerson's 'Forerunners.' (*Longfellow's Journal*, May 3, 1855.)

Not where thou art, but where thou wast,  
Sweet beckoner, more fleet than wind !  
I haunt the pine-dark solitudes,  
With soft brown silence carpeted,  
And plot to snare thee in the woods:  
Peace I o'ertake, but thou art fled !  
I find the rock where thou didst rest,  
The moss thy skimming foot hath prest; 10  
All Nature with thy parting thrills,  
Like branches after birds new-flown;  
Thy passage hill and hollow fills  
With hints of virtue not their own;  
In dimples still the water slips  
Where thou has dipt thy finger-tips;  
Just, just beyond, forever burn  
Gleams of a grace without return;  
Upon thy shade I plant my foot,  
And through my frame strange raptures  
shoot; 20  
All of thee but thyself I grasp;  
I seem to fold thy luring shape,  
And vague air to my bosom clasp,  
Thou lithe, perpetual Escape !

One mask and then another drops,  
And thou art secret as before:  
Sometimes with flooded ear I list,  
And hear thee, wondrous organist,  
From mighty continental stops 30  
A thunder of new music pour;  
Through pipes of earth and air and stone  
Thy inspiration deep is blown;  
Through mountains, forests, open downs,  
Lakes, railroads, prairies, states, and towns,  
Thy gathering fugue goes rolling on  
From Maine to utmost Oregon;  
The factory-wheels in cadence hum,  
From brawling parties concords come;  
All this I hear, or seem to hear,  
But when, enchanted, I draw near 40  
To mate with words the various theme,  
Life seems a whiff of kitchen steam,  
History an organ-grinder's thrum,  
For thou hast slipt from it and me  
And all thine organ-pipes left dumb,  
Most mutable Perversity !

Not weary yet, I still must seek,  
And hope for luck next day, next week;  
I go to see the great man ride,  
Shiplike, the swelling human tide 50  
That floods to bear him into port,  
Trophied from Senate-hall and Court;  
Thy magnetism, I feel it there,  
Thy rhythmic presence fleet and rare,

Making the Mob a moment fine  
With glimpses of their own Divine,  
As in their demigod they see  
Their cramped ideal soaring free;  
'T was thou didst bear the fire about,  
That, like the springing of a mine, 60  
Sent up to heaven the street-long shout;  
Full well I know that thou wast here,  
It was thy breath that brushed my ear;  
But vainly in the stress and whirl  
I dive for thee, the moment's pearl.

Through every shape thou well canst run,  
Proteus, 'twixt rise and set of sun,  
Well pleased with logger-camps in Maine  
As where Milan's pale Duomo lies 70  
A stranded glacier on the plain,  
Its peaks and pinnacles of ice  
Melted in many a quaint device,  
And sees, above the city's din,  
Afar its silent Alpine kin:  
I track thee over carpets deep  
To wealth's and beauty's inmost keep;  
Across the sand of bar-room floors  
'Mid the stale reek of boosing boors;  
Where browse the hay-field's fragrant  
heats, 80  
Or the flail-heart of Autumn beats;  
I dog thee through the market's throngs  
To where the sea with myriad tongues  
Laps the green edges of the pier,  
And the tall ships that eastward steer,  
Curtsy their farewells to the town,  
O'er the curved distance lessening down;  
I follow allwhere for thy sake,  
Touch thy robe's hem, but ne'er o'ertake,  
Find where, scarce yet unmoving, lies,  
Warm from thy limbs, thy last disguise; 90  
But thou another shape hast donned,  
And lurest still just, just beyond !

