Vanity Fair at one time created a considerable stir. It was, in a sense, a pioneering venture. Launched in 1852, The Lantern, the first comic periodical in America, had lasted only about a year. Although Vanity Fair emerged at a crucial period in the history of the nation, when the prospect of great financial support seemed slim, it met with a fair measure of success. Contrary to expectations, the times were ripe for the development of a humorous magazine that provided live, topical, substantial fare. Vanity Fair followed more or less in the footsteps of The Lantern, but it dealt more frequently and more discerningly with political and social matters of importance and it attracted a larger number of talented writers. Coming as it did during a period of intense social and political excitement, it was forced to touch often on the leading issues of the day if it wished to command attention and increase its circulation. The weapon it wielded, that of satire in the form of verse, biting puns and epigrams, bold caricature, brilliant essays, was in many ways more potent than either impassioned editorials or sober argument. By making men laugh, by applying the acid of satire or ridicule to many of the problems that then engaged the distracted and later war-torn nation, it succeeded in producing a deep impression where appeals to logic might have failed. It set men free temporarily from pressing responsibilities; it enabled them to laugh heartily at themselves and their opponents, at the rant of politicians, the hypocrisy of statesmen, the absurdities of editors and public figures. Vanity Fair was literary without making any pretensions to high literary excellence. In a time of seething unrest, of fratricidal hatred and unloosed political passions, the tone of Vanity Fair—witty, ironic, irreverent—was a salutary and stimulating influence.

Vanity Fair was popular in its day precisely because it was clever, caustic, outspoken. Because it did so under the guise of humor, it could satirize politics and eminent politicians without arousing too great resentment. It was an odd hodge-podge of gossip, mental froth, extravagant conceits, journalistic jokes, personal innuendos and at-
tacks, daring squibs, daring satire, and doggerel that occasionally sparkled. It generally gave the appearance of being tremendously alive. That, indeed, was its salient virtue. Its grave defect was that it pursued no definite editorial policy; the magazine as a whole was somewhat nondescript and confusing in its contents. It was too much of a miscellany, a kind of catch-all for the flim-flams and sophisticated wit of the metropolitan literati. It wavered uncertainly between two poles: on the one hand, it sought to engage actively in the social and political affairs of the day by means of corrective satire; on the other, it tried to keep up its reputation as a humorous weekly by printing contributions that were original and provocative, regardless of their political point of view or social significance. It was high-spirited, but its high spirits took, for the most part, the form of outrageous puns. If what *Vanity Fair* printed in its successive issues is typical of the temper of the time, an epidemic of punning was then raging.

Under the editorial management of Charles Godfrey Leland, the magazine assumed a political attitude that was independent and intelligent. It developed into a power of constructive as well as destructive criticism. It was iconoclastic and derisive, but there was a method in its madness; despite its surface levity, it had suggestions to make that were by no means negligible. Under the glib patter of badinage, one could frequently detect a note of intense indignation at affairs grossly mishandled, a feeling of earnest patriotism, a great and serious concern for the future of the Union. Though the official rôle of *Vanity Fair* was that of a jester, there ran beneath its clownish utterances a steady undercurrent of seriousness. The gayety and good humor, the quips and cranks and wanton sallies, did not altogether conceal a profound faith in the destiny of America and a fear that secessionism, if encouraged and left unpunished, would plunge the country into ruin.

The veil of anonymity which has hidden some of the contributors to *Vanity Fair* has, perhaps, tended to detract from its literary and historical importance. Few historians have recognized its positive cultural importance. Occasionally some of its cartoons and caricatures have been reproduced in books dealing with that period, but as a rule it has not received the degree of recognition it deserved. Even Leland's official biographer devotes but scant space to *Vanity Fair*. She merely declares: "He edited 'Vanity Fair,'"—Stoddard, Aldrich,
Artemus Ward his collaborators; that is, he lived the life of the journalist about town, except that he held aloof from ‘the Bohemians’ who used to meet at Pfaff’s tavern. . . .” She also mentions the fact that Leland persuaded Saxe and Stoddard to contribute. But no attempt is made to appraise the value of Leland’s work, to identify the material he wrote or that of his contributors. An examination of the correspondence addressed to Charles Godfrey Leland when he was editor of *Vanity Fair* makes it possible to identify the contributions of some gifted and well-known writers. The veil of anonymity can now be partly lifted. Aside from the Bohemian coterie—men like Henry Clapp, Fitz-James O’Brien, Frank Wood, George Arnold, William Winter, and Walt Whitman—who found in *Vanity Fair* a welcome medium for its exuberant effusions, the magazine enlisted the services of some illustrious men of letters, some of whom insisted on keeping their connection with it a close secret.

