CHAPTER TEN

James T Fields and the Beginnings of Book Promotion, 1840–1855

IN RECENT YEARS much has been written concerning the efflorescence of American literature about the middle of the nineteenth century. Mr. Matthiessen has ably discussed the tone, the quality, and the aesthetic psychology of American romantic literature, and Mr. Brooks has revealed the New England writers as products of a regional culture and as points in the curve of a culture-cycle. But the genius or talent of a newly emergent group of writers is one thing; the transformation of genius into books which provide a living for the geniuses is quite another—and on this subject we have little information. No great art can flourish unless it has an audience and unless artists can live on it: in other words, to be born and to survive, it must have patronage. Up to the eighteenth century that patronage was predominantly royal or aristocratic. From about 1700 on it has been increasingly public, or popular, or democratic—in a word, commercial. The transition from the one kind of patronage to the other was long and chaotic; but the fifteen years which are described in these pages represent the end, in America, of that transition. The last five years of it are those of the first full flowering of American literature.

I propose to describe some of the means by which literary art was put on a basis of effective democratic patronage. If a slight odor of venality hovers over some of these proceedings, let us remember that flowers do not bloom luxuriantly without fertilizer. On the other hand, if these revelations seem a little appalling to the aesthete, it is because literary historians have
failed, on the whole, to recognize the fact that literature is, from one point of view, a form of business enterprise. Writers must eat, and the improvement in their diet since 1800 (in America, at least) is to be accounted for, to an appreciable extent, by improvements in the manufacture and marketing of their books. Considered in historical perspective, the business methods of early publishers, as described in this paper, were neither better nor worse than those of other respectable merchants and manufacturers; and if competition among them engendered abuses, time and experience have supplied correctives.

In 1840 the general problem of the American publisher was that of all manufacturers: mass production and distribution. For the book manufacturer, accelerated competition called for speeding up and reducing the cost of printing processes by means of improved machinery; greater production created a need for wider markets; and expanding markets called for new sales and distributive techniques.

The result of all this was a kind of business revolution. Up to about 1835 American publishing was predominantly local: most cities and towns in the Atlantic states produced their own books; and almost all publishers were primarily retail booksellers. When a bookseller printed a work whose interest transcended local boundaries, he sold sheets to booksellers in other towns who bound them up for distribution in their own neighborhoods. Thus a book sometimes appeared with the imprints of half a dozen booksellers, in as many towns. Some publishers simplified this cumbersome system by assigning the market of a book in a whole area to one large retailer who distributed it at a discount to smaller stores.¹

The South and West were not so easily served in the days before transportation had developed considerably, but New York and Philadelphia had natural geographic advantages which allowed such houses as Harpers in New York and the Carey-Lea-Blanchard dynasty in Philadelphia to monopolize the book
business out to the receding frontier. That is a major reason, perhaps, why New York and Philadelphia were more important literary centers up to 1850 than Boston: they controlled a wider market area. We are still too ignorant of publishing history to make such pronouncements with absolute certainty, but when the subject has been explored, it is possible that the tendency to discuss literary history in terms of geographical "schools" of writers—of inscrutable "flowerings" of genius in New York or Boston or Chicago—will have to give way to more realistic analysis. Consider, for example, that much of New England's famous flowering went on in Philadelphia and New York. For one thing, before the founding of the Atlantic Monthly in 1857, most of the paid contributions of Boston authors appeared in periodicals published in other cities. For another, most of the New England writers who reached professional maturity before 1840—Bryant, Dana, Willis, Prescott, Sparks, Bancroft—did much or most of their book publishing outside of Boston. Even the better known men—Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, and Hawthorne—published some of their early work in New York or Philadelphia. The fact is that Boston publishers came dangerously close to missing out on the New England renaissance. A case in point is Longfellow, who, having experimented with publishers, committed himself to a Boston firm only in 1847. Before that date he brought out five of his most remunerative books through New York and Philadelphia houses. When Evangeline was ready in 1847, Ticknor had to offer a higher royalty than Harpers to get it—higher, probably, than had ever been given for poetry in Boston. Except for Holmes and Emerson, the other major writers turned permanently to Boston publishers even later—Whittier and Lowell in 1849, Hawthorne in 1850. In other words, New England literary activity did not achieve its remarkable unity and homogeneity until the middle of the century, and its pre-eminence in literary publishing was not assured until the Atlantic was founded. As late as 1866, Bayard Taylor made this
interesting statement to Aldrich: "If it were not for the damnable want of unity among our authors, we should have had Ticknor and Fields in Broadway by this time. Even now, it is the best place for them, if they would but see it." Much of the credit for making Boston the center of literary activity, however belatedly, must go to the firm of Ticknor and Fields, ancestor of Houghton, Mifflin Company, and it is likely (although, again, further investigation is needed) that this enterprising house won the business of New England writers by developing a national market for their books. Without belittling the business sagacity of William D. Ticknor, it can be shown that James T. Fields's special talents enabled the company to sell its publications in quantity all over the country despite the geographical disadvantages of Boston and the jealousy of other literary centers. Fields had a gift for what is now called "promotion"; in his own time it was a new but rapidly developing brand of American business enterprise which was shared by his contemporaries, P. T. Barnum, Henry Ward Beecher, James Gordon Bennett, George R. Graham, and Robert Bonner. Fields was a more subtle promoter than some of these, but he was no less successful.

