

**THE NEW ENGLAND POETS; A
STUDY OF EMERSON,
HAWTHORNE, LONGFELLOW,
WHITTIER, LOWELL, HOLMES.
[1898]**

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The New England Poets; A Study of Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Holmes. [1898] by William Cranston Lawton

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WILLIAM CRANSTON LAWTON

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NEW ENGLAND POETS

A Study of

EMERSON, HAWTHORNE, LONGFELLOW
WHITTIER, LOWELL, HOLMES

BY

WILLIAM CRANSTON LAWTON
AUTHOR OF "ART AND HUMANITY IN HOMER,"
"SUCCESSORS OF HOMER," ETC.

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PREFACE

AFTER twenty years devoted to the study and teaching of remoter and richer literatures, the demand for "University Extension" lectures first suggested a return to these earliest guides of our New England boyhood. Like that boyhood itself, these benignant figures have already something of the perspective which Time alone can bestow. Two of the six I never even saw. The men who, like Colonel Higginson and Professor Norton, have been our indulgent Mentors, were in their turn the younger associates of the group here discussed.

Nevertheless our Yankee loyalty throbs too warmly from heart to heart to permit mere cold analytical criticism. But must impartial or fruitful criticism be cold, remote, even semi-hostile? Can we not know aright, and fairly judge, those whom we love best, and to whom we owe most?

Katahdin is not Olympus. The Charles and the Merrimac know not the impetuous spring current of the Arno. Lowell's noblest ode has no Pindaric splendor. Longfellow's epics of dying civilizations cannot set Gabriel and Hiawatha beside Odysseus or Æneas. This, at least, we realize as clearly as Brunetière or Saintsbury could expound it.

But if literary criticism has a right to share in warm and kindly life at all, it may well obey the spirit of the Delphic command, and begin nearest home. These are our poets, the interpreters of our own life. We have loved them as long as we have shivered in the northeast wind, or welcomed the pale blossoms of March. The attempt to indicate the modest amount which they have contributed to the world's abiding wealth, may be defended as natural, loyal, and filial.

W. C. L.

ADELPHI COLLEGE, BROOKLYN,
EASTER, 1898.

THE NEW ENGLAND POETS

I

INTRODUCTION

ENGLISH LITERATURE IN NEW ENGLAND

LITERATURE is an artistic product, as truly as sculpture or architecture. All the fine arts have for their aim perfection of form, the creation of beauty: but, to a Puritan at least, nothing seems permanently beautiful which fails to suggest heroic human endeavor. Artists must, indeed, take their material, and in some degree their suggestions, from their individual and local environment. Yet, of all creative work, the expression of thought in language is least limited by space or time. The Erechtheum is a ruin, and can never leave its desolated Acropolis; the Vatican torso has outlived its proper setting; it stands lost and dethroned in a gallery of antiques; but Homer remains crowned

and serene, as clear-voiced as ever, in far higher honor, indeed, than the singer in his lifetime can ever have dreamed of being. Still, *all* the creations of genius are imperishably beautiful. Perhaps their greatest helpfulness to men lies precisely herein, that they lift us, in imagination, quite out of all the cramping limitations besetting our daily routine: out of mere reality into the ideal world.

Possibly no group of creative writers ever fitted more naturally and easily into their setting, than the authors of Concord, Cambridge, and Boston. Yet, while Emerson and his friends will always be known as the New England poets, their origin, their life, their influence, is neither chiefly sectional, nor even merely national. New England did not create them, did not own them, cannot contain them. As truly as that earlier singer, whose time is disputed, whose name is denied, and to whose wide-wandering ghost an earthly abiding-place will doubtless never be granted, so these whom we fondly call our own, are in truth mankind's *κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί*—a treasure forevermore.

Nor do we turn to them chiefly, or most