

mere fun. A long series of uniform stanzas (I am always speaking of public recitation) with regularly recurring rhymes produces somnolence among the men and a desperate resort to their fans on the part of the women. No method has yet been invented by which the train of thought or feeling can be shunted off from the epical to the lyrical track. My ears have been jolted often enough over the sleepers on such occasions to know that. I know *something* (of course an American can't know much) about Pindar. But *his* odes had the advantage of being chanted. Now, my problem was to contrive a measure which should not be tedious by uniformity, which should vary with varying moods, in which the transitions (including those of the voice) should be managed without jar. I at first thought of mixed rhymed and blank verses of unequal measures, like those in the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*, which are in the main masterly. Of course, Milton deliberately departed from that stricter form of Greek Chorus to which it was bound quite as much (I suspect) by the law of its musical accompaniment as by any sense of symmetry. I wrote some stanzas of the *Commemoration Ode* on this theory at first, leaving some verses without a rhyme to match. But my ear was better pleased when the rhyme, coming at a longer interval, as a far-off echo rather than instant reverberation, produced the same effect almost, and yet was grateful by unexpectedly recalling an association and faint reminiscence of consonance. I think I have succeeded pretty well, and if you will try reading aloud I believe you would agree with me." For changes and emendations suggested by Lowell but never incorporated in the ode, see *Letters*, ii, 141-143. Another description of this scene will be found in A. V. G. Allen's *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks*, i, 552. The prayer of Phillips Brooks seemed to those present the great event of the day, the noblest expression of the deep, suppressed emotion that stirred the hearts of all.

ODE RECITED AT THE HARVARD COMMEMORATION

DEDICATED

"To the ever sweet and shining memory of the ninety-three sons of Harvard College who have died for their country in the war of nationality."

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,
Bringing our robin's-leaf to deck their hearse 5
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 desire,
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.

II

To-day our Reverend Mother welcomes back 15
Her wisest Scholars, those who understood
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 2
 In manly 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 35
 In the dim, unventured wood,
 The VERITAS that lurks beneath
 The letter's unprolific sheath,
 Life of whate'er makes life worth living,
 Seed-grain of high emprise, immortal food, 40
 One heavenly thing whereof earth hath the giving.

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 behind her. 45
 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
 Tasting the raptured fleetness
 Of her divine completeness:

37. An early emblem of Harvard College was a shield with Veritas (truth) upon three open books. This device is still used.

Their higher instinct knew
 Those love her best who to themselves are true,
 And what they dare to dream of, dare to do; 55
 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. 65

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 outlive 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; 75
 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 desires, 85
 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 95
 To claim its birthright with the hosts of heaven;
 A seed of sunshine that can leaven
 Our earthy dulness with the beams of stars,
 And glorify our clay
 With light from fountains elder than the Day; 100
 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, 105
 Which haunts the soul and will not let it be,
 Still glimmering from the heights of undegenerate
 years.

v

Whither leads the path
 To ampler fates that leads?
 Not down through flowery meads, 110
 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 115
 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 120
 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, 125
 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 130
 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, 135
 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; 140
 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, 145
 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, 150
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, 155
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 : 160
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. 165
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, 170
But by his clear-grained human worth,
And brave old wisdom of sincerity !

VI. This stanza was not recited ; it was composed immediately after the public delivery of the ode and included in it. It cannot be called an afterthought, for the noble lines express and carry to a climax the intense feeling which animates the entire poem, and in Lowell's own mind was the very soul of the words that fell from his lips.

They knew that outward grace is dust ;
They could not choose but trust
In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill, 175
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 ; 180
Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined,
Fruitful and friendly for all human-kind,
Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of loftiest stars.
Nothing of Europe here,
Or, then, of Europe fronting morn-ward still, 185
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, 188
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. 195
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. 200
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, 205

The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.

VII

Long as man's hope insatiate can discern
Or only guess some more inspiring goal 210
Outside of Self, enduring as the pole,
Along whose course the flying axles burn
Of spirits bravely-pitched, earth's manlier brood;
Long as below we cannot find
The meed that stills the inexorable mind; 215
So long this faith to some ideal Good,
Under whatever mortal name it masks,
Freedom, Law, Country, this ethereal mood
That thanks the Fates for their severer tasks,
Feeling its challenged pulses leap, 220
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, 225
A virtue round whose forehead we enwreath
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, 230
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. 235
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, 240
And will not please the ear:
I sweep them for a pæan, but they wane
Again and yet again
Into a dirge, and die away in pain.
In these brave ranks I only see the gaps, 245
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 250
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;

246. "In the privately printed edition of the poem the names of eight of the poet's kindred are given. The nearest in blood are his nephews, General Charles Russell Lowell, killed at Winchester, Lieutenant James Jackson Lowell, at Seven Pines, and Captain William Lowell Putnam, at Ball's Bluff. Another relative was the heroic Colonel Robert G. Shaw, who fell in the assault on Fort Wagner." — Underwood's *James Russell Lowell*.

