

American Literature and American Politics

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IN THIS STUDY of the interrelations of the political thinking and the literary achievement of a selected number of our leading men of letters before the Civil War, we are most definitely concerned, first, with the literary result of their political thinking and, second, with the effect of their writing upon the course of politics. This paper can be only a preliminary sketch of a larger study, which should bring the discussion of the subject down to the present day.

It is necessary to begin with a few definitions. It is a common error to speak of the Federalist, Whig, and Republican parties as conservative and of the Democratic as a liberal or even a radical party. But the Southern element in the Democratic party has often been conservative; and while the Whigs were usually conservative, the Republicans have been at times a liberal or even in the days of Thaddeus Stevens, a radical party. Nor is the real distinction the conventional one between a philosophy of centralization of power in the Federal government and an insistence upon the rights of the States. "States' Rights" is a political philosophy which animates usually the party that is *not* in power in Washington. It has been adopted by the Republican party today as one of its cardinal principles, although for many years it was good Democratic doctrine. The essential difference is more fundamental, and the restlessness of some of our greater men of letters in their party affiliations will become clearer in the light of the following distinction, which may also explain the confusion of party thinking today.

Irrespective of party *names*, there have been and now are in this country two political philosophies, two ways in which the people think. One of these philosophies believes in a government of laws, not of men, and has been represented by the Federalist, Whig, and Republican parties. Since it is often concerned with the preservation of some institution, like the tariff, a central bank, the gold standard, or prohibition, it distrusts the brilliant leader, who may seek to override the laws. The real power is therefore to be centered in the legislative rather than in the executive branch of the Government. For, owing to its very nature, it is less likely to destroy an institution it has itself created. And the control of the law making body by a more impersonal group, without the responsibility of office, is more easy to secure than the control of a president who owes his election to his personal appeal to the people.

Hamilton, John Adams, Webster, and Clay were its greatest exponents before the Civil War and it is to be noticed that only one of them reached the Presidency, Hamilton, of course, being ineligible. The Whigs could not elect Clay and they never even nominated Webster, although in the Dartmouth College Case he had established the sanctity of the corporation. The extreme expression of this manner of thinking may be found in Nicholas Biddle's instructions to General William Henry Harrison in his campaign in 1840—"Let him say not one word about his principles! Let him say nothing—promise nothing."

In general these three parties, the Federalist, Whig, and Republican, have included the financial, commercial, and industrial leaders of this country—the organizers, or manipulators, rather than the producers.

The other philosophy, represented by the Democratic-Republican and the Democratic parties, rests on the belief that laws are no better or worse than the *men* who make or

administer them. Jefferson had no constitutional right to buy Louisiana, but he bought it. Madison wrote the Bill of Rights, not to support but to *limit* the Constitution. Jackson broke the power of the United States Bank. To the members of this party, a *leader* is essential, because he alone can hold the clans together. They are not so likely to support an abstract institution as they are to follow a concrete leader. Generally speaking they are producers—planters, farmers, teachers, workers, with hand or brain, not organizers or manipulators. They elected to the Presidency, before the Civil War, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson—for John Quincy Adams, although his portrait decorated the hall of the last Democratic convention, was really an Independent. To the believers in such a philosophy, it mattered little than Jackson violated the principles of States' Rights to keep South Carolina in the Union. He was their hero and that was enough for them. But when they forgot their traditions and, in order to preserve the *institution* of slavery, they elected Pierce in 1852 and Buchanan in 1856 and failed to follow as a united party their great leader, Stephen A. Douglas, they went out of power for a quarter of a century. The Southern leaders, who prevented the nomination of Douglas in 1860, were fighting also for the control of the party, which they had usually possessed since its foundation. History is now repeating itself in the struggle of the Southern senators to control the present Democratic party. It is to be doubted that any Southern states will go as far as they did in 1860 in repudiating the party's choice for President. But if they do they will go out of power again.

For brevity's sake, the representatives of these two opposing political philosophies will be known as the party of leadership and the party of institutions. It is just because they are so fundamental, because they satisfy, in one direction or another, the political desires and instincts of the vast

majority of the people, that third parties have never succeeded in obtaining a permanent hold in the United States.

If this were a complete study of the political philosophies of our men of letters, it would be necessary to commence with the Federalists like Timothy Dwight, David Humphreys, and John Trumbull, and with Democrats like Joel Barlow, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Philip Freneau, and John Dickinson, to say nothing of those political philosophers like Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton, whose writings often become literature through the importance of their thought and the clarity and force of their expression. But for our present purpose, it is sufficient to begin with Washington Irving, partly because he was, after Franklin, our first great man of letters, and partly because of the lack of political clarity in the early days of the Republic, which permitted a Federalist President and a Democratic Vice-President to be elected at the same time.

Indeed Irving's own political career illustrates this epoch of transitional political thinking. He began as a Federalist, coming from a family whose commercial traditions and interests led them naturally in that direction. His own disinclination for business, and the collapse of the Federalist party, which had begun even before he left for Europe in 1815, made it possible for him to accept the post of Secretary of the Legation at London in 1829 from a Democratic administration. His personal friendship for Louis McLane, the Minister of the United States, had something to do with his decision, but even more, Irving's liking for the life of a diplomat and his fitness for it. He never became an active party man, wishing, like Washington, to remain independent. This was not possible, but his fundamental objection to the impersonal form of government which was organizing the Whig party may be seen indirectly in his greatest contribution to literature. The story of "Rip Van Winkle" has lived be-

cause it was a protest against the "small town mind." Rip has kept the sympathy of those who prefer to conduct their own lives, rather than be ruled by the oligarchy of the village. The transfer of Irving's allegiance to the party of leadership was therefore a natural one, and his instinctive reaction in favor of an individual in contest with a political oligarchy is illustrated in the advice he gave to Van Buren when the latter's appointment as Minister to England made Irving his confidant. The Senate, for reasons which now seem petty, had refused to ratify Van Buren's appointment, although he had already reached London, and the Minister brought to Irving, in some doubt, the royal invitation to the King's drawing room. Officially he no longer existed, and he asked his Secretary what he should do. Irving advised him to accept the invitation, for his political sense told him that the incident was just one more of the perennial mistakes of the Senate, and that ultimately it would help rather than hurt Van Buren. In fact it made him President.¹

Irving's constant observation of the agitation in England concerning the First Reform Bill deepened his belief in democracy. His absorption in diplomatic affairs when McLane's illness gave him the full charge of the legation affected his own literary work mainly as an interruption, but he helped other Americans, like Bryant, to obtain publication of their work in England. Realizing that after all his first love was literature, he steadfastly declined to continue as Secretary of Legation, and returned to the United States in 1832. Here his acknowledged preeminence in American letters made him determined to justify it. First, he became more fully acquainted through his travels in the South and West, with his own country. He wrote *A Tour of the Prairies* in 1835 as a result of this experience and *Astoria*, in 1836, was prompted

¹ For a fuller treatment of this incident see Stanley T. Williams: *Life of Washington Irving* (New York, 1935), vol. 2, p. 12.

not only by this wider knowledge but also by his realization, born of his familiarity with British politics, that there was an impending struggle between England and the United States for the control of the North West. Irving's love of the adventurer, which had prompted his *Life of Columbus*, caused him to write the *Adventures of Captain Bonneville* in 1837. His travels taught him also the great importance of this vast Western territory not only for itself, but also as the natural outlet for the expansion of the East. The inevitable result of such experience strengthened his belief in the necessity for the Union, and this, in turn, made him a "Jackson man," for the old General was engaged in his supreme struggle with South Carolina over the right of a State to nullify a Federal act. Irving could have taken a more active share in American politics if he had desired. But he declined Van Buren's offer of the Secretaryship of the Navy in 1838 because he disliked the turmoil of politics, the violence of party feeling and the virulence of the press. Yet when the offer of the Ministry to Spain came from the Tyler administration in February, 1842, Irving accepted it gladly. Some of his friends and enemies, including Cooper, believed he was a Democratic renegade to the Whig camp. But his love for Spain can easily explain his choice, and Tyler, of course, had left the Whigs and reverted to his own political philosophy, that of the Virginia Democrat. Irving's ability as a diplomat was tested at once, for his written credentials were directed to the Queen Regent, who was already in exile when he arrived, and his tact in modifying his formal instructions and winning the goodwill of the actual Government of Spain became the model for other representatives from this continent. The Spanish situation does not concern us here; but Irving's experience must have strengthened his belief in constitutional government. When he returned in 1846 and began his long contemplated, long deferred *Life*

of *Washington*, he enriched the pages of what is still one of the best portraits of the man for whom he is named, with the knowledge and experience his political career had given him.

Bryant began his political thinking in 1808 with some boyish, satirical verses on the Embargo Bill of President Jefferson, which were prompted by his father's definite Federalist views rather than by the political knowledge of a boy of fourteen. He tried to suppress them at a later period, and when he assumed the editorship of the *New York Evening Post* in 1829 he had become a Democrat. He was attracted to the party of leadership because in Andrew Jackson he saw the exponent of the political philosophy which was opposed to special privilege of all kinds. He was opposed to a tariff except for revenue, to legislative restrictions upon commerce, and to the United States Bank, which represented to him the private control of money. His love of freedom led him to prefer the strong executive who could be watched closely and he distrusted the less tangible action of the legislative branch of government, which might fasten upon the country institutions hard to destroy if they proved unwise.

Bryant never held political office, but of course his editorials in the *Post* constantly dealt with politics. He was an example of the combination of an idealist and a party man, who did not believe in third parties, even the Free Soil party, much as he disliked slavery. His practical sense, expressed in a letter to his brother in the campaign of 1852, argued that a party based upon a single idea had no prospect of obtaining a majority in a Presidential election. He therefore steadily supported the Democratic party, except in 1848 when the exclusion of his section of the party in New York State from the National Convention made him refuse to vote for Lewis Cass. When, however, antislavery became

associated with the salvation of the Union in 1860, he supported Lincoln. He swung the *Post* to a limited support of the Republican party but withdrew himself from public participation in politics during his later years. But in 1876 he declined to vote for Hayes, thereby expressing his instinctive preference for the party of leadership under Tilden as he had done in his support of Jackson.

His poetry reflects almost no influence of his political ideas. That was because Bryant had a theory of poetry which confined it largely to general or abstract topics. Nature, Death and the past were his great themes. He wrote of slavery only after it had been destroyed and in the midst of the Civil War his principal contributions to poetry were fanciful verses like "The Little People of the Snow." "Abraham Lincoln" was written after Lincoln's death, and Bryant's poems that struck the national note like "O Mother of a Mighty Race" are abstract, or like "The Song of Marion's Men" are historical rather than political. His prose editorials were of course of great influence during the long period of his control of the *Post*. The paper was always on the side of right feeling, and he established a standard of conduct for the journal which lasted even after his death.