But here a voice, I know not whence,  
Thrills clearly through my inward sense,  
Saying: 'See where she sits at home  
While thou in search of her dost roam !  
All summer long her ancient wheel  
Whirls humming by the open door,  
Or, when the hickory's social zeal  
Sets the wide chimney in a roar, 100  
Close-nestled by the tinkling hearth,  
It modulates the household mirth  
With that sweet serious undertone  
Of duty, music all her own;  
Still as of old she sits and spins  
Our hopes, our sorrows, and our sins;

With equal care she twines the fates  
Of cottages and mighty states;  
She spins the earth, the air, the sea,  
The maiden's unschooled fancy free, 110  
The boy's first love, the man's first grief,  
The budding and the fall o' the leaf;  
The piping west-wind's snowy care  
For her their cloudy fleeces spare,  
Or from the thorns of evil times  
She can glean wool to twist her rhymes;  
Morning and noon and eve supply  
To her their fairest tints for dye,  
But ever through her twirling thread  
There spires one line of warmest red, 120  
Tinged from the homestead's genial heart,  
The stamp and warrant of her art;  
With this Time's sickle she outwears,  
And blunts the Sisters' baffled shears.

'Harass her not: thy heat and stir  
But greater coyness breed in her;  
Yet thou mayst find, ere Age's frost,  
Thy long apprenticeship not lost,  
Learning at last that Stygian Fate  
Unbends to him that knows to wait. 130  
The Muse is womanish, nor deigns  
Her love to him that pules and plains;  
With proud, averted face she stands  
To him that woos with empty hands.  
Make thyself free of Manhood's guild;  
Pull down thy barns and greater build;  
The wood, the mountain, and the plain  
Wave breast-deep with the poet's grain;  
Pluck thou the sunset's fruit of gold,  
Glean from the heavens and ocean old; 140  
From fireside lone and trampling street  
Let thy life garner daily wheat;  
The epic of a man rehearse,  
Be something better than thy verse;  
Make thyself rich, and then the Muse  
Shall court thy precious interviews,  
Shall take thy head upon her knee,  
And such enchantment lilt to thee,  
That thou shalt hear the life-blood flow  
From farthest stars to grass-blades low, 150  
And find the Listener's science still  
Transcends the Singer's deepest skill !'  
1855? 1860.

## MASACCIO

IN THE BRANCACCI CHAPEL

He came to Florence long ago,  
And painted here these walls, that shone

For Raphael and for Angelo,  
With secrets deeper than his own,  
Then shrank into the dark again,  
And died, we know not how or when.

The shadows deepened, and I turned  
Half sadly from the fresco grand;  
'And is this,' mused I, 'all ye earned,  
High-vaulted brain and cunning hand, 10  
That ye to greater men could teach  
The skill yourselves could never reach ?'

'And who were they,' I mused, 'that  
wrought  
Through pathless wilds, with labor long,  
The highways of our daily thought ?  
Who reared those towers of earliest song  
That lift us from the crowd to peace  
Remote in sunny silences ?'

Out clanged the Ave Mary bells,  
And to my heart this message came: 20  
Each clamorous throat among them tells  
What strong-souled martyrs died in flame  
To make it possible that thou  
Shouldst here with brother sinners bow.

Thoughts that great hearts once broke for,  
we  
Breathe cheaply in the common air;  
The dust we trample heedlessly  
Throbbled once in saints and heroes rare,  
Who perished, opening for their race  
New pathways to the commonplace. 30

Henceforth, when rings the health to those  
Who live in story and in song,  
O nameless dead, that now repose  
Safe in Oblivion's chambers strong,  
One cup of recognition true  
Shall silently be drained to you !  
1856? (1868.)

THE ORIGIN OF DIDACTIC  
POETRY

WHEN wise Minerva still was young  
And just the least romantic,  
Soon after from Jove's head she flung  
That preternatural antic,  
'T is said, to keep from idleness  
Or flirting, those twin curses,  
She spent her leisure, more or less,  
In writing po——, no, verses.

How nice they were! to rhyme with *far*  
 A kind *star* did not tarry;  
 The metre, too, was regular  
 As schoolboy's dot and carry;  
 And full they were of pious plums,  
 So extra-super-moral,—  
 For sucking Virtue's tender gums  
 Most tooth-enticing coral.

