

CHARLES RUSSELL LOWELL

Wut's wurds to them whose faith an' truth
On war's red techstone rang true metal,
Who ventered life an' love an, youth
For the gret prize o' death in battle?

To him who, deadly hurt, agen
Flashed on afore the charge's thunder,
Tippin' with fire the bolt of men
Thet rived the rebel line asunder?

--Lowell.

CHARLES RUSSELL LOWELL

Charles Russell Lowell was born in Boston, January 2, 1835. He was the eldest son of Charles Russell and Anna Cabot (Jackson) Lowell, and the nephew of James Russell Lowell. He bore the name, distinguished in many branches, of a family which was of the best New England stock. Educated in the Boston public schools, he entered Harvard College in 1850. Although one of the youngest members of his class, he went rapidly to the front, and graduated not only the first scholar of his year, but the foremost man of his class. He was, however, much more than a fine scholar, for even then he showed unusual intellectual qualities. He read widely and loved letters. He was a student of philosophy and religion, a thinker, and, best of all, a man of ideals--"the glory of youth," as he called them in his valedictory oration. But he was something still better and finer than a mere idealist; he was a man of action, eager to put his ideals into practice and bring them to the test of daily life. With his mind full of plans for raising the condition of workingmen while he made his own career, he entered the iron mills of the Ames Company, at Chicopee. Here he remained as a workingman for six months, and then received an important post in the Trenton Iron Works of New Jersey. There his health broke down. Consumption threatened him, and all his bright hopes and ambitions were overcast and checked. He was obliged to leave his business and go to Europe, where he traveled for two years, fighting the dread disease that was upon him. In 1858 he returned, and took a position on a Western railroad. Although the work was new to him, he manifested the same capacity that he had always shown, and more especially his power over other men and his ability in organization. In two years his health was reestablished, and in 1860 he took charge of the Mount Savage Iron Works, at Cumberland, Maryland. He was there when news came of the attack made by the mob upon the 6th Massachusetts Regiment, in Baltimore. Two days later he had made his way to Washington, one of the first comers from the North, and at once applied for a commission in the regular army. While he was waiting, he employed himself in looking after the Massachusetts troops, and also, it is understood, as a scout for the Government, dangerous work which suited his bold and adventurous nature.

In May he received his commission as captain in the United States cavalry. Employed at first in recruiting and then in drill, he gave himself up to the study of tactics and the science of war. The career above all others to which he was suited had come to him. The field, at last, lay open before him, where all his great qualities of mind and heart his high courage, his power of leadership and of organization, and his intellectual powers could find full play. He moved rapidly forward, just as he had already done in college and in business. His regiment, in 1862, was under Stoneman in the Peninsula, and was engaged in many actions, where Lowell's cool bravery made him constantly conspicuous. At the close of the campaign he was brevetted major, for distinguished services at Williamsburg and Slatersville.

In July, Lowell was detailed for duty as an aid to General McClellan. At Malvern Hill and South Mountain his gallantry and efficiency were strongly shown, but it was at Antietam that he distinguished himself most. Sent with orders to General Sedgwick's division, he found it retreating in confusion, under a hot fire. He did not stop to think of orders, but rode rapidly from point to point of the line, rallying company after company by the mere force and power of his word and look, checking the rout, while the storm of bullets swept all round him. His horse was shot under him, a ball passed through his coat, another broke his sword-hilt, but he came off unscathed, and his service was recognized by his being sent to Washington with the captured flags of the enemy.

The following winter he was ordered to Boston, to recruit a regiment of cavalry, of which he was appointed colonel. While the recruiting was going on, a serious mutiny broke out, but the man who, like Cromwell's soldiers, "rejoiced greatly" in the day of battle was entirely capable of meeting this different trial. He shot the ringleader dead, and by the force of his own strong will quelled the outbreak completely and at once.

In May, he went to Virginia with his regiment, where he was engaged in resisting and following Mosby, and the following summer he was opposed to General Early in the neighborhood of Washington. On July 14, when on a reconnoissance his advance guard was surprised, and he met them retreating in wild confusion, with the enemy at their heels. Riding into the midst of the fugitives, Lowell shouted, "Dismount!" The sharp word of command, the presence of the man himself, and the magic of discipline prevailed. The men sprang down, drew up in line, received the enemy, with a heavy fire, and as the assailants wavered, Lowell advanced at once, and saved the day.