Cooper held no public office in the United States, and while he occupied the Consulate at Lyons from 1826 to 1829, his duties were nominal and apparently unrewarded. He had asked for the appointment simply to give him some standing as a representative of his country, and he received it at the hands of Henry Clay, Adams' Secretary of State, at a time when Clay still called himself a "National Republican," rather than a "Whig." The appointment went to Cooper as a man of letters rather than as a politician. Yet Cooper was constantly concerned with political philosophy and as was the case with everything else in which he was interested, he took definite sides and he expressed himself forcibly. Cooper

belonged to the party of leadership because he was a patrician. The landed estates which he inherited or married represented to him the only *reality*, as opposed to financial or commercial prosperity, which might disappear over night. He had been brought up in a society in which his father had ruled in almost a feudal state at Cooperstown. The only aristocracy which he recognized was that of the land-holder, because of its permanency, and he recognized the obligations of the land-holder as well as his rights. Cooper could be generous, but only after his rights had been acknowledged, and his quarrel with his neighbors at Cooperstown over a disputed passageway over his property, was only one instance in which he was legally right but in which he put himself in the wrong through untactful action.

He belonged to the Democratic party because the individual head of the clan who holds the tribe together, was to him of supreme importance. He came into young manhood when Jefferson was at the height of his fame, and he followed the leader who had added vast territory to the United States, and who represented as well as any American could, the old theory of "the King and the Commons against the rest." The "rest" to Cooper were the middle class, the commercial and the financial oligarchy which depends upon some institution for its strength. That these did not consider themselves as the "middle class" did not disturb Cooper. For their institutional manner of thinking, which had been characteristic of the Federalists and became the guiding principle of the Whigs just before he returned to the United States in 1832, he had no liking. To him, it meant the tyranny of the tribe over the individual, which crushed him under the weight of superficial rules, instead of permitting him to determine his own destiny. Cooper knew English history well and in his novel of *Homeward Bound* he criticized vigorously the oligarchy which ruled England at the time of the American Revolution.

Cooper expressed his philosophy of government both directly and indirectly. In 1828 he included in his *Notions of the Americans, Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, an extremely interesting picture of our system of Government and of our conduct of elections, at that time. The European traveller who gives the excuse for the books in his letters to friends at home represents Cooper's views, of course. His essential democracy is shown in his defence of our system by which Congress represented all strata of the people, and an individual had his chance to win political power if his ability was sufficient. In his *American Democrat* and in his *Gleanings from Europe*, he made his position clear, and in his *Letter to His Countrymen* in June, 1834, he even more vehemently attacked the United States Senate, which had declared Jackson's removal of the deposits unconstitutional.

In *The Crater*, one of his later novels, he drew a picture of a government in which one man ruled over an admiring populace, for their own good. Less directly, but with more artistry, he pictured in a series of novels, written while he was abroad, the advantages of democracy by showing the evils of the opposite philosophy. *The Bravo* portrayed the tyranny of the secret oligarchy of Venice in the fifteenth century. *The Headsman* revealed the cruelty of a small town in Switzerland in the eighteenth century, which required a man to become the public executioner, because it had become an hereditary office in his family. *The Heidenmauer*, laid in the Palatinate at the time of Luther, was a more general attack on the class conflict of the Church, the nobles and the burghers, and is incidentally the weakest of the three.

On his return to the United States, Cooper produced two novels, *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, which illustrated his philosophy of politics in its application to his own country. Through John Effingham, one of the characters, he satirized, especially in the second novel, the commercialized

standards and manner of thinking in New York City. In contrast to Effingham, who came of a good family and had real property, and therefore, to Cooper, was permitted to criticize anyone, New York was the abode of mediocrity. He also attacked the men of letters for their puffery of each other and for their "book clubs" of those days. Cooper became known as "John Effingham" to his enemies from that day forth. One of the most direct consequences of his patrician outlook was the trilogy of novels, *Satanstoe* (1845) *The Chainbearers* (1845), and *The Redskins* (1846). These were written to aid the "patroons" or large landholders in New York State in their fight to retain their estates unbroken, instead of selling them in small units to those who rented their farms from the patroons. Cooper believed that a graphic picture of the hardships endured by the original settlers would sway public opinion in favor of their descendants. The effect of these novels is hard to determine, for the earliest, *Satanstoe*, in which the propaganda is least apparent, is the best, and *The Redskins*, in which Cooper developed his arguments, is almost unreadable.

Not only in those novels in which the very basis is this patrician conception of society, but also in individual characters in others of his narratives, such as Marmaduke Temple in *The Pioneers*, Cooper represented the pride and contentment of the land-holder. A natural consequence, also, is the deep sense of wrong which Oliver Effingham in *The Pioneers* feels concerning the man who, he believes, has robbed him of his inheritance.

Still more indirectly but none the less truly, Cooper's philosophy of leadership affected his greatest characters, Hawkeye, the white hunter, and his Indian braves, Uncas and Chingachgook. Hawkeye is the supreme individual, without a master, except Nature. Uncas and the others are Chieftains—rulers of their tribe, as truly patricians as the

owner of Cooperstown himself, and the summits of a feudal system as complete as his own.

The most immediate effect of his writing upon political conditions came after his return from Europe. He was a notable figure and while most of the attacks upon him by the Whig newspapers of New York State were personal, there can be little doubt that the party of institutions rallied to the defence of the very foundations of their growing financial and commercial supremacy. Certainly the attacks of the *Albany Evening Journal*, the *New York Tribune*, and the *Courier and Enquirer* had a vicious quality which usually springs from a fear that the victim may become the nominee of an opposite party. They persisted until his suits for libel made them cease, somewhat poorer and a bit wiser. Not all the mistakes in this controversy were on one side, for Cooper gave as well as received, but those who think that Dickens exaggerated the sordid quality of the newspapers in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, should read the violent abuse which the Whig journals leveled at Cooper. They make political criticism of today seem mild and tame.

His greatest effect must have come from his novels. His contest against mediocrity and oligarchy must have helped in the fight for democracy as he understood it. In 1834 his novels were translated and published in thirty-four different European and Asiatic cities, and his portrait of American life must have colored and determined the foreign view of the United States and in a larger political sense, must have helped in giving a more correct view of our civilization. For despite his fearless criticisms of our weaknesses, the general effect of his greater novels was to paint a favorable picture of democracy.

Edgar Allan Poe was nominally a Whig, but his interest in party politics was confined largely to his ^{own} successful efforts to obtain a Government position during the administration of

President Tyler. In a letter of his friend, Frederick W. Thomas, written in June, 1841, he said frankly:

My claims, to be sure, are few. I am a Virginian—at least I call myself one, for I have resided all my life until within the last few years, in Richmond. My political principles have always been, as nearly as may be, with the existing administration, and I battled with right goodwill for Harrison, when opportunity offered.

Just how he “battled for Harrison” is not clear. The fragment of a campaign song which has been attributed to him on very slender evidence can hardly refer to Harrison, for it is supposed to have been written in 1843, when Harrison was dead. Poe was interested in public affairs much more definitely than is generally recognized, but his comments, made in his editorial capacity, are concerned usually with a defence of slavery or of some other Southern institution. He made no signal direct contribution to pro-slavery literature but he believed in slavery and mentions the subject in six critical articles and nine times in his tales. Nearly all these references are to the kindly nature of the slaves and their reluctance to be set free.² He disliked the abolitionists extremely and spoke of them as fanatics.

Poe was no democrat. He paid his respects to “the rabblemen” in his first poem *Tamerlane*, and his dislike of democracy is revealed in a satiric fashion in his short story—“Some Words with a Mummy.” An Egyptian mummy has been revived and is being questioned by a group of scientists concerning his opinion of modern ideas:

We then spoke of the great beauty and importance of Democracy, and were at much trouble in impressing the Count with a due sense of the advantages we enjoyed in living where there was suffrage *ad libitum*, and no king.

He listened, with marked interest, and in fact seemed not a little amused. When we had done, he said that, a great while ago, there had occurred something of a very similar sort. Thirteen Egyptian provinces determined all at once to be free, and so set a magnificent example to the rest of mankind. They assembled their wise men, and concocted the

²See his review of R. M. Bird's *Sheppard Lee*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, Sept., 1836.

most ingenious constitution it is possible to conceive. For a while they managed remarkably well; only their habit of bragging was prodigious. The thing ended, however, in the consolidation of the thirteen states, with some fifteen or twenty others, in the most odious and insupportable despotism that ever was heard of upon the face of the Earth.

I asked what was the name of the usurping tyrant.

As well as the Count could recollect it was *Mob*.³

Poe's intensely individual habit of mind and his dislike of the literary oligarchies of New England and New York make his adoption of the party of institutions at first glance, unnatural. But Poe had been brought up in the household of John Allan, his foster father, who belonged to the merchant set of Richmond, rather than to the planter caste. It was the tradition that represented financial integrity and the privileges of property rather than the rights of humanity. In short it was the South of John Marshall and not that of Thomas Jefferson. The preservation of state sovereignty and of slavery was of supreme importance, for upon them rested the commercial prosperity of the South.

Poe's written word had little effect upon politics or events. His violent attacks on the Whig office holders in Philadelphia who, he believed, kept him from office, were confined to letters to his friends, and his satirical remarks on democracy in his fiction could hardly have made any lasting impression.

Hawthorne held political office more frequently than any other of our early men of letters. Through the influence of George Bancroft, Collector of the Port of Boston, he was given the post of Weigher and Gauger in the Boston Custom House from 1839 to 1841, which he lost when the Whigs came into power. From 1846 to 1849 he was Surveyor of the Port of Salem and, finally, when his college mate, Franklin Pierce, became president in 1853, Hawthorne was appointed by him to the Consulate at Liverpool, which he held until

³ *American Review*, April, 1845.

1857. These appointments were made rather through personal friendships than through Hawthorne's service to his party, with one exception. His *Life of Franklin Pierce*, published as a campaign biography, was the most direct result of his party affiliations. In it he did his best, with some obvious difficulty, to emphasize the qualities of leadership or at least personality, which he saw in his old friend. The conventional picture of Franklin Pierce is certainly at variance with the following description written by Hawthorne in Italy in 1859 and included in his *French and Italian Notebooks*:⁴

I see a good deal of General Pierce, and we talk over his presidential life, which, I now really think, he has no latent desire nor purpose to renew. Yet he seems to have enjoyed it while it lasted, and certainly he was in his element as an administrative man; not far-seeing, not possessed of vast stores of political wisdom in advance of his occasions, but endowed with a miraculous intuition of what ought to be done just at the time for action. His judgment of things about him is wonderful, and his Cabinet recognized it as such; for though they were men of great ability, he was evidently the master-mind among them. None of them were particularly his personal friends when he selected them; they all loved him when they parted; and he showed me a letter, signed by all, in which they expressed their feelings of respect and attachment at the close of his administration. There was a noble frankness on his part that kept the atmosphere always clear among them, and in reference to this characteristic, Governor Marcy told him that the years during which he had been connected with his Cabinet had been the happiest of his life.