Having begun as a clerk in the firm of Allen and Ticknor in 1832, Fields became Ticknor's junior partner in 1843 and a full partner in 1854. A student of the early history of the firm quotes an authority to the effect that when Fields was made junior partner, to him "was delegated the responsibility for the literary and social contacts of the firm." While it is true that Fields was corresponding with Whittier and Longfellow as early as 1840, it is unlikely that his real value to the firm in 1843 is accurately indicated by the phrase "literary and social contacts," unless its author had his tongue in his cheek. In view of the condition of book publicity at that time, it is far more likely that his real usefulness lay in his relations with men, not then well known, who had access to the book columns of newspapers and magazines—
his old friend E. P. Whipple, Epes Sargent, Park Benjamin, H. T. Tuckerman, and Rufus Griswold. In the absence of the systematized publicity techniques which today we take for granted, these men were indispensable links between publishers and the periodicals in which books were noticed and reviewed. At their worst they were logrollers and parasites; at their best they were useful agents of the literary profession which in the 1840's was struggling to be born. Inasmuch as their activities were necessarily anonymous, their methods must be reconstructed from such of their correspondence as has survived. At any rate, it was Fields's job to deal with these gentry, and with editors.

The situation which Fields faced in 1843 was somewhat as follows. Book reviewing in the newspapers was completely haphazard. There were no literary editors, no signed reviews. Reviews were, for the most part, short notices, laudatory if the publisher advertised or had influence, libelous if someone on the staff, or some favored outsider, disliked the author or the publisher. Newspapermen were overworked and underpaid. As late as 1849, so conscientious a critic as George Ripley of the New York Tribune complained that he not only wrote all of the book notices but had charge of city news as well, and that he had to work night and day to earn his salary, which was ten dollars a week. It is unlikely that less able and erudite men had time to read books and prepare notices, and under such conditions, countless small venalities on the part of publishers and newspapermen alike were inevitable.

Magazines were hardly subject to corruption through advertising, since few printed any. The publisher’s approach to periodicals, and to newspapers as well, was through review copies. These made up the bulk of his advertising expense. Publishers’ accountings to authors in the forties show that from 150 to 250 copies of a promising new work were sent to editors, constituting as much as 10 per cent of a first printing. Inasmuch as there were,
in 1840, over 1,500 American magazines and newspapers, it was easy for a publisher to incur the displeasure of an editor who had the power to hurt him, by not sending him books or by sending him the wrong ones. Horace Greeley wrote Griswold in 1840, “I shall walk right into your Philadelphia publishers [Carey and Hart] very brisk, if they don’t behave themselves. They have sent me three or four of their ordinary rye-and-Indian novels this week, and not Mrs. Norton’s poems, which you know the New Yorker has done as much to sell as any other paper.”

