

Wut 's best to think may n't puzzle me nor
you,—
The pinch comes in decidin' wut to *du*; 270
Ef you *read* History, all runs smooth ez
grease,
Coz there the men ain't nothin' more'n
idees,—
But come to *make* it, ez we must to-day,
Th' idees hev arms an' legs an' stop the way:
It's easy fixin' things in facts an' figgers,—
They can't resist, nor warn't brought up
with niggers;
But come to try your the'ry on,— why, then
Your facts an' figgers change to ign'ant
men
Actin' ez ugly — — 'Smite 'em hip an'
thigh!'
Sez gran'ther, 'and let every man-child
die!
Oh for three weeks o' Crommle an' the
Lord!
Up, Isr'el, to your tents an' grind the
sword!'—
'Thet kind o' thing worked wal in ole
Judee,
But you forgit how long it 's ben A. D. ;
You think thet's ellerkence,— I call it
shoddy,
A thing,' sez I, 'wun't cover soul nor body;
I like the plain all-wool o' common-sense,
Thet warms ye now, an' will a twelve-
month hence.
You took to follerin' where the Prophets
beckoned,
An', fust you knowed on, back come Charles
the Second; 290
Now wut I want 's to hev all *we* gain stick,
An' not to start Millennium too quick;
We hain't to punish only, but to keep,
An' the cure 's gut to go a cent'ry deep.'
'Wall, milk-an'-water ain't the best o' glue,'
Sez he, 'an' so you 'll find afore you're
thru;
Ef reshness venters sunthin', shilly-shally
Loses ez often wut 's ten times the vally.
Thet exe of ourn, when Charles's neck gut
split,
Opened a gap thet ain't bridged over yit: 300
Slav'ry 's your Charles, the Lord hez gin
the exe'—
'Our Charles,' sez I, 'hez gut eight mil-
lion necks.
The hardest question ain't the black man's
right,
The trouble is to 'mancipate the white;

One 's chained in body an' can be sot free,
But t' other 's chained in soul to an idee:
It's a long job, but we shall worry thru it;
Ef bagnets fail, the spellin'-book must du
it.'

'Hosee,' sez he, 'I think you 're goin to fail:
The rattlesnake ain't dangerous in the
tail;

This 'ere rebellion 's nothing but the ret-
tle,—

You 'll stomp on thet an' think you 've won
the bettle;

It 's Slavery thet 's the fangs an' thinkin'
head,

An' ef you want selvation, cresh it dead,—
An' cresh it suddin, or you 'll larn by
waitin'

Thet Chance wun't stop to listen to de-
batin'!'—

'God's truth!' sez I,— 'an' ef I held the
club,

An' knowed jes' where to strike,— but
there 's the rub!'—

'Strike soon,' sez he, 'or you 'll be deadly
ailin',—

Folks thet 's afear'd to fail are sure o'
failin'; 320

God hates your sneakin' creturs thet be-
lieve

He 'll settle things they run away an'
leave!'

He brought his foot down fercely, ez he
spoke,

An' give me sech a startle thet I woke.
1862. June, 1862.

NO. VII

LATEST VIEWS OF MR. BIGLOW

Er I a song or two could make
Like rockets druv by their own burnin',
All leap an' light, to leave a wake
Men's hearts an' faces skyward turn-
in'!—

But, it strikes me, 't ain't jest the time
Fer stringin' words with settisfaction:
Wut 's wanted now 's the silent rhyme
'Twixt upright Will an' downright Ac-
tion.

Words, ef you keep 'em, pay their keep,
But gabble 's the short cut to ruin; 10
It 's gratis (gals half-price), but cheap
At no rate, ef it henders doin';

Ther' 's nothin' wuss, 'less 't is to set
A martyr-prem'um upon jawrin':
Teapots git dangerous, ef you shet
Their lids down on 'em with Fort War-
ren.

