

**ANTI-SLAVERY PAPERS OF
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.
IN TWO VOLUMES. I**

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Anti-slavery papers of James Russell Lowell. In two volumes. I by James Russell Lowell

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~~Lowell~~

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First editions



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INTRODUCTION

ONE of the most interesting chapters of Mr. Scudder's admirable 'Life' of Lowell is that which recounts Lowell's part in the Abolition movement. The part was not a conspicuous one, and might easily be lost sight of in a career crowded as Lowell's was with distinguished activities. All the more easily might his prose contributions to the columns of the Anti-slavery press be overlooked. He himself did not value them highly, counting his poems his chief service to the cause, and the papers have remained uncollected until now brought together in these two volumes. Yet during the seven years of Lowell's association with the Abolition movement, it had no more brilliant advocacy than he gave it in the contributions which appeared usually unsigned save for the initials J. R. L. They were brief, often fragmentary, frequently taking their text from themes of passing interest, and can hardly heighten Lowell's literary reputation. Yet it is not inconceivable that their author might look with pleasure upon the distinction that

is now given them : for they preserve the record of his part, they glow with his enthusiasm, and burn with his anger, in a great moral and patriotic struggle.

The extent of these papers is prime evidence of Lowell's activity in the cause. The two volumes contain more than fifty articles ; the first five contributed during 1844 to the "Pennsylvania Freeman ;" the rest, between 1845 and 1850, to the "National Anti-Slavery Standard," of which he was for two of these years titular associate editor. Through all the earlier papers runs the fiery zeal which we are accustomed to attribute to the young convert. The implication would seem to be a just one ; for the first of the articles was written soon after Lowell's marriage to Maria White, to whom, in Mr. Norton's words, he "owed all that a man may owe to the woman he loves." There were, to be sure, other influences that tended to enlist him in the Abolition cause. Chief of these were the leadings of heredity : the James Lowell who sixty years earlier had brought forward the Anti-slavery clause in the Massachusetts Bill of Rights was Lowell's grandfather ; and in his father's dining-room at Elmwood there hung, we are told, a portrait of Wilberforce, the English liberator. But we have his own evidence in a letter written many years later,

that his Abolitionism began in 1840, which was the year of his engagement to Miss White. It requires no stretch of the imagination, then, to see in his love the inspiration of Lowell's service to the cause, and find it fired with a chivalrous quality. Yet his enthusiasm did not make him a thorough-going reformer. That would have meant a change of nature. Compact as he was of poet and of critic, he never had that intense and unwearying devotion which keeps a man like Garrison at his task through thick and thin. His temperament was more mercurial. He was, in fact, surprisingly free from radicalism, and never sympathized with the extreme wing of the Abolitionists in their attacks on the Constitution and their proposals to dissolve the Union. The very first contribution he made to the "Freeman" shows the temper in which he espoused the Anti-slavery movement and which he maintained throughout. "The aim of the true Abolitionist," he wrote there, "is not only to put an end to Negro slavery in America: he is equally the sworn foe of tyranny throughout the world." This temper was by no means incompatible with a power of deep indignation, as the most cursory reading of the papers will show. Lowell seldom exhibited his powers of invective and sarcasm more effectually than here. He was not