

And this is all I have to say of these improper games,  
For I live at Table Mountain, and my name is Truthful  
James;  
And I've told in simple language what I know about the  
row  
That broke up our society upon the Stanislaw.

James Russell Lowell is so strong as an essayist and critic that we sometimes forget that he is also one of the greatest of American poets. Perhaps one reason why as a poet he is not as popular as Longfellow, is because he is too subtle and profound; requires too much thought on the part of the reader. His thought-power seems at times to have got the better of his poetic sensibility, and to have in a manner spoiled a great poet to make a great critic. Lowell, without a question, has no living superior to-day as an essayist and reviewer. His mind is a national mint for the coinage of words which, having once received his *imprimatur*, become the current coin of scholars. No other writer of to-day can so well embody the spirit of a whole period in an epigram. For instance, in his essay on Chaucer, where he says, speaking of the literary wedlock of Norman and Saxon genius in the "morning star" of English poetry, "In him we see the first result of the Norman yeast upon the Saxon loaf." And again in his essay on Carlyle, where he strikes off the cynicism of the sage of Chelsea, "Saul, seeking his father's asses, found himself turned suddenly into a king; but, Mr. Carlyle, on the look-out for a king, always seems to find the other sort of animal." But to return to the subject of this short paper, not only does Lowell stand at the head of American essayists, but his place as a writer of humorous poetry is in the very front rank. Take his poem "The Coortin'"; what a rich vein of humour runs through it! I have never heard this selection interpreted by a public reader, but I feel sure that it would prove a gem in the hands of a gifted and skilful reader. Though the poem is a little long for quotation, I plead a space for it in the body of this article:

"God makes sech nights, all white an' still  
Fur'z you can look or listen;  
Moonshine an' snow on field and hill,  
All silence an' all glisten.

Zekle crip' up quite unbeknown,  
An' peeked in thru the winder,  
An' there sat Huldy all alone,  
'Ith no one nigh to hinder.

A fireplace filled the room's one side,  
With half a cord of wood in;  
There wan't no stoves (till comfort died)  
To bake ye to a puddin'.

The wa'nut logs shot sparkles out  
Towards the pootiest, bless her;  
And little flames danced all about  
The chiny on the dresser.

Again the chimbley, crook-necks hung,  
An' in amongst 'em rusted  
The old queen's arm that Gran'ther Young  
Fetched back from Concord' busted.

The very room, coz she was in,  
Seemed warm from floor to ceilin',  
An' she looked full ez rosy again  
Ez the apples she was peelin'.

'Twas kin' o' kingdom-come, to look  
On such a blessed creature;  
A dogrose blushin' to a brook  
Ain't modester nor sweeter.

He was six foot of man, A1,  
Clean grit and human natur';  
None couldn't quicker pitch a ton,  
Nor drov a furrer straighter.

He'd sparked it with full twenty gals,  
He'd squired 'em, danced 'em, druv 'em  
Fust this one, an' then that, by spells—  
All is, he wouldn't love 'em.

But 'long o' her his veins 'ould run  
All crinkly like curled maple;  
The side she breshed felt full o' sun,  
Ez a south slope in April.

She thought no v'ice had such a swing  
Ez his'n in the choir;  
My! when he made Old Hundred ring,  
She knowed the Lord was nigher.

An' she'd blush scarlet, right in prayer,  
When her new meetin' bonnet  
Felt somehow thru' its crown a pair  
O' blue eyes sot upon it.

That night, I tell ye, she looked *some!*  
She seemed to've got a new soul,  
For she felt sartin-sure he'd come  
Down to her very shoe-sole.

She heard a foot, an' knowed it, tu,  
A-rasping on the scraper;  
All ways at once her feelins flew,  
Like sparks in burnt-up paper.

He kin o' l'itered on the mat,  
Some doubtfle o' the sekle;  
His heart kept goin' pity-pat,  
But her'n went pity Zekle.

And yit she gin her cheer a jerk,  
Ez though she wished him funder,  
An' on her apples kep' to work,  
Parin' away like murder.

"You want to see my pa, I s'pose?"  
"Wall...no...I come dasignin'—"  
"To see my ma? She's sprinklin' clo'es  
Agin to-morrer's i'nin'."

To say why gals act so and so,  
Or don't, 'ould be presuming';  
Mebbe to mean *yes* an' say *no*  
Comes nateral to women.

He stood a spell on one foot fust,  
Then stood a spell on t'other,  
An' on which one he felt the wust  
He couldn't ha' told ye, nuther.

Says he, "I'd better call again;"  
Says she, "Think likely, mister."  
That last word pricked him like a pin,  
An'...wal, he up an' kis't her.

When ma bimeby upon 'em slips,  
Huldy sat pale ez ashes,  
All kin' of smily round the lips  
An' teary roun' the lashes.

For she was jes' the quiet kind  
Whose natures never vary,  
Like streams that keep a summer mind  
Snow-hid in Janooary.