To the impecunious employees and owners of the shaky periodicals of that day, editorial copies were an object of some consideration, particularly if the publications were expensive. In 1845 H. J. Raymond, later editor of the New York Times, told Griswold that if he could get Lindsay and Blakiston, Philadelphia publishers, to send him one of the twenty-five-dollar copies of Wilkes’s book on exploring, he would write six or ten articles for it in the New York Courier. “I will very gladly write extended notices of any books of which they send me a copy.” But if they were sent to the editor, who regularly discharged his obligations by copying reviews from other papers, Raymond would write “only such notices as are matters of course.” In view of these facts, it is a little naïve for a biographer to boast, as George Ticknor did of Prescott’s Conquest of Mexico (1843), that a book had drawn 130 good newspaper notices. This work was a six-dollar set, and Harpers was not likely to waste money again on any editor who failed to acknowledge it properly.

How publishers arranged for the writing of acceptable notices is an interesting matter. One common method was to ask the author’s friends to write or to place reviews in home-town newspapers where they had influence. Thus Hawthorne reviewed Longfellow and Melville in the Salem Advertiser. George S. Hillard, who acted as literary attorney for his friends Hawthorne, Longfellow, and Francis Lieber, had strong influence on the Boston Courier, of which he became part owner in 1856, and in
its columns appeared reviews of Prescott's *Mexico* by friend C. C. Felton, and of various Ticknor and Fields authors by Whipple, who knew most of the Boston writers. When Harpers published R. H. Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* in 1840, they wrote him that they were sending copies to the principal editors of Boston, of which they enclosed a list of twelve, and added, "We shall feel obliged if you can exert a favorable influence on the 'notices'; which we have no doubt is the case, both by your intimacy with the editors and by local feeling, aside from the intrinsic merit of the book." When Ticknor and Fields published Boker's *Plays and Poems* in 1856, the author sent them a list of twenty friends in half a dozen cities, who, he said, would review his book, and he promised to distribute copies in the right places in Philadelphia.

But usually reviews came to editors in a less roundabout way. The *Charleston Courier* asserted in 1856 that review copies were usually accompanied by several prepared notices which the editor was tactfully invited to use if they would save him trouble, and there is no lack of evidence that this system was used in the early forties and that editors took advantage of it. Such prepared notices were procured by publishers from various sources. Sometimes junior members of the firm wrote them and passed them on to editorial friends. The notices were then clipped and sent to other editors along with review copies. Fields wrote Bayard Taylor in 1849, "If you do not care to use this article of mine for the Tribune, it may serve your tired brain some purpose elsewhere. No one need know that I wrote it, if you please." H. C. Baird, of Hart and Baird, performed similar services for his company, and it is possible that Frederick Saunders, an employee of Harpers, and Francis Underwood, of Phillips, Sampson and Company, did the same sort of work.

More often, it is likely, publishers made use of a group of hack writers who served as agents for authors, or publishers, or magazines—sometimes all three, as in the case of the ubiquitous
and versatile Mr. Griswold, whose anthologies had made him a kind of patron of publicity. An analysis of Griswold’s letters shows that in the space of seventeen years (1839–56) he functioned in various business capacities for at least thirteen book publishers, twelve magazines, eight newspapers, and seven authors. It is no wonder that in 1843, when sixteen-year-old Charles Eliot Norton took a trip to New York, Longfellow asked Griswold to show him around. “I want him to look a little in the Literary machinery at work around him—the Editors’ chambers, and publishers’ dens, and the whereabouts of penny-a-liners.” During most of the decade Griswold seems to have been a paid publicity and author-contact man for Carey and Hart and their successors. Horace Greeley said so rather crudely when he wrote Griswold in 1847 that he had arranged for him to contribute a literary column to the New York Advertiser. “You understand what is wanted. A column not of puffs of your books, nor Carey’s, nor anybody’s, but of stuff that will cause the paper to be read and preserved”—high-toned language from a man who, in 1840, had asked Griswold to get a notice into the Philadelphia Ledger, with the admonition, “pay for it rather than not get a good one.” The same note is struck in a letter from Carey and Hart to Griswold: the publishers said that they would get his review of one of their books into the Philadelphia North American “even if we have to pay for it.” In 1847 they instructed their agent to get Park Benjamin to reprint, along with an advertisement of one of their books, a review to be clipped from the Richmond Times.

But Griswold had too much energy to confine his work to Carey and Hart. His friendship with Fields, which went back to 1841, was on the “Dear James”–“Dear Rufus” level and sufficiently close for Griswold to invite Fields to be his best man at his third wedding, in 1852. Their professional intimacy is no less obvious, for on July 10, 1843, Griswold wrote him, “Did you see what a puff I gave Tennyson [then being published by Ticknor] in the Sat Eve Post? You must send a copy
to that paper and one to me, which shall be duly acknowledged. I puff your books, you know, without any regard to their quality.”

