

John Lothrop Motley. a memoir — Volume 1 eBook

John Lothrop Motley. a memoir — Volume 1 by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

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JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY.

A MEMOIR

By Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

Volume I.



NOTE.

The Memoir here given to the public is based on a biographical sketch prepared by the writer at the request of the Massachusetts Historical Society for its Proceedings. The questions involving controversies into which the Society could not feel called to enter are treated at considerable length in the following pages. Many details are also given which would have carried the paper written for the Society beyond the customary limits of such tributes to the memory of its deceased members. It is still but an outline which may serve a present need and perhaps be of some assistance to a future biographer.

I.

1814-1827. To AEt. 13.

Birth and early years.

John Motley, the great-grandfather of the subject of this Memoir, came in the earlier part of the last century from Belfast in Ireland to Falmouth, now Portland, in the District, now the State of Maine. He was twice married, and had ten children, four of the first marriage and six of the last. Thomas, the youngest son by his first wife, married Emma, a daughter of John Wait, the first Sheriff of Cumberland County under the government of the United States. Two of their seven sons, Thomas and Edward, removed from Portland to Boston in 1802 and established themselves as partners in commercial business, continuing united and prosperous for nearly half a century before the firm was dissolved.



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The earlier records of New England have preserved the memory of an incident which deserves mention as showing how the historian's life was saved by a quickwitted handmaid, more than a hundred years before he was born. On the 29th of August, 1708, the French and Indians from Canada made an attack upon the town of Haverhill, in Massachusetts. Thirty or forty persons were slaughtered, and many others were carried captive into Canada.

The minister of the town, Rev. Benjamin Rolfe, was killed by a bullet through the door of his house. Two of his daughters, Mary, aged thirteen, and Elizabeth, aged nine, were sleeping in a room with the maid-servant, Hagar. When Hagar heard the whoop of the savages she seized the children, ran with them into the cellar, and, after concealing them under two large washtubs, hid herself. The Indians ransacked the cellar, but missed the prey. Elizabeth, the younger of the two girls, grew up and married the Rev. Samuel Checkley, first minister of the "New South" Church, Boston. Her son, Rev. Samuel Checkley, Junior, was minister of the Second Church, and his successor, Rev. John Lothrop, or Lathrop, as it was more commonly spelled, married his daughter. Dr. Lothrop was great-grandson of Rev. John Lothrop, of Scituate, who had been imprisoned in England for nonconformity. The Checkleys were from Preston Capes, in Northamptonshire. The name is probably identical with that of the Chicheles or Chichleys, a well-known Northamptonshire family.

Thomas Motley married Anna, daughter of the Rev. John Lothrop, granddaughter of the Rev. Samuel Checkley, Junior, the two ministers mentioned above, both honored in their day and generation. Eight children were born of this marriage, of whom four are still living.

John Lothrop Motley, the second of these children, was born in Dorchester, now a part of Boston, Massachusetts, on the 15th of April, 1814. A member of his family gives a most pleasing and interesting picture, from his own recollections and from what his mother told him, of the childhood which was to develop into such rich maturity. The boy was rather delicate in organization, and not much given to outdoor amusements, except skating and swimming, of which last exercise he was very fond in his young days, and in which he excelled. He was a great reader, never idle, but always had a book in his hand,—a volume of poetry or one of the novels of Scott or Cooper. His fondness for plays and declamation is illustrated by the story told by a younger brother, who remembers being wrapped up in a shawl and kept quiet by sweetmeats, while he figured as the dead Caesar, and his brother, the future historian, delivered the speech of Antony over his prostrate body. He was of a most sensitive nature, easily excited, but not tenacious of any irritated feelings, with a quick sense of honor, and the most entirely truthful child, his mother used to say, that she had ever seen. Such are some of the recollections of those who knew him in his earliest years and in the most intimate relations.



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His father's family was at this time living in the house No. 7 Walnut Street, looking down Chestnut Street over the water to the western hills. Near by, at the corner of Beacon Street, was the residence of the family of the first mayor of Boston, and at a little distance from the opposite corner was the house of one of the fathers of New England manufacturing enterprise, a man of superior intellect, who built up a great name and fortune in our city. The children from these three homes naturally became playmates. Mr. Motley's house was a very hospitable one, and Lothrop and two of his young companions were allowed to carry out their schemes of amusement in the garden and the garret. If one with a prescient glance could have looked into that garret on some Saturday afternoon while our century was not far advanced in its second score of years, he might have found three boys in cloaks and doublets and plumed hats, heroes and bandits, enacting more or less impromptu melodramas. In one of the boys he would have seen the embryo dramatist of a nation's life history, John Lothrop Motley; in the second, a famous talker and wit who has spilled more good things on the wasteful air in conversation than would carry a "diner-out" through half a dozen London seasons, and waked up somewhat after the usual flowering-time of authorship to find himself a very agreeable and cordially welcomed writer,—Thomas Gold Appleton. In the third he would have recognized a champion of liberty known wherever that word is spoken, an orator whom to hear is to revive all the traditions of the grace, the address, the commanding sway of the silver-tongued eloquence of the most renowned speakers,—Wendell Phillips.

Both of young Motley's playmates have furnished me with recollections of him and of those around him at this period of his life, and I cannot do better than borrow freely from their communications. His father was a man of decided character, social, vivacious, witty, a lover of books, and himself not unknown as a writer, being the author of one or more of the well remembered "Jack Downing" letters. He was fond of having the boys read to him from such authors as Channing and Irving, and criticised their way of reading with discriminating judgment and taste. Mrs. Motley was a woman who could not be looked upon without admiration. I remember well the sweet dignity of her aspect, her "regal beauty," as Mr. Phillips truly styles it, and the charm of her serene and noble presence, which made her the type of a perfect motherhood. Her character corresponded to the promise of her gracious aspect. She was one of the fondest of mothers, but not thoughtlessly indulgent to the boy from whom she hoped and expected more than she thought it wise to let him know. The story used to be current that in their younger days this father and mother were the handsomest pair the town of Boston could show. This son of theirs was "rather tall," says Mr. Phillips, "lithe, very

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graceful in movement and gesture, and there was something marked and admirable in the set of his head on his shoulders,”—a peculiar elegance which was most noticeable in those later days when I knew him. Lady Byron long afterwards spoke of him as more like her husband in appearance than any other person she had met; but Mr. Phillips, who remembers the first bloom of his boyhood and youth, thinks he was handsomer than any portrait of Byron represents the poet. “He could not have been eleven years old,” says the same correspondent, “when he began writing a novel. It opened, I remember, not with one solitary horseman, but with two, riding up to an inn in the valley of the Housatonic. Neither of us had ever seen the Housatonic, but it sounded grand and romantic. Two chapters were finished.”

There is not much remembered of the single summer he passed at Mr. Green’s school at Jamaica Plain. From that school he went to Round Hill, Northampton, then under the care of Mr. Cogswell and Mr. Bancroft. The historian of the United States could hardly have dreamed that the handsome boy of ten years was to take his place at the side of his teacher in the first rank of writers in his own department. Motley came to Round Hill, as one of his schoolmates tells me, with a great reputation, especially as a declaimer. He had a remarkable facility for acquiring languages, excelled as a reader and as a writer, and was the object of general admiration for his many gifts. There is some reason to think that the flattery he received was for a time a hindrance to his progress and the development of his character. He obtained praise too easily, and learned to trust too much to his genius. He had everything to spoil him,—beauty, precocious intelligence, and a personal charm which might have made him a universal favorite. Yet he does not seem to have been generally popular at this period of his life. He was wilful, impetuous, sometimes supercilious, always fastidious. He would study as he liked, and not by rule. His school and college mates believed in his great possibilities through all his forming period, but it may be doubted if those who counted most confidently on his future could have supposed that he would develop the heroic power of concentration, the long-breathed tenacity of purpose, which in after years gave effect to his brilliant mental endowments. “I did wonder,” says Mr. Wendell Phillips, “at the diligence and painstaking, the drudgery shown in his historical works. In early life he had no industry, not needing it. All he cared for in a book he caught quickly,—the spirit of it, and all his mind needed or would use. This quickness of apprehension was marvellous. “I do not find from the recollections of his schoolmates at Northampton that he was reproached for any grave offences, though he may have wandered beyond the prescribed boundaries now and then, and studied according to his inclinations rather than by rule. While at that school he made one acquisition much less common than now,—a knowledge of the German language and some degree of acquaintance with its literature, under the guidance of one of the few thorough German scholars this country then possessed, Mr. George Bancroft.



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II.

1827-1831. AEt. 13-17.

College life.

Such then was the boy who at the immature, we might almost say the tender, age of thirteen entered Harvard College. Though two years after me in college standing, I remember the boyish reputation which he brought with him, especially that of a wonderful linguist, and the impression which his striking personal beauty produced upon us as he took his seat in the college chapel. But it was not until long after this period that I became intimately acquainted with him, and I must again have recourse to the classmates and friends who have favored me with their reminiscences of this period of his life. Mr. Phillips says:

“During our first year in college, though the youngest in the class, he stood third, I think, or second in college rank, and ours was an especially able class. Yet to maintain this rank he neither cared nor needed to make any effort. Too young to feel any responsibilities, and not yet awake to any ambition, he became so negligent that he was ‘rusticated’ [that is, sent away from college for a time]. He came back sobered, and worked rather more, but with no effort for college rank thenceforward.”

I must finish the portrait of the collegian with all its lights and shadows by the help of the same friends from whom I have borrowed the preceding outlines.

He did not care to make acquaintances, was haughty in manner and cynical in mood, at least as he appeared to those in whom he felt no special interest. It is no wonder, therefore, that he was not a popular favorite, although recognized as having very brilliant qualities. During all this period his mind was doubtless fermenting with projects which kept him in a fevered and irritable condition. “He had a small writing-table,” Mr. Phillips says, “with a shallow drawer; I have often seen it half full of sketches, unfinished poems, soliloquies, a scene or two of a play, prose portraits of some pet character, *etc.* These he would read to me, though he never volunteered to do so, and every now and then he burnt the whole and began to fill the drawer again.”

My friend, Mr. John Osborne Sargent, who was a year before him in college, says, in a very interesting letter with which he has favored me:

“My first acquaintance with him [Motley] was at Cambridge, when he came from Mr. Cogswell’s school at Round Hill. He then had a good deal of the shyness that was just pronounced enough to make him interesting, and which did not entirely wear off till he left college. . . I soon became acquainted with him, and we used to take long walks together, sometimes taxing each other’s memory for poems or passages from poems

that had struck our fancy. Shelley was then a great favorite of his, and I remember that Praed's verses then appearing in the 'New Monthly' he thought very clever and

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brilliant, and was fond of repeating them. You have forgotten, or perhaps never knew, that Motley's first appearance in print was in the 'Collegian.' He brought me one day, in a very modest mood, a translation from Goethe, which I was most happy to oblige him by inserting. It was very prettily done, and will now be a curiosity. . . . How it happened that Motley wrote only one piece I do not remember. I had the pleasure about that time of initiating him as a member of the Knights of the Square Table,—always my favorite college club, for the reason, perhaps, that I was a sometime Grand Master. He was always a genial and jovial companion at our supper- parties at Fresh Pond and Gallagher's."

We who live in the days of photographs know how many faces belong to every individual. We know too under what different aspects the same character appears to those who study it from different points of view and with different prepossessions. I do not hesitate, therefore, to place side by side the impressions of two of his classmates as to one of his personal traits as they observed him at this period of his youth.

"He was a manly boy, with no love for or leaning to girls' company; no care for dress; not a trace of personal vanity. . . . He was, or at least seemed, wholly unconscious of his rare beauty and of the fascination of his manner; not a trace of pretence, the simplest and most natural creature in the world."

Look on that picture and on this:—

"He seemed to have a passion for dress. But as in everything else, so in this, his fancy was a fitful one. At one time he would excite our admiration by the splendor of his outfit, and perhaps the next week he would seem to take equal pleasure in his slovenly or careless appearance."