That Hawthorne's adherence to the party of leadership was not accidental, is shown more than once in his writings. His admiration for Andrew Jackson was keen. In his *Life of Pierce* he described Jackson as "the illustrious man whose military renown was destined to be thrown into the shade by a civil administration, the most splendid and powerful that ever adorned the annals of our country." The most interesting of his political writing, however, is his article "Chiefly About War Matters," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for July, 1862. Here the attitude of the "War Democrat" shows

⁴ On pp. 497-8.

in his fair minded treatment of his theme—too fair minded apparently for the Editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, who made him omit certain passages, notably the description of Abraham Lincoln. This picture of Lincoln was restored in the Riverside Edition of Hawthorne's works.⁵ It is too long for complete reproduction here, but Hawthorne's power of observation is shown in the following passage:

The whole physiognomy is as coarse a one as you would meet anywhere in the length and breadth of the States; but withal, it is redeemed, illuminated, softened, and brightened by a kindly though serious look out of his eyes, and an expression of homely sagacity, that seems weighted with rich results of village experience. A great deal of native sense; no bookish cultivation, no refinement; honest at heart, and thoroughly so, and yet, in some sort, sly,—at least, endowed with a sort of tact and wisdom that are akin to craft, and would impel him, I think, to take an antagonist in flank, rather than to make a bull-run at him right in front. But, on the whole, I like this sallow, queer, sagacious visage, with the homely human sympathies that warmed it; and, for my small share in the matter, would as lief have Uncle Abe for a ruler as any man whom it would have been practicable to put in his place.

Immediately on his entrance the President accosted our member of Congress, who had us in charge, and, with a comical twist of his face, made some jocular remark about the length of his breakfast. He then greeted us all round, not waiting for an introduction, but shaking and squeezing everybody's hand with the utmost cordiality, whether the individual's name was announced to him or not. His manner towards us was wholly without pretence, but yet had a kind of natural dignity, quite sufficient to keep the forwardest of us from clapping him on the shoulder and asking him for a story.

It was certainly Hawthorne's political creed, that of belief in leadership, which prompted this last sentence and also his portrait of General McClellan. One fairly sees the soldier in his few but vivid words. McClellan evidently made a very favorable impression on Hawthorne, for in speaking of the enthusiasm of his soldiers for their commander, he says:

If he is a coward, or a traitor or a humbug, or anything less than a brave, true and able man, that mass of intelligent soldiers whose lives and honor he had in charge, were utterly deceived, and so was this present writer, for they believed in him and so did I.

⁵ Vol. 12, pp. 310-1.

Hawthorne was the only one of the writers with whom this article is concerned who saw McClellan at the head of his soldiers, and his picture is therefore the best.

This essay is interesting for another reason. Except for the Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne's fiction practically never reflects his experiences in the Custom Houses or on the sea, but one of the best passages in this essay is his description of the Union vessels destroyed by the Confederate ram, the Merrimac. After a glowing tribute to the Cumberland, which went down with her flag flying, he continues:

That was a noble fight. When was ever a better word spoken than that of Commodore Smith, the father of the Commander of the *Congress*, when he heard that his son's ship was surrendered? "Then Joe's dead" said he; and so it proved.

Hawthorne's democracy was fundamental. At Bowdoin College, he and Franklin Pierce joined the more democratic of the two literary societies, just as Longfellow belonged to the more conservative. Those who picture him as a recluse forget his excursions into the country, where in the rural taverns he loved to talk to the rustics who made the inn their club. He was quite as much at home there as at the Saturday Club in Boston. His attitude toward the Union was also characteristic. He was devoted to it, but it was to the entire Union, North and South, not to a portion of it.

The most direct effect of Hawthorne's official duties in the Custom Houses upon his fiction was to interrupt it. Only three stories were published during his Boston experience, only one during his surveyorship at Salem and during his Consulate at Liverpool nothing at all. The indirect effect of his strong individualistic philosophy, which led to his adherence to the party of leadership, probably caused his withdrawal from the communistic experiment at Brook Farm and later his satire of the community life in *The Blithedale*

Romance. But of even greater significance is his creation of Hester Prynne, who had defied the bitter tyranny of the small town mind. The supreme creation of our fiction, *The Scarlet Letter*, is a celebration of individual free will.

The effect of this novel, however, or of any of his fiction, upon the course of events must have been of the most indirect nature. The *Life of Pierce*, however, could easily have aided the campaign of his friend, and the *Atlantic* article probably helped to create a better understanding of the "War Democrat" point of view. But the most significant element in the relation of Hawthorne to his political philosophy lies in the fact that alone of the great New Englanders he belonged officially to the party of leadership and equally alone among them he remained content with his political affiliations and uncritical of them.

Emerson was probably the best example of a writer whose basic principles were at variance with his party ties. His active participation in politics was limited to a few speeches in 1851 for J. G. Palfrey, the candidate of the Liberty party for Congress. But he had a decided interest in political affairs, evidenced not only in his essay "Politics," but also in many references in his other *Essays* and in his *Journals*. In "Politics," delivered in his series of lectures in 1839-40, he said:

Of the two great parties which at this hour almost share the nation between them, I should say that one has the best cause, and the other the best men. The philosopher, the poet, or the religious man, will of course wish to cast his vote with the democrat, for free-trade, for wide suffrage, for the abolition of legal cruelties in the penal code, and for facilitating in every manner the access of the young and the poor to the sources of wealth and power. But he can rarely accept the persons whom the so-called popular party propose to him as representatives of these liberalities. They have not at heart the ends which give to the name of democracy what hope and virtue are in it. The spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless: it is not loving; it has no ulterior and divine ends, but is destructive only out of hatred and selfishness. On the other side, the conservative party, composed of the most moder-

ate, able and cultivated part of the population, is timid, and merely defensive of property. It vindicates no right, it aspires to no real good, it brands no crime, it proposes no generous policy; it does not build, nor write, nor cherish the arts, nor foster religion, nor establish schools, nor encourage science, nor emancipate the slave, nor befriend the poor, or the Indian, or the immigrant. From neither party, when in power, has the world any benefit to expect in science, art, or humanity, at all commensurate with the resources of the nation.⁶

This analysis is flavored somewhat by his lack of knowledge of political leaders outside of New England.

When he had to choose between a leader and an institution he preferred the first. "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man," he said in "Self-Reliance," written between 1838 and 1840. Again in "The Conservative," delivered in Boston in 1841, he stated definitely—"It will never make any difference to a hero what the laws are." In his lecture on "The Young American" in 1844 he went as far as any abolitionist in attacking the Union. "At this moment," he said, "the terror of old people and of vicious people is lest the Union be destroyed." He was willing at any time to abandon an institution for a principle.

As we look through his *Journals* for his real thoughts, which he did not always print in his published essays, we find illustrations of his growing discontent with the party of institutions. He objected especially to the attempts at compromise with the pro-slavery elements, North or South.

Ah, thou damnable Half-and-Half! Choose, I pray you between God and the Whig Party, and do not longer strew sugar on this bottled spider.⁷

He resented especially the subservience of the New England representatives in Congress. In 1850 he writes in the *Journal*:

As far as I know, the misfortune of New England is,—that the Southerner always beats us in politics. And for this reason, that it comes at Washington to a game of personalities. The Southerner has personal-

⁶ *Works* (Cent. ed.), *Second Series of Essays*, pp. 209-10.

⁷ *Journals*, vol. 7, p. 126.

ity, has temperament, has manners, persuasion, address and terror. The cold Yankee has wealth, numbers, intellect, material power of all sorts, but has not fire or firmness, and is coated and talked and bantered and shamed and scared till he votes away the dominion of his millions at home!⁸

Again he notes:

The relation of men of thought to society is always the same. They abhor Whiggism, they abhor rebellion. They refuse the necessity of mediocre men, that is, to take sides.⁹

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, September 18, 1850, roused him to fury. His resentment was due quite as much to what he believed to be the cowardice of New England, and especially of Daniel Webster, in supporting the bill, as it was to the immorality of slavery. In the two public addresses Emerson made on the Fugitive Slave Law, one at Concord, May 3, 1851, and one in New York City, March 7, 1854, "on the fourth anniversary of Daniel Webster's speech in favor of the Bill,"¹⁰ he laid great stress on Daniel Webster's support of the Law.

But passing from the ethical to the political view, I wish to place this statute, and we must use the introducer and substantial author of the bill as an illustration of the history. I have as much charity for Mr. Webster, I think, as any one has. I need not say how much I have enjoyed his fame. Who has not helped to praise him? Simply he was the one eminent American of our time, whom we could produce as a finished work of Nature. We delighted in his form and face, in his voice, in his eloquence, in his power of labor, in his concentration, in his large understanding, in his daylight statement, simple force; the facts lay like the strata of a cloud, or like the layers of the crust of the globe. He saw things as they were, and he stated them so. He has been by his clear perceptions and statements in all these years the best head in Congress, and the champion of the interests of the Northern seaboard: but as the activity and growth of slavery began to be offensively felt by his constituents, the senator became less sensitive to these evils. They were not for him to deal with: he was the commercial representative. He indulged occasionally in excellent expression of the known feeling of the New England people: but, when expected and when pledged, he omitted to

⁸ *Journals*, vol. 8, pp. 100-1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, pp. 120-1.

¹⁰ *Miscellanies*, pp. 177-245.

speak, and he omitted to throw himself into the movement in those critical moments when his leadership would have turned the scale. At last, at a fatal hour, this sluggishness accumulated to downright counteraction, and, very unexpectedly to the whole Union, on the 7th March, 1850, in opposition to his education, association, and to all his own most explicit language for thirty years, he crossed the line, and became the head of the slavery party in this country.¹¹

Emerson's regret for Webster's course of action rested upon his basic philosophy, not only in politics but also in history and in life. He loved a great man, especially if he represented the individual's independence of mediocrity. He had remained, not by any means content, in the Whig party, because Webster was *the* great man of New England, and justified Emerson's adherence to it. But when Webster compromised with slavery the idol had fallen, and Emerson was left in a party which he sensed clearly was destined to split apart and decline in power.

Emerson's published criticisms of Webster, which space forbids quoting here any further, are mild compared to those he wrote in his *Journal* in 1851.