For these services, and later ones, Fields seemed to have paid in kind rather than in cash. In 1842 he got J. S. Dwight to “do the amiable” for Griswold’s Poets in the Christian Examiner, and he himself probably reviewed his friend’s Female Poets of America in Graham’s Magazine in March, 1849. An attempt earlier that year was less fortunate. He reported to Griswold on January 17, 1849, that his article on the Female Poets in the Boston Atlas “was altered and revised by an individual who was usurping the Editorial chair during [the editors’] absence. I was mortified and maddened. To print it castrated and non-sensed, with ‘an admirer’ tacked on to the end was an insult I resented I assure you.” But, he added comfortably, “I have written an article for Parley’s Pic-Nic, which goes into all our families here, and will also be printed in the Bee with a circulation of some 5000.”

Still another revelation of the sufferings of publishers in their dealings with newspapers appears in a letter of November 12, 1855. “I have only today learned the real reason why my notice [of the sixth edition of Griswold’s Poets] has not appeared in the Transcript. It seems the Correspondent of the Transcript itself, is an American Poet who does not like yr. notice of him, and so Haskell [the editor] has been instructed by him to be chary of praise in noticing the new Ed.” Fields assured Griswold that he had approached Haskell and that the latter “knows he will offend me if he says ought disparaging to you.”

Other letters show that Griswold probably grounded out notices for Harpers, who hired him to edit, on salary, an encyclopedia of biography; for T. B. Peterson, the Philadelphia pirate, who wrote him furtively on January 7, 1850, “I would like you to get a good notice of [Peterson’s twenty-five-cent edition of Anne Brontë’s Agnes Gray] in the Tribune and any other papers in New York you can, all of them if possible, and you can send
your Bill to me for your trouble. Tear this up and let no one see it"; for George W. Childs, also of Philadelphia; and for Herman Hooker of New York.

Griswold's status is fairly clear, but that of Edwin Percy Whipple, who had real standing as a critic, is much less so. There is no evidence to back up Van Wyck Brooks's assertion that Whipple was the chief reader for Ticknor and Fields. Though he did read one or two of Hawthorne's novels in manuscript, he more frequently read works in the form of proof, which suggests that he functioned as publicity man rather than as a reader. But there is no evidence that he was on Ticknor and Fields's payroll in this capacity either, and it is quite possible to charge off his long and valuable services to the house to his boyhood friendship with Fields and to his later intimacy with Fields's authors. If his reviews were almost invariably kindly, it would be much easier to prove that his criticism was naturally of the appreciative variety than that he was paid for his work.

Nevertheless, his criticism needs to be scrutinized from a new angle. He had, from the early forties, precisely the kind of contacts that publishers valued. His influence grew rapidly from 1842, when he appears to have written notices for the Boston Times, to 1847, when he was Boston correspondent of the New York Literary World and when, though a modest man, he wrote Griswold, "The truth is, from my connection with literary organs, I enjoy a great deal of power, which would make me a dangerous gentleman to abuse." This power made him an irresistible object of the celebrated charms of James Fields, who saw to it that Whipple met, and remained in permanent social relations with, as many Ticknor and Fields authors as possible. It is not surprising that these were the subject of a majority of Whipple's unsigned reviews in Graham's between 1849 and 1853. But Fields used him in other ways as well. When young Bayard Taylor was beginning his work on the Tribune, Fields wrote him congratulations on his new volume of poems, published
by Putnam, and said, "look for my printed praises in some one of our Boston papers before the week is out. I am determined Whipple shall do you up brown and that you shall ride in a shiny coach made from the profits of Boston copies sold in our diggins."36

There is no room here to discuss Whipple's later work in the Atlantic Monthly, the Boston Transcript, and the Boston Globe, but it is apparent that much of his forty years of critical work was the result of Fields's promotional activities. Whether his development as a critical thinker was enhanced by this relationship is another question, but Fields must take some of the blame for what Poe referred to as Whipple's "critical Boswellism."