It is not very difficult to reconcile these two portraitures. I recollect it was said by a witty lady of a handsome clergyman well remembered among us, that he had dressy eyes. Motley so well became everything he wore, that if he had sprung from his bed and slipped his clothes on at an alarm of fire, his costume would have looked like a prince's undress. His natural presentment, like that of Count D'Orsay, was of the kind which suggests the intentional effects of an elaborate toilet, no matter how little thought or care may have been given to make it effective. I think the "passion for dress" was really only a seeming, and that he often excited admiration when he had not taken half the pains to adorn himself that many a youth less favored by nature has wasted upon his unblest exterior only to be laughed at.

I gather some other interesting facts from a letter which I have received from his early playmate and school and college classmate, Mr. T. G. Appleton.

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“In his Sophomore year he kept abreast of the prescribed studies, but his heart was out of bounds, as it often had been at Round Hill when chasing squirrels or rabbits through forbidden forests. Already his historical interest was shaping his life. A tutor coming-by chance, let us hope—to his room remonstrated with him upon the heaps of novels upon his table.

“‘Yes,’ said Motley, ‘I am reading historically, and have come to the novels of the nineteenth century. Taken in the lump, they are very hard reading.’”

All Old Cambridge people know the Brattle House, with its gambrel roof, its tall trees, its perennial spring, its legendary fame of good fare and hospitable board in the days of the kindly old bon vivant, Major Brattle. In this house the two young students, Appleton and Motley, lived during a part of their college course.

“Motley’s room was on the ground floor, the room to the left of the entrance. He led a very pleasant life there, tempering his college duties with the literature he loved, and receiving his friends amidst elegant surroundings, which added to the charm of his society. Occasionally we amused ourselves by writing for the magazines and papers of the day. Mr. Willis had just started a slim monthly, written chiefly by himself, but with the true magazine flavor. We wrote for that, and sometimes verses in the corner of a paper called ‘The Anti-Masonic Mirror,’ and in which corner was a woodcut of Apollo, and inviting to destruction ambitious youths by the legend underneath,—

‘Much yet remains unsung.’

These pieces were usually dictated to each other, the poet recumbent upon the bed and a classmate ready to carry off the manuscript for the paper of the following day. ‘Blackwood’s’ was then in its glory, its pages redolent of ‘mountain dew’ in every sense; the humor of the Shepherd, the elegantly brutal onslaughts upon Whigs and Cockney poets by Christopher North, intoxicated us youths. “It was young writing, and made for the young. The opinions were charmingly wrong, and its enthusiasm was half Glenlivet. But this delighted the boys. There were no reprints then, and to pass the paper-cutter up the fresh inviting pages was like swinging over the heather arm in arm with Christopher himself. It is a little singular that though we had a college magazine of our own, Motley rarely if ever wrote for it. I remember a translation from Goethe, ‘The Ghost-Seer,’ which he may have written for it, and a poem upon the White Mountains. Motley spoke at one of the college exhibitions an essay on Goethe so excellent that Mr. Joseph Cogswell sent it to Madam Goethe, who, after reading it, said, ‘I wish to see the first book that young man will write.’”

Although Motley did not aim at or attain a high college rank, the rules of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, which confine the number of members to the first sixteen of each class, were stretched so as to include him,—a tribute to his recognized ability, and an evidence that a distinguished future was anticipated for him.



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III.

1832-1833. AEt. 18-19.

Study and travel in Europe.

Of the two years divided between the Universities of Berlin and Gottingen I have little to record. That he studied hard I cannot doubt; that he found himself in pleasant social relations with some of his fellow-students seems probable from the portraits he has drawn in his first story, "Morton's Hope," and is rendered certain so far as one of his companions is concerned. Among the records of the past to which he referred during his last visit to this country was a letter which he took from a collection of papers and handed me to read one day when I was visiting him. The letter was written in a very lively and exceedingly familiar vein. It implied such intimacy, and called up in such a lively way the gay times Motley and himself had had together in their youthful days, that I was puzzled to guess who could have addressed him from Germany in that easy and off-hand fashion. I knew most of his old friends who would be likely to call him by his baptismal name in its most colloquial form, and exhausted my stock of guesses unsuccessfully before looking at the signature. I confess that I was surprised, after laughing at the hearty and almost boyish tone of the letter, to read at the bottom of the page the signature of Bismarck. I will not say that I suspect Motley of having drawn the portrait of his friend in one of the characters of "Morton's Hope," but it is not hard to point out traits in one of them which we can believe may have belonged to the great Chancellor at an earlier period of life than that at which the world contemplates his overshadowing proportions.

Hoping to learn something of Motley during the two years while we had lost sight of him, I addressed a letter to His Highness Prince Bismarck, to which I received the following reply:—

Foreignoffice, Berlin, March 11, 1878.

Sir,—I am directed by Prince Bismarck to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 1st of January, relating to the biography of the late Mr. Motley. His Highness deeply regrets that the state of his health and pressure of business do not allow him to contribute personally, and as largely as he would be delighted to do, to your depicting of a friend whose memory will be ever dear to him. Since I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Mr. Motley at Varzin, I have been intrusted with communicating to you a few details I have gathered from the mouth of the Prince. I enclose them as they are jotted down, without any attempt of digestion.

I have the honor to be
Your obedient servant,

Lothair Bucher.

“Prince Bismarck said:—



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“I met Motley at Gottingen in 1832, I am not sure if at the beginning of Easter Term or Michaelmas Term. He kept company with German students, though more addicted to study than we members of the fighting clubs (: corps:). Although not having mastered yet the German language, he exercised a marked attraction by a conversation sparkling with wit, humor, and originality. In autumn of 1833, having both of us migrated from Gottingen to Berlin for the prosecution of our studies, we became fellow-lodgers in the house No. 161 Friedrich Strasse. There we lived in the closest intimacy, sharing meals and outdoor exercise. Motley by that time had arrived at talking German fluently; he occupied himself not only in translating Goethe’s poem “Faust,” but tried his hand even in composing German verses. Enthusiastic admirer of Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, he used to spice his conversation abundantly with quotations from these his favorite authors. A pertinacious arguer, so much so that sometimes he watched my awakening in order to continue a discussion on some topic of science, poetry, or practical life, cut short by the chime of the small hours, he never lost his mild and amiable temper. Our faithful companion was Count Alexander Keyserling, a native of Courland, who has since achieved distinction as a botanist.”“Motley having entered the diplomatic service of his country, we had frequently the opportunity of renewing our friendly intercourse; at Frankfort he used to stay with me, the welcome guest of my wife; we also met at Vienna, and, later, here. The last time I saw him was in 1872 at Varzin, at the celebration of my “silver wedding,” namely, the twenty-fifth anniversary.”“The most striking feature of his handsome and delicate appearance was uncommonly large and beautiful eyes. He never entered a drawing-room without exciting the curiosity and sympathy of the ladies.””

It is but a glimpse of their young life which the great statesman gives us, but a bright and pleasing one. Here were three students, one of whom was to range in the flowery fields of the loveliest of the sciences, another to make the dead past live over again in his burning pages, and a third to extend an empire as the botanist spread out a plant and the historian laid open a manuscript.

IV.

1834-1839. 2Et. 20-25.

Return to America.—Study of law.—Marriage.—
His first novel, “Morton’s hope.”

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Of the years passed in the study of law after his return from Germany I have very little recollection, and nothing of importance to record. He never became seriously engaged in the practice of the profession he had chosen. I had known him pleasantly rather than intimately, and our different callings tended to separate us. I met him, however, not very rarely, at one house where we were both received with the greatest cordiality, and where the attractions brought together many both young and old to enjoy the society of its charming and brilliant inmates. This was at No. 14 Temple Place, where Mr. Park Benjamin was then living with his two sisters, both in the bloom of young womanhood. Here Motley found the wife to whom his life owed so much of its success and its happiness. Those who remember Mary Benjamin find it hard to speak of her in the common terms of praise which they award to the good and the lovely. She was not only handsome and amiable and agreeable, but there was a cordial frankness, an openhearted sincerity about her which made her seem like a sister to those who could help becoming her lovers. She stands quite apart in the memory of the friends who knew her best, even from the circle of young persons whose recollections they most cherish. Yet hardly could one of them have foreseen all that she was to be to him whose life she was to share. They were married on the 2d of March, 1837. His intimate friend, Mr. Joseph Lewis Stackpole, was married at about the same time to her sister, thus joining still more closely in friendship the two young men who were already like brothers in their mutual affection.

Two years after his marriage, in 1839, appeared his first work, a novel in two volumes, called "Morton's Hope." He had little reason to be gratified with its reception. The general verdict was not favorable to it, and the leading critical journal of America, not usually harsh or cynical in its treatment of native authorship, did not even give it a place among its "Critical Notices," but dropped a small-print extinguisher upon it in one of the pages of its "List of New Publications." Nothing could be more utterly disheartening than the unqualified condemnation passed upon the story. At the same time the critic says that "no one can read 'Morton's Hope' without perceiving it to have been written by a person of uncommon resources of mind and scholarship."

It must be confessed that, as a story, "Morton's Hope" cannot endure a searching or even a moderately careful criticism. It is wanting in cohesion, in character, even in a proper regard to circumstances of time and place; it is a map of dissected incidents which has been flung out of its box and has arranged itself without the least regard to chronology or geography. It is not difficult to trace in it many of the influences which had helped in forming or deforming the mind of the young man of twenty-five, not yet come into possession of his full inheritance of the slowly ripening qualities

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which were yet to assert their robust independence. How could he help admiring Byron and falling into more or less unconscious imitation of his moods if not of his special affectations? Passion showing itself off against a dark foil of cynicism; sentiment, ashamed of its own self-betrayal, and sneering at itself from time to time for fear of the laugh of the world at its sincerity,—how many young men were spoiled and how many more injured by becoming bad copies of a bad ideal! The blood of Don Juan ran in the veins of Vivian Grey and of Pelham. But if we read the fantastic dreams of Disraeli, the intellectual dandyisms of Bulwer, remembering the after careers of which these were the preludes, we can understand how there might well be something in those earlier efforts which would betray itself in the way of thought and in the style of the young men who read them during the plastic period of their minds and characters. Allow for all these influences, allow for whatever impressions his German residence and his familiarity with German literature had produced; accept the fact that the story is to the last degree disjointed, improbable, impossible; lay it aside as a complete failure in what it attempted to be, and read it, as “Vivian Grey” is now read, in the light of the career which it heralded.

“Morton’s Hope” is not to be read as a novel: it is to be studied as an autobiography, a prophecy, a record of aspirations, disguised under a series of incidents which are flung together with no more regard to the unities than a pack of shuffled playing-cards. I can do nothing better than let him picture himself, for it is impossible not to recognize the portrait. It is of little consequence whether every trait is an exact copy from his own features, but it is so obvious that many of the lines are direct transcripts from nature that we may believe the same thing of many others. Let us compare his fictitious hero’s story with what we have read of his own life.

In early boyhood Morton amused himself and astonished those about him by enacting plays for a puppet theatre. This was at six years old, and at twelve we find him acting in a play with other boys, just as Motley’s playmates have already described him. The hero may now speak for himself, but we shall all perceive that we are listening to the writer’s own story.

“I was always a huge reader; my mind was essentially craving and insatiable. Its appetite was enormous, and it devoured too greedily for health. I rejected all guidance in my studies. I already fancied myself a misanthrope. I had taken a step very common for boys of my age, and strove with all my might to be a cynic.”