An illustrated comic weekly, *Vanity Fair* was first edited in New York by Frank Wood. The first issue, which came out on December 31, 1859, was cleverly arranged. As the Prospectus stated, its intention was not to play the part of a mountebank. Jokes and puns were to be included, but they would be kept in a position of subordination. Nor, in its efforts at reform, would it take a sour, hostile view of human nature and of society. The true spirit of a satirical paper of that type should be, not extermination, but reformation. Hence it could better serve its purpose by good-natured raillery. When necessary, however, it would be sternly uncompromising in its censure. It would give no quarter to tricksters and charlatans and venal editors. This gives a fairly adequate summary of the aims and contents of the magazine over a period of more than two years. In its attacks it employed every possible weapon of satire; it sharply criticized shady or corrupt politicians; it hurled barbed darts of wit against the Moguls of the press who were pretentious or dishonest; it exposed unmercifully the hollow cant of quacks and held up to scorn writers, no

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2 There is strong internal evidence that Whitman wrote for *Vanity Fair*, but John Burroughs is more explicit: “During the first period of the war he [Walt Whitman] wrote for ‘Vanity Fair’ and other comic or satirical papers in New York, and was a recognized member of a group of young ‘Bohemians,’ as they were called, made up of musical, dramatic and literary critics attached to the daily press. At this time he led the life of a literary free-lance.” Biographical sketch of Whitman contributed by Burroughs to *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1898), I. 255.
matter how high their reputation, whose work was dull or mediocre. It used puns copiously, Leland himself being, perhaps, the chief offender in this respect. It contained poems satirizing the men and movements of the time. In addition there were articles of a broadly facetious nature, epigrams, cartoons, sketches of travel, letters from pseudonymous correspondents, and literary chit-chat.

The first issue, for instance, contained a scathing poem by George Arnold, effectively satirizing the adulterated foods sold over the grocery counter; a familiar essay on “The Home-Made Shirt,” by Ada Clare, the Queen of Bohemia; a rollicking article, “Opened with Prayer,” describing the bloody brawls that took place during Congressional sessions. A cartoon accompanying the article shows the chaplain praying while the Congressmen are piously engaged in battle with knives and pistols and missiles of all kinds. Aldrich contributed the poem, “At the Café,” which begins with the well-known line: “We were all very merry at Pfaff’s.” An unsigned article on “Politics” stated the political attitude of the magazine. It would criticize freely when it saw fit. It intended to laugh all Disunionists out of countenance and cake the Union under its special protection. Not without insight it announced that “The one great panacea for social and political evils is mirth.”

Politics continued to occupy a prominent place in the magazine. Rarely a week was allowed to pass without some vicious dig at President James Buchanan. One “Dramatic Scene,” satirically describes a conversation in Washington between Buchanan and Seward, each of whom is ambitious to secure the presidential nomination. One long poem, called “The Vexation of J. B.,” shows Buchanan sitting in the White House reading the Herald as

A quaint Imp, up before him rose,
And talked and sputter’d as down squat he,
And cried, ‘Beware how my plans you oppose,
Or tinker with Squatter Sovereignty!’
Of Kansas, he shriek’d, of Border Roughs,
Of Lecompton Constitutions too,
Called Buck and his backers a set of muffs,
And made a most tremendous ado.

His biographical sketch of Oliver Wendell Holmes is based almost entirely on far-fetched plays on words. Note this specimen of his vein of punning humor: “His habits are pacific, notwithstanding his connection with the Atlantic.” Vanity Fair, II. 222.

