

written in December, 1844. Its inspiration came from the great struggle between the forces of freedom and slavery, then just beginning. He never had any sympathy with that class of abolitionists who were ready to free the slave by pulling down the pillars of State, and sounding then a general decree of emancipation. But from the first he was a stout and staunch opponent of the system of slavery. His muse had the intensest delight in freedom. It was with him a religion to proclaim its eternal foundations; and so in the poem "The Present Crisis" we find the deep, subduing religious sense which gives to his "Commemoration Ode" so profound and so solemn a movement. "The Present Crisis" has been read and quoted as perhaps no other lines of American poetry, unless it be Bryant's "Thanatopsis." Many of its ringing verses have been heard from the lips of popular orators on platforms and of preachers in pulpits; such, for example, as the stanzas beginning

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide."

"Careless seems the great avenger; history's pages but record."

"By the light of burning heretics Christ's bleeding feet I track."

"For humanity sweeps onward; where to-day the martyr stands."

Two of its stanzas, less known, seldom quoted, have, however, in them a truth of equally solemn moment. That beginning with the line

"For mankind are one in spirit, and an instinct bears along"

and that one ending with this far-reaching, deep-reaching truth:

"They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin."

In the well-known "Biglow Papers" the same spirit is shown, but in wholly different vein. Never since Chaucer satirized the corruptions of religion has satire done nobler work than in Lowell's satire of the corruptions of politics in the interest of slavery. It would be quite superfluous to point out in this article what the "Biglow Papers," in both series, were. They are household words. The American people were quick to see underneath the satirical humor the indomitable love of truth and righteousness; the scorn of temporizing expedients; the religious love of freedom and hatred of slavery; the moral courage which dared to stand

"In the right with two or three."

Scattered through the twofold series are couplets which embody imperishable truths. We smile at the satiric thrust, but every honest heart responds with a glow of moral feeling to Mr. Lowell's downright assertion of moral law above all expediency. Together with Longfellow and Whittier, Mr. Lowell lent his muse to the cause of anti-slavery. What a triumvirate of poets of freedom they are! The pulpit should study them, not as mere recreation for vacant moments. They are a chapter in our literary

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