A clean, fair copy she prepares,  
 Makes sure of moods and tenses,  
 With her own hand,— for prudence spares  
 A man-(or woman-)—uensis;  
 Complete, and tied with ribbons proud,  
 She hinted soon how cosy a  
 Treat it would be to read them loud  
 After next day's Ambrosia.

The Gods thought not it would amuse  
 So much as Homer's Odyssees,  
 But could not very well refuse  
 The properest of Goddesses;  
 So all sat round in attitudes  
 Of various dejection,  
 As with a *hem!* the queen of prudens  
 Began her grave prelection.

At the first pause Zeus said, 'Well sung! —  
 I mean — ask Phœbus, — *he* knows.'  
 Says Phœbus, 'Zounds! a wolf's among  
 Admetus's merinos!  
 Fine! very fine! but I must go;  
 They stand in need of me there;  
 Excuse me!' snatched his stick, and so  
 Plunged down the gladdened ether.

With the next gap, Mars said, 'For me  
 Don't wait, — naught could be finer,  
 But I'm engaged at half past three, —  
 A fight in Asia Minor!  
 Then Venus lisped, 'I'm sorely tried,  
 These duty-calls are vip'rous;  
 But I *must* go; I have a bride  
 To see about in Cyprus.'

Then Bacchus, — 'I must say good-by,  
 Although my peace it jeopardis;  
 I meet a man at four, to try  
 A well-broke pair of leopards.'  
 His words woke Hermes. 'Ah!' he said,  
 'I so love moral theses!  
 Then winked at Hebe, who turned red,  
 And smoothed her apron's creases.

Just then Zeus snored, — the Eagle drew  
 His head the wing from under;

Zeus snored, — o'er startled Greece there  
 Flew  
 The many-volumed thunder.  
 Some augurs counted nine, some, ten;  
 Some said 't was war, some, famine,  
 And all, that other-minded men  
 Would get a precious —.

Proud Pallas sighed, 'It will not do;  
 Against the Muse I've sinned, oh!  
 And her torn rhymes sent flying through  
 Olympus's back window.  
 Then, packing up a peplus clean,  
 She took the shortest path thence,  
 And opened, with a mind serene,  
 A Sunday-school in Athens.

The verses? Some in ocean swilled,  
 Killed every fish that bit to 'em;  
 Some Galen caught, and, when distilled,  
 Found morphine the residuum;  
 But some that rotted on the earth  
 Sprang up again in copies,  
 And gave two strong narcotics birth,  
 Didactic verse and poppies.

Years after, when a poet asked  
 The Goddess's opinion,  
 As one whose soul its wings had tasked  
 In Art's clear-aired dominion,  
 'Discriminate,' she said, 'betimes;  
 The Muse is unforgiving;  
 Put all your beauty in your rhymes,  
 Your morals in your living.'

1857. 1

THE DEAD HOUSE<sup>2</sup>

HERE once my step was quickened,  
 Here beckoned the opening door,  
 And welcome thrilled from the threshold  
 To the foot it had known before.

<sup>1</sup> In the first number of the *Atlantic Monthly*, of which Lowell was editor.

<sup>2</sup> I have a notion that the inmates of a house should never be changed. When the first occupants go out it should be burned, and a stone set up with 'Sacred to the memory of a HOME' on it. Suppose the body were eternal, and that when one spirit went out another took the lease. How frightful the strange expression of the eyes would be! I fancy sometimes that the look in the eyes of a familiar house changes when aliens have come into it. For certainly a dwelling adapts itself to its occupants. The front door of a hospitable man opens easily and looks broad, and you can read Welcome! on every step that leads to it. (*Lowell's Letters*, vol. i, pp. 283, 284. Quoted by permission of Messrs. Harper and Brothers.)

For the first form of the poem, see Scudder's *Life of Lowell*, vol. i, pp. 435-437.

A glow came forth to meet me  
 From the flame that laughed in the grate,  
 And shadows adance on the ceiling,  
 Danced blither with mine for a mate.