Vanity Fair, I. 13 (December 13, 1859).
Ibid., I. 134 (February 25, 1860).
Ibid., I. 147 (March 3, 1860).
Again on January 12, 1861, *Vanity Fair* printed a medal with the graven head of Andrew Jackson on it and below it said: "This medal is presented by *Vanity Fair* to James Buchanan, President of the United States, as a testimonial of respect for his MANLY and PATRIOTIC stand in defence of the rights of the Union." In another scathing poem, "The Other ‘Abou-Bein-Adam," Buchanan is set down in a book of gold as being first among those who sold their country. He was also caricatured in drawings which represented him variously as a streaming comet falling through the heavens, a guttering candle, a garish gas jet, an Easter egg inside of which his head appears with a lugubrious expression. Lincoln, too, came in for a generous share of ridicule and abuse. Though severe enough in tone, the attacks on Lincoln were not prompted by political enmity but by a desire to get him to state his platform and to take decisive action in curbing the rebellious South. Compared with the impassive and futile Buchanan, Lincoln seemed a Redeemer, a Sun of Righteousness. There are, however, numerous unkind references to his ungainly figure, his abortive attempts at humor, and his early policy of straddling. There is, for example, a full-page cartoon of Lincoln in a Highland costume, hands on hips, desperately balancing on his forehead a transverse beam on one end of which is Sumter and on the other a dove of peace. The attack is even more outspoken in the article, "The Republican Fizzle," which roundly condemns Lincoln as "a characterless candidate, supported by an aimless party. Poor bleeding Kansas has bled herself to death, the Anti-Slavery movement was the only plank left in the platform, and that, the Republicans have labored incessantly to root out." The writer believes that Lincoln possesses certain characteristics which, if properly exposed in the newspapers, will go far towards defeating him in the election. First, he is known as "Old Uncle Abe," an appellation which will detract from his dignity. "Further, he is a longitudinal person, with a shambling gait—a physical formation termed 'slab-sided,' in the Eastern States. . . . He has a thin, almost nasal voice, and his grammar is not so far above suspicion as Caesar's wife is reported to have been." Another article, after reviewing the various afflictions besetting Lincoln, declares: "But the worst malady he has ever had to

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7 Ibid., III. 23.  
8 *Vanity Fair*, III. 16 (February 16, 1861).  
9 Ibid., III. 139 (March 23, 1861).  
10 Ibid., I. 349 (May 26, 1860).  
11 *Vanity Fair*, I. 349.
 contend with is the Abolition Mania. This virulent plague has unfortunately taken root in his system, and will it is thought, eventually hurry him to a political grave.\textsuperscript{12} The dilatory, compromising attitude of Lincoln—that was what chiefly antagonized the editor of \textit{Vanity Fair}. Though it hoped for ultimate reconciliation before hostilities actually broke out, it believed that reconciliation would best be achieved by a stern and resolute policy.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Vanity Fair}, it is evident, had violently taken sides. It espoused the cause of Unionism; it was definitely partisan in its views and utterances. Though Leland declared that it was “blinded by no party, no prejudice. We strike at folly South or North. We have at least shot our arrows at All parties,”\textsuperscript{14} this was merely an editorial concession that the contents of the magazine belied.

\textbf{II}

\textit{Vanity Fair}, however, is interesting not so much as political history; it was primarily a literary and humorous periodical. It embodies the temper of a group of New York writers and the talent and industry of the editor, Charles Godfrey Leland. It was he who labored hard to give it spice, timeliness, and originality. Judging by the galleys that still survive,\textsuperscript{15} Leland did most of the work himself. After a year of his editorship, the improvements he had made were marked; the magazine began to attract attention. His friend, R. Shelton Mackenzie, editor of the Philadelphia \textit{Bulletin}, wrote to Leland:\textsuperscript{16}

I have an idea of writing an article upon *Vanity Fair,* with your aid—as to information touching the authors and artists, &c. I mean that you should give me leads, which I could work up, so as to tell the public, but not so particularly as to shew it came from any one connected with the paper, as much about it, as is generally known in the literary circles of New York. . . . You have made a sort of ‘institution’ of V. F., and the publication is worthy of a good article. Mind this must be wholly \textit{entre nous}.

