

The Friendship of Five New England Poets.

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Outline.

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"The Friendship of Five New England Poets."

Of all the sacred relations existing among men, none is more sacred and inspiring than that of friendship. It should be cultivated and cherished, for more than any other relation, it develops and enriches a man's life - creates in him lofty ideals and noble aspirations and fosters a desire to constantly make these yet nobler and more lofty.

The truest friendship can exist only in pure and loving hearts - in those whose lives are upright and good - whose natures are responsive to the highest and tenderest feelings in man, and whose characters are such as to bring out and produce these feelings in others.

Sincerity, truthfulness and the sympathetic spirit are characteristics, and one who possesses these, will exert an unbounded influence for good; for their natures will react on all those with whom they come in contact.

The worth and grandeur of friendship is manifest when we think of

the innumerable references to it in all literature. It is one of the themes that geniuses of all ages and climes have dwelt upon and one whose praises shall be sung as long as literature remains. A study of the lives of these men of genius, in their relations to their friends and associates, reveals the working out of many of the noble thoughts they have penned!

In the records we have of the friendships existing among great literary men, are found many that we might study with interest, but among all, there is none more beautiful; none that has had a more far-reaching influence; or that has been a greater power for good, than that friendship which existed among the five New England poets clustered around Concord, - Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes and Lowell.

How the heart of every true American should thrill with pride at the sound of those names! For although they were New Englanders, and wrote of New England's landscapes and customs; yet

they wrote for the whole nation, and in their powerful and matchless way have done more than any other writers, to give America her high place in literature.

The works of these men should be found in every home in our land, and all should be familiar, both with the writings and lives of these authors. They have been the foremost writers of poetry in America, in this century; they are coming to be more and more appreciated as they are studied more closely, and they hold a warmer and more exalted place in the hearts of the people today than ever before. A study of these works is profitable in many ways, both to old and young. They are inspiring and cheering, and the truths taught therein, if taken into men's lives would much to lift up humanity.

But no less profitable than a study of the poems of these authors, is a study of their lives, especially when viewed from the aspect of their associations with each other. In daily

life, in college life and in the outside world as men of letters, they were associated, and the influence they exerted each upon the other, is apparent in many of their poems.

We often think of great poets as beings who live apart from their fellow-men, and have not much in common with them; but a study of the lives and friendships of these men shows us that with them this was not the case. Their greatness only made them better able to understand the true meaning of friendship, and their tender sympathetic natures responded to all whom they touched.

The oldest of this group was Emerson, the sage of Concord, who, because of his strange and wonderful personality, was revered and admired by all who knew him. This striking personality won him distinction all through his life. Even as a boy, it was noticeable, there was something about him that could not be resisted, and his associates could

not but have for him a feeling of regard and affection. As he grew older, this singularly sweet nature developed, and became more elevating and influential. In college, he was esteemed by all his classmates. They were attracted by his quiet, sympathetic nature, and his genial smile was even then highly prized.

Emerson was an exception to the rule that a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country; for in Concord, where he spent the greater part of his life, he was loved by his fellow-townsmen. He was one with them in all town affairs, and was known by all as a true friend.

One great characteristic of Emerson was his sincerity. He was sincere to those about him, to himself, and to that which he believed. In his life, he was compelled to make great sacrifices for the sake of his beliefs, but he made them un murmuringly.

His greatness was such as to place him upon an eminence above

his contemporaries, so that he influenced others more than others influenced him. This great influence over others is manifest in the lives of the other members of this group. They all, with one accord, agree in thinking him the greatest poet our country has produced, and this when they themselves hold a high and sure place in the hearts of their countrymen. He criticised them when they did not reach his ideal of a poet, and they accepted the criticism as a just one, and as coming not from one who would criticise for his own sake but from a true and loving heart.