'Bout long enough it 's ben discussed
Who sot the magazine afire,
An' whether, ef Bob Wickliffe bust,
'T would scare us more or blow us
higher. 20

D' ye s'pose the Gret Foreseer's plan
Wuz settled fer him in town-meetin' ?
Or thet ther' 'd ben no Fall o' Man,
Ef Adam 'd on'y bit a sweetin' ?

Oh, Jon'than, ef you want to be
A rugged chap agin an' hearty,
Go fer wutever 'll hurt Jeff D.,
Nur wut 'll boost up ary party.
Here 's hell broke loose, an' we lay flat
With half the univarse a-singein', 30
Till Sen'tor This an' Gov'nor Thet
Stop squabblin' fer the garding-ingin.

It 's war we 're in, not politics;
It 's systems wrastlin' now, not parties;
An' victory in the eend 'll fix
Where longest will an' truest heart is.
An' wut 's the Guv'ment folks about ?
Tryin' to hope ther' 's nothin' doin',
An' look ez though they did n't doubt
Sunthin' pertickler wuz a-brewin'. 40

Ther' 's critters yit thet talk an' act
Fer wur they call Conciliation;
They 'd hand a buff'lo-drove a tract
When they wuz madder than all Ba-
shan.

Conciliate ? it jest means *be kicked*,
No metter how they phrase an' tone it;
It means thet we 're to set down licked,
Thet we 're poor shotes an' glad to own
it!

A war on tick 's ez dear 'z the deuce,
But it wun't leave no lastin' traces, 50
Ez 't would to make a sneakin' truce
Without no moral specie-basis:
Ef greenbacks ain't nut jest the cheese,
I guess ther' 's evils thet 's extremer,—
Fer instance,— shinplaster idees
Like them put out by Gov'nor Seymour.¹

¹ Horatio Seymour (1810-1886), of Utica, New York,
was one of the most prominent and respected men in

Last year, the Nation, at a word,
When tremblin' Freedom cried to shield
her,
Flamed weldin' into one keen sword
Waitin' an' longin' fer a wielder: 60
A splendid flash!— but how 'd the grasp
With sech a chance ez thet wuz tally ?
Ther' warn't no meanin' in our clasp,—
Half this, half thet, all shilly-shally.

More men ? More Man ! It 's there we fail;
Weak plans grow weaker yit by length-
enin':

Wut use in addin' to the tail,
When it 's the head 's in need o' strength-
enin' ?

We wanted one thet felt all Chief
From roots o' hair to sole o' stockin', 70
Square-sot with thousan'-ton belief
In him an' us, ef earth went rockin' !

Ole Hick'ry would n't ha' stood see-saw
'Bout doin' things till they wuz done
with,—

He 'd smashed the tables o' the Law
In time o' need to load his gun with;
He could n't see but jest one side,—
Ef his, 't wuz God's, an' thet wuz plenty;
An' so his 'Forrards!' multiplied
An army's fightin' weight by twenty. 80

But this 'ere histin', creak, creak, creak,
Your cappen's heart up with a derrick,
This tryin' to coax a lightnin'-streak
Out of a half-discouraged hay-rick,
This hangin' on mont' arter mont'
Fer one sharp purpose 'mongst the
twitter,—

I tell ye, it doos kind o' stunt
The peth and sperit of a critter.

In six months where 'll the People be,
Ef leaders look on revolution 90
Ez though it wuz a cup o' tea,—
Jest social el'ments in solution ?
This weighin' things doos wal enough
When war cools down, an' comes to
writin';

the Democratic party, and a bitter opponent of Lincoln.
He had at this time been recently elected governor of
New York on a platform that denounced almost every
measure the government had found it necessary to
adopt for the suppression of the Rebellion. His influ-
ence contributed not a little to the encouragement of
that spirit which inspired the Draft Riot in the city of
New York in July, 1863. (F. B. Williams, in *Riverside*
and *Cambridge Editions*.)

But while it's makin', the true stuff
Is pison-mad, pig-headed fightin'.