The tribute was entirely deserved. Leland had made a sort of institution of \textit{Vanity Fair}, and he felt a justifiable pride when pre-

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, I. 389 (June 16, 1860).
\textsuperscript{13} It perpetrated this feeble but characteristic pun: “It is said that President Lincoln is quite ill, on consequence of the acres that Weigh upon him. This seems natural enough, for how could the duties of his administration be light, when his whole policy is Wait!” \textit{Ibid.}, III. 173 (April 13, 1861).
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, III. 36 (January 19, 1861).
\textsuperscript{15} Among the Leland manuscripts in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
\textsuperscript{16} Philadelphia, January 19, 1861, in H.S.P.
paring the commencement of the third volume. The manuscript is still extant.\footnote{Manuscript in H.S.P.}

The second volume of *Vanity Fair* is now near its close & the publisher refers with pride to its past career as a guarantee to the public of its future excellence. In less than a single year from its commencement, *Vanity Fair* has made such rapid strides towards success, as to very generally attract the attention & good opinion of leading literary men in both the New & Old World, and it is but just to say that it has been pronounced by competent critical authorities to be without exception

*The first humorous publication of the Day.*

It can no longer be said that America is without a first-class Journal of Wit & Humor. It is generally conceded that this country produces a vast amount of original facetious literature & within a few months the best writers of this class have found in *Vanity Fair* a common ground of meeting.

What Leland said about the best writers was more or less true. He succeeded in gathering about him a phalanx of able pens. He secured the services of Edmund Clarence Stedman, George Arnold, R. H. Stoddard, and many other contributors, most of them anonymous or else unknown. Chiefly it was the New York writers who let off their squibs and squawks in *Vanity Fair*. Whitman, who, as we have pointed out, was probably a contributor, though none of his material has as yet been identified, was frequently the object of satiric comment. In an article on "The Esthetics of Boots," the writer states: "I have occupied myself considerably in searching for the outward manifestations of the divine one. I have traveled through the Wilt Whatman, the Weller & Fowls, and the R. A. F. Waldersonian schools. With the first I have sat on the lap of Paumanok, and heard the little child say softly,—amid the hoarse, heaving breaths of the old Mother, as W. W. puts it,—

'O what am I?
O I don't know anything about it,
O that I did,
Or you,
Or any other man.'"

Another writer, in the hyperbolical article, "Ages of American Authors," goes in for madcap fabrications, saying that the "author of Leaves of Grass is 81 (his youthful appearance may be attributed

\footnote{Original manuscript in H.S.P.}
to vegetable diet).” On another occasion, the question is asked: “What will Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass be when they are dried, and posterity has raked ’em—Hey?” Quite a number of parodies of Whitman’s work, some of them ingenious, others inept and heavy-handed, were printed in Vanity Fair. He was often the center of discussion partly because many of his friends were contributors and partly because he seemed so vulnerable. In one sketch he is spoken of in this strain: “We are out of Ossian, and Adah Isaacs Mencken &c. has wailing enough to do for herself in poetry, while Walt Whitman is engaged, or else the world should see a lyric of despair which would drive to raving lunacy the infant in her cradle, and the crow on the housetop.” A few months earlier, Vanity Fair had published an article, “The Model Statesman,” which declared, while referring to Senator Wigfall, the embodiment of the Republican idea: “His utterances are those of an accomplished and popular oracle. Go to, Walt Whitman, thy slabs of wisdom are all in a crumble compared with the granitic chunks that fall from Wigfall! Rising in the Senate of the United States on the 4th inst., ‘Poverty,’ he said, ‘was a crime. The Man who was poor had sinned, and there was a screw in his head somewhere.’ ”

