

## 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 Colonel Scott showed me letters, tables, and documents, then unpublished, that led him to certain conclusions in respect to certain men.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.



## Lectures on American History.

trained "at the gates of the king," and the king's gates in those antislavery days were thronged by such men as Sumner and Phillips and Garrison, Rantoul and Mann, from whom, as Xenophon puts it, one could learn much good and no evil thing. There was always there a good supply of "them literary fellers" with the double D's. The scholar became a statesman, the statesman a scholar by force of association. There was then, as always, a form of statecraft which meant "manipulation," which never presides at the formation of parties based on principle; which is, in fact, too busy in "handling" to do much with heading parties; and Lowell, who had helped in his way in founding the old antislavery and the new Republican parties, could never look into the face of a "manipulator" without a laugh; and the more he looked the more he laughed. The satirical laugh, as a weapon of offense, he was master of; and with it, better than many stump-speakers, he did service. It is a wholesome weapon, this amalgam of satire with laughter—if that can be called wholesome which first doubles you up and then cuts at the doubling-point. "Heartsease and Rue," however, is, as I have said, not greatly given to satire of any sort. It is the mellowest and kindest of all Lowell's literary work. Many of the poems date back a quarter of a century and more. Of these one of the best in pure humor is, "At the Burns Centennial," which antedates the war period. For the promised continuation of another, "Fitz Adam's Story," some of us have been waiting and hoping half of an average life. "The Origin of Didactic Poetry" reads like a stray leaflet from the "Fable for Critics," and will be remembered with that. The "Agassiz," which is younger, rises at times to the full height of the old "Commemoration Ode." All scholars will count it a perpetual treasure. Of the various sonnets—a form of verse in which Mr. Lowell seems least successful, perhaps because his fancy is too rich and too discursive to let him follow one clear stream of thought as closely as the sonnet requires—the most pleasing to one reader at least are "Scottish Border," and the first and third of those entitled "Bankside." But there are two stanzas, sonnets in quality, and almost in form, of unusually beautiful clearness. These are "The Prison of Cervantes" and "My Portrait Gallery."

But how idle to try to pick out the best, when each will be best to some, and when all have passages not excelled by any poet of to-day for flavor, for humor, for virility, for the human quality, which still, as ever, serves to bring Lowell home to our hearts, and to keep his verse on the scholar's table. One of these poems of finest reach and beauty is his latest, "Endymion," wherein the mood, however, is of the almost incommunicable kind, kindled in all of us sooner or later by the fact that the image-making faculty of youth will enter at last into an unsatisfactory competition with the dull realism of middle life and old age. It is the mood which led Wordsworth, on the one hand, to write his grand ode on "Immortality," and Byron, on the other, to sing, in more human strain:

O could I feel as I have felt, or be what I have been,  
Or weep as I could once have wept o'er many a vanished scene,—  
As springs in deserts found seem sweet, all brackish though they  
be,  
So midst the withered waste of life, those tears would flow to me.

James Herbert Morse.

THE attention given by THE CENTURY to matters of educational importance prompts me to bring to the notice of its vast circle of readers a project which must have much interest for them as citizens of this great republic. The value of educating and elevating their fellow-citizens, or of assuring that the education of future citizens be such as to secure their highest honesty and efficiency as citizens, will commend itself to all who are already good citizens. The project referred to has this end in view.

For several years courses of lectures have been given to the youth of Boston with a view to afford sound instruction in history and the principles of American institutions and government. These lectures were instituted by Mrs. Mary Hemenway, who was instrumental in saving from destruction and devoting to this noble object the Old South Church; and these lectures have been known as the "Old South Historical Courses." In Boston they have aroused an interest in and an enthusiasm for political and historical study that has borne valuable fruit; and lately similar courses have been instituted in some Western cities, notably Chicago, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis, the value of the work having been perceived by energetic educators of those places. Now it is proposed seriously to push this work forward throughout the country wherever there is interest or opportunity enough for its direction and maintenance. Interest in and knowledge of it are almost everything that it is necessary to arouse. Its direction and maintenance will be easy, and the opportunities for it are unlimited. It would prove valuable where there is even only one school, and home talent for its conduct could generally be found even in such places. The study of the local history and institutions of the places would in such cases be a fitting and comparatively easy work, and, besides showing what real study and investigation mean, would lead to the larger study of the history and institutions of state and nation, and so prove of incalculable value. But the need of such work in the large cities particularly, and in New York more particularly, is what I wish to enforce now. The socialistic and communistic doctrines so prevalent in these cities, the corruption so widespread among their officials,—and often, too, among their voters,—the ignorance so apparent of either institutions or economics, the want of reason even, as shown in the misunderstanding or misapplication of the simplest and most evident principles of this science and in the conduct of private organizations, prove this need of something better in the education of citizens.

The education of citizens is the proper work of the common schools. They have no other valid reason for existence. They have no other right to public money. If they fail in the education of citizens, they have no right whatever to public maintenance. But they do fail. Hence—However, we will not enforce the conclusion. What we do wish is to see the schools put on such a basis as will falsify the premises and consequently nullify the conclusion. To do this, some such work as we have touched on above is necessary. The schools at present are incompetent to do their first duty. They must be made competent. Their teachers must be taught—first their duty, then how to do it. Some such work as that of the Old South His-