Democ'acy gives every man
The right to be his own oppressor;
But a loose Gov'ment ain't the plan,
Helpless ez spilled beans on a dresser: 100
I tell ye one thing we might larn
From them smart critters, the Seced-

ers, —
Ef bein' right 's the fust consarn,
The 'fore-the-fust 's cast-iron leaders.

But 'pears to me I see some signs
Thet we're a-goin' to use our senses:
Jeff druv us into these hard lines,
An' ough' to bear his half th' expenses;
Slavery 's Secession's heart an' will,
South, North, East, West, where'er you
find it, 110
An' ef it drors into War's mill,
D'ye say them thunder-stones sha'n't
grind it?

D'ye s'pose, ef Jeff giv *him* a lick,
Ole Hick'ry 'd tried his head to sof'n
So 's't would n't hurt thet ebony stick
Thet's made our side see stars so
of'n?
'No!' he 'd ha' thundered, 'on your knees,
An' own one flag, one road to glory!
Soft-heartedness, in times like these,
Shows sof'ness in the upper story!' 120

An' why should we kick up a muss
About the Pres'dunt's proclamation? 1
It ain't a-goin' to lib'rate us,
Ef we don't like emancipation:
The right to be a cussed fool
Is safe from all devices human,
It's common (ez a gin'l rule)
To every critter born o' woman.

So we're all right, an' I, fer one,
Don't think our cause 'll lose in vally 130
By rammin' Scriptur in our gun,
An' gittin' Natur' fer an ally:
Thank God, say I, fer even a plan
To lift one human bein's level,
Give one more chance to make a man,
Or, anyhow, to spile a devil!

Not thet I'm one thet much expec'
Millennium by express to-morrer;
1 The Emancipation Proclamation.

They *will* miscarry, — I rec'lee'
Tu many on 'em, to my sorrer: 140
Men ain't made angels in a day,
No matter how you mould an' labor-
'em,
Nor 'riginal ones, I guess, don't stay
With Abe so of'n ez with Abraham.

The'ry thinks Fact a pooty thing,
An' wants the banns read right ensuin';
But fact wun't noways wear the ring,
'Thout years o' settin' up an' woin':
Though, arter all, Time's dial-plate
Marks cent'ries with the minute-finger,
An' Good can't never come tu late, 151
Though it doos seem to try an' linger.

An' come wut will, I think it's grand
Abe 's gut his will et last bloom-fur-
naced
In trial-flames till it 'll stand
The strain o' bein' in deadly earnest:
Thet 's wut we want, — we want to know
The folks on our side hez the bravery
To b'lieve ez hard, come weal, come woe,
In Freedom ez Jeff doos in Slavery. 160

Set the two forces foot to foot,
An' every man knows who 'll be winner,
Whose faith in God hez ary root
Thet goes down deeper than his dinner:
Then 't will be felt from pole to pole,
Without no need o' proclamation,
Earth's biggest Country 's gut her soul
An' risen up Earth's Greatest Nation!
February, 1863.

No. X

MR. HOSEA BIGLOW TO THE
EDITOR OF THE ATLANTIC
MONTHLY

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

You're 'n want o' sunthin' light an' cute,
Rattlin' an' shrewd an' kin' o' jingle-
ish, 10

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

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

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

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

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

Nothin' don't seem like wut it wuz;
I can't see wut there is to hender, 50
An' yit my brains jes' go buzz, buzz,
Like bumblebees agin a winder;

'fore these times come, in all airth's row,
Ther' wuz one quiet place, my head in,
Where I could hide an' think, — but now
It 's all one teeter, hopin', dreadin'.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rat-tat-tat-tattle thru the street
 I hear the drummers makin' riot,
 An' I set thinkin' o' the feet
 That follered once an' now are quiet, —
 White feet ez snowdrops innercent,
 That never knowed the paths o' Satan,
 Whose comin' step ther' 's ears that won't,
 No, not lifelong, leave off awaitin'. ¹²⁰

Why, hain't I held 'em on my knee? ¹
 Did n't I love to see 'em growin',
 Three likely lads ez wal could be,
 Hahnsome an' brave an' not tu knowin' ?
 I set an' look into the blaze
 Whose natur', jes' like theirn, keeps
 climbin',
 Ez long 'z it lives, in shinin' ways,
 An' half despise myself for rhymin'.