Leland, however, was not satisfied to confine himself to the work of the New York litterateurs; he was after what he considered bigger game, and so he took it upon himself to solicit contributions from men like James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and John Godfrey Saxe. Lowell, to whom Leland had sent a personal copy of his book of translation from Heine, was kind enough to send in now and then a paragraph of pointed humor. He wrote to Leland directly:

Cambridge
Saint Snob’s Day
1860

Dear Sir,

Some time ago Mr. James T. Fields read me part of a letter from you, which concerned me among others. Ten years [ago] I should have jumped at the chance of helping in an American humorous paper—but alas, “What is this life? What asketh men to have? Now with his love, now in the colden grave?”

of a professorship! I have to teach boys, who don’t wish to learn, the rudiments of Italian & Spanish, & I confess with ashes on my head that I prefer those abstract & colorless puns which one finds between roots in one language & those in another to the best joke that was ever made. My small Diogones-tub I have turned right side up & use it now to store these etymologic radishes in. It may be that I am in fatal training for the most pancratic punster that ever lived, & shall be able to draw assonances of sound and sense from seven languages at once, stringing my bow with as many chords as the lyre—but for the present I am gone under.

I cannot write letters of compliment so I am glad to be able to say that my chief interest in ‘Vanity Fair’ began with the journey of ‘Broadway Spuytenteufel’—the author of which I didn’t know whose Rabelaisian humor & to-the-back-bone Americanism tickled my very jeur[?]. I liked the ‘sloshin’-around’ of it vastly, & I specially like, moreover, the genuine culture that kept showing through the knowliness. Jeroosalem! I exclaimed, here’s Thor in the stithy with a wannon! look out, for your anvils! I thought there was a new hand at the bellows—somebody to push us old fellows from their stools—so I was glad afterward to hear that it was you whom I already knew through Heine.

To show you that I have not unfrocked myself wholly, nor renounced my right among you in the Abbey of Theleme where there is such snug lying, I send a specimen which will not do to print, but yet may not displease the initiated. It is apropos of poor Pio Nono’s new dogmas of the immaculate conception of the Virgin—What is Mariolatry but another form of Polyaism?

I enclose you a scrap which you may print if you have a corner to fill, & wishing you all success, remain

Cordially yours

J. R. Lowell

The next Lowell letter came from Cambridge and was dated March 5, 1861. After discussing an article that Leland had submitted for the Atlantic Monthly, Lowell went on to say:

For the last three weeks I have been moving. I am now back in my old garret in the house where I was born & where I have spent thirty years of my life. I hope to get back my old self again. For the last six years, I have been camping out, & had got out of health & spirits, dyspeptic, hypped, & blue as the blue forgetmenot. I hope before long to be able to send you a torpedo now & then for the V. F. whose unflagging wit & sagacity have given me the highest satisfaction. Hitherto, I have had enough to do in keeping myself up merely to treadmill pitch. Now that I have a home once more, I may be good for something. I should have seen you in New York this vacation, had it not been for my father’s sudden death. Do you ever come Eastward? Let me hope to see & welcome you here.

It was this letter which contained, in Lowell’s handwriting, a contribution to Vanity Fair called “Reinforcements for Major Anderson”.

24 Charles Godfrey Leland was the author.  
25 Manuscript letter in H.S.P.  
26 Vanity Fair, III. 126 (March 16, 1861).
We think the public has been hasty in its censure of the late Public Defunc-
tionary, for not sending succor to the gallant commander of Fort Sumter. We
observe that the batteries of the fortress are mounted with '10 inch Colum-
boids.' If these are the famous Barlow's 'Columbiads,' (though in that case the
Bore is put at a rather low figure), the place is impregnable. No human in-
genuity could force its way through such defences as these. Let the land-side of
the fort be made terrible with a few 'Conquests of Canaan,' and the Charleston
people will soon cry for quarter. Henceforth let no one deny the practical
benefits of literature to a nation. The pen, in the hands of a Barlow or a
Dwight, is indeed mightier than the sword.