Other informal methods which publishers used to build up good will are well illustrated by Fields's doings. His recognition of the importance, from the publisher's point of view, of breaking down sectional animosities is reflected in the following note to Taylor: "Did you see the other gossip of mine (in the Transcript) touching the literary men of New York? Was my mention of you agreeable or otherwise?"37 In return for such favors, he was able to get publicity in New York, for Longfellow wrote in his journal in the same year, "Fields has written for some New York paper a sketch of 'what the Literary Men are doing in Boston,' one of the gossiping articles, which I do not much affect."38 Just how much of this sort of thing he did is impossible to say, but one can assume that he was not referring merely to his ability as a poster hanger when he wrote Longfellow, in May, 1849, "No family of any respectability shall sleep unapprized of the publication of K[avanagh] on Saturday night. By this hour today New York is glittering with our new show cards. All Broadway at least is ornamented with the fact that Kavanagh is 'just published.'"39 And a little later, "I am off in the morning for N. Y. where I hope to do a deed that will make a noise in our Bk. of Debits."40
Another publicity method he developed was the publication in periodicals of selections from forthcoming books. He aimed to serve both publicity and good will when he asked Longfellow to send a chapter of Kavanagh to the Literary World for advance publication. He gave the same writer exact instructions about the set-up of the "Dedication" to The Seaside and the Fireside in Graham's and in the Boston Transcript, whose editor, Epes Sargent, Fields said, "is always kind to 'our house.'" Perhaps the kindness was that of one partner to another, for the Transcript's owners, Dutton and Wentworth, sometimes published books in collaboration with Ticknor and Fields.

Still another Fields specialty was winning the friendship of critics in other cities before their ability was generally recognized and rewarded. How he got the backing of powerful George William Curtis, a Harpers man, is suggested by the fact that in 1854, when Curtis was an editor of Putnam's and had been newly appointed assistant for the Editor's Easy Chair in Harper's Magazine, Ticknor and Fields gave him a banquet in the company of Longfellow, Holmes, Whipple, and other literary lights. It is possible to see a connection between this thoughtful gesture and a letter which Curtis wrote Fields not long afterward: "Will you let me see an early proof of Longfellow's poem that I may make a notice for Putnam [The publishers] promise to get in an article I have made upon Tennyson and Maud [a Ticknor publication]. There ought to be in the October number at least a 'book notice' of Hiawatha."

Perhaps young Thomas Bailey Aldrich was amenable to Fields's blandishments because, as a reader for Derby and Jackson, and G. W. Carleton, he had the publisher's point of view. As junior literary critic of the New York Evening Mirror in 1855, he received copies of Fields's books with personal inscriptions, in return for which he sent such billets doux as the following: "I have access to every department of the 'Mirror' and if I can be
of service to you in any way, please command me heart and pen.” In the same year he wrote from the office of the New York *Home Journal* that, as newly appointed subeditor, “I can do more for the books which you so considerately send me than hitherto.” Later, Aldrich was to edit two magazines published by the house.

Henry Mills Alden was still another critic and editor whose friendship Fields secured early. When Alden was a struggling hack writer in the early sixties, Fields, as editor of the *Atlantic*, accepted some of his articles and hired him to do book notices. But Alden’s gratitude overflowed when Fields used his influence to procure for him the Lowell Institute Lectureship for 1863, which, as Alden wrote him, was “highly auspicious to myself and my future prospects as a worker and thinker on this earth.”

This event paid off in both directions, for that same year Alden became managing editor of *Harper’s Weekly*, where he was in a position to place reviews which he wrote of Ticknor and Fields books.

Rather more independent was Richard Grant White, critic on the staff of the *New York Courier*, who wrote in 1858 that if his projected weekly literary paper should come into being, “books and things will be talked about in it I hope in a way that you will like—that is unless Ticknor and Fields take to publishing very poor books.”

In their printed reminiscences James and Annie Fields have presented a picture of famous friendships with Hawthorne, Dickens, Trackeray, and other literary notables; but a reading of Fields’s private correspondence shows that, from the point of view of the publisher, these connections were window dressing compared to the vital relationships which Fields built up in the world of critics, editors, and reviewers. In his almost pathetic effort to make himself remembered as a writer, lecturer, and patron of authors, he succeeded only in looking like a glorified autograph hunter. In doing so he concealed his real talent as a
publisher, which was his amazing ability to secure the good will of young men who later turned out to be molders of public taste. The list is impressive: Whipple, Griswold, Aldrich, Lowell, Curtis, Alden, Taylor, White, not to mention “Grace Greenwood,” whose occasional literary comments in her fluffy “columns” had the same kind of publicity value as the late Alexander Woollcott’s book plugs.