¹ Of Lowell's three nephews one, William Lowell Putnam, was killed, and another, James Jackson Lowell, seriously wounded, at the battle of Ball's Bluff, the same battle in which Holmes's son was wounded (see 'My Hunt After the Captain'); the third, Charles Russell Lowell, died October 20, 1864, of wounds received the previous day at the battle of Cedar Creek. James Jackson Lowell recovered from the wounds received at Ball's Bluff, but was killed in the battle of Seven Pines. See *Lowell's Letters*, vol. i, pp. 162-166; and Scudder's *Life of Lowell*, vol. ii, pp. 23-31. See also the note on Emerson's 'Sacrifice,' p. 95, note 1; and Colonel Henry Lee Higginson's *Four Addresses*, there referred to. Emerson wrote to Carlyle, October 15, 1870: 'The Lowell race, again, in our War yielded three or four martyrs so able and tender and true, that James Russell Lowell cannot allude to them in verse or prose but the public is melted anew.' (*Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence*, vol. ii, p. 374.) See also Lowell's 'Commemoration Ode,' p. 490, and 'Under the Old Elm,' p. 512, with the passages from his letters there quoted.

Wut 's words to them whose faith an'
 truth
 On War's red teehstone rang true metal,
 Who ventered life an' love an' youth ¹³¹
 For the gret prize o' death in battle ?
 To him who, deadly hurt, agen
 Flashed on afore the charge's thunder,²
 Tippin' with fire the bolt of men
 Thet rived the Rebel line asunder ?

'T ain't right to hev the young go fust,
 All throbbin' full o' gifts an' graces,
 Leavin' life's paupers dry ez dust
 To try an' make b'lieve fill their places:
 Nothin' but tells us wut we miss, ¹⁴¹
 Ther' 's gaps our lives can't never fay
 in,

An' *thet* world seems so fur from this
 Lef' for us loafers to grow gray in !

My eyes cloud up for rain; my mouth
 Will take to twitchin' roun' the cor-
 ners;

I pity mothers, tu, down South,
 For all they sot among the scornors:
 I 'd sooner take my chance to stan'
 At Judgment where your meanest slave
 is, ¹⁵⁰

Than at God's bar hol' up a han'
 Ez drippin' red ez yourn, Jeff Davis !

Come, Peace ! not like a mourner bowed
 For honor lost an' dear ones wasted,
 But proud, to meet a people proud,
 With eyes thet tell o' triumph tasted !
 Come, with han' grippin' on the hilt,
 An' step thet proves ye Victory's daugh-
 ter !

Longin' for you, our sperits wilt
 Like shipwrecked men's on raf's for
 water. ¹⁶⁰

Come, while our country feels the lift
 Of a gret instinct shoutin' 'Forwards !'
 An' knows thet freedom ain't a gift
 Thet carries long in han's o' cowards !
 Come, sech ez mothers prayed for, when
 They kissed their cross with lips thet
 quivered,

An' bring fair wages for brave men,
 A nation saved, a race delivered !

April, 1865.

² General Charles Russell Lowell, at the battle of Cedar Creek.

ON BOARD THE '76¹

WRITTEN FOR MR. BRYANT'S SEVEN-
 TIETH BIRTHDAY

NOVEMBER 3, 1864

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

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

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

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

There our foe wallowed, like a wounded
 brute
 The fiercer for his hurt. What now
 were best ?

¹ See the third quotation from *Lowell's Letters*, in note on p. 444.

Once more tug bravely at the peril's root,
 Though death came with it ? Or evade
 the test
 If right or wrong in this God's world of ours
 Be leagued with mightier powers ? ³⁰

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

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

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

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

We, listening, learned what makes the
 might of words, —
 Manhood to back them, constant as a
 star;
 His voice rammed home our cannon, edged
 our swords,
 And sent our boarders shouting; shroud
 and spar

Heard him and stiffened; the sails heard,
and wooed
The winds with loftier mood. 60

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

1864. 1865.

