

editor, orator, and reformer, a great public man in the latter half of his life, while literature proper held him only in his earlier years. It was a unique and fascinating combination—the author, editor, orator, and reformer all in one—each part strengthened and purified by the other, and all together making a total impression of culture, integrity, power, and personal charm that had not before been rivaled. Mr. Cary tells the story well of the development of the noble, mature manhood out of the joyous and genial early years. He does not add much to our knowledge of “Emerson and Brook Farm” in the chapter so entitled, for Curtis himself had given a full account of those Arcadian days in the Easy Chair and elsewhere. Mr. Cary is especially just and discriminating in treating of Curtis’ books, stating their merits and their defects in a manner both judicial and appreciative. This is his conclusion concerning the *Potiphar Papers*:

As the satirist is not always the moralist, but is sometimes the hopeless cynic, wearying and discouraging and depressing the manhood and womanhood of his readers, I do not take it to be a serious qualification of Mr. Curtis’ position in literature that he was not eminently a satirist. And as the sound moralist, however he may elect or be impelled to do his work, does work that lasts and blesses while it lasts, I find in this volume a source for which we may well be thankful, for which I feel deeply thankful, knowing that its influence was not only wholesome, but strong and wide. Many a young man, reading the papers from month to month, found erected between him and the temptation of a frivolous and essentially low life the light, but not easily disregarded, barrier of the scorn of a guide who was at once a moralist, a philosopher, and an accomplished gentleman.

The brief chapter on “Business Experiences” relates the fine stand taken by Curtis in assuming “a large indebtedness for which he was not legally bound,” to defray which he lectured for nearly twenty years. With the campaign of 1856, he came to the front as a political orator, and henceforth Mr. Cary is occupied with the high-minded partisan, who threw off the chains of party later and embodied the independent spirit:

He was the most conspicuous instance of his time of the Independent who, without hope of reward or gain . . . followed the orders of his conscience. This . . . I regard as his greatest service to his country and as a service of inestimable value, for the independence of Mr. Curtis was not narrow, or obstinate, or ignorant, or conceited. Of that kind there is no lack. It is, to a certain order of mind, not merely easy, but attractive. The conscience which Mr. Curtis obeyed was enlightened and open. He was as careful, painstaking, and critical in seeking to know the right as he was firm and determined in support of what he finally decided was for him the right; and he was, so far as I have been able to see, singularly respectful of the same sort of independence in others.

Mr. Cary, who, we understand, is an editorial writer on the *New York Times* and a lifelong friend of Mr. Curtis, has done his difficult task—for biography of this kind is not easy to write so soon after the great man is gone—with rare deli-

cacy and skill, and his volume deserves the widest reading. Its influence will be of the best on all who read it with an open mind.

The Harpers continue their good work of publishing Mr. Curtis’ miscellaneous writings in handsome form. *Literary and Social Essays* is made up of papers of moderate length on Emerson, Hawthorne, Rachel, Thackeray in America, Sir Philip Sidney, Longfellow, Holmes, and Irving. The one on Sidney is here first published. Mr. Curtis’ attractive qualities as an essayist are too well known to need mention. A great critic of literature he was not by nature or training, but in the generous appreciation of true excellence he was one of the foremost.

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS.*

THE series of American Statesmen might almost as fitly have claimed George William Curtis as the one in which Mr. Cary’s excellent biography appears. Though not an office-holder to any extent, he was, as

*American Men of Letters. George William Curtis. By Edward Cary. Houghton, Mifflin & Co. \$1.25.
Literary and Social Essays. By George William Curtis. Harper & Brothers. \$2.50.