He goes on to describe, under the perfectly transparent mask of his hero, the course of his studies. “To poetry, like most infants, I devoted most of my time.” From modern poetry he went back to the earlier sources, first with the idea of systematic reading and at last through Chaucer and



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Gower and early ballads, until he lost himself “in a dismal swamp of barbarous romances and lying Latin chronicles. I got hold of the Bibliotheca Monastica, containing a copious account of Anglo-Norman authors, with notices of their works, and set seriously to reading every one of them.” One profit of his antiquarianism, however, was, as he says, his attention to foreign languages,—French, Spanish, German, especially in their earliest and rudest forms of literature. From these he ascended to the ancient poets, and from Latin to Greek. He would have taken up the study of the Oriental languages, but for the advice of a relative, who begged him seriously to turn his attention to history. The paragraph which follows must speak for itself as a true record under a feigned heading.

“The groundwork of my early character was plasticity and fickleness. I was mortified by this exposure of my ignorance, and disgusted with my former course of reading. I now set myself violently to the study of history. With my turn of mind, and with the preposterous habits which I had been daily acquiring, I could not fail to make as gross mistakes in the pursuit of this as of other branches of knowledge. I imagined, on setting out, a system of strict and impartial investigation of the sources of history. I was inspired with the absurd ambition, not uncommon to youthful students, of knowing as much as their masters. I imagined it necessary for me, stripling as I was, to study the authorities; and, imbued with the strict necessity of judging for myself, I turned from the limpid pages of the modern historians to the notes and authorities at the bottom of the page. These, of course, sent me back to my monastic acquaintances, and I again found myself in such congenial company to a youthful and ardent mind as Florence of Worcester and Simeon of Durham, the Venerable Bede and Matthew Paris; and so on to Gregory and Fredegarius, down to the more modern and elegant pages of Froissart, Hollinshed, Hooker, and Stowe. Infant as I was, I presumed to grapple with masses of learning almost beyond the strength of the giants of history. A spendthrift of my time and labor, I went out of my way to collect materials, and to build for myself, when I should have known that older and abler architects had already appropriated all that was worth preserving; that the edifice was built, the quarry exhausted, and that I was, consequently, only delving amidst rubbish.” This course of study was not absolutely without its advantages. The mind gained a certain proportion of vigor even by this exercise of its faculties, just as my bodily health would have been improved by transporting the refuse ore of a mine from one pit to another, instead of coining the ingots which lay heaped before my eyes. Still, however, my time was squandered. There was a constant want of fitness and concentration of my energies. My dreams of education were



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boundless, brilliant, indefinite; but alas! they were only dreams. There was nothing accurate and defined in my future course of life. I was ambitious and conceited, but my aspirations were vague and shapeless. I had crowded together the most gorgeous and even some of the most useful and durable materials for my woof, but I had no pattern, and consequently never began to weave. "I had not made the discovery that an individual cannot learn, nor be, everything; that the world is a factory in which each individual must perform his portion of work:—happy enough if he can choose it according to his taste and talent, but must renounce the desire of observing or superintending the whole operation. . . ." "From studying and investigating the sources of history with my own eyes, I went a step further; I refused the guidance of modern writers; and proceeding from one point of presumption to another, I came to the magnanimous conviction that I could not know history as I ought to know it unless I wrote it for myself. . . ." "It would be tedious and useless to enlarge upon my various attempts and various failures. I forbear to comment upon mistakes which I was in time wise enough to retrieve. Pushing out as I did, without compass and without experience, on the boundless ocean of learning, what could I expect but an utter and a hopeless shipwreck?" Thus I went on, becoming more learned, and therefore more ignorant, more confused in my brain, and more awkward in my habits, from day to day. I was ever at my studies, and could hardly be prevailed upon to allot a moment to exercise or recreation. I breakfasted with a pen behind my ear, and dined in company with a folio bigger than the table. I became solitary and morose, the necessary consequence of reckless study; talked impatiently of the value of my time, and the immensity of my labors; spoke contemptuously of the learning and acquirements of the whole world, and threw out mysterious hints of the magnitude and importance of my own project. "In the midst of all this study and this infant authorship the perusal of such masses of poetry could not fail to produce their effect. Of a youth whose mind, like mine at that period, possessed some general capability, without perhaps a single prominent and marked talent, a proneness to imitation is sure to be the besetting sin. I consequently, for a large portion of my earlier life, never read a work which struck my fancy, without planning a better one upon its model; for my ambition, like my vanity, knew no bounds. It was a matter of course that I should be attacked by the poetic mania. I took the infection at the usual time, went through its various stages, and recovered as soon as could be expected. I discovered soon enough that emulation is not capability, and he is fortunate to whom is soonest revealed the relative extent of his ambition and his powers.

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“My ambition was boundless; my dreams of glory were not confined to authorship and literature alone; but every sphere in which the intellect of man exerts itself revolved in a blaze of light before me. And there I sat in my solitude and dreamed such wondrous dreams! Events were thickening around me which were soon to change the world, but they were unmarked by me. The country was changing to a mighty theatre, on whose stage those who were as great as I fancied myself to be were to enact a stupendous drama in which I had no part. I saw it not; I knew it not; and yet how infinitely beautiful were the imaginations of my solitude! Fancy shook her kaleidoscope each moment as chance directed, and lo! what new, fantastic, brilliant, but what unmeaning visions. My ambitious anticipations were as boundless as they were various and conflicting. There was not a path which leads to glory in which I was not destined to gather laurels. As a warrior I would conquer and overrun the world. As a statesman I would reorganize and govern it. As a historian I would consign it all to immortality; and in my leisure moments I would be a great poet and a man of the world. “In short, I was already enrolled in that large category of what are called young men of genius,—men who are the pride of their sisters and the glory of their grandmothers,—men of whom unheard-of things are expected, till after long preparation comes a portentous failure, and then they are forgotten; subsiding into indifferent apprentices and attorneys’ clerks. “Alas for the golden imaginations of our youth! They are bright and beautiful, but they fade. They glitter brightly enough to deceive the wisest and most cautious, and we garner them up in the most secret caskets of our hearts; but are they not like the coins which the Dervise gave the merchant in the story? When we look for them the next morning, do we not find them withered leaves?”

The ideal picture just drawn is only a fuller portraiture of the youth whose outlines have been already sketched by the companions of his earlier years. If his hero says, “I breakfasted with a pen behind my ear and dined in company with a folio bigger than the table,” one of his family says of the boy Motley that “if there were five minutes before dinner, when he came into the parlor he always took up some book near at hand and began to read until dinner was announced.” The same unbounded thirst for knowledge, the same history of various attempts and various failures, the same ambition, not yet fixed in its aim, but showing itself in restless effort, belong to the hero of the story and its narrator.

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Let no man despise the first efforts of immature genius. Nothing can be more crude as a novel, nothing more disappointing, than "Morton's Hope." But in no other of Motley's writings do we get such an inside view of his character with its varied impulses, its capricious appetites, its unregulated forces, its impatient grasp for all kinds of knowledge. With all his university experiences at home and abroad, it might be said with a large measure of truth that he was a self-educated man, as he had been a self-taught boy. His instincts were too powerful to let him work quietly in the common round of school and college training. Looking at him as his companions describe him, as he delineates himself 'mutato nomine,' the chances of success would have seemed to all but truly prophetic eyes very doubtful, if not decidedly against him. Too many brilliant young novel-readers and lovers of poetry, excused by their admirers for their shortcomings on the strength of their supposed birthright of "genius," have ended where they began; flattered into the vain belief that they were men at eighteen or twenty, and finding out at fifty that they were and always had been nothing more than boys. It was but a tangled skein of life that Motley's book showed us at twenty-five, and older men might well have doubted whether it would ever be wound off in any continuous thread. To repeat his own words, he had crowded together the materials for his work, but he had no pattern, and consequently never began to weave.

The more this first work of Motley's is examined, the more are its faults as a story and its interest as a self-revelation made manifest to the reader. The future historian, who spared no pains to be accurate, falls into the most extraordinary anachronisms in almost every chapter. Brutus in a bob-wig, Othello in a swallow-tail coat, could hardly be more incongruously equipped than some of his characters in the manner of thought, the phrases, the way of bearing themselves which belong to them in the tale, but never could have belonged to characters of our Revolutionary period. He goes so far in his carelessness as to mix up dates in such a way as almost to convince us that he never looked over his own manuscript or proofs. His hero is in Prague in June, 1777, reading a letter received from America in less than a fortnight from the date of its being written; in August of the same year he is in the American camp, where he is found in the company of a certain Colonel Waldron, an officer of some standing in the Revolutionary Army, with whom he is said to have been constantly associated for some three months, having arrived in America, as he says, on the 15th of May, that is to say, six weeks or more before he sailed, according to his previous account. Bohemia seems to have bewitched his chronology as it did Shakespeare's geography. To have made his story a consistent series of contradictions, Morton should have sailed from that Bohemian seashore which may be found in "A Winter's Tale," but not in the map of Europe.



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And yet in the midst of all these marks of haste and negligence, here and there the philosophical student of history betrays himself, the ideal of noble achievement glows in an eloquent paragraph, or is embodied in a loving portrait like that of the professor and historian Harlem. The novel, taken in connection with the subsequent developments of the writer's mind, is a study of singular interest. It is a chaos before the creative epoch; the light has not been divided from the darkness; the firmament has not yet divided the waters from the waters. The forces at work in a human intelligence to bring harmony out of its discordant movements are as mysterious, as miraculous, we might truly say, as those which give shape and order to the confused materials out of which habitable worlds are evolved. It is too late now to be sensitive over this unsuccessful attempt as a story and unconscious success as a self-portraiture. The first sketches of Paul Veronese, the first patterns of the Gobelin tapestry, are not to be criticised for the sake of pointing out their inevitable and too manifest imperfections. They are to be carefully studied as the earliest efforts of the hand which painted the Marriage at Cana, of the art which taught the rude fabrics made to be trodden under foot to rival the glowing canvas of the great painters. None of Motley's subsequent writings give such an insight into his character and mental history. It took many years to train the as yet undisciplined powers into orderly obedience, and to bring the unarranged materials into the organic connection which was needed in the construction of a work that should endure. There was a long interval between his early manhood and the middle term of life, during which the slow process of evolution was going on. There are plants which open their flowers with the first rays of the sun; there are others that wait until evening to spread their petals. It was already the high noon of life with him before his genius had truly shown itself; if he had not lived beyond this period, he would have left nothing to give him a lasting name.

V.

1841-1842. AEt. 27-28.

First diplomatic appointment, Secretary of legation to the Russian Mission.—Brief residence at St. Petersburg.—Letter to his mother.— Return.

In the autumn of 1841, Mr. Motley received the appointment of Secretary of Legation to the Russian Mission, Mr. Todd being then the Minister. Arriving at St. Petersburg just at the beginning of winter, he found the climate acting very unfavorably upon his spirits if not upon his health, and was unwilling that his wife and his two young children should be exposed to its rigors. The expense of living, also, was out of proportion to his income, and his letters show

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that he had hardly established himself in St. Petersburg before he had made up his mind to leave a place where he found he had nothing to do and little to enjoy. He was homesick, too, as a young husband and father with an affectionate nature like his ought to have been under these circumstances. He did not regret having made the experiment, for he knew that he should not have been satisfied with himself if he had not made it. It was his first trial of a career in which he contemplated embarking, and in which afterwards he had an eventful experience. In his private letters to his family, many of which I have had the privilege of looking over, he mentions in detail all the reasons which influenced him in forming his own opinion about the expediency of a continued residence at St. Petersburg, and leaves the decision to her in whose judgment he always had the greatest confidence. No unpleasant circumstance attended his resignation of his secretaryship, and though it must have been a disappointment to find that the place did not suit him, as he and his family were then situated, it was only at the worst an experiment fairly tried and not proving satisfactory. He left St. Petersburg after a few months' residence, and returned to America. On reaching New York he was met by the sad tidings of the death of his first-born child, a boy of great promise, who had called out all the affections of his ardent nature. It was long before he recovered from the shock of this great affliction. The boy had shown a very quick and bright intelligence, and his father often betrayed a pride in his gifts and graces which he never for a moment made apparent in regard to his own.