'I claim you, old friend,' yawned the arm-  
 chair,  
 'This corner, you know, is your seat;' <sup>10</sup>  
 'Rest your slippers on me,' beamed the  
 fender,  
 'I brighten at touch of your feet.'

'We know the practised finger,'  
 Said the books, 'that seems like brain;'  
 And the shy page rustled the secret  
 It had kept till I came again.

Sang the pillow, 'My down once quivered  
 On nightingales' throats that flew  
 Through moonlit gardens of Hafiz  
 To gather quaint dreams for you.'

Ah me, where the Past sowed heart's-ease,  
 The Present plucks rue for us men!  
 I come back: that scar unhealing  
 Was not in the churchyard then.

But, I think, the house is unaltered,  
 I will go and beg to look  
 At the rooms that were once familiar  
 To my life as its bed to a brook.

Unaltered! Alas for the sameness  
 That makes the change but more! <sup>20</sup>  
 'T is a dead man I see in the mirrors,  
 'T is his tread that chills the floor!

To learn such a simple lesson,  
 Need I go to Paris and Rome,  
 That the many make the household,  
 But only one the home?

'T was just a womanly presence,  
 An influence unexpressed,  
 But a rose she had worn, on my grave-sod  
 Were more than long life with the rest!

'T was a smile, 't was a garment's rustle, <sup>41</sup>  
 'T was nothing that I can phrase,  
 But the whole dumb dwelling grew con-  
 scious,  
 And put on her looks and ways.

Were it mine I would close the shutters,  
 Like lids when the life is fled,

And the funeral fire should wind it,  
 This corpse of a home that is dead.

For it died that autumn morning  
 When she, its soul, was borne <sup>50</sup>  
 To lie all dark on the hillside  
 That looks over woodland and corn.  
 1858. 1858.

## AT THE BURNS CENTENNIAL

JANUARY, 1859

## I

A HUNDRED years! they're quickly fled,  
 With all their joy and sorrow;  
 Their dead leaves shed upon the dead,  
 Their fresh ones sprung by morrow!  
 And still the patient seasons bring  
 Their change of sun and shadow;  
 New birds still sing with every spring,  
 New violets spot the meadow.

## II

A hundred years! and Nature's powers  
 No greater grown nor lessened! <sup>10</sup>  
 They saw no flowers more sweet than  
 ours,  
 No fairer new moon's crescent.  
 Would she but treat us poets so,  
 So from our winter free us,  
 And set our slow old sap afflow  
 To sprout in fresh ideas!


## III

Alas, think I, what worth or parts  
 Have brought me here competing,  
 To speak what starts in myriad hearts  
 With Burns's memory beating! <sup>20</sup>  
 Himself had loved a theme like this;  
 Must I be its entomber?  
 No pen save his but's sure to miss  
 Its pathos or its humor.

## IV

As I sat musing what to say,  
 And how my verse to number,  
 Some elf in play passed by that way,  
 And sank my lids in slumber;  
 And on my sleep a vision stole,  
 Which I will put in metre, <sup>30</sup>  
 Of Burns's soul at the wicket-hole  
 Where sits the good Saint Peter.

V

The saint, methought, had left his post  
That day to Holy Willie,  
Who swore, 'Each ghost that comes shall  
toast  
In brunstane, will he, nill he;  
There's nane need hope with phrases  
fine  
Their score to wipe a sin frae;  
I'll chalk a sign, to save their tryin',—  
A hand  and "Vide infra!"' 40

VI

Alas! no soil's too cold or dry  
For spiritual small potatoes,  
Scrimped natures, spry the trade to ply  
Of *diaboli advocatus*;  
Who lay bent pins in the penance-stool  
Where Mercy plumps a cushion,  
Who've just one rule for knave and fool,  
It saves so much confusion!