I opened a paper today in which he [Webster] pounds on the old strings in a letter to the Washington's Birthday feasters in New York. "Liberty! liberty?" Pho! Let Mr. Webster, for decency's sake, shut his lips once and forever on this word. The word *liberty* in the mouth of Mr. Webster sounds like the word *love* in the mouth of a courtesan.¹²

For the institutions the Whigs represented he had little concern. In his *Journal* for 1851 we find: "The malignity of parties betrays the want of great men. If there were a powerful person to be the Belisarius of Free Soil, he would strike terror into these rich Whigs and these organized vulgarities called the Democracy. The puzzle of currency remains for rich and poor. I never saw a rich man who thought he knew whence the hard times came.

"As for the tariff, that interests only a few rich gentlemen in Boston and Philadelphia."¹³

¹¹ *Miscellanies*, pp. 202-3.

¹² *Journals*, vol. 8, p. 182.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

Emerson's denunciation of Webster was, of course, unfair. Webster honestly believed that the preservation of the Union was more important than the abolition of slavery. Emerson took the opposite ground. In the *Journal* for 1851 we find him attacking the Union.

Nothing seems to me more bitterly futile than this bluster about the Union. . . . We sneak about with the infamy of crime in the streets and cowardice in ourselves, and frankly once for all, the Union is sunk, the flag is hateful, and will be hissed.

The worst mischiefs that could follow from Secession and new combinations of the smallest fragments of the wreck were slight and medicable to the calamity your Union has brought us.¹⁴

During 1852 he still continued to confide in his *Journal* his opinion on party differences. One passage is especially interesting, because it represents his real opinion perhaps more truly than his printed utterances. It is:

Let your elevation make you courteous, else your courtesy is paint and varnish. The Democrats are good-humored—the Whigs are angry because the Democrat has really the safe and broad ground. Let your zeal for freedom proceed from grounds of character and insight and you can afford a courtesy which Websters cannot afford.¹⁵

He was attracted toward the Democracy because he sensed its foundation in leadership—but he did not quite *see* it himself, because he was not acquainted with the Southern leaders, and because the Democratic party in the fifties was beginning to shift its ground and become the party of institutions.

To Emerson, the Union was an institution which kept slavery alive. In his "Speech on Affairs in Kansas" in 1856 he described the Union as "a conspiracy against the Northern states which the Northern states are to have the privilege of paying for."¹⁶ As before it was the repression of individual liberty he deplored.

¹⁴ *Journals*, vol. 8, pp. 185-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹⁶ *Miscellanies*, p. 259.

There is no Union. Can any citizen of Massachusetts travel in honor through Kentucky and Alabama and speak his mind?¹⁷

It was in this same address that Emerson showed his insight into the conditions which were making a contest between the two sections inevitable. He appreciated the dangers which were threatening—and said:

Send home everyone who is abroad, lest they should find no country to return to. Come home and stay at home, while there is a country to save.¹⁸

And in the *Journal* for 1856 he prophesied that South Carolina would attack as soon as she was able to do it.¹⁹

George Bancroft in a review of Holmes' *Life of Emerson* recognized Emerson's farsightedness in political affairs when he said:

Even after the inauguration of Lincoln, several months passed away before his Secretary of State or he himself saw the future so clearly as Emerson had foreshadowed it in 1856.²⁰

In 1862 in his speech delivered in Washington and printed in the *Atlantic Monthly* in April, 1862, as "American Civilization," Emerson pointed out the necessity of Emancipation:

Congress can by edict, as a part of the military defence which it is the duty of Congress to provide, abolish slavery and pay for such slaves as we ought to pay for.

It is interesting to note that Lincoln, in the Emancipation Proclamation, spoke of his action as:

An act of justice, warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity.

Emerson changed naturally his point of view concerning the payment for the slaves. In his "Boston Hymn," read at the meeting in January, 1863, in Boston, to celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation he said:

¹⁷ *Miscellanies*, p. 260.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁹ *Journals*, vol. 9, p. 49.

²⁰ *North American Review*, vol. 140 (February, 1885), p. 142.

Pay ransom to the owner
 And fill the bag to the brim.
 Who is the owner? The slave is owner,
 And ever was. Pay him.

At last, after Lincoln's election, Emerson believed he had found a party to suit him.

The country is cheerful and jocund in the belief that it has a government at last. The men in search of a party, parties in search of a principle, interests and dispositions that could not fuse for want of some base,—all joyfully unite in this great Northern party, on the basis of Freedom.²¹

But by 1862, he is once more critical:

But our politics are petty and expectant. The Government is paralyzed, the army paralyzed. And we are waiters on Providence. Better for us, perhaps, that we should be ruled by slow heads than by bold ones, whilst insight is withheld. Yet one conceives of a head capable of taking in all the elements of this problem, the blockade, the stone fleet, the naval landings, insurrection, English ill-will, French questionability, Texas.²²

Again he was looking for a leader. On the occasion of his visit to Washington in January, 1862, he was taken by Senator Sumner to visit the officers of the government. In his *Journal* is shown his power to bring statesmen and politicians vividly before us. There is a fair and unconventional picture of Lincoln:

A frank, sincere, well-meaning man, with a lawyer's habit of mind, good clear statement of his fact; correct enough, not vulgar, as described, but with a sort of boyish cheerfulness, or that kind of sincerity and jolly good meaning that our class meetings on Commencement Days show, in telling our old stories over. When he has made his remark, he looks up at you with great satisfaction, and shows all his white teeth, and laughs. He argued with Sumner the whole case of Gordon, the slave-trader, point by point, and added that he was not quite satisfied yet, and meant to refresh his memory by looking again at the evidence. All this showed a fidelity and conscientiousness very honourable to him.²³

There is also a more unusual word picture of the interviews with Stanton, Chase, and Seward. Emerson noted especially the way in which one politician maneuvered to

²¹ *Journals*, vol. 9, p. 325.

²² *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 364.

²³ *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 375.

force the other to make the first advances. Seward's complaints of the dilatory actions of Congress, which threw upon the Executive all the responsibility for getting things done, has quite a modern ring. As Emerson proceeds with his account, one cannot fail to be impressed with his acuteness, as he passes from Seward to the White House for a second visit and hears Lincoln's reaction to the messages from France and Spain, congratulating him on the conclusion of the Trent affair. Emerson's tact is also revealed in the following passage:

Governor Andrew [of Massachusetts] had much to say of Mr. Seward. He thought that he surpassed all men in the bold attempt at gasing other people, and pulling wool over their eyes. He thought it very offensive. He might be a donkey,—a good many men are,—but he didn't like to have a man by this practice show that he thought him one. I told him that I had much better impressions of Mr. Seward, but I did not relate to him any conversations.²⁴

Emerson's effect on political thinking of his time must have come quite as much from his public addresses as from his printed essays. Some of them indeed were not printed until 1884 in the *Miscellanies*. When he read the "Boston Hymn," however, the audience felt "an electric thrill," according to good judges like John S. Dwight.²⁵

Of his other poems, "Voluntaries" (1863) and "The Ode Sung in the Town Hall of Concord" (1857) are connected with Emerson's political philosophy only in their celebration of freedom. But that, after all, was his principal concern. His effect must have come from the fact that a great leader of the thought of his day had courage and foresight; even if he could find no party that had a political leader he could follow.

Longfellow's relation to politics presents at first glance a paradox. He was in no sense a politician, and in 1844 he

²⁴ *Journals*, vol. 9, p. 391.

²⁵ See Carl F. Strauch, "The Background of Emerson's Boston Hymn," *Amer. Lit.*, vol. 14 (March 1942), pp. 36-41.

declined Whittier's proposal that he should accept a nomination to Congress on the Liberty Party ticket, saying:

Though a strong anti-slavery man, I am not a member of any society and fight under no single banner.²⁶

Yet one of his poems, dealing with a political issue, had probably more effect and will last longer than any written by his contemporaries.

Longfellow's greatest poems deal with national themes, but they are inspired usually by legend or tradition. His poetry upon local scenes or expressing local feeling like "The Village Blacksmith," was democratic, and his dislike for intolerance caused him to write the *New England Tragedies*. These are treated, however, from a universal point of view. In his *Journal*, he makes comparatively little reference to politics. He mentioned Taylor's election in 1840 in his *Journal* but made no comment and did not mention the election of Pierce in 1852 or of Buchanan in 1856. He voted with the Whigs in state elections on November 12, 1849, but supported Palfrey, the Free Soil Candidate for Congress.

The conventional but quite incorrect picture of Longfellow as "a sweet and gentle singer" makes it necessary to insist that his real nature was one that kindled to leadership. That was the reason why the rioting Harvard students in 1841 refused to talk to any other member of the Faculty, including the President, but sent word they would talk to Professor Longfellow.²⁷ Anyone who has stopped an undergraduate riot, knows that it cannot be controlled by "sweet and gentle singers."

To the cause of abolition, Longfellow contributed his *Poems on Slavery* in 1842. They are not representative of Longfellow at his best, and while there are quotable lines, the poems as a whole seem to have been written from a

²⁶ *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (ed. by Samuel Longfellow), vol. 2, p. 20.

²⁷ Thomas W. Higginson, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Cambridge, 1902), pp. 176-7.

purely descriptive point of view. Yet one of the, "The Witnesses," was republished in the *Leeds' Anti-Slavery Series* in London. Longfellow evidently felt their weakness, for he omitted them in the Collected Edition of his poems, published by Carey and Hart in 1845. In his *Journal* for February 6, 1846, he notes:

The anti-slavery papers attack me for leaving out the "slavery poems" in the illustrated edition. They are rather savage.²⁸

The omission was evidently at the request of the publishers. But in another edition, published in 1846 by Harpers, the poems were restored. It was characteristic of Longfellow that when he was confronted with the choice between the abolition of slavery and the preservation of the Union, he should take the broader and more fundamental view of the situation. On September 22, 1849, he completed "The Building of the Ship." The apostrophe to the Union with which the poem closes is expressed with such magnificent simplicity and inevitability of phrase that it has become itself a standard by which all similar poems must be judged:

Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!
 Sail on, O UNION, strong and great!
 Humanity with all its fears,
 With all the hopes of future years,
 Is hanging breathless on thy fate!
 We know what Master laid thy keel,
 What Workmen wrought thy ribs of steel,
 Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,
 What anvils rang, what hammers beat,
 In what a forge and what a heat
 Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!
 Fear not each sudden sound and shock,
 'Tis of the wave and not the rock;
 'Tis but the flapping of the sail,
 And not a rent made by the gale!
 In spite of rock and tempest's roar,
 In spite of false lights on the shore,
 Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea!
 Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,

²⁸ Samuel Longfellow, *Life*, vol. 2, p. 32.

Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee,—are all with thee.

In Longfellow's *Journal* for February 12, 1850, he notes:

In the evening Mrs. Kemble read before the Mercantile Library Association, to an audience of more than three thousand . . . "The Building of the Ship," standing out upon the platform, book in hand, trembling, palpitating, and weeping, and giving every word its true weight and emphasis. She prefaced the recital by a few words, to this effect: that when she first saw the poem, she desired to read it before a Boston audience; and she hoped she would be able to make every word audible to that great multitude.

The effect which this British actress, carried away herself by the dramatic value of the poem, made upon an American audience is only faintly reflected in Longfellow's words.

One of the most significant tributes to its power was made by Noah Brooks, in an article published in *Scribner's Monthly* for August, 1879, entitled "Lincoln's Imagination." Brooks described his reading of the poem to Lincoln early in the sixties, and the deep impression it made upon the President. "He did not speak for some minutes, but finally said, with simplicity; 'It is a wonderful gift to be able to stir men like that.' "

Certainly it is hard to overestimate the importance of the share Longfellow played in the building up of an imaginative picture of the Union. He was generally recognized as the foremost poet of the nation, and to millions of people the word went forth that in spite of doubts and dangers he had not despaired of the Republic. Moreover, his influence helped in another way. Historians have often remarked how strange it was that in the Civil War the common people of Great Britain sympathized with the Union. We know how widespread was the distribution of Longfellow's poetry in England. The late Professor Grosvenor of Amherst related the tribute of a British editor who remarked to him, "A stranger can hardly have an idea how familiar many of our

working people are with Longfellow. Thousands can repeat his poems who have never read a line of Tennyson and probably never heard of Browning."²⁹ Can anyone doubt that the apostrophe to the Union was among the poems that Englishmen learned by heart, coming as it did at the end of a poem about the sea?

In January, 1864, Bryant was asked by the Committee in charge of the Long Island Sanitary Fair to contribute verses which would appeal to the hearts of those who had suffered in the war. Instead of sending anything of his own he copied a portion of Longfellow's poem, saying: "I can think of nothing more pertinent to this occasion than the thought expressed in the noble lines of Longfellow." The energetic Chairman sent a copy of this letter to Longfellow, asking him to contribute some lines of Bryant. Longfellow's reply is extremely interesting:

Dear Madam,

It is certainly a very graceful compliment which Mr. Bryant has paid me, and which you are kind enough to send me. I should like to send you a stanza from one of his poems in return, but it would look like a parody upon his idea, and parodies always take away the grace of the original.

I therefore send you a stanza which will rhyme better with your other pieces, than the one first sent.

He then added the concluding stanza of his poem, "The Cumberland":

Ho! brave hearts that went down in the seas!
 Ye are at peace in the troubled stream;
 Ho! brave land! with hearts like these,
 Thy flag that is rent in twain
 Shall be one again,
 And without a seam!

The permanent quality of "The Building of the Ship" has recently been recognized by its inclusion in a message from President Roosevelt to Prime Minister Churchill.

²⁹ Quoted by Higginson, *Life*, p. 3.

The effect of this poem upon Lincoln was not, however, the only instance of Longfellow's influence upon him. At the conclusion of Lincoln's special message to Congress, July 4, 1861, he said:

And having thus chosen our course, without guile and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear and with manly hearts.

He must have remembered the passage in Longfellow's *Hyperion*, translated by Longfellow from a tablet he had seen at San Gilgen:

Look not mournfully into the Past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the Present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the Shadowy Future, without fear and with a manly heart.

As the Civil War drew near, Longfellow makes occasional reference to the question of approaching trouble. On May 18, 1860, he notes in his *Journal* Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency without comment. But on December 3, he wrote:

I hope the North will stand firm, and not bate a jot of its manhood. Secession of the North from freedom would be tenfold worse than secession of the South from the Union.⁸⁰

Whittier was the most definitely of all the New England group, a practical politician, and was keenly ambitious for political office at the beginning of his career. He wished to go to Congress, and we find him, according to a letter, written by him to his friend Edwin Harriman, probably in August, 1832, advocating a postponing of the Congressional election in the North Essex district, by playing off the two opposing forces in the Whig party, until after the November trial. The reason for this effort lay in the fact that Whittier was not then twenty-five years old and would not reach that age until December 17, 1832. He hoped to slip in as a compromise candidate.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Samuel Longfellow, *Life*, vol. 2, pp. 353, 358-9.

⁸¹ Samuel T. Pickard, *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston, 1894), vol. 1, pp. 167-8.

His sacrifice in joining the cause of Abolition was all the greater because it shut the doors of a national political opportunity against him. He was elected twice to the State Legislature of Massachusetts, but he declined the second election on account of his health.

Whittier left the Whigs and helped to found the Liberty party. He realized that such a party would have little success at first and he led his followers to support a Whig, Caleb Cushing, in the northern district of Essex, because he leaned toward the cause of abolition, while he helped to elect a Democrat, Robert Rantoul, Jr., in the southern district, for a similar reason.³² The political instincts of his youth led him to separate from Abolitionists like Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, who believed that politics should be avoided and that the moral sense of the community should be aroused. Whittier went on, year after year, helping to elect members of the lower legislative bodies, who in their turn could affect Congress, until the time should come when an Abolitionist might be elected to the Senate or the House of Representatives.

Whittier left the Whig party because he was not happy in the party of institutions. His natural instinct was for leadership, but he could not join the Democrats for they meant to him the preservation of slavery. He attacked the Union because he believed that institution was keeping slavery alive. In 1842, in a letter to his friend Sewall, he said, "If Texas is to be added to us—let us say 'Disunion before Texas,' " and his poem "Texas," in 1844, read in its first form:

Make our Union band a chain!
We will snap its links in twain,
We will stand erect again.

Useful as Whittier's efforts in the political field may have been, his best service to his party lay in his poetry. Some of

³² S. T. Pickard, *Whittier as a Politician* (1900), pp. 2-3.

his most effective verse was written with the object of forcing the leaders of the Whig party to take a stand against slavery instead of dodging the issue. "Ichabod," his attack on Webster for his support of compromise, ranks with Browning's "The Lost Leader" in its lament for the great man

who might
Have lighted up and led his age.

but failed to do it. Like Emerson, Whittier's bitter attack on Webster was prompted by his belief that the great Whig leader of New England was a renegade to the cause of humanity. Years later, Whittier, in his poem "The Lost Occasion," paid a sincere tribute to Webster, realizing that he knew better than Whittier what was best for national unity. But mistaken as it was, "Ichabod" is the finer poem, from the point of view of emotional appeal. It sprang from Whittier's instinctive love for leadership. All through life he was constantly writing verse tributes to those he wished to honor. In his *Complete Works*, his "Personal Poems," written to individuals, number sixty-four, and not to insist too strongly on the political theory of this paper, his last tribute was to Samuel J. Tilden, a Democrat.

Whittier's poetic appeal was not only to the Whig politicians, but also to the conscience of New England, to shake off the apathy which bound them through financial and commercial connections with the South. His prose articles like "Justice and Expediency" with its statistical proof that slavery did not pay, could be disregarded, but when the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, and Whittier rose to his greatest height in "Massachusetts to Virginia," the ringing appeal swept through the North and insisted on being heard:

And sandy Barnstable rose up, wet with the salt sea spray;
And Bristol sent her answering shout down Narragansett Bay!
Along the broad Connecticut old Hampton felt the thrill,
And the cheer of Hampshire's woodmen swept down from Holyoke Hill.

The voice of Massachusetts! Of her free sons and daughters,
 Deep calling unto deep aloud, the sound of many waters!
 Against the burden of that voice what tyrant power shall stand?
 No fetters in the Bay State! No slave upon her land!

Since the Civil War was against his principles as a member of the Society of Friends, his verse was turned into other channels, or when as in "Barbara Frietchie" he did celebrate an imaginary incident of the war, the interest is not political. When slavery was abolished, his stirring verses, "Laus Deo," show where his heart always lay.

When the Free Soil party merged, with other elements, into the Republican party, he naturally joined it, and as a Presidential Elector he voted for Lincoln both in 1860 and 1864. But his political activity lessened in his later years, and as one of his best biographers has put it:

Too old to change his vote when the reaction against the Republicans set in, he yet felt the force of the counter movement and respected its best motives. Long a partisan, he became in his later years a lover of the right irrespective of party, a friend of freedom and truth and honest dealing under any name.³³

Oliver Wendell Holmes took practically no share in party politics. His position with regard to the reform causes of the day is given clearly in a letter he wrote in 1846 to Lowell, who had urged him to take a more active share in them. Dr. Holmes stated with his usual clarity, that he was not opposed to the War with Mexico, although he thought it "a poor quarrel"; that he regretted a stanza in his Phi Beta Kappa Poem, which apparently reflected upon the Abolitionists, but he expressed no interest in the anti-slavery campaign:

I believe [he said], that at present you and I cannot prevent the existence of slavery. But the catastrophe of disunion I believe we can prevent, and thus avert a future of war and bloodshed which is equally frightful to both of us in contemplation. Can you trust me that I really *believe* this, or do you confine all honest faith and intelligent judgment to those who think with you? *Mind this one thing*,—I give these as reasons

³³ George R. Carpenter, *John Greenleaf Whittier* (Cambridge, 1903), p. 259.

why I did not feel specially called upon to introduce the subject of slavery in preference to many others, but I am glad there are always eloquent men to keep the moral sense of the world alive on the subject. I thought disunion the most vital matter at present.³⁴

That Dr. Holmes did not refrain entirely from comment on political personages, a poem "The Statesman's Secret"³⁵ read by him at a meeting of the Mercantile Library Association of Boston in November, 1855, is evidence. It formed a portion of a longer poem, "Each Heart Hath Its Own Secret," and it dealt with types of humanity who cherish a secret love or ambition. The "statesman" was unquestionably Webster, who is pictured as having a "fatal dream" of a throne. Dr. Holmes then proceeds:

Ah, fatal dream! What warning spectres meet
 In ghastly circle round its shadowy seat!
 Yet still the Tempter murmurs in his ear
 The maddening taunt he cannot choose but hear:
 "Meanest of slaves; by gods and men accurst,
 He who is second when he might be first!
 Climb with bold front the ladder's topmost round,
 Or chain thy creeping footsteps to the ground!"
 Illustrious Dupe! Have those majestic eyes
 Lost their proud fire for such a vulgar prize?
 Art thou the last of all mankind to know
 That party-fights are won by aiming low?
 Thou, stamped by Nature with her royal sign,
 That party-hirelings hate a look like thine?
 Shake from thy sense the wild delusive dream!
 Without the purple, art thou not supreme?
 And soothed by love unbought, thy heart shall own
 A nation's homage nobler than its throne!³⁶

Dr. Holmes recognized apparently that the party of institutions had no wish to nominate a man as great as Webster. How much wiser was his judgment of Webster than that of Whittier or Emerson is seen in his poem on the "Birthday of Daniel Webster, January 18, 1856." There is here no criti-

³⁴ J. T. Morse, Jr., *Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Cambridge, 1896), vol. 1, pp. 300-1.

