



Sainte-Beuve, Lowell, and the "Atlantic Monthly"

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Sainte-Beuve, Lowell, and the *Atlantic Monthly*

IN the autograph files of the Harvard College Library is a fine example of a Sainte-Beuve manuscript. Sainte-Beuve's small condensed handwriting packs into eleven pages approximately five inches by eight, written only on the recto, a complete article on the poet Béranger. At the top of the first page are the words: 'Handwriting of Sainte-Beuve,' signed 'J. R. Lowell.' Certain explanations of French customs and geography make it clear that this article was not written to be read by a French public. Its first appearance, in February 1858, was, in fact, a translation by Lowell in the newly founded *Atlantic Monthly*. This date is still within the period in which no *Atlantic* articles carried a signature, so that the authorship could be guessed only by an astute reader, a scholar of Sainte-Beuve. Curiously enough, this article was never included, even in an appendix, with the critical works of Sainte-Beuve published in France.

Though it adds nothing new to Sainte-Beuve's judgment on Béranger set forth in seven articles published over a period of thirty-five years, yet the very date of the article's publication gives it a certain importance. The first two articles on Béranger (1832, 1833), it will be remembered, are quite laudatory; the third article (1850) still recognizes Béranger's merit but revokes some of the youthful enthusiasm of the first two; the 1857 piece is simply a necrology at Béranger's death. In 1861, however, Sainte-Beuve indicates that he has been accused of heresy since 1859 by the Béranger disciples.

The date 1858 assigned to the Harvard manuscript is interesting, therefore, because it shows Sainte-Beuve's very fair and temperate judgment just at the moment when Béranger's disciples were beginning to cry treason.

After its first publication in the *Atlantic*, the article was forgotten. Lowell gave the manuscript to Charles Eliot Norton, from whom it passed to form a part of the autograph collection of one of his sons, Dr Rupert Norton. On the latter's death, in 1914, his widow presented the collection to Harvard University. Finally, in 1929, Professor R. L. Hawkins transcribed and published the manuscript for the first time in the *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (XXXVI, 427-438).

A minor point remains to be settled: Through whose agency was the article secured for the *Atlantic*? Among the founders and early contributors to the *Atlantic* the contacts with France were numerous, but a careful scrutiny of this group as well as of the group of Americans who knew Sainte-Beuve¹ reveals only five logical possibilities, chosen by date of contact and range of interests. While John Bigelow is the only one of the five not connected with the *Atlantic*, he did obtain from Sainte-Beuve two articles for the *New York Evening Post*, but he was not in Paris until 29 November 1858, or after the publication of the translation of the Harvard manuscript. Norton was in Paris and wrote Lowell on 20 June 1857 about the *Atlantic* and possible

¹ Robert G. Mahieu, *Sainte-Beuve aux Etats-Unis* (Princeton, 1945), pp. 7-14.

contributors. It would be easy to think that Norton approached Sainte-Beuve about writing for the new magazine, but, when asked, Professor Mahieu wrote that he does not believe Norton ever knew Sainte-Beuve. Although Lowell and Longfellow knew Sainte-Beuve, they were not in Paris at the time and their correspondence reveals no request. On the other hand, Francis H. Underwood, the 'literary man' of Phillips, Sampson and Co., and projector of the *Atlantic*, attempted as early as 1853 to found a literary magazine, and his correspondence with distinguished possible contributors seems to date from the same period. Bliss Perry, in an essay on Underwood for the fiftieth anniversary number of the *Atlantic*, says:

One is tempted to quote all of Aldrich's inimitable notes to Underwood as well as letters from Sainte-Beuve and other foreign writers, and many a friendly line from Holmes and Whittier.²

Before giving this sentence of Perry's, Professor Mahieu asks: 'Pourquoi

² 'The Editor Who Was Never the Editor,' *Atlantic Monthly*, C (1907), 675.

Sainte-Beuve eut-il une correspondance suivie avec H. F. Underwood?'³ Subsequently he explains that the Underwood papers known to Perry cannot at present be traced. With all this, one may readily conjecture that it was Underwood who approached Sainte-Beuve on behalf of the new magazine of which he was 'the editor who was never the editor.' The request by mail would account for the manuscript's being folded to envelope size, and Underwood's agency would explain why Lowell as editor in title received the manuscript without seeming to solicit it in any way. It is a purely circumstantial theory, to be proved or vitiated, perhaps, when the publication of the *Correspondance générale de Sainte-Beuve* is completed or the Underwood letters are found again. Whatever the method of contact between Sainte-Beuve and the *Atlantic*, however, the manuscript is an interesting holograph from a great critic, and stands as the original of the most extensive article he did for America.

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³ Mahieu, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

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