ODE RECITED AT THE HAR-
VARD COMMEMORATION¹

JULY 21, 1865

I

WEAK-WINGED is song,
Nor aims at that clear-ethered height
Whither the brave deed climbs for light:
We seem to do them wrong,

¹ The Commemoration services (July 21, 1865) took place in the open air, in the presence of a great assembly. Prominent among the speakers were Major-General Meade, the hero of Gettysburg, and Major-General Devens. The wounds of the war were still fresh and bleeding, and the interest of the occasion was deep and thrilling. The summer afternoon was drawing to its close when the poet began the recital of the ode. No living audience could for the first time follow with intelligent appreciation the delivery of such a poem. To be sure, it had its obvious strong points and its sonorous charms; but, like all the later poems of the author, it is full of condensed thought and requires study. The reader to-day finds many passages whose force and beauty escaped him during the recital, yet the effect of the poem at the time was overpowering. The face of the poet, always singularly expressive, was on this occasion almost transfigured,—glowing, as if with an inward light. It was impossible to look away from it. Our age has furnished many great historic scenes, but this Commemoration combined the elements of grandeur and pathos, and produced an impression as lasting as life. (Underwood's *James Russell Lowell*, quoted in the *Riverside Literature Series*.)

The passage about Lincoln was not in the Ode as originally recited, but added immediately after. More than eighteen months before, however, I had written about Lincoln in the *North American Review*,—an article which pleased him. I did divine him earlier than most men of the Brahmin caste. The Ode itself was an improvisation. Two days before the Commemoration I had told my friend Child that it was impossible,—that I was dull as a door-mat. But the next day something gave me a jog and the whole thing came out of me with a rush. I sat up all night writing it out clear, and took it on the morning of the day to Child. 'I have something, but don't yet know what it is, or whether it will do. Look at it and tell

Bringing our robin's-leaf to deck their
hearse
Who in warm life-blood wrote their nobler
verse,
Our trivial song to honor those who
come
With ears attuned to strenuous trump and
drum,
And shaped in squadron-strophes their de-
sire,
Live battle-odes whose lines were steel and
fire: 10
Yet sometimes feathered words are
strong,
A gracious memory to buoy up and save
From Lethe's dreamless ooze, the common
grave
Of the unventurous throng.

me.' He went a little way apart with it under an elm-tree in the college yard. He read a passage here and there, brought it back to me, and said, 'Do? I should think so! Don't you be scared.' And I was n't, but virtue enough had gone out of me to make me weak for a fortnight after. (Lowell, in a letter to Richard Watson Gilder, January 16, 1886. *Letters*, Harper and Brothers, vol. ii, pp. 305-306.)

I don't know how to answer your queries about my 'Ode.' I guess I am right, for it was a matter of pure instinct—except the strophe you quote, which I added for balance both of measure and thought. I am not sure if I understand what you say about the tenth strophe. You will observe that it leads naturally to the eleventh, and that I there justify a certain narrowness in it as an expression of the popular feeling as well as my own. I confess I have never got over the feeling of wrath with which (just after the death of my nephew Willie) I read in an English paper that nothing was to be hoped of an army officered by tailors' apprentices and butcher-boys. The poem was written with a vehement speed, which I thought I had lost in the skirts of my professor's gown. Till within two days of the celebration I was hopelessly dumb, and then it all came with a rush, literally making me lean (*mi fece magro*) and so nervous that I was weeks in getting over it. I was longer in getting the new (eleventh) strophe to my mind than in writing the rest of the poem. In that I hardly changed a word, and it was so undeliberate that I did not find out till after it was printed that some of the verses lacked corresponding rhymes. All the 'War Poems' were improvisations as it were. My blood was up, and you would hardly believe me if I were to tell how few hours intervened between conception and completion, even in so long a one as 'Mason and Slidell.' So I have a kind of faith that the 'Ode' is right because it was *there*, I hardly knew how. I doubt you are right in wishing it more historical. But then I could not have written it. I had put the ethical and political view so often in prose that I was weary of it. The motives of the war? I had impatiently argued them again and again—but for an ode they must be in the blood and not the memory. (Lowell, in a letter of December 8, 1868. *Letters*, Harper and Brothers, vol. ii, pp. 9-10.) See also Lowell's letter to Miss Norton, July 25, 1865; and Scudder's *Life of Lowell*, vol. ii, pp. 1-73, especially 63-73.