On March 12, 1861, Lowell wrote again, this time from Elm-
wood:27

You say you are drawing hitherward? Then come so as to nick the last
Saturday in the month & dine with our 'Saturday Club.' We Athenians look
on it as a pumpkin of itemest proportions. We number Appleton (the best wit
since Selwyn), Agassiz, Felton, Emerson, Hawthorne, Dwight (for music),
Dana, Motley, Holmes, Hedge, & others 'as good as they,' & we catch Lelands
when we can. I can give you a bed.

Your circular for the autograph-harriers is capital, & really worth more than
the kind of characterless thing they are after. Odd, but I had been thinking of
giving them a screed of doctrine in V. F. And speaking of V. F. I did not
answer your longago letter, for this reason. I follow Tallyrand's advice & never
write a letter if I can help it. Holmes told me that I was announced as a con-
tributor—so that part was answered as I should have answered it. For the rest
I hoped the gods would give me something to send you—but they wouldn't. As
for pay—wait till I send something worth paying for. I like V. F. & should
be glad to help it in any way if I could. When my leaves are out, & my windows
open, I may find my spring too. At present I am friz solid.

Leland was probably equally delighted when he received one
morning a characteristic letter from Oliver Wendell Holmes, the
scrawl half-illegible, the humor bright and buoyant. It was marked
"private" and stated that Holmes had spent "many a pleasant hour
over Vanity Fair, which some good angel had dropped kindly on my
desk every week, and have meant a long time to tell you how much
I enjoyed it." Like Lowell, Holmes was particularly pleased with
the "irregularly wide awake Spuytenteufels," in which he found "an
immense amount of vitality." He also had a good laugh over the
brief biographical sketch of Dr. Holmes that appeared on November
3, 1860. He was represented in the cartoon as standing on one of
his medical publications and brandishing a pen in the face of his
enemies—the entire medical faculty:28

This is a very good-natured squib and funny, though not correct in all its facts.
I shall rectify these mistakes in my autobiography prefixed to the Jork'sanny
[?] edition of 'Holmes's Whole Works.'

27 Manuscript letter in H.S.P.  28 Manuscript letter in H.S.P.
I have never written a word for V. F. you know. I may or may not hereafter—up to this time I have been too busy with all sorts of things—three or four books in press—Medical lectures every day—letters, bores and bothers generally, have given me enough to do.

But you have got a power in your hands, and I think tend to do it well. When three [?] Silly Doctors—a new scattering representing our State Policy—for the moment attacked me I hoped you would get hold of them, but I did not choose to give you a hint to that effect. I think you have done me a good service [?] and I may want you to do me another....

[It seems a newspaper man on the World, by the name of Spalding, had undertaken] to dog me about . . . at any rate who has attacked our faculty at various times for expressing my opinion on subjects open to all.

Now I cannot answer them now. That is just what they want. I cannot even make fun of them, for I should be found out. My only rule is when a fellow squeals to 'hit him again' in the same place as a new one—not to explain the black eye I have already given him. If the 'World' undertakes to bully me or any body else for asserting that freedom which is endemic in the Queen's Chaplain and proclaimed in the quadrangles of Oxford I think there may be some fun in showing it up as a poor miserable old toothless—29 gnashing its jaws at the passing train of circulation as Pope and Pagan did of old at the Christian pilgrims.

You will pardon me for all that is personal in this suggestion. A manly literature is our first necessity, and however we may agree or differ and whether we write as novelists or poets or satirists we must agree in this, that the sectarianism of our kitchens shall not gag our parlors. When one of these fellows is insolent, an argumentative hit in his dial or a vituperative kick on his sequel is not half so good as a clever little sting right on his nose. Up goes his hand, and every body looks to see what is the matter.

Some of you, editors, or publishers have been kind enough to send me V. F. regularly, and of this number with the 'Snubs' biography I have received four copies. This is very kind, and I have got so to depend on V. F. that if my head is worth more living than as a caput mortuum on your list your publishers are welcome to it at any time.

I ought to add that my first acquaintance with you was through the Knickerbocker Gallery when I recognized the rollicking life of your Viking sketch, and the source of it in your vigorous portrait.

