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JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

THE
VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL
AND OTHER POEMS

BY
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

EDITED WITH NOTES AND INTRODUCTION

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE object that I have set before myself in editing this poem is that which directs my teaching it in the classroom. This object is compounded of several elements. First of all, the pupil should understand the poem, should get from it the meaning that the poet put into it. He should, secondly, draw from it something of the imaginative elevation that inspired the poet to its composition. Thirdly, mingled with these, he should get some perception of the character, the personal magnetism, of the author, — should feel him speaking through his poem.

Incidental to this there should be explanation of words, comment on verse-forms, — all that minor detail that it is folly to despise, and still greater folly to overestimate. Over all should stand the main pur-

pose,—to explain and enforce the dual message of the poet:—

“Not only around our infancy,
Doth heaven with all its splendors lie,”

and,—

“Not that which we give, but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare.”

To make the pupils understand this and feel it, feel it in the spirit of the man that gave it utterance, this should be the ideal alike of editor and teacher.

In teaching the poem in class, it will be found helpful to devote one lesson to the poem as a whole before taking it up in detail. This will make clearer its main purpose and emphasize its message. But most important and hardest, one must avoid a shrinking tendency to keep the poem's highest meaning and inspiration for the tabernacle of one's own heart, leaving the class to seek this for themselves, and putting before them only the dry husks of verbal elucidation. It is the height of egotism to regard the higher enjoyment of poetry as the perquisite of the

æsthetically elect. In each soul there lurks some seed of poetry, a seed that quickens responsive to the warm influence of the true poet. It is for us to bring these seeds to this sunlight,—to develop, with unabashed idealism, a human tendency that may defeat the material greed that endangers modern life,—to arouse the divine discontent that looks beyond the partial, which is, to the perfect, which may be.

H. B.

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INTRODUCTION

THE POET AND HIS SURROUNDINGS

OF American poets Lowell is one of the most American. Wiser than the eccentric Whitman, wiser than our writers of *Columbiads* and epics of the red Indian, Lowell saw that the real American is not a new being, cut off from the literary tradition of the past. The American is the Englishman in a new world. He has brought with him the language, the traditions, the mental characteristics, the instincts of his ancestors; and he has modified these in accordance with his new environment. He has carried the old life into a new land, and the result, though with something of a "sea-change," is not wholly "new or strange."

Lowell stands, aggressively, perhaps, for the American of English descent, for the American whose "forebears" left England to carry on in a new country the spirit of the old. Few of our poets have studied with greater diligence the models of the past. Few have turned their eyes with such painstaking fidelity to the life about us. For Lowell's world is not conventional.