For a noble description of the Commemoration procession and the exercises, see W. G. Brown's *The Foe of Compromise and other Essays*, pp. 197-199; quoted in Greenleaf's *Lowell*, pp. 161-163.

II

To-day our Reverend Mother welcomes
back
Her wisest Scholars, those who under-
stood
The deeper teaching of her mystic tome,
And offered their fresh lives to make it
good:
No lore of Greece or Rome.
No science peddling with the names of
things, 20
Or reading stars to find inglorious fates,
Can lift our life with wings
Far from Death's idle gulf that for the
many waits,
And lengthen out our dates
With that clear fame whose memory sings
In many hearts to come, and nerves them
and dilates:

Nor such thy teaching, Mother of us all!
Not such the trumpet-call
Of thy diviner mood,
That could thy sons entice 30
From happy homes and toils, the fruitful
nest
Of those half-virtues which the world calls
best,

Into War's tumult rude;
But rather far that stern device
The sponsors chose that round thy cradle
stood
In the dim, unventured wood,
The VERITAS that lurks beneath¹
The letter's unprolific sheath,
Life of whate'er makes life worth living,
Seed-grain of high emprise, immortal food,
One heavenly thing whereof earth hath
the giving. 41

III

Many loved Truth, and lavished life's best
oil
Amid the dust of books to find her,
Content at last, for guerdon of their toil,
With the cast mantle she hath left be-
hind her.
Many in sad faith sought for her,
Many with crossed hands sighed for
her;
But these, our brothers, fought for her,
At life's dear peril wrought for her,
So loved her that they died for her, 50

¹ VERITAS, the motto on the seal of Harvard University, inscribed upon three open books. See Holmes's poem 'Veritas,' p. 396.

Tasting the raptured fleetness
Of her divine completeness:
Their higher instinct knew
Those love her best who to themselves are
true,
And what they dare to dream of, dare to
do;
They followed her and found her
Where all may hope to find,
Not in the ashes of the burnt-out mind,
But beautiful, with danger's sweetness
round her.
Where faith made whole with deed 60
Breathes its awakening breath
Into the lifeless creed,
They saw her plumed and mailed,
With sweet, stern face unveiled,
And all-repaying eyes, look proud on them
in death.

IV

Our slender life runs rippling by, and
glides
Into the silent hollow of the past;
What is there that abides
To make the next age better for the
last?
Is earth too poor to give us 70
Something to live for here that shall out-
live us?
Some more substantial boon
Than such as flows and ebbs with Fortune's
fickle moon?
The little that we see
From doubt is never free;
The little that we do
Is but half-nobly true;
With our laborious hiving
What men call treasure, and the gods call
dross,
Life seems a jest of Fate's contriving, 80
Only secure in every one's conniving,
A long account of nothings paid with loss,
Where we poor puppets, jerked by unseen
wires,
After our little hour of strut and rave,
With all our pasteboard passions and de-
sires,
Loves, hates, ambitions, and immortal fires,
Are tossed pell-mell together in the
grave.
But stay! no age was e'er degenerate,
Unless men held it at too cheap a rate,
For in our likeness still we shape our
fate. 90

Ah, there is something here
 Unfathomed by the cynic's sneer,
 Something that gives our feeble light
 A high immunity from Night,
 Something that leaps life's narrow bars
 To claim its birthright with the hosts of
 heaven;
 A seed of sunshine that can leaven
 Our earthly dullness with the beams of
 stars,
 And glorify our clay
 With light from fountains elder than the
 Day;
 A conscience more divine than we,
 A gladness fed with secret tears,
 A vexing, forward-reaching sense
 Of some more noble permanence;
 A light across the sea,
 Which haunts the soul and will not let it
 be,
 Still beaconing from the heights of unde-
 generate years.