Incidentally, it is worth noting at this point that in the light of the facts here presented, the numerous recent studies of the contemporary reputation of American writers are subject to careful scrutiny. To attempt to estimate Melville’s reputation, for example, by counting up favorable reviews is simply naïve. Melville himself was well aware of the value of such evidence, for he had the far more realistic figures of Harper’s accounting office to tell him how popular he was with readers.

The last chapter of this cheerful story is sour but prophetic. In 1855 a loud explosion blew up the cozy nest into which publishers and newspaper critics had settled, and, amusingly enough, it was a faux pas by the normally tactful Fields that ignited the fuse. But the dynamite was advertising.

Since the early forties the advertising of books in newspapers had increased enormously. A casual examination of some of the large metropolitan dailies in the middle fifties shows that books were one of the products most advertised, and that they were given relatively more space than in the modern newspaper. This was true also of reviews and notices. Moreover, it is evidence of the nationalization of publishing that many, frequently most, of the advertisements came from publishers in other cities. Needless to say, there was a perceptible relation between advertisements and reviews. The “Silent Bargain,” as Bliss Perry called it, had become an institution.

On November 13, 1855, the Boston Daily Evening Traveller printed a notice of Longfellow’s newly published Hiawatha,
which, though respectful to the poet's reputation and ability, ended with this passage:

We cannot but express a regret that our own pet national poet should not have selected as the theme of his muse something higher and better than the silly legends of the savage aborigines. His poem does not awaken one single sympathetic throb; it does not teach a single truth; and rendered into prose, Hiawatha would be a mass of the most childish nonsense that ever dropped from human pen. In verse it contains nothing so precious as the golden time which will be lost in reading it.

Three days later, the *Traveller* printed an article headed "Attempt to Coerce the Press." After stating their pride in the independence yet kindliness of their book notices, the editors printed the following letter, dated November 13, and signed by Ticknor and Fields:

Dear Sirs—From the above extract from a notice of one of our publications in this evening's Traveller, we presume that your Editors care very little for our personal feelings as publishers or our friendly regard in any way. So marked and complete a depreciation of our book is, to say the least, uncalled for. You will please send in your bill of all charges against us, and in future we will not trouble you with our publications or the advertisements of them. You will please also stop the paper.

The editors' concluding comment was,

They may deceive themselves if they hope to defeat criticism by withholding their publications from us. . We shall find no difficulty probably in procuring copies of such of their works as may be worthy of criticism.

Fields should have known better, of course, but he was not used to such treatment. In fact, he was downright spoiled. Evidently his friend Griswold had not told him that three years earlier the same scrappy editors had refused to reveal the author-
ship of an unfavorable notice of a book in which Griswold was interested. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the Traveller had the belligerence of ten because its heart was pure. Its columns, from October 31 to November 13, show that Ticknor and Fields advertisements were few and small; in fact, they had been channelizing their ads a little too pointedly, for the bulk of their space was taken up by five insertions of a two-and-one-half-inch advertisement of Hiawatha. Certainly they made a poor showing in the counting-room, compared to Crosby, Nichols; Phillips, Sampson; Appleton; and Harpers.

The publishing world hastened to respond to the Traveller's deed. On December 1 the American Publishers' Circular countered with a rejoinder written by a man who turned out later to be one Mason, of Mason Brothers, New York publishers. The writer admitted, for the sake of argument, that publishers, anxious to get good notices, may take "objectionable means" to procure them:

in other words, that they pay, directly or indirectly, a pecuniary consideration therefor. They have a right to expect able and impartial criticism. If then they seek to bribe the press it is from necessity, not choice. As a whole the press is not only susceptible to pecuniary influences in its book criticisms, but openly so; it is not only willing but anxious to be bribed. 'Give us advertisements and we will give you good notices' is a proposition made every day to publishers. It is a common thing for an editor to refuse to notice a book at all, because it is not advertised in his columns. Again, critics occupying important positions are plainly seen to be influenced in their published opinions. In some cases, the manner of doing the thing properly is simply to enclose five dollars to the critic without word or comment. In other cases, more delicacy must be used, and the critic may be salaried by the publisher as manuscript reader, or in some other capacity.