Other writers were more squeamish about having their names publicly associated with Vanity Fair. On August 27, 1860, John Godfrey Saxe submitted an "Epigram on a Décolleté Dress," six lines long, together with a letter stating that if this and another epigram he had sent previously were worth a dollar, "I'll put the money in my meerschaum and smoke it."30 Then in a letter dated September 4, 1860, acknowledging receipt of one dollar for each epigram, he begged Leland: "Don't tell any body that I write for V. F."31

30 Word in the manuscript is illegible.
31 Ibid.  
32 Ibid.
reason for Saxe’s desire to remain anonymous may be inferred from the nature of the epigrams he contributed: 82

Epigram on a Décolleté Dress

That ‘effects are the same from a similar cause,’
Is one of the famous Socratic laws,
Whose falsity we may discover;
For quite in the teeth of the logical rule,
The style of apparel that keeps Emma cool,
Just kindles a flame in her lover!

Another epigram he contributed, “Conjurgium non Conjugium,” depends for its effect on a play of words: 84

Dick leads, it is known, with his beautiful wife—
In spite of their vows—such a turbulent life;
The social condition of Dick and his mate
Should surely be called the conjugal state.

Valuable as these occasional contributions were, Leland could not rely on them to keep the magazine going. The contents of each weekly issue had to be supplied largely by his own exertions, those of his loyal friend Stoddard, and especially by the effusions of the habitués at Pfaff’s. Though Leland might despise them for their manner of life, he had a high regard for their ability. A contributor he particularly valued was that brilliant Irishman, Fitz-James O’Brien, who was given frequent space in Vanity Fair. Among his papers Leland treasured a manuscript poem by O’Brien, “The Wharf-Rat,” as well as the manuscript of the poem, “Persia,” five stanzas of three lines each. He also preserved “Meriam’s Address to the Great Meteor,” which is now, for the first time, identified as having been written by O’Brien. At the end of the manuscript Leland wrote: “The above poem in the handwriting of Fitz James O’Brien was contributed by him to No. 32 of Vanity Fair.” 84 The poem is worth quoting in full: 85

Meriam’s Address to the Great Meteor

Great sparks that flew from the anvil of the skies
Flew in the dazzled face of Friday night,
Until the very planets winked their eyes,
And even the ruby Mars grew pale with fright—
I, a philosopher, serene and cold,
Holding sweet converse with each silent star,

82 Vanity Fair, II. 127 (September 8, 1860).
84 Ibid., II. 171 (October 6, 1860).
85 Manuscript in H.S.P.
84 Vanity Fair, II. 55 (August 4, 1860).
From my tall tower on Brooklyn Heights make bold
To ask you mildly what the deuce you are?

Though you're a roarer, I am sure you're not.
The least auroral, for a year ago.
A silken shred of Northern light I got,
   And somewhat wisely bottled it for show;
To that old theory of red hot stone
   Flung off from planets, I can't say confiteor,
But I've a slight opinion, which I own
   Is that you're nothing but a great gas meteor.

What brought you? Are you on a summer tour
In search of some celestial Saratoga,
To cool that visage red a Pandour,
   And terrible to look on as an Ogre?
Or do you, as in days of old, portend
   A foreign war, or home-brewed insurrection?
Say, is our planet coming to an end?
Or are you interested in the election?

Whate'er your mission, you have to the Press
A blessing been, in paragraph and column;
Reporters served you in all sorts of dress
   And grew quite astronomical and solemn.
Nay! the calm Everett, even now I know
   Is neatly trimming you for illustration,
So that he—when you're quite prepared for show—
   May ventilate you in his next oration.

Though O'Brien contributed many other poems and articles to *Vanity Fair*, we have no clues as yet, except internal evidence, which would help us to identify them. We do know that O'Brien was the author of the poem, "Song of the Locomotive," which appeared, unsigned, in *Vanity Fair* on January 7, 1860. It is printed as his in the collection of O'Brien's work edited by William Winter.