VII

So when Burns knocked, Will knit his  
brows,  
His window gap made scunter, 50  
And said, 'Go rouse the other house;  
We lodge no Tam O'Shanter!  
'We lodge!' laughed Burns. 'Now well  
I see  
Death cannot kill old nature;  
No human flea but thinks that he  
May speak for his Creator!

VIII

'But, Willie, friend, don't turn me forth,  
Auld Cloutie needs no gauger;  
And if on earth I had small worth,  
You've let in worse, I'se wager!' 60  
'Na, nane has knockit at the yett  
But found me hard as whunstane;  
There's chances yet your bread to get  
Wi Auld Nick, gaugin' brunstane.'

IX

Meanwhile, the Unco' Guid had ta'en  
Their place to watch the process,  
Flattening in vain on many a pane  
Their disembodied noses.  
Remember, please, 't is all a dream;  
One can't control the fancies 70  
Through sleep that stream with wayward  
gleam,  
Like midnight's boreal dances.

X

Old Willie's tone grew sharp's a knife:  
'In primis, I indite ye,  
For makin' strife wi' the water o' life,  
And preferrin' *aqua vita*!'  
Then roared a voice with lusty din,  
Like a skipper's when 't is blowy,  
'If that's a sin, I'd ne'er got in,  
As sure as my name's Noah!' 80

XI

Baulked, Willie turned another leaf,—  
'There's many here have heard ye,  
To the pain and grief o' true belief,  
Say hard things o' the clergy!'  
Then rang a clear tone over all,—  
'One plea for him allow me:  
I once heard call from o'er me, "Saul,  
Why persecutest thou me?"'

XII

To the next charge vexed Willie turned,  
And, sighing, wiped his glasses: 90  
'I'm much concerned to find ye yearned  
O'er-warmly tow'rd the lasses!'  
Here David sighed; poor Willie's face  
Lost all its self-possession:  
'I leave this case to God's own grace;  
It baffles *my* discretion!'

XIII

Then sudden glory round me broke,  
And low melodious surges  
Of wings whose stroke to splendor woke  
Creation's farthest verges; 100  
A cross stretched, ladder-like, secure  
From earth to heaven's own portal,  
Whereby God's poor, with footing sure,  
Climbed up to peace immortal.

XIV

I heard a voice serene and low  
(With my heart I seemed to hear it)  
Fall soft and slow as snow on snow,  
Like grace of the heavenly spirit;  
As sweet as over new-born son  
The croon of new-made mother, 110  
The voice begun, 'Sore tempted one!'  
Then, pausing, sighed, 'Our brother!'

XV

'If not a sparrow fall, unless  
The Father sees and knows it,  
Think! recks He less his form express,  
The soul his own deposit?

XXI

If only dear to Him the strong,  
That never trip nor wander,  
Where were the throng whose morning  
song  
Thrills his blue arches yonder? 120

XVI

'Do souls alone clear-eyed, strong-kneed,  
To Him true service render,  
And they who need his hand to lead,  
Find they his heart untender?  
Through all your various ranks and fates  
He opens doors to duty,  
And he that waits there at your gates  
Was servant of his Beauty.

XVII

'The Earth must richer sap secrete  
(Could ye in time but know it!), 130  
Must juice concrete with fiercer heat,  
Ere she can make her poet;  
Long generations go and come,  
At last she bears a singer,  
For ages dumb of senses numb  
The compensation-bringer!

XVIII

'Her cheaper broods in palaces  
She raises under glasses,  
But souls like these, heav'n's hostages,  
Spring shelterless as grasses: 140  
They share Earth's blessing and her bane,  
The common sun and shower;  
What makes your pain to them is gain,  
Your weakness is their power.

XIX

'These larger hearts must feel the rolls  
Of stormier-waved temptation;  
These star-wide souls between their poles  
Bear zones of tropic passion.  
He loved much!—that is gospel good,  
Howe'er the text you handle; 150  
From common wood the cross was hewed,  
By love turned priceless sandal.