Among the letters which he wrote from St. Petersburg are two miniature ones directed to this little boy. His affectionate disposition shows itself very sweetly in these touching mementos of a love of which his first great sorrow was so soon to be born. Not less charming are his letters to his mother, showing the tenderness with which he always regarded her, and full of all the details which he thought would entertain one to whom all that related to her children was always interesting. Of the letters to his wife it is needless to say more than that they always show the depth of the love he bore her and the absolute trust he placed in her, consulting her at all times as his nearest and wisest friend and adviser,—one in all respects fitted “To warn, to comfort, and command.”

I extract a passage from one of his letters to his mother, as much for the sake of lending a character of reality to his brief residence at St. Petersburg as for that of the pleasant picture it gives us of an interior in that Northern capital.



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“We entered through a small vestibule, with the usual arrangement of treble doors, padded with leather to exclude the cold and guarded by two ‘proud young porters’ in severe cocked hats and formidable batons, into a broad hall,—threw off our furred boots and cloaks, ascended a carpeted marble staircase, in every angle of which stood a statuesque footman in gaudy coat and unblemished unmentionables, and reached a broad landing upon the top thronged as usual with servants. Thence we passed through an antechamber into a long, high, brilliantly lighted, saffron-papered room, in which a dozen card-tables were arranged, and thence into the receiving room. This was a large room, with a splendidly inlaid and polished floor, the walls covered with crimson satin, the cornices heavily incrustated with gold, and the ceiling beautifully painted in arabesque. The massive fauteuils and sofas, as also the drapery, were of crimson satin with a profusion of gilding. The ubiquitous portrait of the Emperor was the only picture, and was the same you see everywhere. This crimson room had two doors upon the side facing the three windows: The innermost opened into a large supper-room, in which a table was spread covered with the usual refreshments of European parties,—tea, ices, lemonade, and *et ceteras*,—and the other opened into a ball-room which is a sort of miniature of the ‘salle blanche’ of the Winter Palace, being white and gold, and very brilliantly lighted with ‘ormolu’ chandeliers filled with myriads of candles. This room (at least forty feet long by perhaps twenty-five) opened into a carpeted conservatory of about the same size, filled with orange-trees and japonica plants covered with fruit and flowers, arranged very gracefully into arbors, with luxurious seats under the pendent boughs, and with here and there a pretty marble statue gleaming through the green and glossy leaves. One might almost have imagined one’s self in the ‘land of the cypress and myrtle’ instead of our actual whereabouts upon the polar banks of the Neva. Wandering through these mimic groves, or reposing from the fatigues of the dance, was many a fair and graceful form, while the brilliantly lighted ballroom, filled with hundreds of exquisitely dressed women (for the Russian ladies, if not very pretty, are graceful, and make admirable toilettes), formed a dazzling contrast with the tempered light of the ‘Winter Garden.’ The conservatory opened into a library, and from the library you reach the antechamber, thus completing the ‘giro’ of one of the prettiest houses in St. Petersburg. I waltzed one waltz and quadrilled one quadrille, but it was hard work; and as the sole occupation of these parties is dancing and card-playing—conversation apparently not being customary—they are to me not very attractive.”

He could not be happy alone, and there were good reasons against his being joined by his wife and children.



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"With my reserved habits," he says, "it would take a great deal longer to become intimate here than to thaw the Baltic. I have only to 'knock that it shall be opened to me,' but that is just what I hate to do. . . . 'Man delights not me, no, nor woman neither.'"

Disappointed in his expectations, but happy in the thought of meeting his wife and children, he came back to his household to find it clad in mourning for the loss of its first-born.

VI.

1844. AEt. 30.

LETTER TO PARK BENJAMIN.—POLITICAL VIEWS AND FEELINGS.

A letter to Mr. Park Benjamin, dated December 17, 1844, which has been kindly lent me by Mrs. Mary Lanman Douw of Poughkeepsie, gives a very complete and spirited account of himself at this period. He begins with a quiet, but tender reference to the death of his younger brother, Preble, one of the most beautiful youths seen or remembered among us, "a great favorite," as he says, "in the family and in deed with every one who knew him." He mentions the fact that his friends and near connections, the Stackpoles, are in Washington, which place he considers as exceptionally odious at the time when he is writing. The election of Mr. Polk as the opponent of Henry Clay gives him a discouraged feeling about our institutions. The question, he thinks, is now settled that a statesman can never again be called to administer the government of the country. He is almost if not quite in despair "because it is now proved that a man, take him for all in all, better qualified by intellectual power, energy and purity of character, knowledge of men, a great combination of personal qualities, a frank, high-spirited, manly bearing, keen sense of honor, the power of attracting and winning men, united with a vast experience in affairs, such as no man (but John Quincy Adams) now living has had and no man in this country can ever have again,—I say it is proved that a man better qualified by an extraordinary combination of advantages to administer the government than any man now living, or any man we can ever produce again, can be beaten by anybody. . . . It has taken forty years of public life to prepare such a man for the Presidency, and the result is that he can be beaten by anybody,—Mr. Polk is anybody,—he is Mr. Quelconque."

I do not venture to quote the most burning sentences of this impassioned letter. It shows that Motley had not only become interested most profoundly in the general movements of parties, but that he had followed the course of political events which resulted in the election of Mr. Polk with careful study, and that he was already looking forward to the revolt of the slave States which occurred sixteen years later. The letter is

full of fiery eloquence, now and then extravagant and even violent in expression, but throbbing with a generous heat which shows the excitable spirit

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of a man who wishes to be proud of his country and does not wish to keep his temper when its acts make him ashamed of it. He is disgusted and indignant to the last degree at seeing “Mr. Quelconque” chosen over the illustrious statesman who was his favorite candidate. But all his indignation cannot repress a sense of humor which was one of his marked characteristics. After fatiguing his vocabulary with hard usage, after his unsparing denunciation of “the very dirty politics” which he finds mixed up with our popular institutions, he says,—it must be remembered that this was an offhand letter to one nearly connected with him,—

“All these things must in short, to use the energetic language of the Balm of Columbia advertisement, ‘bring every generous thinking youth to that heavy sinking gloom which not even the loss of property can produce, but only the loss of hair, which brings on premature decay, causing many to shrink from being uncovered, and even to shun society, to avoid the jests and sneers of their acquaintances. The remainder of their lives is consequently spent in retirement.’”

He continues:—

“Before dropping the subject, and to show the perfect purity of my motives, I will add that I am not at all anxious about the legislation of the new government. I desired the election of Clay as a moral triumph, and because the administration of the country, at this moment of ten thousand times more importance than its legislation, would have been placed in pure, strong, and determined hands.”

Then comes a dash of that satirical and somewhat cynical way of feeling which he had not as yet outgrown. He had been speaking about the general want of attachment to the Union and the absence of the sentiment of loyalty as bearing on the probable dissolution of the Union.

“I don’t mean to express any opinions on these matters,—I haven’t got any. It seems to me that the best way is to look at the hodge-podge, be good-natured if possible, and laugh,

’As from the height of contemplation
We view the feeble joints men totter on.’

I began a tremendous political career during the election, having made two stump speeches of an hour and a half each,—after you went away,—one in Dedham town-hall and one in Jamaica Plain, with such eminent success that many invitations came to me from the surrounding villages, and if I had continued in active political life I might have risen to be vote-distributor, or fence-viewer, or selectman, or hog-reeve, or something of the kind.”

The letter from which the above passages are quoted gives the same portrait of the writer, only seen in profile, as it were, which we have already seen drawn in full face in the story of "Morton's Hope." It is charged with that 'saeva indignatio' which at times verges on misanthropic contempt for its objects, not unnatural to a high-spirited



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young man who sees his lofty ideals confronted with the ignoble facts which strew the highways of political life. But we can recognize real conviction and the deepest feeling beneath his scornful rhetoric and his bitter laugh. He was no more a mere dilettante than Swift himself, but now and then in the midst of his most serious thought some absurd or grotesque image will obtrude itself, and one is reminded of the lines on the monument of Gay rather than of the fierce epitaph of the Dean of Saint Patrick's.

VII.

1845-1847. AEt. 31-33.

First historical and critical essays.—Peter the great.—Novels of Balzac.—Polity of the puritans.

Mr. Motley's first serious effort in historical composition was an article of fifty pages in "The North American Review" for October, 1845. This was nominally a notice of two works, one on Russia, the other "A Memoir of the Life of Peter the Great." It is, however, a narrative rather than a criticism, a rapid, continuous, brilliant, almost dramatic narrative. If there had been any question as to whether the young novelist who had missed his first mark had in him the elements which might give him success as an author, this essay would have settled the question. It shows throughout that the writer has made a thorough study of his subject, but it is written with an easy and abundant, yet scholarly freedom, not as if he were surrounded by his authorities and picking out his material piece by piece, but rather as if it were the overflow of long-pursued and well-remembered studies recalled without effort and poured forth almost as a recreation.

As he betrayed or revealed his personality in his first novel, so in this first effort in another department of literature he showed in epitome his qualities as a historian and a biographer. The hero of his narrative makes his entrance at once in his character as the shipwright of Saardam, on the occasion of a visit of the great Duke of Marlborough. The portrait instantly arrests attention. His ideal personages had been drawn in such a sketchy way, they presented so many imperfectly harmonized features, that they never became real, with the exception, of course, of the story-teller himself. But the vigor with which the presentment of the imperial ship-carpenter, the sturdy, savage, eager, fiery Peter, was given in the few opening sentences, showed the movement of the hand, the glow of the color, that were in due time to display on a broader canvas the full-length portraits of William the Silent and of John of Barneveld. The style of the whole article is rich, fluent, picturesque, with light touches of humor here and there, and perhaps a trace or two of youthful jauntiness, not quite as yet outgrown. His illustrative poetical quotations are mostly from Shakespeare,—from Milton and Byron also in a passage or

two,—and now and then one is reminded that he is not unfamiliar with Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus" and the "French Revolution" of the same unmistakable writer, more perhaps by the way in which phrases borrowed from other authorities are set in the text than by any more important evidence of unconscious imitation.

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The readers who had shaken their heads over the unsuccessful story of “Morton’s Hope” were startled by the appearance of this manly and scholarly essay. This young man, it seemed, had been studying,—studying with careful accuracy, with broad purpose. He could paint a character with the ruddy life-blood coloring it as warmly as it glows in the cheeks of one of Van der Helst’s burgomasters. He could sweep the horizon in a wide general outlook, and manage his perspective and his lights and shadows so as to place and accent his special subject with its due relief and just relations. It was a sketch, or rather a study for a larger picture, but it betrayed the hand of a master. The feeling of many was that expressed in the words of Mr. Longfellow in his review of the “Twice-Told Tales” of the unknown young writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne: “When a new star rises in the heavens, people gaze after it for a season with the naked eye, and with such telescopes as they may find. . . . This star is but newly risen; and ere long the observation of numerous star-gazers, perched up on arm-chairs and editor’s tables, will inform the world of its magnitude and its place in the heaven of”—not poetry in this instance, but that serene and unclouded region of the firmament where shine unchanging the names of Herodotus and Thucydides. Those who had always believed in their brilliant schoolmate and friend at last felt themselves justified in their faith. The artist that sent this unframed picture to be hung in a corner of the literary gallery was equal to larger tasks. There was but one voice in the circle that surrounded the young essayist. He must redeem his pledge, he can and will redeem it, if he will only follow the bent of his genius and grapple with the heroic labor of writing a great history.

And this was the achievement he was already meditating.

In the mean time he was studying history for its facts and principles, and fiction for its scenery and portraits. In “The North American Review” for July, 1847, is a long and characteristic article on Balzac, of whom he was an admirer, but with no blind worship. The readers of this great story-teller, who was so long in obtaining recognition, who “made twenty assaults upon fame and had forty books killed under him” before he achieved success, will find his genius fully appreciated and fairly weighed in this discriminating essay. A few brief extracts will show its quality.

