

Excerpts from James Russell Lowell, “*The Present Crisis*”, 1844-5.

Once, to ev’ry...man and nation...comes the moment...to decide...
in the strife of...Truth with Falsehood...for the good or...evil side.

Some great cause (God’s new Messiah) offers each the...bloom or blight;
and the choice goes by forever ‘twixt that darkness...and that light.

We see dimly (in the Present) what is small and...what is great.
Slow of faith! How weak an arm may turn the iron...helm of fate.

Now it is the brave man chooses, while the coward...stands aside
till the multitude make virtue of the faith they...had denied.

For mankind are one, in spirit...and an impulse...bears along
(‘round the Earth’s electric circuit) the swift flash of...right or wrong.

Whether conscious or unconscious, yet Humani...ty’s vast frame,
through its ocean-sundered fiber, feels the gush of...joy or shame.

‘Tis as easy to be heroes, as to sit the...idle slaves
of a legend-...-ary virtue,...carved upon our...father’s graves.

Worshippers of light ancestral make the present...light a crime!
Was the Mayflow’r launched by cowards, steered by men be-...-hind their time?

But we make their truth our falsehood, thinking that hath...made us free!
Feel the rude grasp of great Instinct! We ourselves must...Pilgrims be.

Launch our Mayflow’r! And steer boldly through the desp’rate...winter sea.
Nor attempt the Future’s portal with the Past’s blood-...-rusted key.

Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet t’is Truth a-...-lone is strong.
I see troops of beautiful angels to enshield Her...from all wrong.

New occasions teach new duties. Time makes ancient...good uncouth!
They must upward...still, and onward...who would keep a-...breast of...Truth.

A condensation, from 90 lines to 24, embodying no changes of wording, only modernization of order, size and punctuation.
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Today’s still-popular words of goodbye, “Onward and upward” (often heard after a group meeting) originated with this poem. Our contemporary re-use shows how once-powerful original meanings can become greatly diluted and sadly weakened over time. Lowell’s own words were definitely not any casual goodbye...today suggesting an escalator or airplane moving up effortlessly. His own words are not adverbs...but action verbs... within the explicit context of duty, courage, struggle, and dedicated hard work. Within our ever-necessary ‘strife of Truth with Falsehood’, each of us must, in our own personal way, ‘upward still...and onward’.