In July, he was put in command of the "Provisional Brigade," and joined the army of the Shenandoah, of which in August General Sheridan took command. He was so struck with Lowell's work during the next month that in September he put him in command of the "Reserved Brigade," a very fine body of cavalry and artillery. In the fierce and continuous fighting that ensued Lowell was everywhere conspicuous, and in thirteen weeks he had as many horses shot under him. But he now had scope to show more than the dashing gallantry which distinguished him always and everywhere. His genuine military ability, which surely would have led him to the front rank of soldiers had his life been spared, his knowledge, vigilance, and nerve all now became apparent. One brilliant action succeeded another, but the end was drawing near. It came at last on the famous day

of Cedar Creek, when Sheridan rode down from Winchester and saved the battle. Lowell had advanced early in the morning on the right, and his attack prevented the disaster on that wing which fell upon the surprised army. He then moved to cover the retreat, and around to the extreme left, where he held his position near Middletown against repeated assaults. Early in the day his last horse was shot under him, and a little later, in a charge at one o'clock, he was struck in the right breast by a spent ball, which embedded itself in the muscles of the chest. Voice and strength left him. "It is only my poor lung," he announced, as they urged him to go to the rear; "you would not have me leave the field without having shed blood." As a matter of fact, the "poor" lung had collapsed, and there was an internal hemorrhage. He lay thus, under a rude shelter, for an hour and a half, and then came the order to advance along the whole line, the victorious advance of Sheridan and the rallied army. Lowell was helped to his saddle. "I feel well now," he whispered, and, giving his orders through one of his staff, had his brigade ready first. Leading the great charge, he dashed forward, and, just when the fight was hottest, a sudden cry went up: "The colonel is hit!" He fell from the saddle, struck in the neck by a ball which severed the spine, and was borne by his officers to a house in the village, where, clear in mind and calm in spirit, he died a few hours afterward.

"I do not think there was a quality," said General Sheridan, "which I could have added to Lowell. He was the perfection of a man and a soldier." On October 19, the very day on which he fell, his commission was signed to be a brigadier-general.

This was a noble life and a noble death, worthy of much thought and admiration from all men. Yet this is not all. It is well for us to see how such a man looked upon what he was doing, and what it meant to him. Lowell was one of the silent heroes so much commended by Carlyle. He never wrote of himself or his own exploits. As some one well said, he had "the impersonality of genius." But in a few remarkable passages in his private letters, we can see how the meaning of life and of that great time unrolled itself before his inner eyes. In June, 1861, he wrote:

I cannot say I take any great pleasure in the contemplation of the future. I fancy you feel much as I do about the profitableness of a soldier's life, and would not think of trying it, were it not for a muddled and twisted idea that somehow or other this fight was going to be one in which decent men ought to engage for the sake of humanity,--I use the word in its ordinary sense. It seems to me that within a year the slavery question will again take a prominent place, and that many cases will arise in which we may get fearfully in the wrong if we put our cause wholly in the hands of fighting men and foreign legions.

In June, 1863, he wrote:

I wonder whether my theories about self-culture, etc., would ever have been modified so much, whether I should ever have seen what a necessary failure they lead to, had it not been for this war. Now I feel every day, more and more, that a man has no right to himself at all; that, indeed, he can do nothing useful unless he recognizes this clearly. Here again, on July 3, is a sentence which it is well to take to heart, and for all men to remember when their ears are deafened with the cry that war, no matter what the cause, is

the worst thing possible, because it interferes with comfort, trade, and money-making: "Wars are bad," Lowell writes, "but there are many things far worse. Anything immediately comfortable in our affairs I don't see; but comfortable times are not the ones that make a nation great." On July 24, he says:

Many nations fail, that one may become great; ours will fail, unless we gird up our loins and do humble and honest days' work, without trying to do the thing by the job, or to get a great nation made by a patent process. It is not safe to say that we shall not have victories till we are ready for them. We shall have victories, and whether or no we are ready for them depends upon ourselves; if we are not ready, we shall fail,--voila tout. If you ask, what if we do fail? I have nothing to say; I shouldn't cry over a nation or two, more or less, gone under.

Finally, on September 10, a little more than a month before his death, he wrote to a disabled officer:

I hope that you are going to live like a plain republican, mindful of the beauty and of the duty of simplicity. Nothing fancy now, sir, if you please; it's disreputable to spend money when the government is so hard up, and when there are so many poor officers. I hope that you have outgrown all foolish ambitions, and are now content to become a "useful citizen." Don't grow rich; if you once begin, you will find it much more difficult to be a useful citizen. Don't seek office, but don't "disremember" that the "useful citizen" always holds his time, his trouble, his money, and his life ready at the hint of his country. The useful citizen is a mighty, unpretending hero; but we are not going to have any country very long, unless such heroism is developed. There, what a stale sermon I'm preaching. But, being a soldier, it does seem to me that I should like nothing so well as being a useful citizen. Well, trying to be one, I mean. I shall stay in the service, of course, till the war is over, or till I'm disabled; but then I look forward to a pleasanter career.

I believe I have lost all my ambitions. I don't think I would turn my hand to be a distinguished chemist or a famous mathematician. All I now care about is to be a useful citizen, with money enough to buy bread and firewood, and to teach my children to ride on horseback, and look strangers in the face, especially Southern strangers.