“Balzac is an artist, and only an artist. In his tranquil, unimpassioned, remorseless diagnosis of morbid phenomena, in his cool method of treating the morbid anatomy of the heart, in his curiously accurate dissection of the passions, in the patient and painful attention with which, stethoscope in hand, finger on pulse, eye everywhere, you see him watching every symptom, alive to every sound and every breath, and in the scientific accuracy with which he portrays the phenomena which have been the subject of his investigation,—in

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all this calm and conscientious study of nature he often reminds us of Goethe. Balzac, however, is only an artist . . . He is neither moral nor immoral, but a calm and profound observer of human society and human passions, and a minute, patient, and powerful delineator of scenes and characters in the world before his eyes. His readers must moralize for themselves. . . . It is, perhaps, his defective style more than anything else which will prevent his becoming a classic, for style above all other qualities seems to embalm for posterity. As for his philosophy, his principles, moral, political, or social, we repeat that he seems to have none whatever. He looks for the picturesque and the striking. He studies sentiments and sensations from an artistic point of view. He is a physiognomist, a physiologist, a bit of an anatomist, a bit of a mesmerist, a bit of a geologist, a Flemish painter, an upholsterer, a micrological, misanthropical, sceptical philosopher; but he is no moralist, and certainly no reformer.”

Another article contributed by Mr. Motley to “The North American Review” is to be found in the number for October, 1849. It is nominally a review of Talvi’s (Mrs. Robinson’s) “Geschichte der Colonisation von New England,” but in reality an essay on the Polity of the Puritans,—an historical disquisition on the principles of self-government evolved in New England, broad in its views, eloquent in its language. Its spirit is thoroughly American, and its estimate of the Puritan character is not narrowed by the nearsighted liberalism which sees the past in the pitiless light of the present,—which looks around at high noon and finds fault with early dawn for its long and dark shadows. Here is a sentence or two from the article:—

“With all the faults of the system devised by the Puritans, it was a practical system. With all their foibles, with all their teasing, tyrannical, and arbitrary notions, the Pilgrims were lovers of liberty as well as sticklers for authority. . . . Nowhere can a better description of liberty be found than that given by Winthrop, in his defence of himself before the General Court on a charge of arbitrary conduct. ‘Nor would I have you mistake your own liberty,’ he says. ‘There is a freedom of doing what we list, without regard to law or justice; this liberty is indeed inconsistent with authority; but civil, moral, and federal liberty consists in every man’s enjoying his property and having the benefit of the laws of his country; which is very consistent with a due subjection to the civil magistrate.’ . . . “We enjoy an inestimable advantage in America. One can be a republican, a democrat, without being a radical. A radical, one who would uproot, is a man whose trade is dangerous to society. Here is but little to uproot. The trade cannot flourish. All classes are conservative by necessity, for none can wish to change the structure of our polity.



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. .“The country without a past cannot be intoxicated by visions of the past of other lands. Upon this absence of the past it seems to us that much of the security of our institutions depends. Nothing interferes with the development of what is now felt to be the true principle of government, the will of the people legitimately expressed. To establish that great truth, nothing was to be torn down, nothing to be uprooted. It grew up in New England out of the seed unconsciously planted by the first Pilgrims, was not crushed out by the weight of a thousand years of error spread over the whole continent, and the Revolution was proclaimed and recognized.”

VIII.

1847-1849. AEt. 33-35.

Joseph Lewis Stackpole, the friend of Motley. His Sudden death.—Motley in the Massachusetts house of representatives.—Second novel, “Merry-Mount, A romance of the Massachusetts Colony.”

The intimate friendships of early manhood are not very often kept up among our people. The eager pursuit of fortune, position, office, separates young friends, and the indoor home life imprisons them in the domestic circle so generally that it is quite exceptional to find two grown men who are like brothers,—or rather unlike most brothers, in being constantly found together. An exceptional instance of such a more than fraternal relation was seen in the friendship of Mr. Motley and Mr. Joseph Lewis Stackpole. Mr. William Amory, who knew them both well, has kindly furnished me with some recollections, which I cannot improve by changing his own language.

“Their intimacy began in Europe, and they returned to this country in 1835. In 1837 they married sisters, and this cemented their intimacy, which continued to Stackpole’s death in 1847. The contrast in the temperament of the two friends—the one sensitive and irritable, and the other always cool and good-natured—only increased their mutual attachment to each other, and Motley’s dependence upon Stackpole. Never were two friends more constantly together or more affectionately fond of each other. As Stackpole was about eight years older than Motley, and much less impulsive and more discreet, his death was to his friend irreparable, and at the time an overwhelming blow.”

Mr. Stackpole was a man of great intelligence, of remarkable personal attractions, and amiable character. His death was a loss to Motley even greater than he knew, for he needed just such a friend, older, calmer, more experienced in the ways of the world, and above all capable of thoroughly understanding him and exercising a wholesome influence over his excitable nature without the seeming of a Mentor preaching to a Telemachus. Mr. Stackpole was killed by a railroad accident on the 20th of July, 1847.

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In the same letter Mr. Amory refers to a very different experience in Mr. Motley's life,—his one year of service as a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1849.

“In respect to the one term during which he was a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, I can recall only one thing, to which he often and laughingly alluded. Motley, as the Chairman of the Committee on Education, made, as he thought, a most masterly report. It was very elaborate, and, as he supposed, unanswerable; but Boutwell, then a young man from some country town [Groton, Mass.], rose, and as Motley always said, demolished the report, so that he was unable to defend it against the attack. You can imagine his disgust, after the pains he had taken to render it unassailable, to find himself, as he expressed it, ‘on his own dunghill,’ ignominiously beaten. While the result exalted his opinion of the speech-making faculty of a Representative of a common school education, it at the same time cured him of any ambition for political promotion in Massachusetts.”

To my letter of inquiry about this matter, Hon. George S. Boutwell courteously returned the following answer:—

Boston, October 14, 1878.

*My dear sir,—*As my memory serves me, Mr. Motley was a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives in the year 1847 [1849]. It may be well to consult the manual for that year. I recollect the controversy over the report from the Committee on Education.

His failure was not due to his want of faculty or to the vigor of his opponents.

In truth he espoused the weak side of the question and the unpopular one also. His proposition was to endow the colleges at the expense of the fund for the support of the common schools. Failure was inevitable. Neither Webster nor Choate could have carried the bill.

Very truly,
GEO. S. *Boutwell.*

No one could be more ready and willing to recognize his own failures than Motley. He was as honest and manly, perhaps I may say as sympathetic with the feeling of those about him, on this occasion, as was Charles Lamb, who, sitting with his sister in the front of the pit, on the night when his farce was damned at its first representation, gave way to the common feeling, and hissed and hooted lustily with the others around him. It was what might be expected from his honest and truthful nature, sometimes too severe in judging itself.

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The commendation bestowed upon Motley's historical essays in "The North American Review" must have gone far towards compensating him for the ill success of his earlier venture. It pointed clearly towards the field in which he was to gather his laurels. And it was in the year following the publication of the first essay, or about that time (1846), that he began collecting materials for a history of Holland. Whether to tell the story of men that have lived and of events that have happened, or to create the characters and invent the incidents of an imaginary tale be the higher task, we need not stop to discuss. But the young author was just now like the great actor in Sir Joshua's picture, between the allurements of Thalia and Melpomene, still doubtful whether he was to be a romancer or a historian.

The tale of which the title is given at the beginning of this section had been written several years before the date of its publication. It is a great advance in certain respects over the first novel, but wants the peculiar interest which belonged to that as a partially autobiographical memoir. The story is no longer disjointed and impossible. It is carefully studied in regard to its main facts. It has less to remind us of "Vivian Grey" and "Pelham," and more that recalls "Woodstock" and "Kenilworth." The personages were many of them historical, though idealized; the occurrences were many of them such as the record authenticated; the localities were drawn largely from nature. The story betrays marks of haste or carelessness in some portions, though others are elaborately studied. His preface shows that the reception of his first book had made him timid and sensitive about the fate of the second, and explains and excuses what might be found fault with, to disarm the criticism he had some reason to fear.

That old watch-dog of our American literature, "The North American Review," always ready with lambent phrases in stately "Articles" for native talent of a certain pretension, and wagging its appendix of "Critical Notices" kindly at the advent of humbler merit, treated "Merry-Mount" with the distinction implied in a review of nearly twenty pages. This was a great contrast to the brief and slighting notice of "Morton's Hope." The reviewer thinks the author's descriptive power wholly exceeds his conception of character and invention of circumstances.

"He dwells, perhaps, too long and fondly upon his imagination of the landscape as it was before the stillness of the forest had been broken by the axe of the settler; but the picture is so finely drawn, with so much beauty of language and purity of sentiment, that we cannot blame him for lingering upon the scene. . . . The story is not managed with much skill, but it has variety enough of incident and character, and is told with so much liveliness that few will be inclined to lay it down before reaching the conclusion. . . . The writer certainly needs practice



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in elaborating the details of a consistent and interesting novel; but in many respects he is well qualified for the task, and we shall be glad to meet him again on the half-historical ground he has chosen. His present work, certainly, is not a fair specimen of what he is able to accomplish, and its failure, or partial success, ought only to inspire him for further effort."

The "half-historical ground" he had chosen had already led him to the entrance into the broader domain of history. The "further effort" for which he was to be inspired had already begun. He had been for some time, as was before mentioned, collecting materials for the work which was to cast all his former attempts into the kindly shadow of oblivion, save when from time to time the light of his brilliant after success is thrown upon them to illustrate the path by which it was at length attained.

IX.

1850. AEt. 36.

Plan of A history.—Letters.

The reputation of Mr. Prescott was now coextensive with the realm of scholarship. The histories of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella and of the conquest of Mexico had met with a reception which might well tempt the ambition of a young writer to emulate it, but which was not likely to be awarded to any second candidate who should enter the field in rivalry with the great and universally popular historian. But this was the field on which Mr. Motley was to venture.

After he had chosen the subject of the history he contemplated, he found that Mr. Prescott was occupied with a kindred one, so that there might be too near a coincidence between them. I must borrow from Mr. Ticknor's beautiful life of Prescott the words which introduce a letter of Motley's to Mr. William Amory, who has kindly allowed me also to make use of it.

