

OPEN LETTERS.

Lincoln as a Military Man.*

THE recent publication in THE CENTURY, in the Nicolay and Hay history of Abraham Lincoln, of documents, letters, etc. hitherto inaccessible to the public has shown the phenomenal superiority in civil matters of this man of men to his associates and his surroundings. Whether as a publicist, diplomate, statesman, constitutional lawyer, or "politician," he had no equal in those fateful and momentous days from 1861 to 1865.

There are some who estimate his military ability as equal to his civil. My own reading of and acquaintance with the war of the Rebellion led me to entertain this opinion some years since, albeit my judgment in such matters is not entitled to weight enough to warrant its publication.

But of all war-students none was so well qualified to speak with authority on this point as the late Colonel Robert N. Scott. His intimate personal acquaintance with the prominent actors in that war, his varied personal experience of military service, and, above all, his relation to and familiarity with the "Rebellion Records," gave him the right to speak with authority.

Having to call upon him some years since at his "War Records" office, the business in hand led naturally to some discussion of the leaders of the army. Colonel Scott showed me letters, tables, and documents, then unpublished, that led him to certain conclusions in respect to certain men. Then looking up, he said, with enthusiasm and vehemence, "I tell you, M., the biggest military man we had was Abraham Lincoln." He disclaimed for him, of course, knowledge of military technique; but, in respect to what should and what should not be done, and when and where, he said Lincoln "was more uniformly right and less frequently wrong than any man we had."

WASHINGTON, D. C.

R. D. M.

Lowell's Recent Writings.

WHATEVER diplomacy loses in the renewed lease of leisure given to Mr. James Russell Lowell, there is a distinct gain to American letters in more fields than one. His recent addresses on subjects not yet wholly resigned to the "shouters" furnish a model for the "gentleman in politics." In these addresses he reaches that high standard of public duty which led him as a young man to speed the flight of the runaway slave to Canada, and which, in the later antislavery days, held him with Sumner at the van before the piping times of peace had brought the rear to the front. This is a clear gain for political literature; while the few essays—only too rare—on purely literary themes show no weakening of the critical faculty on the part of our best and keenest critic. The scholarship is as rich; the wit riper and more genial, less combative, but not less trenchant. Now we have in the new

volume, "Heartsease and Rue,"† all the virtues lying behind the prose—the sure touch of the critic; the shrewd cast of judgment which holds state affairs to the tests of conscience; satire, less in quantity, but equal in quality to his best; and wit flashing through satire, giving to it a kindlier glow. Of unmodified satire perhaps the best specimen is the "Tempora Mutantur," dating back in form and manner to the oldest satirical verse, but striking the public vices of the times with an accuracy of aim worthy of Andrew Marvel, the Parliament poet of the Commonwealth who is less read to-day than he deserves, but of whom we are reminded in verses like the following:

A hundred years ago
If men were knaves, why, people called them so.

Men had not learned to admire the graceful swerve
Wherewith the Æsthetic Nature's genial mood
Makes public duty slope to private good.

But now that "Statesmanship" is just a way
To dodge the primal curse and make it pay,
Since office means a kind of patent drill
To force an entrance to the Nation's till,
And speculation something rather less
Risky than if you spell it with an "s,"

With generous curve we draw the moral line:
Our swindlers are permitted to resign.

Confront mankind with brazen front sublime,
Steal but enough, the world is unsevere,—
Tweed is a statesman, Fisk a financier;
Invent a mine, and be—the Lord knows what;
Secure, at any rate, with what you've got.

Even if indicted, what is that but fudge
To him who counted in the elective judge?
Whitewashed, he quits the politician's strife
At ease in mind, with pockets filled for life—

A public meeting, treated at his cost,
Resolves him back more virtue than he lost.

With choker white, wherein no cynic eye
Dares see idealized a hempen tie,
At parish meetings he conducts in prayer,
And pays for missions to be sent elsewhere;
On 'Change respected, to his friends endeared;
Add but a Sunday-school class, he's revered,
And his too early tomb will not be dumb
To point a moral for our youth to come.

Lines of severe satire like these are fewer in Lowell than those wherein humor, if it does not entirely neutralize, at least dulcifies the acids. The man who looked upon public life sixteen years ago—let us put it as far back as that—had little stomach for anything but satire. Lowell was no lamp-blinded scholar stumbling into politics with a green shade over his eyes, but a man who saw the active side of human life in company with men of the widest knowledge of affairs. It has always been the fashion for the genuine statesman in New England to lounge in the scholar's arm-chair, and for the scholar to hobnob, over cigars, with the statesman. Thus Lowell dropped into politics, in the higher sense, and did service some years before the "shouters" of to-day knew how to spell the word politics. When he went to Spain, and afterwards to England, he went as one

* See especially the present installment of the "Life of Lincoln."—EDITOR.

† "Heartsease and Rue." By James Russell Lowell. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.