V

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

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

VI

Such was he, our Martyr-Chief,
 Whom late the Nation he had led,
 With ashes on her head,
 Wept with the passion of an angry grief:
 Forgive me, if from present things I
 turn
 To speak what in my heart will beat and
 burn,
 And hang my wreath on his world-honored
 urn.
 Nature, they say, doth dote,
 And cannot make a man
 Save on some worn-out plan,
 Repeating us by rote:
 For him her Old-World moulds aside she
 threw,
 And choosing sweet clay from the
 breast
 Of the unexhausted West,
 With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
 Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and
 true.
 How beautiful to see
 Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
 Who loved his charge, but never loved to
 lead;
 One whose meek flock the people joyed to
 be,
 Not lured by any cheat of birth,
 But by his clear-grained human worth,
 And brave old wisdom of sincerity!

They knew that outward grace is dust;
 They could not choose but trust
 In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill,
 And supple-tempered will
 That bent like perfect steel to spring again
 and thrust.
 His was no lonely mountain-peak of
 mind,
 Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy
 bars,
 A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors
 blind;
 Broad prairie rather, genial, level-
 lined,
 Fruitful and friendly for all human
 kind,
 Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of lofti-
 est stars.

Nothing of Europe here,
 Or, then, of Europe fronting mornward still,
 Ere any names of Serf and Peer
 Could Nature's equal scheme deface
 And thwart her genial will;
 Here was a type of the true elder race,
 And one of Plutarch's men talked with us
 face to face.

I praise him not; it were too late;
 And some innate weakness there must be
 In him who condescends to victory
 Such as the Present gives, and cannot wait,
 Safe in himself as in a fate.
 So always firmly he:
 He knew to bide his time,
 And can his fame abide,
 Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
 Till the wise years decide.

Great captains, with their guns and
 drums,
 Disturb our judgment for the hour,
 But at last silence comes;
 These all are gone, and, standing like a
 tower,
 Our children shall behold his fame.
 The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing
 man,
 Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not
 blame,
 New birth of our new soil, the first Amer-
 ican.

VII

Long as man's hope insatiate can discern
 Or only guess some more inspiring
 goal
 Outside of Self, enduring as the pole,

Along whose course the flying axles burn
 Of spirits bravely-pitched, earth's man-
 lier brood;

Long as below we cannot find
 The meed that stills the inexorable mind;
 So long this faith to some ideal Good,
 Under whatever mortal names it masks,
 Freedom, Law, Country, this ethereal
 mood
 That thanks the Fates for their severer
 tasks,
 Feeling its challenged pulses leap,
 While others skulk in subterfuges cheap,
 And, set in Danger's van, has all the boon
 it asks,
 Shall win man's praise and woman's love,
 Shall be a wisdom that we set above
 All other skills and gifts to culture dear,
 A virtue round whose forehead we in-
 wreath
 Laurels that with a living passion breathe
 When other crowns grow, while we twine
 them, sear.
 What brings us thronging these high rites
 to pay,
 And seal these hours the noblest of our year,
 Save that our brothers found this better
 way?

VIII

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

Who went, and who return not. — Say not so!
 'T is not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
 But the high faith that failed not by the way;
 Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave;
 No ban of endless night exiles the brave;
 And to the saner mind
 We rather seem the dead that stayed behind.
 Blow, trumpets, all your exultations blow!
 For never shall their aureoled presence lack:
 I see them muster in a gleaming row, ²⁶¹
 With ever-youthful brows that nobler show;
 We find in our dull road their shining track;
 In every nobler mood
 We feel the orient of their spirit glow,
 Part of our life's unalterable good,
 Of all our saintlier aspiration;
 They come transfigured back,
 Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,
 Beautiful evermore, and with the rays ²⁷⁰
 Of morn on their white Shields of Expectation!

