



The Technology Review

VOL. III.

JANUARY, 1901

No. 1

AUGUSTUS LOWELL

By the death of Mr. Augustus Lowell the Institute of Technology has lost a warm friend, a wise counsellor, and a constant and liberal benefactor.

He came of an old and well-known Massachusetts family, some of whose representatives, in their successive generations during the last hundred and twenty years, have done eminent public service to the State and the country ; while others have been foremost among the men to whose courage, foresight, industry, and skill we owe the origin and prosperity of the manufacturing enterprises of Massachusetts.

The Rev. John Lowell, for forty-one years the honored and trusted minister of the third parish in Newbury, was the father of the first Judge John Lowell, one of the three judges appointed by the Continental Congress for the trial of appeals from the Courts of Admiralty, who was afterward commissioned by Washington as judge of the United States District Court of Massachusetts, and promoted by John Adams to be chief justice for this circuit of the short-lived United States Circuit Court, which was abolished by Jefferson's first Congress the year after its creation by the Federalists. Judge Lowell will, perhaps, be longest remembered as the person who secured the in-

sertion in the Constitution of Massachusetts of the declaration, "All men are born free and equal," which was afterwards judicially decided to have abolished slavery in this State. Judge Lowell's oldest son, John Lowell, was a brilliant lawyer, a leading spirit among the Federalists, and the oracle of that party in Massachusetts. His only son, John Amory Lowell, was the father of Augustus Lowell, who was born in Boston on the 15th of January, 1830. His mother was a daughter of the Hon. Samuel Putnam, for nearly thirty years a judge of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts.

Augustus Lowell was fitted for college at the Boston Latin School. He was a manly, frank, honest, high-spirited boy, a person of influence with his classmates, and possessing the confidence and good will of his teachers. He entered Harvard at the age of sixteen, and was graduated in 1850. After leaving college, he travelled in Europe with his father and family for about a year. Returning in 1851, he went into the counting-room of Bullard & Lee, a firm composed of the late William Bullard and Colonel Henry Lee, who were at that time leading merchants in the East India trade. He remained two years with them, and then went to Lowell to study manufacturing. He was subsequently for a time with the firm of James M. Beebe, Morgan & Co., where his business education was completed.

He then formed a partnership with Mr. Franklin H. Story, and had a counting-room on Central Wharf. They were engaged in the East India business, and continued in that until the crisis of 1857 put an end for the time being to the Calcutta trade here, and to many of the traders, though it is believed that by his India business Mr. Lowell rather made than lost money.

Judge Lowell's second son, Francis Cabot Lowell, was in early life a merchant; but when the British orders in council made a British protection necessary to secure vessels from capture on the high seas, and Napoleon's decrees directed the confiscation of any vessel and its cargo provided with such a protection, foreign commerce for the Americans became so hazardous as to be practically impossible, and Mr. Francis Lowell conceived the idea that, as we were much nearer the cotton fields of the South, we ought to be able to manufacture cotton goods for ourselves instead of importing them from England. The first experiment in this direction was made at Waltham; and, as its success justified engaging in the business on a larger scale, Mr. Lowell and his associates started new mills at the falls of the Merrimac, and called the settlement Lowell.

John Amory Lowell was early interested with his uncle in his manufacturing business, was one of the founders of Lowell, and at a later date of the city of Lawrence. The financial crisis of 1857 affected very severely the cotton mills in Massachusetts, and Mr. Lowell found his property for the moment seriously impaired. Augustus, who had just retired from the East India business, took a desk in his father's office, that he might assist him in the management of his affairs; and in this office he remained until his father's death.

He had married in 1854 the younger daughter of the Hon. Abbott Lawrence; and in 1864 he went abroad on account of her illness, and remained away a couple of years.