XX

'If scant his service at the kirk,  
He *paters* heard and *aves*  
From choirs that lurk in hedge and birk,  
From blackbird and from mavis;  
The cowering mouse, poor unroofed thing,  
In him found Mercy's angel;  
The daisy's ring brought every spring  
To him Love's fresh evangel! 160

XXI

'Not he the threatening texts who deals  
Is highest 'mong the preachers,  
But he who feels the woes and weals  
Of all God's wandering creatures.  
He doth good work whose heart can find  
The spirit 'neath the letter;  
Who makes his kind of happier mind,  
Leaves wiser men and better.

XXII

'They make Religion be abhorred  
Who round with darkness gulf her, 170  
And think no word can please the Lord  
Unless it smell of sulphur.  
Dear Poet-heart, that childlike guessed  
The Father's loving kindness,  
Come now to rest! Thou didst his best,  
If haply 't was in blindness!'

XXIII

Then leapt heaven's portals wide apart,  
And at their golden thunder  
With sudden start I woke, my heart  
Still throbbing-full of wonder. 180  
'Father,' I said, 't is known to Thee  
How Thou thy Saints preparest;  
But this I see,—Saint Charity  
Is still the first and fairest!'

XXIV

Dear Bard and Brother! let who may  
Against thy faults be railing  
(Though far, I pray, from us be they  
That never had a failing!),  
One toast I'll give, and that not long,  
Which thou wouldst pledge if present,—  
To him whose song, in nature strong, 190  
Makes man of prince and peasant!  
1859?

### THE WASHERS OF THE SHROUD<sup>1</sup>

OCTOBER, 1861

ALONG a river-side, I know not where,  
I walked one night in mystery of dream;

<sup>1</sup> Lowell wrote to Professor Charles Elliot Norton, October 12, 1861: 'I had just two days allowed me by Fields for the November *Atlantic*, and I got it done. It had been in my head some time, and when you see it you will remember my having spoken to you about it. Indeed, I owe it to you, for the hint came from one of those books of Souvestre's you lent me—the Breton legends. The writing took hold of me enough to leave

A chill creeps curdling yet beneath my hair,  
To think what chanced me by the pallid gleam  
Of a moon-wraith that waned through haunted air.

Pale fireflies pulsed within the meadow-mist  
Their halos, wavering thistle downs of light;  
The loon, that seemed to mock some goblin tryst,  
Laughed; and the echoes, huddling in affright,  
Like Odin's hounds, fled baying down the night.

Then all was silent, till there smote my ear  
A movement in the stream that checked my breath:  
Was it the slow plash of a wading deer?  
But something said, 'This water is of Death!  
The Sisters wash a shroud,—ill thing to hear!'

I, looking then, beheld the ancient Three  
Known to the Greek's and to the Northman's creed,  
That sit in shadow of the mystic Tree,  
Still crooning, as they weave their endless brede,  
One song: 'Time was, Time is, and Time shall be.'

No wrinkled crones were they, as I had deemed,  
But fair as yesterday, to-day, to-morrow,  
To mourner, lover, poet, ever seemed;  
Something too high for joy, too deep for sorrow,  
Thrilled in their tones, and from their faces gleamed.

me tired out and to satisfy me entirely as to what was the original of my head and back pains. But whether it is good or not, I am not yet far enough off to say. But *do* like it, if you can. Fields says it is "splendid," with tears in his eyes—but then I read it to him, which is half the battle. I began it as a lyric, but it would be too aphoristic for that, and finally flatly refused to sing at any price. So I submitted, took to pentameters, and only hope the thoughts are good enough to be preserved in the ice of the colder and almost glacier-slow measure. I think I have done well—in some stanzas at least—and not wasted words. It is about present matters.' (*Lowell's Letters*, vol. i, p. 318. Quoted by permission of Messrs. Harper and Brothers.)

'Still men and nations reap as they have strawn,'  
So sang they, working at their task the while;  
'The fatal raiment must be cleansed ere dawn:  
For Austria? Italy? the Sea-Queen's isle?  
O'er what quenched grandeur must our shroud be drawn?'