There are profound and lofty lessons of patriotism and conduct in these passages, and a very noble philosophy of life and duty both as a man and as a citizen of a great republic. They throw a flood of light on the great underlying forces which enabled the American people to save themselves in that time of storm and stress. They are the utterances of a very young man, not thirty years old when he died in battle, but much beyond thirty in head and heart, tried and taught as he had been in a great war. What precisely such young men thought they were fighting for is put strikingly by Lowell's younger brother James, who was killed at Glendale, July 4, 1862. In 1861, James Lowell wrote to his classmates, who had given him a sword:

Those who died for the cause, not of the Constitution and the laws,--a superficial cause, the rebels have now the same,--but of civilization and law, and the self-restrained

freedom which is their result. As the Greeks at Marathon and Salamis, Charles Martel and the Franks at Tours, and the Germans at the Danube, saved Europe from Asiatic barbarism, so we, at places to be famous in future times, shall have saved America from a similar tide of barbarism; and we may hope to be purified and strengthened ourselves by the struggle.

This is a remarkable passage and a deep thought. Coming from a young fellow of twenty-four, it is amazing. But the fiery trial of the times taught fiercely and fast, and James Lowell, just out of college, could see in the red light around him that not merely the freedom of a race and the saving of a nation were at stake, but that behind all this was the forward movement of civilization, brought once again to the arbitrament of the sword. Slavery was barbarous and barbarizing. It had dragged down the civilization of the South to a level from which it would take generations to rise up again. Was this barbarous force now to prevail in the United States in the nineteenth century? Was it to destroy a great nation, and fetter human progress in the New World? That was the great question back of, beyond and above all. Should this force of barbarism sweep conquering over the land, wrecking an empire in its onward march, or should it be flung back as Miltiades flung back Asia at Marathon, and Charles Martel stayed the coming of Islam at Tours? The brilliant career, the shining courage, best seen always where the dead were lying thickest, the heroic death of Charles Lowell, are good for us all to know and to remember. Yet this imperfect story of his life has not been placed here for these things alone. Many thousand others, officers and soldiers alike, in the great Civil War gave their lives as freely as he, and brought to the service of their country the best that was in them. He was a fine example of many who, like him, offered up all they had for their country. But Lowell was also something more than this. He was a high type of a class, and a proof of certain very important things, and this is a point worthy of much consideration.

The name of John Hampden stands out in the history of the English-speaking people, admired and unquestioned. He was neither a great statesman, nor a great soldier; he was not a brilliant orator, nor a famous writer. He fell bravely in an unimportant skirmish at Chalgrove Field, fighting for freedom and what he believed to be right. Yet he fills a great place in the past, both for what he did and what he was, and the reason for this is of high importance. John Hampden was a gentleman, with all the advantages that the accidents of birth could give. He was rich, educated, well born, of high traditions. English civilization of that day could produce nothing better. The memorable fact is that, when the time came for the test, he did not fail. He was a type of what was best among the English people, and when the call sounded, he was ready. He was brave, honest, high-minded, and he gave all, even his life, to his country. In the hour of need, the representative of what was best and most fortunate in England was put to the touch, and proved to be current gold. All men knew what that meant, and Hampden's memory is one of the glories of the English-speaking people.

Charles Lowell has the same meaning for us when rightly understood. He had all that birth, breeding, education, and tradition could give. The resources of our American life and civilization could produce nothing better. How would he and such men as he stand the great ordeal when it came? If wealth, education, and breeding were to result in a class

who could only carp and criticize, accumulate money, give way to self-indulgence, and cherish low foreign ideals, then would it have appeared that there was a radical unsoundness in our society, refinement would have been proved to be weakness, and the highest education would have been shown to be a curse, rather than a blessing. But Charles Lowell, and hundreds of others like him, in greater or less degree, all over the land, met the great test and emerged triumphant. The Harvard men may be taken as fairly representing the colleges and universities of America. Harvard had, in 1860, 4157 living graduates, and 823 students, presumably over eighteen years old. Probably 3000 of her students and graduates were of military age, and not physically disqualified for military service. Of this number, 1230 entered the Union army or navy. One hundred and fifty-six died in service, and 67 were killed in action. Many did not go who might have gone, unquestionably, but the record is a noble one. Nearly one man of every two Harvard men came forward to serve his country when war was at our gates, and this proportion holds true, no doubt, of the other universities of the North. It is well for the country, well for learning, well for our civilization, that such a record was made at such a time. Charles Lowell, and those like him, showed, once for all, that the men to whom fortune had been kindest were capable of the noblest patriotism, and shrank from no sacrifices. They taught the lesson which can never be heard too often--that the man to whom the accidents of birth and fortune have given most is the man who owes most to his country. If patriotism should exist anywhere, it should be strongest with such men as these, and their service should be ever ready. How nobly Charles Lowell in this spirit answered the great question, his life and death, alike victorious, show to all men.