In 1875 he became treasurer of the Boott Cotton Mills at Lowell, which had been built by his father; and he held this position for eleven years. He was also for a few months in 1877 the treasurer of the Merrimac Manufacturing Company, but was never afterwards the active manager

of any business. He was, however, connected as president or director with a large number of business corporations; was for years one of the governing body of the Provident Institution for Savings, and from 1898 its president; was a director of the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company; for twenty years was president of the Boston Gas Light Company, and connected with many other manufacturing and business corporations, in the management of which he took great interest and was often an important factor. He was a member of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, of the Massachusetts Historical Society, of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and vice-president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He never held but one public position: he was one of the Boston School Committee in the years 1857-58. He did, however, in two capacities, a great work for the public benefit. Upon the death of his father in 1881 he became the trustee of the Lowell Institute. The objects of this trust are, perhaps, too well known to need any enumeration here; but a brief statement of them may not be altogether amiss.

John Lowell, Jr., a cousin and brother-in-law of Mr. Augustus Lowell's father, created by his will a trust, the income of which was to be devoted to the maintenance and support of public lectures to be delivered in Boston, upon philosophy, natural history, the arts and sciences, and such other subjects as the trustee for the time being should think expedient. Mr. John Amory Lowell, Augustus Lowell's father, was the trustee named in the will, which contained a provision that each trustee should appoint his own successor. The trust became operative in 1839; and for more than sixty years the citizens of Boston have had in each winter, under the wise benevolence of its founder, and the

careful and judicious management of the successive trustees, the opportunity of hearing lectures from the best men in the various departments of philosophy, history, literature, and art, as well as the last word in scientific discovery from the leaders in their respective branches of study and investigation. It was to the munificence of its founder and the wisdom of its first trustee that we owed in 1846 the visit of Louis Agassiz, then the foremost naturalist of the day, who came here to lecture at the Lowell Institute, and, remaining here as a Harvard professor, inspired an enthusiasm for scientific investigation and study, which, beginning in his own department, spread into every other, and to which we owe the Agassiz Museum at Cambridge, a monument to his memory and to the scientific research and munificent liberality of his family.

To discharge thoroughly the duties of trustee of the Lowell Institute, in addition to those connected with the management of the property which constitutes its fund, requires, in making a wise selection of the subjects to be treated of, much thought, a sound judgment, attention to the wants and desires of the public who are to be instructed and a knowledge of the persons most competent to lecture upon these subjects.

Succeeding to this trust upon the death of his father in 1881, Mr. Augustus Lowell gave himself conscientiously, carefully, and intelligently to the duties thus imposed on him. He had never received any special scientific education or training; yet by his reading and study he made himself sufficiently familiar with scientific subjects to be able to judge of the merits of the lectures on these subjects, while he also kept himself so far in touch with the leading men and discoveries in science as to select wisely both the lecturers and the subjects which would be of most interest

and advantage to the public, and was so constant an attendant upon these lectures that he could judge of their value and fitness for a popular audience, and observe as each course progressed the favor with which it was received by the public, as indicated by the increasing or diminishing numbers of the audience.

Besides the popular lectures, admission to which is to be had by ticket, the founder of the Lowell Institute provided by his will for others "more abstruse, erudite, and particular"; and under this clause lectures have been given for many years to advanced students under the direction of the Institute of Technology, as well as to the school-teachers of Boston, under the supervision of the Society of Natural History, and more recently to workingmen under the auspices of the Wells Memorial Workingmen's Institute; while the Lowell School of Industrial Design in connection with the Institute of Technology has been maintained from this fund for nearly thirty years.

In founding the Lowell Institute, John Lowell, Jr., builded better than he knew. He provided for the people of Boston opportunities of gratuitous instruction, improvement, and enjoyment far beyond anything that he in his lifetime could by possibility have anticipated. The importance and influence of the Lowell lectures has steadily increased, their scope has been constantly enlarged, and the public interest in them has continually grown. No record, however, of all that in sixty years the noble gift of John Lowell, Jr., has accomplished would be complete if it failed to recognize how much is due to the skilful business management of the successive trustees, father and son, and to the fidelity and devotion with which they have endeavored to carry out the purposes of the generous giver in the spirit which inspired him. A casual observer, seeing only

what appears on the surface, would have but little idea of the amount of time and thought the proper management of this trust requires; but a few years ago a work was published giving a history of the Lowell Institute, from which one can judge how important and engrossing are the duties of the trustee. These duties Mr. Augustus Lowell discharged with a fidelity and ability which cannot be overestimated, and the service which he in this way rendered to the public is one which should not be forgotten.