IX

But is there hope to save
 Even this ethereal essence from the grave?
 What ever 'scaped Oblivion's subtle wrong
 Save a few clarion names, or golden threads of song?
 Before my musing eye
 The mighty ones of old sweep by,
 Disvoiced now and insubstantial things,
 As noisy once as we; poor ghosts of kings,
 Shadows of empire wholly gone to dust,
 And many races, nameless long ago, ²⁸¹
 To darkness driven by that imperious gust
 Of ever-rushing Time that here doth blow:
 O visionary world, condition strange,
 Where naught abiding is but only Change,
 Where the deep-bolted stars themselves still shift and range!
 Shall we to more continuance make pretence?
 Renown builds tombs; a life-estate is Wit;
 And, bit by bit,
 The cunning years steal all from us but woe;

Leaves are we, whose decays no harvest sow.
 But, when we vanish hence, ²⁹¹
 Shall they lie forceless in the dark below,
 Save to make green their little length of sods,
 Or deepen pansies for a year or two,
 Who now to us are shining-sweet as gods?
 Was dying all they had the skill to do?
 That were not fruitless: but the Soul resents
 Such short-lived service, as if blind events
 Ruled without her, or earth could so endure; ³⁰⁰
 She claims a more divine investiture
 Of longer tenure than Fame's airy rents;
 Whate'er she touches doth her nature share;
 Her inspiration haunts the ennobled air,
 Gives eyes to mountains blind,
 Ears to the deaf earth, voices to the wind,
 And her clear trump sings succor everywhere
 By lonely bivouacs to the wakeful mind;
 For soul inherits all that soul could dare:
 Yea, Manhood hath a wider span
 And larger privilege of life than man. ³¹¹
 The single deed, the private sacrifice,
 So radiant now through proudly-hidden tears,
 Is covered up ere long from mortal eyes
 With thoughtless drift of the deciduous years;
 But that high privilege that makes all men peers,
 That leap of heart whereby a people rise
 Up to a noble anger's height,
 And, flamed on by the Fates, not shrink,
 but grow more bright,
 That swift validity in noble veins, ³²⁰
 Of choosing danger and disdaining shame,
 Of being set on flame
 By the pure fire that flies all contact base
 But wraps its chosen with angelic might,
 These are imperishable gains,
 Sure as the sun, medicinal as light,
 These hold great futures in their lusty reins
 And certify to earth a new imperial race.

X

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

XI

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

Till the basest can no longer cower,
 Feeling his soul spring up divinely tall,
 Touched but in passing by her mantle-hem.
 Come back, then, noble pride, for 't is her dower!
 How could poet ever tower,
 If his passions, hopes, and fears,
 If his triumphs and his tears,
 Kept not measure with his people? ³⁸⁰
 Boom, cannon, boom to all the winds and waves!
 Clash out, glad bells, from every rocking steeple!
 Banners, adance with triumph, bend your staves!
 And from every mountain-peak
 Let beacon-fire to answering beacon speak,
 Katahdin tell Monadnock, Whiteface he,
 And so leap on in light from sea to sea,
 Till the glad news be sent
 Across a kindling continent,
 Making earth feel more firm and air breathe braver: ³⁹⁰
 Be proud! for she is saved, and all have helped to save her!
 She that lifts up the manhood of the poor,
 She of the open soul and open door,
 With room about her hearth for all mankind!
 The fire is dreadful in her eyes no more;
 From her bold front the helm she doth unbind,
 Sends all her handmaid armies back to spin,
 And bids her navies, that so lately hurled
 Their crashing battle, hold their thunders in,
 Swimming like birds of calm along the unharmed shore. ⁴⁰⁰
 No challenge sends she to the elder world,
 That looked askance and hated; a light scorn
 Plays o'er her mouth, as round her mighty knees
 She calls her children back, and waits the morn
 Of nobler day, enthroned between her subject seas.