

A halftone-style illustration of a library. In the center, an open book lies on a dark, reflective table. The pages are white with faint, illegible text. The background is filled with bookshelves packed with books of various colors. The lighting is dramatic, with a bright spot on the open book and a warm glow from a light source on the right. The entire image has a dotted, halftone texture.

James Russell Lowell

*A Fable for
Critics*

James Russell Lowell

A Fable for Critics



Published by Good Press, 2021

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066447861

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Griswold](#)

[Emerson](#)

[Thoreau](#)

[Alcott](#)

[Brownson](#)

[Willis](#)

[Parker](#)

[Bryant](#)

[Whittier](#)

[Dana](#)

[Neal](#)

[Hawthorne](#)

[Cooper](#)

[British vs. American](#)

[Abolitionism and Fuller](#)

[Halleck](#)

[Briggs](#)

[Poe and Longfellow](#)

[Child](#)

[Irving](#)

[Judd](#)

[Massachusetts](#)

[Holmes](#)

[Lowell](#)

[Halleck](#)

Conclusion

Introduction

Table of Contents

Phoebus, sitting one day in a laurel-tree's shade,
Was reminded of Daphne, of whom it was made,
For the god being one day too warm in his wooing,
She took to the tree to escape his pursuing;
Be the cause what it might, from his offers she
drunk,
And, Ginevra-like, shut herself up in a trunk;
And, though 't was a step into which he had driven
her,
He somehow or other had never forgiven her;
Her memory he nursed as a king of a tonic,
Something bitter to chew when he'd play the
Byronic,
And I can't count the obstinate nymphs that he
brought over
By a strange kind of smile he put on when he
thought of her.
"My case is like Dido's," he sometimes remarked;
"When I last saw my love, she was fairly embarked
In a laurel, as *she* thought — but (ah, how Fate
mocks!)

She has found it by this time a very bad box;
Let hunters from me take this saw when they need
it, —
You're not always sure of your game when you've
treed it.

Just conceive such a change taking place in one's mistress!

What romance would be left? — who can flatter or kiss trees?

And, for mercy's sake, how could one keep up a dialogue

With a dull wooden thing that will live and will die a log, —

Not to say that the thought would forever intrude
That you've less chance to win her the more she is wood!

Ah! it went to my heart, and the memory still grieves,

To see those loved graces all taking their leaves;
Those charms beyond speech, so enchanting but now,

As they left me forever, each making its bough!
If her tongue *had* a tang sometimes more than was right

Her new bark is worse than ten times her old bite."

Now, Daphne, — before she was happily treeified —

Over all other blossoms the lily had deified,

And when she expected the god on a visit

('T was before he had made his intentions explicit),

Some buds she arranged with a vast deal of care,

To look as if artlessly twined in her hair,

Where they seemed, as he said, when he paid his addresses,

Like the day breaking through the long night of her

tresses;

So whenever he wished to be quite irresistible,
Like a man with eight trumps in his hand at a whist-
table

(I feared me at first that the rhyme was untwistable,
Though I might have lugged in an allusion to
Cristabel), —

He would take up a lily, and gloomily look in it,
As I shall at the —, when they cut up my book in it.

Well, here, after all the bad rhyme I've been
spinning,

I've got back at last to my story's beginning:

Sitting there, as I say, in the shade of his mistress,
As dull as a volume of old Chester mysteries,

Or as those puzzling specimens which, in old
histories,

We read of his verses — the Oracles, namely,—

(I wonder the Greeks should have allowed them
tamely,

For one might bet safely whatever he has to risk,

They were laid at his door by some ancient Miss
Asterisk,

And so dull that the men who retailed them out-
doors

Got the ill name of augurs, because they were bores,
—)

First, he mused what the animal substance or herb
is

Would induce a mustache, for you know he's

imberbis;

Then he shuddered to think how his youthful
position

Was assailed by the age of his son the physician;
At some poems he glanced, had been sent to him
lately,

And the metre and sentiment puzzled him greatly;
"Mehercle! I'd make such proceeding felonious, —
Have they all of them slept in the cave of
Trophonius?

Look well to your seat, 't is like taking an airing
On a corduroy road, and that out of repairing;
It leads one, 't is true, through the primitive forest,
Grand natural features, but then one has no rest;
You just catch a glimpse of some ravishing distance,
When a jolt puts the whole of it out of existence, —
Why not use their ears, if they happen to have any?"
— Here the laurel-leaves murdered the name of poor
Daphne.

"O weep with me, Daphne," he sighed, "for you know
it's

A terrible thing to be pestered with poets!

But, alas, she is dumb, and the proverb holds good,
She never will cry till she's out of the wood!

What wouldn't I give if I never had known of her?

'T were a kind of relief had I something to groan
over:

If I had but some letters of hers, now, to toss over,
I might turn for the nonce a Byronic philosopher,