In the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Mr. Lowell from his connection with various manufacturing enterprises naturally took a great interest. His father had seen at the outset that this school was to some extent in the line of the purposes which John Lowell, Jr., had in view in founding the Lowell Institute; and he had therefore made use of it as a medium for carrying out these purposes. Mr. Augustus Lowell was elected a member of the Corporation of the Institute in 1873, when the financial depression of that period, which was aggravated in Boston by the great fire of the previous year, was beginning to be severely felt. This condition of things and the ill-health and resignation of its president and founder, Professor Rogers, had a great effect upon the Institute, then barely twelve years old, and for some four or five years it seemed very doubtful whether it would survive, or succumb from lack of the funds necessary for its support; but with the reviving prosperity of the country the numbers of its students again increased and its fortunes steadily improved.

Mr. Rogers had seen during this period of depression that the Corporation of the Institute as then organized was an unwieldy body, unfitted to secure an efficient administration, and in October, 1875, had suggested that it might

perhaps now be wise "to try to select a small but efficient Executive Committee who should have the time and ability to give a real supervision and to aid the president." Nothing came of this at the time, however, nor until after Mr. Rogers's death, when in April, 1883, Mr. Augustus Lowell moved for the appointment of a committee to consider and report upon this subject. A committee was appointed; and a month later they made a report proposing a scheme of organization which was then adopted, and which has worked entirely satisfactorily ever since. Under this scheme there are chosen five members of the Corporation, who with the president and treasurer constitute the Executive Committee, and are charged with the immediate management of the affairs of the Institute, much as the directors of a business corporation. Each of these members is elected for five years, and the matter is so arranged that one member goes out each year. Mr. Lowell was chosen a member of this committee when it was first organized. A year later he was appointed on the Committee on Nominations, and held both these positions until his death.

Some idea of the fidelity with which he discharged his duties on these committees and the interest which he took in them may be had from the fact that the records show that out of 277 meetings of the Executive Committee from 1883 to 1900 he was present at 247.

The work of this committee covers almost every subject connected with the Institute of Technology. It includes the arrangement of the different courses of instruction, the introduction of new courses, the appointment of instructors, the management of the property, and the providing of ways and means to meet the expenses of the Institute. For many of the years while Mr. Lowell was on the Executive Committee this last matter was a source of con-

stant anxiety and difficulty ; and much time and thought were given to the discussion and determination of what could be done, what must be abandoned or modified, what further economies could be initiated, and how the slender resources of the Institute could be best used to tide it over the financial difficulties which weighed upon it so heavily. To the consideration of all these questions Mr. Lowell gave the best that was in him ; and the Institute had the advantage of his business skill and experience, of his financial caution, of his zealous interest and his broad views as to the aims and objects of the Institute, and his fixed purpose that these should be ultimately carried out, but that their success should not be hazarded by too much haste or by incurring expenses and embarking on undertakings which the resources of the Corporation did not fairly warrant.

As time went on, the Institute of Technology became one of the principal interests of Mr. Lowell's life. It not only occupied his thoughts when he was able to attend to his duties, but it also served to distract his mind when he was ill and suffering. On its twenty-fifth anniversary he delivered a commemorative address, in which he gave an account of the history and development of the school, of its methods of instruction and their adaptation to the changes and developments in practical science.

After a severe illness in the summer of 1899, from which he never fully recovered, Mr. Lowell tendered his resignation as a member of the Corporation ; and the appreciation which the other members had of the value and importance of his services, and of the great loss which the Institute would sustain by his resignation, is shown by the fact that a letter was sent him, signed by all the members of the Corporation, in which they say : —