The blood clos't roun' her heart felt glued  
Too tight for all expressin',  
Tell mother see how matters stood,  
And gin' 'em both her blessin'.

Then her red come back like the tide  
Down to the Bay o' Fundy;  
An' all I know is they was cried  
In meetin' come nex' Sunday."

To write a sketch of the humorous in American poetry and leave out the genius of Oliver Wendell Holmes would be like a presentation of Hamlet with the Dane left out. Dr. Holmes's humour in both prose and verse is of the truest kind. You will find in all his humorous poems, as you will indeed find in all genuine humour, an element of tender and kindly feeling. Holmes has given us more witty epigrams and aphorisms in his prose works the "Autocrat," the "Professor" and the "Poet" than any other American writer. Let me transcribe a few specimens charged with flashes of his wit and the atmosphere of his humour. Speaking of fame, Dr. Holmes says "Fame usually comes to those who are thinking of something else; rarely to those who say to themselves, 'Go to, now! let us be a celebrated individual!'" And this about praise: "You may set it down as a truth which admits of few exceptions that those who ask your opinion really want your praise." The noble Red Man Dr. Holmes defines to be "A few instincts on legs flourishing a tomahawk." Dr. Holmes has written so many excellent humorous poems that I find myself beset with an embarrassment of riches in the selection of one. The very first poem which comes to my mind is the "One-Hoss Shay," which recalls, by association of ideas, its companion, "How the Old Horse Won the Bet." I think one of the most typical of Holmes' humorous poems is "The Organ-Grinders." Here it is:

There are three ways in which men take  
One's money from one's purse,  
And very hard it is to tell  
Which of the three is worse;  
But all of them are bad enough  
To make a body curse.

You're riding out some pleasant day  
And counting up your gains;  
A fellow jumps from out a bush  
And takes your horse's reins;  
Another hints some words about  
A bullet in your brains.

It's hard to meet such pressing friends  
In such a lonely spot;  
It's very hard to lose your cash,  
But harder to be shot;  
And so you take your wallet out,  
Though you would rather not.

Perhaps you're going out to dine—  
Some filthy creature begs  
You'll hear about the cannon-ball  
That carried off his pegs,  
And says it is a dreadful thing  
For men to lose their legs.

He tells you of his starving wife,  
His children to be fed—  
Poor little lonely innocents  
All clamorous for bread—  
And so you kindly help to put  
A bachelor to bed.

You're sitting on your window seat,  
Beneath a cloudless moon;  
You hear a sound that seems to wear  
The semblance of a tune;  
As if a broken fife should strive  
To drown a cracked bassoon.

And nearer, nearer still the tide  
Of music seems to come;  
There's something like a human voice,  
And something like a drum;  
You sit in speechless agony  
Until your ear is numb.

Poor "Home, Sweet Home" should seem to be  
A very dismal place;  
Your "Auld Acquaintance" all at once  
Is altered in the face;  
Their discords sting through Burns and Moore  
Like hedgehogs dressed in lace.

You think they are crusaders sent  
From some infernal clime  
To pluck the eyes of Sentiment  
And dock the tail of Rhyme,  
To crack the voice of Melody  
And break the legs of Time.

But hark! the air again is still,  
The music is all ground;  
And silence, like a poultice, comes  
To heal the blows of sound;  
It cannot be—it is—it is—  
A hat is going round!

No! Pay the dentist when he leaves  
A fracture in your jaw,  
And pay the owner of the bear  
That stunned you with his paw,  
And buy the lobster that has had  
Your knuckles in his claw.

But if you are a portly man,  
Put on your fiercest frown,  
And talk about a constable  
To turn them out of town;  
Then close your sentence with an oath,  
And shut the window down!

And if you are a slender man,  
Not big enough for that,  
Or if you cannot make a speech  
Because you are a flat,  
Go very quietly and drop  
A button in the hat!

I would like to say something of the comic genius of Robert H. Newell, John Godfrey Saxe and the author of "Pike County Ballads," but already my paper has grown beyond its intended proportions. At some future day I hope to give readers of THE DOMINION ILLUSTRATED a short study of the comic poets of England of to-day, together with a comparative view of English and American humour, as exemplified in the genius of the poets of both lands.

Ottawa.

THOMAS O'HAGAN.

We have to judge of all things in this world by human faculties, more or less enlightened by reason and common sense. By these tests, I dare to judge of the Christian system of theology, and, where it seems to conflict with the revelation of God's character in outward nature, to condemn that system as erroneous. We should consider without dogmatism those questions respecting religion which are of the highest import and interest both to ourselves and to our children. We must decide by the light of our mental constitution the great questions concerning the character of God and our relations to him, and the sentiments we should cherish and express toward him. And, as the interest of all requires that the best guiding principles in all our relations with God and man should be adhered to, as far as we know them, all should be willing to meet amicably on the common ground of reflection, investigation, and kindness.  
—James Eddy.