³⁵ Originally called "The Disappointed Statesman."

³⁶ *Poetical Works* (Boston, 1893), vol. 3, p. 224.

cism of Webster for his compromise with the South; it is an elegy upon a great man, and the closing stanza may have been prompted by the attacks made upon the statesman:

In vain the envious tongue upbraids,
His name a nation's heart shall keep
Till morning's latest sunlight fades
On the blue tablet of the deep.³⁷

When the Civil War came, Dr. Holmes became one of the most prolific of poets, twenty-four poems at least being written by him. Several were hymns, like "The Army Hymn" or "Union and Liberty," which seem not to have caught the fancy of those for whom they were written. His verses were patriotic rather than political. "The Voice of the Loyal North," read at his class dinner January 3, 1861, has some striking phrases, like:

God help them if the tempest swings
The pine against the palm.

but the total effect is hardly distinguished. The best of his poems dealing with the war are the noble memorial verses "To John and Robert Ware," and the most interesting in some ways is his satire "The Sweet Little Man, Dedicated to Our Stay-at-Home Rangers."

In October, 1861, at a time when disappointment over the first battle of Bull Run was keen, Dr. Holmes published in the *Atlantic Monthly* "The Wormwood Cordial of History," an article which has not been reprinted in his *Collected Works*. It has, however, a special interest because of its emphasis upon the necessity of a strong executive in time of war, and the belief that a sudden successful attack by the enemy at the beginning of a war may be on the whole a good thing to unify the nation. His remark that "a ship of the line costs as much as a college, but we are finding out that the masts are a part of the fence around the college," has a certain pertinence also.

³⁷ *Poetical Works*, vol. 1, p. 246.

On July 4, 1863, Dr. Holmes delivered an *Oration before the City Authorities of Boston* which was printed as a pamphlet in 1863 and reprinted as "The Inevitable Trial" in *Pages from an Old Volume of Life*. It is political in the larger sense, for it is an eloquent plea for the Union, at a time of discouragement. His main thesis was that the war was inevitable, but he erred in believing that slavery was the main cause, rather than the preservation of the Union.

Dr. Holmes' general political philosophy, that of the party of institutions, is shown in his statement that "if any institution or statute is a violation of the sovereign law of God," it is to be expected that those who believe it is wrong will try to get rid of it. His criticism of the South rested on his opinion that "They breed a superior order of men for leaders, an ignorant commonalty ready to follow them as vassals of feudal times follow their lords . . . and a race of bondsmen." This would imply that the party of leadership had no attraction for him. Yet later on in the address he said, "We want the virile energy of determination which made the oath of Andrew Jackson sound so like the devotion of an ardent saint that the recording angel might have entered it unquestioned among the prayers of the faithful." The climax of the address is a bugle call to those who "are frightened by the money we have spent," to the timid and the neutral to forget their fears and "in the name of outraged honor, in the interest of violated sovereignty, for the life of an imperilled nation, for the sake of men everywhere and of our common humanity, for the glory of God, to stand by their country through good and through evil report until victory comes."

While Dr. Holmes was speaking these words, which might almost be an utterance of today, the great victories of Gettysburg and Vicksburg were being won.

These two prose utterances and the shrewd observations

concerning political events which he included in his letters written during the sixties to John Lothrop Motley, prove that Dr. Holmes might have taken a more prominent part in political expression during the forties and fifties had he chosen to do so. But his energies were then turned in other directions; in his attack on what he thought to be outworn theological doctrines, or in his attempted reforms in medical practice. In these efforts he felt he was of more service, and perhaps he was right.

Lowell was an independent in politics, especially at the beginning and at the close of his career. His interest in politics was constant and keen. But he declined to run for office, although he accepted diplomatic appointments at the hands of President Hayes, to the Spanish and to the English missions. He also served as a Presidential Elector on the Hayes ticket in 1876.

Lowell's interest in politics resulted in more published contributions to literature than were produced by any other of the writers who have been treated in this discussion. In the edition of his works, which he supervised in 1890, there are fifteen essays or addresses classed as "Political." Both series of the *Biglow Papers*, twenty in all, had their inspiration in politics, local or national, and five other poems dealt with the Civil War. He also reprinted in this edition twenty-six poems, originally dealing with slavery, which at the time the verses were written was a political issue. In their revised form several of these no longer refer to slavery but deal with freedom in general. Lowell did not include in his authorized edition fifty-five prose articles published in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* or the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Yet they contain some of his most brilliant political satire. These have fortunately been reprinted.³⁸ He also omitted four of his essays printed in the *Atlantic Monthly* or the *North*

³⁸ *The Anti-Slavery Papers of James Russell Lowell* (Boston, 1902).

American Review, as well as minor editorials. Finally, there are nineteen poems, published originally in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, which have not been reprinted, and four articles in the *London Daily News*, written in 1846. Altogether there are seventy-four poems and seventy-eight prose articles which owed their inspiration to his interest in political and public affairs.³⁹

In 1843 Lowell wrote to G. B. Loring:

As for the two great parties which divide this country, I for one dare to say that democracy does belong to neither of them . . . so I care not which whips. . . . The Abolitionists are the only ones with whom I sympathize of the present extant parties.⁴⁰

Lowell's interest in the Abolition movement became definite after his engagement to an ardent anti-slavery champion, Maria White, in 1840. In 1844 he was a delegate to the New England Anti-Slavery Convention and after his marriage in December, 1844, he became a contributor to the *Pennsylvania Freeman* and the *Anti-Slavery Standard*. Lowell threw himself heart and soul into the movement, but it remains a distinct stratum in his career and it was his perennial interest in the cause of freedom of all kinds that led him into the anti-slavery ranks. This is illustrated by one of his greatest poems, "The Present Crisis," published in the *Boston Courier*, December 11, 1845. While the slave is referred to clearly, the attack is upon slavery everywhere and the climax of the poem could refer to any situation, even one of today.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife with Truth and Falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light.

³⁹ For the *Daily News* articles, see Horace E. Scudder, *James Russell Lowell* (Boston, 1901), vol. 1, pp. 186-9.

⁴⁰ *Letters of James Russell Lowell* (C. E. Norton, ed.), vol. 1, p. 43.

Hast thou chosen, O my people, on whose party thou shalt stand,
 Ere the doom from its worn sandals shakes the dust against our land?
 Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet 't is Truth alone is strong,
 And, albeit she wander outcast now, I see around her throng
 Troops of beautiful, tall angels, to enshield her from all wrong.

Backward look across the ages and the beacon-moments see,
 That, like peaks of some sunk continent, jut through Oblivion's sea;
 Not an ear in court or market for the low foreboding cry
 Of those Crises, God's stern winnowers, from whose feet earth's chaff must
 fly;
 Never shows the choice momentous till the judgment hath passed by.

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record
 One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word;
 Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—
 Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
 Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

It is the universal quality which lifts this and other poems of Lowell far above the average literary utterance of the abolitionists. It is also the reason why the first of the *Biglow Papers*, published in the *Boston Courier*, June 17, 1846, with its stirring appeal to the conscience of New England, still needs no annotation:

Massachusetts, God forgive her,
 She's akneelin' with the rest,
 She thet ough' to ha' clung forever
 In her grand old eagle-nest;
 She thet ough' to stand so fearless
 W'ile the wracks are round her hurled,
 Holdin' up a beacon peerless
 To the oppressed of all the world!

Almost as good are the third paper, "What Mr. Robinson Thinks," with its catchy refrain; the fifth, "The Debate in the Sennit," voicing Lowell's indignation at the attitude of John C. Calhoun toward the Northern Senators; and the seventh, "A Letter from a Candidate for the Presidency," published in June, 1848, which includes

Ez to my princerples, I glory
 In hevin' nothin o' the sort;
 I aint a Wig, I aint a Tory,
 I'm just a canderdate, in short. . . .

This gives you a safe pint to rest on,
An' leaves me frontin' South by North.

The remaining papers of the First Series fail to be as convincing as they were at the time of their publication. The "Birdofredom Sawin" verses need too much explaining in their local allusions. The significance of the *Biglow Papers* lay in their turning the tables on those who had tried to laugh the abolitionists out of court. Frequently their vehemence had made them fit subjects to cause a smile, but Lowell turned his satiric blasts on that part of the Whig party which truckled to the slave power, and made it ridiculous. The First Series of the *Biglow Papers* also contained Lowell's most definite statements concerning the dissolution of the Union. He had made a guarded reference to it in his poem "On the Captures of Certain Fugitive Slaves near Washington" in July, 1845, but in the *Biglow Papers* the first paper ended:

Ef I'd *my* way I hed ruther
We should go to work an' part,
They take one way, we take t'other,
Guess it wouldn't break my heart;
Man hed ough' to put asunder
Them that God has noways jined;
An' I shouldn't gretly wonder
Ef there's thousands o' my mind.

Lowell, however, was never as rabid an abolitionist as Whittier and in a letter to C. F. Briggs in 1848 he said:

I do not agree with the abolitionists in their dis-union and non-voting theories.⁴¹

Of the other poems of the forties, the "Stanzas on Freedom," closes with the lines:

They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.

Sometimes as in the "Ode to France," ostensibly dealing with the revolution in that country in 1848, there are clear

⁴¹ *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, vol. 1, p. 173.

connotations of Lowell's anti-slavery feeling. Who can doubt that such lines as

They trampled Peace between their savage feet,
And by her golden tresses drew
Mercy along the pavement of the street.

referred to the dragging of Lloyd Garrison along the streets of Boston in 1835?