III

This scattered summary does scant justice to the variety and vitality of *Vanity Fair*. It was, as Holmes recognized, a power, and it was used for good purpose. It apparently found more abundant inspiration in raillery and abuse and satire than in praise. When the *Herald* ventured to print an article stating that the comic periodicals were short-lived and ill-starred in this country, and that after a few numbers of smart humor the fun of *Vanity Fair* was dying out, Leland retaliated with "Hexameters for the Herald," addressed to J. G. B. 86

How could you go to ruin our fair and flourishing enterprise?
   How could you brutally slaughter our innocent comical suckling?

86 *Vanity Fair*, I. 165 (March 10, 1860).
We who had only just opened our eyes upon popular favor—
We who had just tasted the lacteal fluid of kindness—
How could you go for to bury us, and ruin our prospects in this way?
Did you consider the awful and terrible responsibility?
O! most noble, magnanimous, generous, yacht-loving Scotchman!
Eater of oatmeal! Newspaper Norval! Friend of Argyle the ducal!

What would then become of "the wretched and penniless corps of contributors?" The poem concludes:

O you man of the Herald! O you Bluebeard ferocious!
Who keep a closet where hang the heads of refractory editors,
Spite of your awful anathemas—spite of your fierce editorials,
We ain't dead yet, by no means! as once said the orator Daniel!

As a rule, however, *Vanity Fair* professed to entertain benevolent and constructive aims. In "Vanity Fair to the World," it attempted to reply to those who thought it too censorious:87

Good world, you think we're harsh no doubt,
And given too much your faults to flout,
But all our satires on your blindness
Are really meant in thorough kindness,
But if too bitter was the cup,
Why let us kiss and make it up.

If *Vanity Fair* became "the first measurably successful illustrated and literary weekly" in America,88 it was due in a large measure to Leland's management and to the collective talent of the Bohemians who foregathered at Pfaff's. Just as Wood, the first editor, was forced out because of some disagreement with the proprietor, so Leland was later compelled to resign. After the election of Lincoln and the firing on Fort Sumter, Leland's views on slavery had become more pronounced. For a time he tried to steer a middle course. "The manager of Vanity Fair was very much averse to absolutely committing the journal to Republicanism, and I was determined on it. I had a delicate and very difficult path to pursue, and I succeeded, as the publication bears witness."89 The compromise, however, could not last. Leland became more and more outspoken in his editorial utterances. "It Still Lives," published in the issue of April 20, 1861, was a challenging affirmation of faith in democracy. Freedom had not died out in America, he declared:40

40 *Vanity Fair*, III. 186.
Don't believe it. The Republic is now as large, gentlemen, as ever it was and a great deal more purified. What have we lost, let us ask, in the name of all justice and truth? Leave out the blacks, and tell us when there was ever any Republicanism—any recognition of the equal rights of white men, in the seceding States?

When did they ever legislate humanely and tenderly so as to give the poorer human beings among them so much kind treatment as English laws extend to dumb beasts?

When Sumter fell, Leland actually experienced a sense of relief. Now hesitation would be at an end. Action would take the place of diplomatic chess-moves and protracted efforts at conciliation. In "'Gone—For Good,'" Leland wrote: "But it is gone and to good purpose. No more platering now, no squeaming, and squirming, and shrugging of shoulders—no delicate dread of 'offending the South,' of 'coercion' and of 'irreparably widening the breach.' All that is cast to the winds. Friends and brothers—sisters, and all in whose bosoms beat honest American hearts, let us bravely face the fact that WAR IS HERE—and don't let a living soul flinch before the fact. Ay, war—and let it be so."

The editorial concludes nobly: "And it is a great privilege for every man of brave heart and noble feelings, to realize that he has the chance to fight in behalf of this truth, more clearly expressed than it has ever been at any time. There is not a principle of progress, of humanity, of liberty, and above all, not a struggle for that holiest of doctrines, free thought and action, which is not involved on the one side—not a dark dogma to the contrary which is not professed by the other."41 Sentiments like these proved a bone of contention between owner and editor, and Leland's services came to an end.

Charles I. Glicksberg

41 Vanity Fair, III. 201 (April 27, 1861).