

**A
CRITICAL FABLE**

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A critical fable by Amy Lowell

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AMY LOWELL

**A
CRITICAL FABLE**

Dear Sir (or Dear Madam) who happen to glance at this

TITLE-PAGE

Printed you'll see to enhance its æsthetic attraction,
Pray buy, if you're able, this excellent bargain:

A CRITICAL FABLE

The book may be read in the light of
A Sequel to the "FABLE for CRITICS"
A volume unequal (or hitherto so) for its quips and digressions on

The Poets of the Day

WITHOUT UNDUE PROFESSIONS, I WOULD SAY THAT THIS TREATISE
IS FULLY AS LIGHT AS THE FORMER, ITS JUDGMENTS AS
CERTAINLY RIGHT AS NEED BE.

A HODGE-PODGE

Delivered primarily in the hope of instilling instruction
so airily that readers may see, in the persons on view,
a peripatetic, poetic *Who's Who*.

An Account of the Times

By

A POKER OF FUN, WITT D., O.S., A.I. *Amey Lowell*

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
Boston and New York
Published *September, 1922*

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GENTLE READER,

THE book you're about to peruse has only one object, which is to amuse. If, as over its pages you may chance to potter, you discover it's rather more pungent and hotter than this simple pretension might lead one to think, recollect, if you please, there's a devil in ink; and a critic who starts without any intention to do more than recount, will find his apprehension of the poets running on to minutely-limned pictures of the men as he sees them. Neither praises nor strictures were in my design for I tried to clude them; but a man, plus his writings, must always include them inferentially, even if nothing be stated. As the picture emerges, the sitter stands rated.

But who would be backward when others have done the very same thing in a search of pure fun? Sixty-odd years ago, a volume appeared called "A Fable for Critics," wherein were ensphered eighteen authors of merit. The poet who selected them dared many sly prods just because he respected them. What a serious analysis may fail to discover is often revealed to a fun-loving lover.

In the volume before you, you will find twenty-one modern poets popped off 'twixt a laugh and a pun. I have spared them no squib and no palm, what I give is a cursory view of them run through a sieve. As I rattle

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my poets about faster and faster, each man shakes more certainly into a master; to my thinking, at least, for their rich native flavour gives them all so abundant a claim on my favour that I'm willing to leave them for sixty-odd years and let my great-grandchildren foot the arrears.

With the poets I've not noticed, there's a chance for a sequel, and some other critic who thinks himself equal to the writing may build on my scaffolding gratis; and for readers, I really cannot calculate his — with his hundreds of victims he'll sell each edition as fast as it's printed — I'm no mathematician. Take the Poetry Society's roster of members, brush away all the laymen and leave just the embers which spark into verse now and then; for equations, let A. equal the poet and B. his relations; then his wife and her friends with their "circles" and "clubs"; and the cultural ladies, impervious to snubs, who get out long programmes of up-to-date readings which are called "very helpful" in the printed proceedings of some Woman's Club's "most remarkable year" (one wonders sometimes what the poor creatures hear, for of course they don't read now books are so dear), and some one's geometry's needed, it's clear, to post up the total. I'll not volunteer for a task which requires an expert cashier. For the ladies I've mentioned, who take what they're told as immaculate gospel in letters of gold, and rather than buy prefer to be sold, they'll be moved, I believe, to purchase his anthology which, like Poe, he might call "A Hand-Book of Conchology." Since I've got the

pearls, he must e'en take the shells, but the public at large has no knowledge of sells — see them gape at the lies which every quack tells — and, as I said before, on the question of vails, if I collar the kudos, why he'll gorge the sales.

For I really don't think there's one person in ten who can tell the first-class from the second-class men. If I've twenty-one poets and he sixty-four, how many will stop to consider that more of the very same thing means a well-watered article? In my book, you'll perceive, there is n't a particle of stuffing or layers of lath to increase the absolute weight of my poets, piece by piece. Each is wrapped in tin-foil and set round the core of a box that I've softened with excelsior which, as every one knows, is the lightest of packing and exceedingly cheap; so, if money be lacking, you have only to take a few useless trees, such as laurel, or willow, or bay, and with these make a bundle of shavings as thick as you please. The foil, I admit, is a good deal more trouble. To wrap poets round with tin is like hoisting a bubble with grapples and rope. Do you notice my drift? You can't pull at your bubbles or teach your poets thrift. Having done what you can to arrange them precisely — and, considering their angles, this is hard to do nicely — you should view them a moment to be sure that no jutting or over-sized head will prevent the box shutting; then, just at the last, right under the cover, to off-set any jars, put a thick wad of clover. A few little holes may be left here and there for the egress of words and the ingress of air, and your

poets are quite ready for nailing and mailing. If you're sure of your press, the rest is plain sailing.

Having read me so far, you will ask, I am certain, for just a stray peep round the edge of the curtain I have carefully hung up between us, but this is, Gentle Reader, the one of all my prejudices I would not depart from by even a tittle. Suppose, for a moment, the author's a little just-out-of-the-egg sort of fellow — why then, would you care half a jot what fell from his pen? Supposing, for naturally you must suppose at least something or other, he's (under the rose) a personage proper, whose judgments are wont to sway many opinions, would you dare to confront so seasoned a reasoning with your own reflections?

Where's the fun of a book if you can't take objections to this and to that, call the author a zany, and in doing so prove to yourself what a brainy person you are, with a tribe of convictions which only malicious folk speak of as fictions?

Have I laboured my point? You'll enjoy me the more if you hazard a guess between every score or so lines. Why, it's endless; you'll see in a twinkling how exciting a book can be when you've no inkling as to who, or to why, or to whether, or what, the author may be. If it fall to your lot to unmask him, how deeply you'll relish the jest. No, Kind Reader, I cannot fulfil your request.

Think again of my poets, each one will be lying in wait with some sharp, eager weapon. For dying — why, all in good time, but not plunked on the head by a

furious poet who's disliked what I said. They're all sure to dislike the particular parts which deal with their own books, own heads, and own hearts. All poets are the same in one singular trait: whatever is said of them, that thing they hate. As I wish to enjoy a life of some quiet, I refuse to be pestered by poets on the riot. Having opened my heart, I must seek to preserve it from every result, even though it deserve it.

Then, like most other writers, I've a scant equanimity and scarcely can hope to retain my sublimity, in spite of all efforts to show magnanimity, if any one penetrates my anonymity.

One word more, and I'm silent in *propria persona*: If you, who are reading, should chance to be owner of the volume in hand and a poet comes to call, fling it into the fire or over the wall, put it into your work-basket, under your seat; but, whatever you do, don't permit him to see it.

With which parting remark, I close my introduction and leave you the book without farther obstruction, only wishing you joy of my modest production.