"The moment, therefore, that he [Mr. Motley] was aware of this condition of things, and the consequent possibility that there might be an untoward interference in their plans, he took the same frank and honorable course with Mr. Prescott that Mr. Prescott had taken in relation to Mr. Irving, when he found that they had both been contemplating a 'History of the Conquest of Mexico.' The result was the same. Mr. Prescott, instead of treating the matter as an interference, earnestly encouraged Mr. Motley to go on, and placed at his disposition such of the books in his library as could be most useful to him. How amply and promptly he did it, Mr. Motley's own account will best show. It is in a letter dated at Rome, 26th February, 1859, the day he heard of Mr. Prescott's death, and was addressed to his intimate friend, Mr. William Amory, of Boston, Mr. Prescott's

much-loved brother-in-law.”“It seems to me but as yesterday,” Mr. Motley writes, “though it must be now twelve years ago, that I was talking with our ever-



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lamented friend Stackpole about my intention of writing a history upon a subject to which I have since that time been devoting myself. I had then made already some general studies in reference to it, without being in the least aware that Prescott had the intention of writing the 'History of Philip the Second.' Stackpole had heard the fact, and that large preparations had already been made for the work, although 'Peru' had not yet been published. I felt naturally much disappointed. I was conscious of the immense disadvantage to myself of making my appearance, probably at the same time, before the public, with a work not at all similar in plan to 'Philip the Second,' but which must of necessity traverse a portion of the same ground. "My first thought was inevitably, as it were, only of myself. It seemed to me that I had nothing to do but to abandon at once a cherished dream, and probably to renounce authorship. For I had not first made up my mind to write a history, and then cast about to take up a subject. My subject had taken me up, drawn me on, and absorbed me into itself. It was necessary for me, it seemed, to write the book I had been thinking much of, even if it were destined to fall dead from the press, and I had no inclination or interest to write any other. When I had made up my mind accordingly, it then occurred to me that Prescott might not be pleased that I should come forward upon his ground. It is true that no announcement of his intentions had been made, and that he had not, I believe, even commenced his preliminary studies for Philip. At the same time I thought it would be disloyal on my part not to go to him at once, confer with him on the subject, and if I should find a shadow of dissatisfaction on his mind at my proposition, to abandon my plan altogether. "I had only the slightest acquaintance with him at that time. I was comparatively a young man, and certainly not entitled on any ground to more than the common courtesy which Prescott never could refuse to any one. But he received me with such a frank and ready and liberal sympathy, and such an open-hearted, guileless expansiveness, that I felt a personal affection for him from that hour. I remember the interview as if it had taken place yesterday. It was in his father's house, in his own library, looking on the garden-house and garden,—honored father and illustrious son,—alas! all numbered with the things that were! He assured me that he had not the slightest objection whatever to my plan, that he wished me every success, and that, if there were any books in his library bearing on my subject that I liked to use, they were entirely at my service. After I had expressed my gratitude for his kindness and cordiality, by which I had been in a very few moments set completely at ease,—so far as my fears of his disapprobation went,—I also very naturally stated my opinion that the danger was entirely mine,



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and that it was rather wilful of me thus to risk such a collision at my first venture, the probable consequence of which was utter shipwreck. I recollect how kindly and warmly he combated this opinion, assuring me that no two books, as he said, ever injured each other, and encouraging me in the warmest and most earnest manner to proceed on the course I had marked out for myself. "Had the result of that interview been different,—had he distinctly stated, or even vaguely hinted, that it would be as well if I should select some other topic, or had he only sprinkled me with the cold water of conventional and commonplace encouragement,—I should have gone from him with a chill upon my mind, and, no doubt, have laid down the pen at once; for, as I have already said, it was not that I cared about writing a history, but that I felt an inevitable impulse to write one particular history." You know how kindly he always spoke of and to me; and the generous manner in which, without the slightest hint from me, and entirely unexpected by me, he attracted the eyes of his hosts of readers to my forthcoming work, by so handsomely alluding to it in the Preface to his own, must be almost as fresh in your memory as it is in mine. "And although it seems easy enough for a man of world-wide reputation thus to extend the right hand of fellowship to an unknown and struggling aspirant, yet I fear that the history of literature will show that such instances of disinterested kindness are as rare as they are noble."

It was not from any feeling that Mr. Motley was a young writer from whose rivalry he had nothing to apprehend. Mr. Amory says that Prescott expressed himself very decidedly to the effect that an author who had written such descriptive passages as were to be found in Mr. Motley's published writings was not to be undervalued as a competitor by any one. The reader who will turn to the description of Charles River in the eighth chapter of the second volume of "Merry-Mount," or of the autumnal woods in the sixteenth chapter of the same volume, will see good reason for Mr. Prescott's appreciation of the force of the rival whose advent he so heartily and generously welcomed.

X.

1851-1856. AEt. 37-42.

Historical studies in Europe.-Letter from Brussels.

After working for several years on his projected "History of the Dutch Republic," he found that, in order to do justice to his subject, he must have recourse to the authorities to be found only in the libraries and state archives of Europe. In the year 1851 he left America with his family, to begin his task over again, throwing aside all that he had already done, and following up his new course of investigations at Berlin, Dresden, the Hague, and Brussels during several succeeding years. I do not know that I can give a better idea of his mode of life during this busy period, his occupations, his state of mind,

his objects of interest outside of his special work, than by making the following extracts from a long letter to myself, dated Brussels, 20th November, 1853.

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After some personal matters he continued:—

“I don’t really know what to say to you. I am in a town which, for aught I know, may be very gay. I don’t know a living soul in it. We have not a single acquaintance in the place, and we glory in the fact. There is something rather sublime in thus floating on a single spar in the wide sea of a populous, busy, fuming, fussy world like this. At any rate it is consonant to both our tastes. You may suppose, however, that I find it rather difficult to amuse my friends out of the incidents of so isolated an existence. Our daily career is very regular and monotonous. Our life is as stagnant as a Dutch canal. Not that I complain of it,—on the contrary, the canal may be richly freighted with merchandise and be a short cut to the ocean of abundant and perpetual knowledge; but, at the same time, few points rise above the level of so regular a life, to be worthy of your notice. You must, therefore, allow me to meander along the meadows of commonplace. Don’t expect anything of the impetuous and boiling style. We go it weak here. I don’t know whether you were ever in Brussels. It is a striking, picturesque town, built up a steep promontory, the old part at the bottom, very dingy and mouldy, the new part at the top, very showy and elegant. Nothing can be more exquisite in its way than the grande place in the very heart of the city, surrounded with those toppling, zigzag, ten-storied buildings bedizened all over with ornaments and emblems so peculiar to the Netherlands, with the brocaded Hotel de Ville on one side, with its impossible spire rising some three hundred and seventy feet into the air and embroidered to the top with the delicacy of needle-work, sugarwork, spider-work, or what you will. I haunt this place because it is my scene, my theatre. Here were enacted so many deep tragedies, so many stately dramas, and even so many farces, which have been familiar to me so long that I have got to imagine myself invested with a kind of property in the place, and look at it as if it were merely the theatre with the coulisses, machinery, drapery, *etc.*, for representing scenes which have long since vanished, and which no more enter the minds of the men and women who are actually moving across its pavements than if they had occurred in the moon. When I say that I knew no soul in Brussels I am perhaps wrong. With the present generation I am not familiar. ‘En revanche,’ the dead men of the place are my intimate friends. I am at home in any cemetery. With the fellows of the sixteenth century I am on the most familiar terms. Any ghost that ever flits by night across the moonlight square is at once hailed by me as a man and a brother. I call him by his Christian name at once. When you come out of this place, however, which, as I said, is in the heart of the town,—the antique gem in the modern setting,—you may go either up or down. If you go down,



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you will find yourself in the very nastiest complications of lanes and culs-de-sac possible, a dark entanglement of gin-shops, beer-houses, and hovels, through which charming valley dribbles the Senne (whence, I suppose, is derived Senna), the most nauseous little river in the world, which receives all the outpourings of all the drains and houses, and is then converted into beer for the inhabitants, all the many breweries being directly upon its edge. If you go up the hill instead of down, you come to an arrangement of squares, palaces, and gardens as trim and fashionable as you will find in Europe. Thus you see that our Cybele sits with her head crowned with very stately towers and her feet in a tub of very dirty water. "My habits here for the present year are very regular. I came here, having, as I thought, finished my work, or rather the first Part (something like three or four volumes, 8vo), but I find so much original matter here, and so many emendations to make, that I am ready to despair. However, there is nothing for it but to penelopeize, pull to pieces, and stitch away again. Whatever may be the result of my labor, nobody can say that I have not worked like a brute beast,—but I don't care for the result. The labor is in itself its own reward and all I want. I go day after day to the archives here (as I went all summer at the Hague), studying the old letters and documents of the fifteenth century. Here I remain among my fellow-worms, feeding on these musty mulberry-leaves, out of which we are afterwards to spin our silk. How can you expect anything interesting from such a human cocoon? It is, however, not without its amusement in a mouldy sort of way, this reading of dead letters. It is something to read the real, bona fide signs-manual of such fellows as William of Orange, Count Egmont, Alexander Farnese, Philip II., Cardinal Granvelle, and the rest of them. It gives a 'realizing sense,' as the Americans have it. . . . There are not many public resources of amusement in this place,—if we wanted them,—which we don't. I miss the Dresden Gallery very much, and it makes me sad to think that I shall never look at the face of the Sistine Madonna again,—that picture beyond all pictures in the world, in which the artist certainly did get to heaven and painted a face which was never seen on earth—so pathetic, so gentle, so passionless, so prophetic. . . . There are a few good Rubenses here,—but the great wealth of that master is in Antwerp. The great picture of the Descent from the Cross is free again, after having been ten years in the repairing room. It has come out in very good condition. What a picture? It seems to me as if I had really stood at the cross and seen Mary weeping on John's shoulder, and Magdalen receiving the dead body of the Saviour in her arms. Never was the grand tragedy represented in so profound and dramatic a manner. For it is not only in his color in which this man so easily



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surpasses all the world, but in his life-like, flesh-and-blood action,—the tragic power of his composition. And is it not appalling to think of the ‘large constitution of this man,’ when you reflect on the acres of canvas which he has covered? How inspiring to see with what muscular, masculine vigor this splendid Fleming rushed in and plucked up drowning Art by the locks when it was sinking in the trashy sea of such creatures as the Luca Giordanos and Pietro Cortonas and the like. Well might Guido exclaim, ‘The fellow mixes blood with his colors! . . . How providentially did the man come in and invoke living, breathing, moving men and women out of his canvas! Sometimes he is ranting and exaggerated, as are all men of great genius who wrestle with Nature so boldly. No doubt his heroines are more expansively endowed than would be thought genteel in our country, where cryptogams are so much in fashion, nevertheless there is always something very tremendous about him, and very often much that is sublime, pathetic, and moving. I defy any one of the average amount of imagination and sentiment to stand long before the Descent from the Cross without being moved more nearly to tears than he would care to acknowledge. As for color, his effects are as sure as those of the sun rising in a tropical landscape. There is something quite genial in the cheerful sense of his own omnipotence which always inspired him. There are a few fine pictures of his here, and I go in sometimes of a raw, foggy morning merely to warm myself in the blaze of their beauty.”

I have been more willing to give room to this description of Rubens's pictures and the effect they produced upon Motley, because there is a certain affinity between those sumptuous and glowing works of art and the prose pictures of the historian who so admired them. He was himself a colorist in language, and called up the image of a great personage or a splendid pageant of the past with the same affluence, the same rich vitality, that floods and warms the vast areas of canvas over which the full-fed genius of Rubens disported itself in the luxury of imaginative creation.

XI.

1856-1857. AEt. 42-43.

Publication of his first historical work, “Rise of the Dutch Republic.”— Its reception.— Critical notices.

The labor of ten years was at last finished. Carrying his formidable manuscript with him, —and how formidable the manuscript which melts down into three solid octavo volumes is, only writers and publishers know,—he knocked at the gate of that terrible fortress from which Lintot and Curll and Tonson looked down on the authors of an older generation. So large a work as the “History of the Rise of the Dutch Republic,” offered for the press by an author as yet unknown to the British public, could

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hardly expect a warm welcome from the great dealers in literature as merchandise. Mr. Murray civilly declined the manuscript which was offered to him, and it was published at its author's expense by Mr. John Chapman. The time came when the positions of the first-named celebrated publisher and the unknown writer were reversed. Mr. Murray wrote to Mr. Motley asking to be allowed to publish his second great work, the "History of the United Netherlands," expressing at the same time his regret at what he candidly called his mistake in the first instance, and thus they were at length brought into business connection as well as the most agreeable and friendly relations. An American edition was published by the Harpers at the same time as the London one.

If the new work of the unknown author found it difficult to obtain a publisher, it was no sooner given to the public than it found an approving, an admiring, an enthusiastic world of readers, and a noble welcome at the colder hands of the critics.

"The Westminster Review" for April, 1856, had for its leading article a paper by Mr. Froude, in which the critic awarded the highest praise to the work of the new historian. As one of the earliest as well as one of the most important recognitions of the work, I quote some of its judgments.