In a letter to S. H. Gay in June, 1846, Lowell wrote "I had rather give the cause one good poem than one thousand indifferent prose articles." But for our purpose his prose is quite as significant as his verse for it reveals his political philosophy more directly. His traditions led him to the Whigs, but his instincts turned him in the direction of the party of leadership. Consequently, his keenest shafts were directed against the cowardice, as he described it, of the Whig party in not taking a firm stand on slavery. In his article on the annexation of Texas he said:

If the Whig party had gone into the contest as sincerely opposed to the annexation of Texas as the mass of the Democrats were in favor of it, we have no doubt the result of the presidential election would have been reversed. But a large majority of the Whig party are not, and cannot well ever be, very ardent haters of the slave system. Embracing as it does, the large capitalists and monopolists of the North, who feel a natural sympathy with the monopolists of the South, it is not to be expected that the Whig party can take a very decided or honest anti-slavery stand. It is not money or railroads or factories that the Northern monopolist usurps; he lays his selfish hands upon human freedom like his brother at the South, and hence a feeling of unavoidable sympathy between them. The system of labor and of its reward at the North we sincerely believe to be but little better than that at the South.⁴²

Like Emerson and Whittier he looked for leadership to Daniel Webster and he was disappointed. In his article on Webster⁴³ he asked "How far might not that trumpet voice have reached, in behalf of the oppressed, from the com-

⁴² "Texas," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, January 30, 1845. Rep. in *Anti-Slavery Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 9-10.

⁴³ "Daniel Webster," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, July 2, 1846. Rep. in *Anti-Slavery Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 35-43.

manding position conceded to his powerful intellect! . . . Shall not the Recording Angel write *Ichabod* after the name of this man in the great book of doom?" It is an interesting fact that Lowell used in 1846 the title of one of Whittier's finest poems, written in 1850. And later in his article "What Will Mr. Webster Do?"⁴⁴ Lowell said:

We cannot find that Mr. Webster has communicated an impulse to any of the great ideas which it is the destiny of the nineteenth century to incarnate in action. His energies have been absorbed by Tariff and Constitution and Party—dry bones into which the touch of no prophet could send life. Party could hardly take up the whole of a great mind so that nothing would be left over for humanity. . . . The people are fast awakening to great principles: what they want is a great man to concentrate and intensify their diffuse enthusiasm.

Lowell was naturally disheartened when the Whig party nominated General Zachary Taylor. He had expressed himself vigorously on May 11, 1848,⁴⁵ concerning the policy of nominating men who had no known opinions. His cleverness was shown in the same article when he spoke of the only Whig candidates who won the Presidency:

General Harrison, it is understood, was surrounded by a *cordon sanitaire* of a committee. No prisoner in Spielberg was ever more cautiously deprived of the use of writing materials.

General Taylor's claims may be very shortly summed up. He is a general, a slaveholder and nobody knows what his opinions are.

After Taylor had received the nomination of the Whigs, Lowell expressed himself even more vigorously, in "The Nominations for the Presidency":

General Taylor must certainly have been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. That he is possessed of every good quality is at once quietly taken for granted. His partisans work as strange miracles about him as Mephistopheles did with his gimlet in Auerbach's cellar. The guests had but to call for white wine or red, and a few twirls of the gimlet into the wainscot would set the desired liquor abroach. In the same way one needs only to inquire for any desirable quality of intellect or character

⁴⁴ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, July 13, 1848. Rep. in *Anti-Slavery Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 108-15.

⁴⁵ "Presidential Candidates," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 11, 1848. Rep. in *Anti-Slavery Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 60-1.

and a turn or two of the political augurs indicates at once its hitherto unsuspected existence in General Taylor. One can hardly conceive of so many and so great virtues combined except in an epitaph or an obituary. It may safely be conceded that so perfect a character could never have been formed except under the fostering influence of slavery. In comparison with the General, Cerberus hides his diminished heads and acknowledges himself outdone in a walk which has hitherto been considered peculiarly his own. Taylor must be a great many more than three gentlemen at once.⁴⁶

Lowell's political sagacity was shown in his article "The Course of the Whigs." The party was jubilant over its victory, but Lowell knew better. "We think the Whig Party has over-reached itself," he wrote. "It has gained a momentary advantage at the cost of its existence."⁴⁷ His prophecy came true—no Whig again crossed the threshold of the White House. In this same article Lowell said: "The Whigs have no positive principle to give them coherence," and he might have added, no institution to defend. Consequently Lowell voted in 1850 for a "Union Ticket (half free-soil, half Democrat)," in order to overthrow "the Whig domination."⁴⁸

When the Republican party was born, Lowell greeted it with enthusiasm, for he believed it was founded upon the principle of Free Soil. He used the *Atlantic Monthly*, of which he became editor in 1857, as a vehicle for the attack upon Buchanan's administration for its lack of vigor. The quality which lifts Lowell's political writings above the thousands which have been forgotten, is illustrated in this article, "Mr. Buchanan's Administration," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for April, 1858. It was begun by Parke Godwin, but as we pass to the portion written by Lowell⁴⁹ there is an increase in the vigor, and one feels an imagination

⁴⁶ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 22, 1848. Rep. in *Anti-Slavery Papers*, vol. 1, p. 95.

⁴⁷ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Jan. 11, 1849. Rep. *Anti-Slavery Papers*, vol. 2, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Letter to S. A. Gay. *Letters of Lowell* (Norton ed.), vol. 1, p. 253.

⁴⁹ Lowell's portion begins in the middle of the first column, p. 754. It was not reprinted.

playing upon facts which is absent in the earlier portion of the article.

"The Election in November," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in October, 1860, illustrates Lowell's power of analysis of the relative positions of the parties from his point of view. While the writing is at times brilliant, this essay also reveals Lowell's temporary lack of foresight, which he shared incidentally with a large majority of his fellow citizens. It seems strange to read today some of his statements:

We do not see how the particular right of whose infringement we hear so much, is to be made safer by the election of Mr. Bell, Mr. Breckenridge, or Mr. Douglas, there being quite as little chance that any of them would abolish human nature as that Mr. Lincoln would abolish slavery.

Or again:

The object of the Republican party is not the abolition of slavery, but the utter extirpation of dogmas which are the logical sequence of attempts to establish its righteousness and wisdom.⁵⁰

"E Pluribus Unum," appearing in the *Atlantic* for February, 1861, is an able exposition of the opinions of those who believed in a strong central government. Lowell was coming out of the slavery dispute into the broader field of Union and disunion. "Slavery," he says, "is no longer the matter in debate, and we must beware of being led off upon that side-issue."⁵¹

When Lowell transferred his editorial interest to the *North American Review* in January, 1864, he published an estimate of Lincoln in "The President's Policy," which appears now in the *Political Essays* as "Abraham Lincoln," with a short addition written after Lincoln's death. Lowell's estimate of Lincoln was fair and just:

Mr. Lincoln's task was one of peculiar and exceptional difficulty. Long habit had accustomed the American people to the notion of a party in power, and of a President as its creature and organ, while the more vital fact, that the executive for the time being represents the abstract idea

⁵⁰ *Works* (Riverside ed.), vol. 5, pp. 30 and 42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

of government as a permanent principle superior to all party and all private interest, had gradually become unfamiliar. They had so long seen the public policy more or less directed by views of party, and often even of personal advantage, as to be ready to suspect the motives of a chief magistrate compelled, for the first time in our history, to feel himself the head and hand of a great nation⁵²

Lowell realized that what was needed to preserve the Union was a great leader. The essay is studded with quotable passages, such as:

The cautious, but steady, advance of his policy during the war was like that of a Roman army. He left behind him a firm road on which public confidence could follow; he took America with him where he went; what he gained he occupied, and his advanced posts became colonies. . . .

The imputation of inconsistency is one to which every sound politician and every honest thinker must sooner or later subject himself. The foolish and the dead alone never change their opinion.⁵³

The final passage was an eloquent tribute, to be outdone only by Lowell's own poetic portrait of Lincoln in the "Harvard Commemoration Ode."

Lowell's political essays are always best when he is dealing with a large issue, as in this essay, or in "The Rebellion," published in the *North American Review* for July, 1864. But in the articles on strictly political issues of the moment, like "General McClellan's Report," or "McClellan and Lincoln," he shows definite partisan bias and is quite unfair to the ablest general the North possessed. It is startling, to say the least, in view of the judgment of history, to read that McClellan was acting for political motives while Stanton was incapable of doing such a thing! In "Reconstruction," published in April, 1865, Lowell mingles curious ideas concerning confiscation of Southern property with broad-minded statements:

We should remember that it is our country which we have regained, and not merely a rebellious faction which we have subdued.⁵⁴

⁵² *Works*, vol. 5, pp. 184-5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 195, 196.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

He had ideal views of the negro—his principles were correct enough but unfortunately many of his hopeful prophecies read now very sadly. He says:

The only way to fit men for freedom is to make them free; the only way to teach them how to use political power is to give it to them.⁵⁵

He argues for suffrage being given to the blacks, partly for abstract reasons, partly to secure political supremacy.

The papers on Reconstruction fall below Lowell's high standard, being too greatly colored by his party feeling. So are those devoted to Andrew Johnson, whose patriotic efforts to carry out Lincoln's policies were not appreciated by Lowell at that time. The last of his articles to deal directly with the Civil War was "A Look Before and After,"⁵⁶ in which he does not hesitate to repeat some passages which had appeared in the essay on Lincoln. Once again the difference in the style is noticeable when his portion of the essay is reached.

Lowell's poetry during the Civil War dealt generally with national rather than sectional themes. He revived Hosea Biglow and in February, 1862, appeared "Mason and Slidell, a Yankee Idyll," the best of the *Second Series*. The seizure by Captain Wilkes, commander of the *San Jacinto*, of Mason and Slidell, two Confederate envoys, from the British mail steam *Trent* in October, 1861, had caused great excitement in both countries. The British Government demanded immediate return of the envoys, although they had been informed by their highest legal authority that their position was untenable, in view of their own conduct through many years. Lincoln gave the envoys back, obviously not wishing a war with England. Lowell voiced the general indignation in the biting phrases with which he characterized the British policy. There is a little too much introduction,

⁵⁵ *Works*, vol. 5, p. 230.

⁵⁶ *North American Review*, January, 1869. The portion from p. 260 is by Lowell. See George W. Cooke, *Bibliography of James Russell Lowell* (Boston, 1906), p. 35.

but when "Jonathan to John" finally begins, the spirit of the nation seems to be speaking through the words. Four of the fourteen stanzas will illustrate how the poems rises into prophecy at the close:

We give the critters back, John,
 Cos Abram thought 't was right;
 It warn't your bullyin' clack, John,
 Provokin' us to fight.
 Ole Uncle S. sez he, "I guess
 We've a hard row," sez he,
 "To hoe jest now; but thet somehow,
 May happen to J. B.,
 Ez wal ez you an' me!"

We know we've got a cause, John,
 Thet's honest, just, an' true;
 We thought 't would win applause, John,
 Ef nowheres else, from you.
 Ole Uncle S. sez he, "I guess
 His love of right," sez he,
 "Hangs by a rotten fibre o' cotton:
 There's natur' in J. B.,
 Ez wal'z in you an' me!"