'Or is it for a younger, fairer corse,  
That gathered States like children round his knees,  
That tamed the wave to be his posting horse,  
Feller of forests, linker of the seas,  
Bridge-builder, hammerer, youngest son of Thor's?'

'What make we, murmur'st thou? and what are we?  
When empires must be wound, we bring the shroud,  
The time-old web of the implacable Three:  
Is it too coarse for him, the young and proud?  
Earth's mightiest deigned to wear it,—why not he?'

'Is there no hope?' I moaned, 'so strong, so fair!  
Our Fowler whose proud bird would brook erewhile  
No rival's swoop in all our western air!  
Gather the ravens, then, in funeral file  
For him, life's morn yet golden in his hair?'

'Leave me not hopeless, ye unpitying dames!  
I see, half seeing. Tell me, ye who scanned  
The stars, Earth's elders, still must noblest aims  
Be traced upon oblivious ocean-sands?  
Must Hesper join the wailing ghosts of names?'

'When grass-blades stiffen with red battle-dew,  
Ye deem we choose the victor and the slain:  
Say, choose we them that shall be leal and true  
To the heart's longing, the high faith of brain?  
Yet there the victory lies, if ye but knew.

'Three roots bear up Dominion: Knowledge, Will,—  
These twain are strong, but stronger yet the third,—  
Obedience,—'t is the great tap-root that still,  
Knit round the rock of Duty, is not stirred,  
Though Heaven-loosed tempests spend their utmost skill.

'Is the doom sealed for Hesper? 'T is not we  
Denounce it, but the Law before all time:  
The brave makes danger opportunity;  
The waverer, paltering with the chance sublime,  
Dwarfs it to peril: which shall Hesper be?'

'Hath he let vultures climb his eagle's seat  
To make Jove's bolts purveyors of their maw?  
Hath he the Many's plaudits found more sweet  
Than Wisdom? held Opinion's wind for Law?  
Then let him hearken for the doomster's feet!'

'Rough are the steps, slow-hewn in flintiest rock,  
States climb to power by; slippery those with gold  
Down which they stumble to eternal mock:  
No chafferer's hand shall long the sceptre hold,  
Who, given a Fate to shape, would sell the block.

'We sing old Sagas, songs of weal and woe,  
Mystic because too cheaply understood;  
Dark sayings are not ours; men hear and know,  
See Evil weak, see strength alone in Good,  
Yet hope to stem God's fire with walls of tow.

'Time Was unlocks the riddle of Time  
Is,  
That offers choice of glory or of gloom;  
The solver makes Time Shall Be surely his.

But hasten, Sisters! for even now the tomb  
Grates its slow hinge and calls from the abyss.'

'But not for him,' I cried, 'not yet for him,  
Whose large horizon, westering, star by star  
Wins from the void to where on Ocean's rim  
The sunset shuts the world with golden bar,  
Not yet his thews shall fail, his eye grow dim!'

'His shall be larger manhood, saved for those  
That walk unblenching through the trial-fires;  
Not suffering, but faint heart, is worst of woes,  
And he no base-born son of craven sires,  
Whose eye need blench confronted with his foes.

'Tears may be ours, but proud, for those who win  
Death's royal purple in the foeman's lines;  
Peace, too, brings tears; and 'mid the battle-din,  
The wiser ear some text of God divines,  
For the sheathed blade may rust with darker sin.

'God, give us peace! not such as lulls to sleep,  
But sword on thigh, and brow with purpose knit!  
And let our Ship of State to harbor sweep,  
Her ports all up, her battle-lanterns lit,  
And her leashed thunders gathering for their leap!'

So cried I with clenched hands and passionate pain,  
Thinking of dear ones by Potomac's side;  
Again the loon laughed mocking, and again  
The echoes bayed far down the night and died,  
While waking I recalled my wandering brain.

1861.

1861.