253 See the *Book of Numbers*, chapter xiii.

Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave ; 255
 No bar 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 : 260

I see them muster in a gleaming row,

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, 265

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 274

Save a few clarion names, or golden threads of song ?

Before my musing eye

The mighty ones of old sweep by,

Disvoicèd now and insubstantial things,

As noisy once as we ; poor ghosts of kings,

Shadows of empire wholly gone to dust, 280

And many races, nameless long ago,

255. Compare Gray's line in *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*,

"The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

Tennyson uses the same words, but with different and nobler meaning, in his *Ode to the Duke of Wellington*.

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, 285

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 : 290

Leaves are we, whose decays no harvest sow.

But, when we vanish hence,

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, 295

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, 305

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 310

And larger privilege of life than man.

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 ; 315
 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, 325
 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 : 335
 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 345
 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. 355
 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 !
 'Tis no Man we celebrate, 365
 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. 375
 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, 385
 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, 389
 Making earth feel more firm and air breathe braver:
 "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; 395
 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, 399
 Swimming like birds of calm along the unharmed shore.
 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." 405

XII

Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release!
 Thy God, in these distempered days,
 Hath taught thee the sure wisdom of His ways,
 And through thine enemies hath wrought thy peace!
 Bow down in prayer and praise! 410
 No poorest in thy borders but may now
 Lift to the juster skies a man's enfranchised brow,
 O Beautiful! my Country! ours once more!
 Smoothing thy gold of war-dishevelled hair
 O'er such sweet brows as never other wore, 415
 And letting thy set lips,
 Freed from wrath's pale eclipse,
 The rosy edges of their smile lay bare,
 What words divine of lover or of poet
 Could tell our love and make thee know it, 420
 Among the Nations bright beyond compare?
 What were our lives without thee?
 What all our lives to save thee?
 We reek not what we gave thee;
 We will not dare to doubt thee, 425
 But ask whatever else, and we will dare!



MEMORIÆ POSITUM

R. G. SHAW

I

BENEATH the trees,
 My lifelong friends in this dear spot,
 Sad now for eyes that see them not,
 I hear the autumnal breeze
 Wake the dry leaves to sigh for gladness gone,
 Whispering vague omens of oblivion,
 Hear, restless as the seas,
 Time's grim feet rustling through the withered
 grace
 Of many a spreading realm and strong-stemmed
 race,
 Even as my own through these. 10

Why make we moan
 For loss that doth enrich us yet
 With upward yearnings of regret?
 Bleaker than unmossed stone
 Our lives were but for this immortal gain 15
 Of unstilled longing and inspiring pain!
 As thrills of long-hushed tone
 Live in the viol, so our souls grow fine
 With keen vibrations from the touch divine
 Of noble natures gone. 20

1. This poem is printed here on account of its relation to the *Commemoration Ode*; see note, p. 57. The same memories inspired the stanza in *Mr. Hosea Biglow's Letter*, etc.



ROBERT GOULD SHAW
 WILLIAM LOWELL PUTNAM CHARLES RUSSELL LOWELL
 JAMES JACKSON LOWELL

'T were indiscreet
 To vex the shy and sacred grief
 With harsh obtrusions of relief ;
 Yet, Verse, with noiseless feet,
 Go whisper : " *This* death hath far choicer ends 25
 Than slowly to impearl in hearts of friends ;
 These obsequies 't is meet
 Not to seclude in closets of the heart,
 But, church-like, with wide doorways, to impart
 Even to the heedless street." 30

II

Brave, good, and true,
 I see him stand before me now,
 And read again on that young brow,
 Where every hope was new,
How sweet were life ! Yet, by the mouth firm-set, 35
 And look made up for Duty's utmost debt,
 I could divine he knew
 That death within the sulphurous hostile lines,
 In the mere wreck of nobly-pitched designs,
 Plucks heart's-ease, and not rue. 40

Happy their end
 Who vanish down life's evening stream
 Placid as swans that drift in dream
 Round the next river-bend !
 Happy long life, with honor at the close, 45
 Friends' painless tears, the softened thought of foes !
 And yet, like him, to spend
 All at a gush, keeping our first faith sure
 From mid-life's doubt and eld's contentment poor,
 What more could Fortune send ? 50