Whittier was one of Emerson's closest friends, and their friendship meant much to each. Lowell was very greatly influenced by Emerson, who was very kind to him when he was a young man in Concord. In speaking of one of Emerson's lectures, he says that "every word seemed to have just dropped down to him from the clouds." This reverence for him remained with Lowell all his life and entered into all his writings.

Unlike Emerson in many particulars yet like him in his charming manner and sympathetic tenderness was Longfellow. When a professor in Harvard College, Longfellow was very popular with the students. Unlike all the other professors, he did not hold himself aloof from his students, but made them feel that he was their friend and fellow-worker. One of his characteristics was helpfulness. He had an intense longing to help all those with whom he came in contact, and this feeling pervades his poems. He wanted to feel that his poems were a help and comfort to those who read them, and himself said that he wanted his songs to "take root in the heart of a friend". Especially to those who were striving after an ideal did his helpful and sympathetic nature reveal itself. For such an one he always had a word of encouragement and inspiration.

Longfellow is the poet of the beautiful, and more than any other poet has awakened a new feeling and love

for poetry. In all his poems, his own self is revealed so vividly that all who read them cannot help but love him.

Holmes says of him that he was one of the loveliest of human characters, and in one of his poems in honor of Longfellow, says that his gentle voice has come into all their lives as a power for good.

Between him and Lowell there existed a close friendship, and the sunshine and loveliness of Longfellow's nature was deeply felt by Lowell.

Whittier, 'the Quaker poet,' was one to whom friendship was peculiarly sweet and blessed. His life was a lonely one and friends meant much to him - even those afar off seemed to be his personally, and their affection for him afforded him great pleasure.

He has not the flavor of Emerson, nor the literary art of Lowell, yet he will live as one of the greatest American poets, for he lives with the people. His verse is spontaneous and enthusiastic, and the simple Christian truths he

teaches, and his beautiful portrayals of home life awaken a response in the hearts of all who read them.

One striking characteristic of Whittier was appreciation of his contemporaries, of whom he speaks in the highest terms.

Holmes was the genial, sparkling wit of this galaxy of poets. His nature was vivacious and cheerful, but full of tenderness and simplicity. He supplied pure, wholesome pleasure combined with wisdom and truth.

Whittier speaks of him as the "rarest optimist" who cheered the world by his songs of gladness. Lowell was thrilled by his genius, which called out the deepest emotions in him.

Holmes outlived the other members of this group, and no man was more deeply mourned and no one's loss felt more keenly than his.

Lowell, "the American man of letters," possessed a charm of manners and a refinement that increased attractive as was Emerson's personality.

He had a social magnetism that drew men to him, and a tact which could not be resisted. He was a brilliant conversationalist, which with his generous sympathetic nature, won him many friends.

Between him and Longfellow there existed a close friendship and Longfellow said he was one of the noblest and noblest men that ever lived.

Holmes writing of him speaks in highest terms of his greatness and of the love felt for him by all his friends.

Each of these men had an individuality that distinguished him from the others, but there were many points of likeness in their characters and writings.

One remarkable fact about them is, that they had none of the faults commonly attributed to genius. In the lives of nearly all of the great English men of letters, there is some blemish, some stain on their character; but

in the lives of these men none could be found. In every particular, in thought, word, and deed, they were pure, chaste, and honest, and their noble Christian characters shone with a brilliant radiance in all they did. They were all alike in the simplicity of their lives, in their generous, sympathetic natures, and in their desire to reach out and be an influence in other lives.

Not only were they poets of America, but they were also patriots, each loyal and true to his country. The combination of their genius and patriotism when the great question of slavery came before the people, was far reaching in its results. The inspiring and patriotic words they uttered aroused men to their duty, and led them on to deeds of heroism.

The lives of these men, so closely united by that golden bond of friendship which unites all humanity, should inspire all to purer, nobler lives and a desire to develop

in their natures such qualities as will enable them to enjoy all of the blessings which true, sincere friendships may bring to them.