Shall it be love, or hate, John?
 It's you thet's to decide;
 Ain't *your* bonds held by Fate, John,
 Like all the world's beside?
 Ole Uncle S. sez he, "I guess
 Wise men forgive," sez he,
 "But not forgit; an' some time yit
 Thet truth may strike J. B.,
 Ez wal ez you an' me!"

God means to make this land, John,
 Clear thru, from sea to sea,
 Believe an' understand, John,
 The *wuth* o' bein' free.
 Ole Uncle S. sez he, "I guess
 God's price is high," sez he;
 "But nothin' else than wut He sells
 Wears long, an' thet J. B.
 May larn, like you an' me!"

Nearly all of the remaining *Biglow Papers* are now hard reading, being grotesque in too ridiculous a fashion. The sixth

paper, "Suthin in the Pastoral Line," which reveals again Lowell's interest in nature is much better than his "Jeff Davis in Secret Session." "The Latest Views of Mr. Biglow," published in February, 1863, urges the necessity of action, and Andrew Jackson is held up as the model who would have *done* things. Outside of the *Biglow Papers*, Lowell wrote only a few poems which he classified as referring to the Civil War. "Memoriae Positum," on the death of Robert Gould Shaw, is a noble ode. But the greatest poetic utterance of Lowell, the "Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration," delivered July 21, 1865, rises above politics. The magnificent tribute to Lincoln, which was added after the poem was read, remains still the best interpretation of the character of the great leader.

After the Civil War Lowell grew restive at the elements that controlled the Republican party. As a delegate to the National Convention in 1876 he helped to defeat Blaine for the nomination and he presided at a meeting to purge the party of the corruption of the Grant regime. He declined, however, the offer of a nomination for Congress in the same year, although he was told that he was the only candidate with whom the Republicans could carry the district.⁵⁷ In a letter to Mrs. Charles Russell Lowell on September 16, 1876, he tells her:

I am doing what I can in a quiet way to secure a good man, and if we fail in this, I shall vote for the present member, a Democrat to be sure, but a very respectable and intelligent man.⁵⁸

His acceptance of the post of Presidential Elector on the Hayes Ticket placed him in a position in which he might have changed history. It is now generally recognized that Tilden was elected. He received at least two hundred and three electoral votes to one hundred and sixty-six for Hayes,

⁵⁷ Letter to C. E. Norton, August 21, 1876, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 403.

⁵⁸ *New Letters of James Russell Lowell* (M. A. DeWolfe Howe, ed. 1932), p. 220.

and had a popular plurality of two hundred and fifty thousand. But the canvassing boards in the states of Florida, South Carolina and Louisiana manipulated the votes and returned majorities for Hayes. Ultimately the Electoral Commission decided by a strict party vote of eight to seven that Tilden had received one hundred and eighty-four votes and Hayes one hundred and eighty-five. The Electors are not bound by the Constitution to vote for the party's choice, and Lowell was appealed to by those who believed Tilden had been elected, to vote for him. His own words explain why he did not do so:

There was a rumor, it seems, that I was going to vote for Tilden. But, in my own judgment, I have no choice, and am bound in honor to vote for Hayes, as the people who chose me expected me to do. They did not choose me because they had confidence in my judgment, but because they thought they knew what that judgment would be. If I had told them that I should vote for Tilden, they would never have nominated me. It is a plain question of trust. The provoking part of it is that I tried to escape nomination all I could, and only did not decline because I thought it would be making too much fuss over a trifle.⁶⁹

During his term as Ambassador to Great Britain he made an address on "Democracy," the occasion being his inaugural address on assuming the Presidency of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, On October 6, 1884. This address still remains one of the fundamental expressions of the best kind of American political philosophy. He was explaining to a foreign country the real meaning of our democracy as a liberal understood it. He showed how the dire prophecies of those who opposed the abolition of property qualifications for voting in Massachusetts had come to nothing, and then proceeded to analyze the inevitable growth of a broader understanding, on the part of the privileged classes, of the rights of the common man. The address is studded with some of his best epigrams:

⁶⁹ *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 408-9.

Formerly the immense majority of men—our brothers—knew only their sufferings, their wants, and their desires. They are beginning now to know their opportunity and their power.⁶⁰

It is only by instigation of the wrongs of men that what are called the Rights of Man become turbulent and dangerous.⁶¹

Not a change for the better in our human housekeeping has ever taken place that wise and good men have not opposed it.⁶²

Theodore Parker said that "Democracy meant not 'I'm as good as you are,' but 'You're as good as I am.'"⁶³

I am one of those who believe that the real will never find an irremovable basis till it rests on the ideal.⁶⁴

He then explained the underlying policies of the framers of the Constitution, and the necessity of the compromises that secured its adoption. He met the fears of those who depended upon property rights by asking:

Is it not the best security for anything, to interest the largest possible number of persons in its preservation and the smallest in its division?⁶⁵

He paid his respects both to Congress and Parliament in a pointed fashion:

The English race, if they did not invent government by discussion, have at least carried it nearest to perfection in practice. It seems a very safe and reasonable contrivance for occupying the attention of the country, and is certainly a better way of settling questions than by push of pike. Yet, if one should ask it why it should not rather be called government by gabble, it would have to fumble in its pocket a good while before it found the change for a convincing reply.⁶⁶

His definition of democracy still stands. After quoting a phrase of Napoleon he said:

I should be inclined to paraphrase this by calling democracy that form of society, no matter what its political classification, in which every man had a chance and knew he had it. . . . Democracy in its best sense is merely the letting in of light and air.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ *Works*, Riverside ed., vol. 6, p. 15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

Lowell's clarity is shown by his ability to distinguish between Communism, Socialism, and State Socialism, at a time when the terms were generally confused. The essay concludes by an eloquent plea for humanity.

He watched with great interest the Cleveland-Blaine campaign of 1884.

"As for the small majority for Cleveland," he wrote to C. E. Norton, "I am more than satisfied with *any*, considering the obstacles. That we are saved from Blaine is enough for the nonce."⁶⁸

And in a letter to Dr. Holmes he states definitely that he would have voted for Cleveland had he been at home. Holmes had written to Cleveland urging him to retain Lowell in his post at London. Cleveland felt, however, that he should be represented by a Democrat, and Lowell was glad to return to his native country.

In 1888 he spoke before the Reform Club of New York City upon "The Place of the Independent in Politics." In England he had eulogized our democratic institutions, but in this address he called attention to our shortcomings. He defined politics as:

An art which concerns itself about the national housekeeping, about the immediate interests and workaday wants, the income and the outgo of the people. . . . But there is a higher and wider sense in which politics may fairly be ranked as a science.⁶⁹

It was with politics as a science that Lowell was interested. But he felt called upon to be more specific:

It is admitted on all hands that matters have been growing worse for the last twenty years, as it is the nature of evil to do. It is publicly asserted that admission to the Senate of the United States is a marketable thing. I know not whether this be true or not, but is it not an ominous sign of the times that this has been asserted and generally believed to be possible, if not probable? It is notorious that important elections are decided by votes bought with money, or by the more mischievous equivalent of money, places in public service. What is even more disheartening,

⁶⁸ *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 121.

⁶⁹ *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 195-6.

the tone of a large part of the press in regard to this state of things is cynical, or even jocular.⁷⁰

Lowell believed that the only remedy lay in an independent body, which would seek the best men for office. In other words he wanted a party of leadership, without the partisan machinery. His instinctive feeling is revealed in his question "what aggregate of little men will amount to a single great one, that most precious coinage of the mint of nature? They are not the product of institutions." He tried to make his address non-partisan but he trained his guns definitely at the "waving of the bloody shirt" by the Republican party, and the "war tariff." His words concerning the evils of high protection read like a prophecy:

I confess I cannot take a cheerful view of the future of that New England I love so well when her leading industries shall be gradually drawn to the South, as they infallibly will be, by the greater cheapness of labor there. It is not pleasant to hear that called the American system which has succeeded in abolishing our commercial marine. It is even less pleasant to hear it advocated as being for the interest of the laborer by men who imported cheaper labor till it was forbidden by law. The true American system is that which produces the best *men* by leaving them as much as possible to their own resources.⁷¹

His interest in Tariff Reform had been shown in his brief address before the Tariff Reform League of Boston in December, 1887. This became largely an eulogy of President Cleveland:

Personally, I confess that I feel myself strongly attracted to Mr. Cleveland as the best representative of the higher type of Americanism that we have seen since Lincoln was snatched from us. . . . But we are not here to thank him as the head of a party. We are here to felicitate each other that the presidential chair has a MAN in it, and this means that every word he *says* is weighted with what he *is*.⁷²

He inveighed against the policy of nominating men for the highest office because they had "no record," just as he had done in 1848.

⁷⁰ *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 199-200.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

In short, his personal and local traditions led him into the party of institutions while his desire to see real leaders in office turned him away from the oligarchy that ruled from 1865 until 1884. His praise of Cleveland in 1887 shows where his heart really lay.

The effect of Lowell's political writings is hard to estimate. The fiery anti-slavery poems of his youth must have stirred men's hearts, as Whittier's did. The *Biglow Papers* were widely read, and *The First Series* undoubtedly helped to disturb the consciences of the Whig appeasers. As the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *North American Review* he must have influenced a significant group especially through the *Second Series* of the *Bigelow Papers*. His personal qualities as well as his addresses during his Ministry helped in impressing Great Britain with the real meaning of our democracy. In his later years his notable addresses as well as his personal authority were of service in the attempts to secure civil service and tariff reform. If his writings could be revived and circulated among the younger generations, they would be of inestimable service through his insistence that the only hope of democracy is the selection of great leaders who have secured the trust of the people.

Indeed the instinctive feeling of practically all of the writers I have discussed turned them away from the party of institutions. The very fact that they were creative artists led them to the party of leadership, the party of progressive ideas. Irving, Bryant, Cooper, and Hawthorne remained there, usually content, as Poe remained with the Whigs. Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, and Lowell were restless in the Whig party, but local conditions kept them from understanding the basic philosophy which would have taken them over to Democracy. They tried to make the great leader they wanted out of Webster, but when he failed them, they turned their guns on him, and Whittier simply

left the party altogether. By 1852 the party of leadership had abandoned for the time its best traditions and this left them no place to go. They, therefore, joined the new party of institutions, the Republican, because the defence of the Union gave them a valid reason for doing so. And soon a great leader, Lincoln, arose unexpectedly, within those ranks, to satisfy their instinctive desires. He too was a man of letters, who wrote the greatest prose utterance in celebration of the triumph of the Union, in whose defence Longfellow and Lowell wrote the noblest poetry.

Limitations of space have prevented a discussion of other writers of the Middle States or of the South whose work was done largely before the Civil War and was affected by their political affiliations. Their importance demands separate treatment, which may come at a future time.

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