"A history as complete as industry and genius can make it now lies before us of the first twenty years of the Revolt of the United Provinces; of the period in which those provinces finally conquered their independence and established the Republic of Holland. It has been the result of many years of silent, thoughtful, unobtrusive labor, and unless we are strangely mistaken, unless we are ourselves altogether unfit for this office of criticising which we have here undertaken, the book is one which will take its place among the finest histories in this or in any language. . . . All the essentials of a great writer Mr. Motley eminently possesses. His mind is broad, his industry unwearied. In power of dramatic description no modern historian, except perhaps Mr. Carlyle, surpasses him, and in analysis of character he is elaborate and distinct. His principles are those of honest love for all which is good and admirable in human character wherever he finds it, while he unaffectedly hates oppression, and despises selfishness with all his heart."

After giving a slight analytical sketch of the series of events related in the history, Mr. Froude objects to only one of the historian's estimates, that, namely, of the course of Queen Elizabeth.

"It is ungracious, however," he says, "even to find so slight a fault with these admirable volumes. Mr. Motley has written without haste, with the leisurely composure of a master. . . . We now take our leave of Mr. Motley, desiring him only to accept our hearty thanks for these volumes, which we trust will soon take their place in every English library."

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Our quotations will have sufficed to show the ability of the writer. Of the scope and general character of his work we have given but a languid conception. The true merit of a great book must be learned from the book itself. Our part has been rather to select varied specimens of style and power. Of Mr. Motley's antecedents we know nothing. If he has previously appeared before the public, his reputation has not crossed the Atlantic. It will not be so now. We believe that we may promise him as warm a welcome among ourselves as he will receive even in America; that his place will be at once conceded to him among the first historians in our common language."

The faithful and unwearied Mr. Allibone has swept the whole field of contemporary criticism, and shown how wide and universal was the welcome accorded to the hitherto unknown author. An article headed "Prescott and Motley," attributed to M. Guizot, which must have been translated, I suppose, from his own language, judging by its freedom from French idioms, is to be found in "The Edinburgh Review" for January, 1857. The praise, not unmingled with criticisms, which that great historian bestowed upon Motley is less significant than the fact that he superintended a translation of the "Rise of the Dutch Republic," and himself wrote the Introduction to it.

A general chorus of approbation followed or accompanied these leading voices. The reception of the work in Great Britain was a triumph. On the Continent, in addition to the tribute paid to it by M. Guizot, it was translated into Dutch, into German, and into Russian. At home his reception was not less hearty. "The North American Review," which had set its foot on the semi-autobiographical medley which he called "Morton's Hope," which had granted a decent space and a tepid recognition to his "semi-historical" romance, in which he had already given the reading public a taste of his quality as a narrator of real events and a delineator of real personages,—this old and awe-inspiring New England and more than New England representative of the Fates, found room for a long and most laudatory article, in which the son of one of our most distinguished historians did the honors of the venerable literary periodical to the new-comer, for whom the folding-doors of all the critical headquarters were flying open as if of themselves. Mr. Allibone has recorded the opinions of some of our best scholars as expressed to him.

Dr. Lieber wrote a letter to Mr. Allibone in the strongest terms of praise. I quote one passage which in the light of after events borrows a cruel significance:—

"Congress and Parliament decree thanks for military exploits,— rarely for diplomatic achievements. If they ever voted their thanks for books,—and what deeds have influenced the course of human events more than some books?—Motley ought to have the thanks of our Congress; but I doubt not that he has already the thanks of every American who has read the work. It will leave its distinct mark upon the American mind."

Mr. Everett writes:—



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“Mr. Motley's ‘History of the Dutch Republic’ is in my judgment a work of the highest merit. Unwearying research for years in the libraries of Europe, patience and judgment in arranging and digesting his materials, a fine historical tact, much skill in characterization, the perspective of narration, as it may be called, and a vigorous style unite to make it a very capital work, and place the name of Motley by the side of those of our great historical trio,—Bancroft, Irving, and Prescott.”

Mr. Irving, Mr. Bancroft, Mr. Sumner, Mr. Hillard, united their voices in the same strain of commendation. Mr. Prescott, whose estimate of the new history is of peculiar value for obvious reasons, writes to Mr. Allibone thus:—

“The opinion of any individual seems superfluous in respect to a work on the merits of which the public both at home and abroad have pronounced so unanimous a verdict. As Motley's path crosses my own historic field, I may be thought to possess some advantage over most critics in my familiarity with the ground. “However this may be, I can honestly bear my testimony to the extent of his researches and to the accuracy with which he has given the results of them to the public. Far from making his book a mere register of events, he has penetrated deep below the surface and explored the cause of these events. He has carefully studied the physiognomy of the times and given finished portraits of the great men who conducted the march of the revolution. Every page is instinct with the love of freedom and with that personal knowledge of the working of free institutions which could alone enable him to do justice to his subject. We may congratulate ourselves that it was reserved for one of our countrymen to tell the story—better than it had yet been told—of this memorable revolution, which in so many of its features bears a striking resemblance to our own.”

The public welcomed the work as cordially as the critics. Fifteen thousand copies had already been sold in London in 1857. In America it was equally popular. Its author saw his name enrolled by common consent among those of the great writers of his time. Europe accepted him, his country was proud to claim him, scholarship set its jealously guarded seal upon the result of his labors, the reading world, which had not cared greatly for his stories, hung in delight over a narrative more exciting than romances; and the lonely student, who had almost forgotten the look of living men in the solitude of archives haunted by dead memories, found himself suddenly in the full blaze of a great reputation.

XII.

1856-1857. AEt. 42-43.

Visit to America.—Residence in Boylston place.



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He visited this country in 1856, and spent the winter of 1856-57 in Boston, living with his family in a house in Boylston Place. At this time I had the pleasure of meeting him often, and of seeing the changes which maturity, success, the opening of a great literary and social career, had wrought in his character and bearing. He was in every way greatly improved; the interesting, impulsive youth had ripened into a noble manhood. Dealing with great themes, his own mind had gained their dignity. Accustomed to the company of dead statesmen and heroes, his own ideas had risen to a higher standard. The flattery of society had added a new grace to his natural modesty. He was now a citizen of the world by his reputation; the past was his province, in which he was recognized as a master; the idol's pedestal was ready for him, but he betrayed no desire to show himself upon it.

XIII.

1858-1860. AEt. 44-46.

Return to England.—Social relations.—Lady HARCOURT'S letter.

During the years spent in Europe in writing his first history, from 1851 to 1856, Mr. Motley had lived a life of great retirement and simplicity, devoting himself to his work and to the education of his children, to which last object he was always ready to give the most careful supervision. He was as yet unknown beyond the circle of his friends, and he did not seek society. In this quiet way he had passed the two years of residence in Dresden, the year divided between Brussels and the Hague, and a very tranquil year spent at Vevay on the Lake of Geneva. His health at this time was tolerably good, except for nervous headaches, which frequently recurred and were of great severity. His visit to England with his manuscript in search of a publisher has already been mentioned.

In 1858 he revisited England. His fame as a successful author was there before him, and he naturally became the object of many attentions. He now made many acquaintances who afterwards became his kind and valued friends. Among those mentioned by his daughter, Lady Harcourt, are Lord Lyndhurst, Lord Carlisle, Lady William Russell, Lord and Lady Palmerston, Dean Milman, with many others. The following winter was passed in Rome, among many English and American friends.

“In the course of the next summer,” his daughter writes to me, “we all went to England, and for the next two years, marked chiefly by the success of the ‘United Netherlands,’ our social life was most agreeable and most interesting. He was in the fulness of his health and powers; his works had made him known in intellectual society, and I think his presence, on the other hand, increased their effects. As no one knows better than you do, his belief in his own country and in its institutions at their best was so passionate and intense that it was a part of his nature, yet



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his refined and fastidious tastes were deeply gratified by the influences of his life in England, and the spontaneous kindness which he received added much to his happiness. At that time Lord Palmerston was Prime Minister; the weekly receptions at Cambridge House were the centre of all that was brilliant in the political and social world, while Lansdowne House, Holland House, and others were open to the 'sommities' in all branches of literature, science, rank, and politics. . . . It was the last year of Lord Macaulay's life, and as a few out of many names which I recall come Dean Milman, Mr. Froude (whose review of the 'Dutch Republic' in the 'Westminster' was one of the first warm recognitions it ever received), the Duke and Duchess of Argyll, Sir William Stirling Maxwell, then Mr. Stirling of Keir, the Sheridan family in its different brilliant members, Lord Wensleydale, and many more."

There was no society to which Motley would not have added grace and attraction by his presence, and to say that he was a welcome guest in the best houses of England is only saying that these houses are always open to those whose abilities, characters, achievements, are commended to the circles that have the best choice by the personal gifts which are nature's passport everywhere.

XIV.

1859. AEt. 45.

Letter to Mr. Francis H. Underwood.—Plan of Mr. Motley's historical works.—Second great work, "History of the united Netherlands."

I am enabled by the kindness of Mr. Francis H. Underwood to avail myself of a letter addressed to him by Mr. Motley in the year before the publication of this second work, which gives us an insight into his mode of working and the plan he proposed to follow. It begins with an allusion which recalls a literary event interesting to many of his American friends.

Rome, March 4, 1859.

F. H. Underwood, ESQ.

My dear Sir,—. . . I am delighted to hear of the great success of "The Atlantic Monthly." In this remote region I have not the chance of reading it as often as I should like, but from the specimens which I have seen I am quite sure it deserves its wide circulation. A serial publication, the contents of which are purely original and of such remarkable merit, is a novelty in our country, and I am delighted to find that it has already taken so prominent a position before the reading world. . .



The whole work [his history], of which the three volumes already published form a part, will be called "The Eighty Years' War for Liberty."

Epoch I. is the Rise of the Dutch Republic.

Epoch II. Independence Achieved. From the Death of William the Silent till the Twelve Years' Truce. 1584-1609.

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Epoch III. Independence Recognized. From the Twelve Years' Truce to the Peace of Westphalia. 1609-1648.

My subject is a very vast one, for the struggle of the United Provinces with Spain was one in which all the leading states of Europe were more or less involved. After the death of William the Silent, the history assumes world-wide proportions. Thus the volume which I am just about terminating . . . is almost as much English history as Dutch. The Earl of Leicester, very soon after the death of Orange, was appointed governor of the provinces, and the alliance between the two countries almost amounted to a political union. I shall try to get the whole of the Leicester administration, terminating with the grand drama of the Invincible Armada, into one volume; but I doubt, my materials are so enormous. I have been personally very hard at work, nearly two years, ransacking the British State Paper Office, the British Museum, and the Holland archives, and I have had two copyists constantly engaged in London, and two others at the Hague. Besides this, I passed the whole of last winter at Brussels, where, by special favor of the Belgian Government, I was allowed to read what no one else has ever been permitted to see,—the great mass of copies taken by that government from the Simancas archives, a translated epitome of which has been published by Gachard. This correspondence reaches to the death of Philip II., and is of immense extent and importance. Had I not obtained leave to read the invaluable and, for my purpose, indispensable documents at Brussels, I should have gone to Spain, for they will not be published these twenty years, and then only in a translated and excessively abbreviated and unsatisfactory form. I have read the whole of this correspondence, and made very copious notes of it. In truth, I devoted three months of last winter to that purpose alone. The materials I have collected from the English archives are also extremely important and curious. I have hundreds of interesting letters never published or to be published, by Queen Elizabeth, Burghley, Walsingham, Sidney, Drake, Willoughby, Leicester, and others. For the whole of that portion of my subject in which Holland and England were combined into one whole, to resist Spain in its attempt to obtain the universal empire, I have very abundant collections. For the history of the United Provinces is not at all a provincial history. It is the history of European liberty. Without the struggle of Holland and England against Spain, all Europe might have been Catholic and Spanish. It was Holland that saved England in the sixteenth century, and, by so doing, secured the triumph of the Reformation, and placed the independence of the various states of Europe upon a sure foundation. Of course, the materials collected by me at the Hague are of great importance. As a single specimen, I will state that I found in the archives there an



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immense and confused mass of papers, which turned out to be the autograph letters of Olden Barneveld during the last few years of his life; during, in short, the whole of that most important period which preceded his execution. These letters are in such an intolerable handwriting that no one has ever attempted to read them. I could read them only imperfectly myself, and it would have taken me a very long time to have acquired the power to do so; but my copyist and reader there is the most patient and indefatigable person alive, and he has quite mastered the handwriting, and he writes me that they are a mine of historical wealth for me. I shall have complete copies before I get to that period, one of signal interest, and which has never been described. I mention these matters that you may see that my work, whatever its other value may be, is built upon the only foundation fit for history,—original contemporary documents. These are all unpublished. Of course, I use the contemporary historians and pamphleteers,—Dutch, Spanish, French, Italian, German, and English,—but the most valuable of my sources are manuscript ones. I have said the little which I have said in order to vindicate the largeness of the subject. The kingdom of Holland is a small power now, but the Eighty Years' War, which secured the civil and religious independence of the Dutch Commonwealth and of Europe, was the great event of that whole age. The whole work will therefore cover a most remarkable epoch in human history, from the abdication of Charles Fifth to the Peace of Westphalia, at which last point the political and geographical arrangements of Europe were established on a permanent basis,—in the main undisturbed until the French Revolution. . . . I will mention that I received yesterday a letter from the distinguished M. Guizot, informing me that the first volume of the French translation, edited by him, with an introduction, has just been published. The publication was hastened in consequence of the appearance of a rival translation at Brussels. The German translation is very elegantly and expensively printed in handsome octavos; and the Dutch translation, under the editorship of the archivist general of Holland, Bakhuyzen v. d. Brink, is enriched with copious notes and comments by that distinguished scholar. There are also three different piratical reprints of the original work at Amsterdam, Leipzig, and London. I must add that I had nothing to do with the translation in any case. In fact, with the exception of M. Guizot, no one ever obtained permission of me to publish translations, and I never knew of the existence of them until I read of it in the journals. . . . I forgot to say that among the collections already thoroughly examined by me is that portion of the Simancas archives still retained in the Imperial archives of France. I spent a considerable time in Paris



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for the purpose of reading these documents. There are many letters of Philip II. there, with apostilles by his own hand. . . . I would add that I am going to pass this summer at Venice for the purpose of reading and procuring copies from the very rich archives of that Republic, of the correspondence of their envoys in Madrid, London, and Brussels during the epoch of which I am treating.

I am also not without hope of gaining access to the archives of the Vatican here, although there are some difficulties in the way.

With kind regards . . .
I remain very truly yours,
J. L. *Motley*.

XV.

1860. At. 46.

Publication of the first two volumes of the "History of the united Netherlands."—Their reception.

We know something of the manner in which Mr. Motley collected his materials. We know the labors, the difficulties, the cost of his toils among the dusty records of the past. What he gained by the years he spent in his researches is so well stated by himself that I shall borrow his own words:—

"Thanks to the liberality of many modern governments of Europe, the archives where the state secrets of the buried centuries have so long mouldered are now open to the student of history. To him who has patience and industry, many mysteries are thus revealed which no political sagacity or critical acumen could have divined. He leans over the shoulder of Philip the Second at his writing-table, as the King spells patiently out, with cipher-key in hand, the most concealed hieroglyphics of Parma, or Guise, or Mendoza. He reads the secret thoughts of 'Fabius' [Philip II.] as that cunctative Roman scrawls his marginal apostilles on each dispatch; he pries into all the stratagems of Camillus, Hortensius, Mucius, Julius, Tullius, and the rest of those ancient heroes who lent their names to the diplomatic masqueraders of the sixteenth century; he enters the cabinet of the deeply pondering Burghley, and takes from the most private drawer the memoranda which record that minister's unutterable doubtings; he pulls from the dressing-gown folds of the stealthy, soft-gliding Walsingham the last secret which he has picked from the Emperor's pigeon-holes or the Pope's pocket, and which not Hatton, nor Buckhurst, nor Leicester, nor the Lord Treasurer is to see,—nobody but Elizabeth herself; he sits invisible at the most secret councils of the Nassaus and Barneveld and Buys, or pores with Farnese over coming victories and vast schemes of



universal conquest; he reads the latest bit of scandal, the minutest characteristic of king or minister, chronicled by the gossiping Venetians for the edification of the Forty; and after

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all this prying and eavesdropping, having seen the cross-purposes, the bribings, the windings in the dark, he is not surprised if those who were systematically deceived did not always arrive at correct conclusions.”

The fascination of such a quest is readily conceivable. A drama with real characters, and the spectator at liberty to go behind the scenes and look upon and talk with the kings and queens between the acts; to examine the scenery, to handle the properties, to study the “make up” of the imposing personages of full-dress histories; to deal with them all as Thackeray has done with the Grand Monarque in one of his caustic sketches,—this would be as exciting, one might suppose, as to sit through a play one knows by heart at Drury Lane or the Theatre Francais, and might furnish occupation enough to the curious idler who was only in search of entertainment. The mechanical obstacles of half-illegible manuscript, of antiquated forms of speech, to say nothing of the intentional obscurities of diplomatic correspondence, stand, however, in the way of all but the resolute and unwearied scholar. These difficulties, in all their complex obstinacy, had been met and overcome by the heroic efforts, the concentrated devotion, of the new laborer in the unbroken fields of secret history.

Without stopping to take breath, as it were,—for his was a task ‘de longue haleine,’—he proceeded to his second great undertaking.

The first portion—consisting of two volumes—of the “History of the United Netherlands” was published in the year 1860. It maintained and increased the reputation he had already gained by his first history.

“The London Quarterly Review” devoted a long article to it, beginning with this handsome tribute to his earlier and later volumes:—

“Mr. Motley’s ‘History of the Rise of the Dutch Republic’ is already known and valued for the grasp of mind which it displays, for the earnest and manly spirit in which he has communicated the results of deep research and careful reflection. Again he appears before us, rich with the spoils of time, to tell the story of the United Netherlands from the time of William the Silent to the end of the eventful year of the Spanish Armada, and we still find him in every way worthy of this ‘great argument.’ Indeed, it seems to us that he proceeds with an increased facility of style, and with a more complete and easy command over his materials. These materials are indeed splendid, and of them most excellent use has been made. The English State Paper Office, the Spanish archives from Simancas, and the Dutch and Belgian repositories, have all yielded up their secrets; and Mr. Motley has enjoyed the advantage of dealing with a vast mass of unpublished documents, of which he has not failed to avail himself to an extent which places his work in the foremost rank as an authority for the period to which it relates. By means of his labor and his



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art we can sit at the council board of Philip and Elizabeth, we can read their most private dispatches. Guided by his demonstration, we are enabled to dissect out to their ultimate issues the minutest ramifications of intrigue. We join in the amusement of the popular lampoon; we visit the prison-house; we stand by the scaffold; we are present at the battle and the siege. We can scan the inmost characters of men and can view them in their habits as they lived.”

After a few criticisms upon lesser points of form and style, the writer says:—

“But the work itself must be read to appreciate the vast and conscientious industry bestowed upon it. His delineations are true and life-like, because they are not mere compositions written to please the ear, but are really taken from the facts and traits preserved in those authentic records to which he has devoted the labor of many years. Diligent and painstaking as the humblest chronicler, he has availed himself of many sources of information which have not been made use of by any previous historical writer. At the same time he is not oppressed by his materials, but has sagacity to estimate their real value, and he has combined with scholarly power the facts which they contain. He has rescued the story of the Netherlands from the domain of vague and general narrative, and has labored, with much judgment and ability, to unfold the ‘*Belli causas, et vitia, et modos,*’ and to assign to every man and every event their own share in the contest, and their own influence upon its fortunes. We do not wonder that his earlier publication has been received as a valuable addition, not only to English, but to European literature.”

One or two other contemporary criticisms may help us with their side lights. A critic in “The Edinburgh Review” for January, 1861, thinks that “Mr. Motley has not always been successful in keeping the graphic variety of his details subordinate to the main theme of his work.” Still, he excuses the fault, as he accounts it, in consideration of the new light thrown on various obscure points of history, and

“it is atoned for by striking merits, by many narratives of great events faithfully, powerfully, and vividly executed, by the clearest and most life-like conceptions of character, and by a style which, if it sacrifices the severer principles of composition to a desire to be striking and picturesque, is always vigorous, full of animation, and glowing with the genuine enthusiasm of the writer. Mr. Motley combines as an historian two qualifications seldom found united,—to great capacity for historical research he adds much power of pictorial representation. In his pages we find characters and scenes minutely set forth in elaborate and characteristic detail, which is relieved and heightened in effect by the artistic breadth of light and shade thrown across the broader prospects of history. In an American author, too,

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we must commend the hearty English spirit in which the book is written; and fertile as the present age has been in historical works of the highest merit, none of them can be ranked above these volumes in the grand qualities of interest, accuracy, and truth.”

A writer in “Blackwood” (May, 1861) contrasts Motley with Froude somewhat in the way in which another critic had contrasted him with Prescott. Froude, he says, remembers that there are some golden threads in the black robe of the Dominican. Motley “finds it black and thrusts it farther into the darkness.”

Every writer carries more or less of his own character into his book, of course. A great professor has told me that there is a personal flavor in the mathematical work of a man of genius like Poisson. Those who have known Motley and Prescott would feel sure beforehand that the impulsive nature of the one and the judicial serenity of the other would as surely betray themselves in their writings as in their conversation and in their every movement. Another point which the critic of “Blackwood’s Magazine” has noticed has not been so generally observed: it is what he calls “a dashing, offhand, rattling style,”—“fast” writing. It cannot be denied that here and there may be detected slight vestiges of the way of writing of an earlier period of Motley’s literary life, with which I have no reason to think the writer just mentioned was acquainted. Now and then I can trace in the turn of a phrase, in the twinkle of an epithet, a faint reminiscence of a certain satirical levity, airiness, jauntiness, if I may hint such a word, which is just enough to remind me of those perilous shallows of his early time through which his richly freighted argosy had passed with such wonderful escape from their dangers and such very slight marks of injury. That which is pleasant gayety in conversation may be quite out of place in formal composition, and Motley’s wit must have had a hard time of it struggling to show its spangles in the processions while his gorgeous tragedies went sweeping by.

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS:

All classes are conservative by necessity
Already looking forward to the revolt of the slave States
Attacked by the poetic mania
Becoming more learned, and therefore more ignorant
But not thoughtlessly indulgent to the boy
Cold water of conventional and commonplace encouragement
Could paint a character with the ruddy life-blood coloring
Emulation is not capability
Excused by their admirers for their shortcomings
Excuses to disarm the criticism he had some reason to fear
Fear of the laugh of the world at its sincerity
Fitted “To warn, to comfort, and command”



How many more injured by becoming bad copies of a bad ideal
Ignoble facts which strew the highways of political life
Indoor home life imprisons them in the domestic circle
Intellectual dandyisms of Bulwer

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Kindly shadow of oblivion
Misanthropical, sceptical philosopher
Most entirely truthful child wne had ever seen
Nearsighted liberalism
No two books, as he said, ever injured each other
Not a single acquaintance in the place, and we glory in the fact
Only foundation fit for history,—original contemporary document
Radical, one who would uproot, is a man whose trade is dangerous
Sees the past in the pitiless light of the present
Self-educated man, as he had been a self-taught boy
Solitary and morose, the necessary consequence of reckless study
Spirit of a man who wishes to be proud of his country
Studied according to his inclinations rather than by rule
Style above all other qualities seems to embalm for posterity
Talked impatiently of the value of my time
The dead men of the place are my intimate friends
The fellow mixes blood with his colors!
The loss of hair, which brings on premature decay
The personal gifts which are nature's passport everywhere
Twenty assaults upon fame and had forty books killed under him
Vain belief that they were men at eighteen or twenty
Weight of a thousand years of error

[The End]

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