The juicy tidbit about critics salaried as publishers' readers referred, of course, to George Ripley of the Tribune and Harpers, and on December 12 Francis Underwood, of Phillips, Sampson
and Company, spiced it up in the *Boston Atlas*, over the signature of "Upsilon."

If [said Upsilon, cattily] the literary editor of a paper so able and widely known as the New York Tribune, were "salaried as manuscript reader" by one or more prominent publishers in that city, what value would the world at large attach to his judgment of books? In such circumstances, impartiality is out of the question. The critic must remember the hand that feeds him. It is time, if such be the case, that these disguises were stripped off, so that the confidence of readers and fair-dealing publishers may be no longer abused.

This was too much for the *Tribune*. Even before he had seen Upsilon's article, Greeley, who was a slightly soiled St. George, in view of his earlier proficiency as a logroller, growled, in the issue of December 12,

We can say that [Mason Brothers] have made repeated efforts to control our columns for their own purposes, and have been repeatedly disappointed. Extensive advertising has failed to secure the admission of notices of their books prepared by their own writers, to obtain for them any more favorable reviews than their intrinsic merits would justify. Some of these disappointments have been the occasion of anger privately manifested.

Coming back to the subject of publishers' readers the next day, the *Tribune* put up a convincing defense of the hurt and bewildered Ripley, asserting that the jobs of reader and critic were compatible because "the fact that a gentleman has long been trusted in such capacity by any publishing house able to select and to pay for its literary employees, must therefore be highly favorable to the reputation of that gentleman for integrity, independence, and soundness of judgment."

On December 15 the *Tribune* turned its attention to Underwood, declaring that he had repeatedly sought the use of its columns; that just before his company published *Modern Pil-
grims, a "stupid book," Underwood had visited the Tribune offices in a friendly way, and that he was now angry because the book had been thoroughly castigated. Underwood, the Tribune summed up amiably, is a "small and unclean insect." But "while our hand is engaged we will also hang up another better-known person of the same class," who has encouraged the attitudes of Mason and Underwood—Rufus Griswold—"a person so notorious in this community that to trace a calumny to him suffices effectually to dispose of it."

A few days later (December 19) Underwood got revenge by printing in the Atlas specific details about Ripley: that he was paid $1,200 a year by Harpers, and $800 by J. C. Derby. Underwood's concluding statements have all the earmarks of culpability:

Very few people go through the world without committing some folly or absurdity, or worse perhaps. And if nothing more can be urged against me than having once accepted a courtesy from a man who afterwards proved himself so little of a gentleman, [etc.].

As tempers cooled down somewhat, the belligerents became rather more philosophical and constructive in their discussion of what was, after all, a situation that needed cleaning up for the good of all concerned. The Tribune (December 26) got at one aspect of the problem by revealing that publishing had expanded so enormously that no paper had room for notices of all books; and it pointed out that already specialization had begun, in that the Tribune stressed works relating to "progressive ideas and popular reforms," the Courier, "elegant literature," the Evangelist and the Independent, theology. As to critics who held other jobs, the Tribune admitted that because newspaper work was poor pay, all employees had to fill in with other work.

As to the aftermath of the fracas, Longfellow apparently was shocked into silence by Fields's indiscretion, for no word of the event appears in his letters or private journals. Ripley, in a
steaming letter to Theodore Parker, refused to be reconciled with
the perfidious Underwood, whom he called the "sneakingest and
nastiest of men." Griswold, writing sadly to Fields, denied
having given occasion for such "wanton and malevolent libel." Fields, who had the sense to keep quiet after his initial blunder,
suffered less than these bystanders, for Ticknor and Fields were
hardly mentioned in the squabble. Fields's New York friendships
now paid dividends, for Richard Grant White wrote him, "I sent
you a paper in which I handled the matter you stirred up.
The other journals have followed my lead as you see: it will
divert attention from you." Then, unable to resist the tempta-
tion, he nuzzled Mason's jibe into Fields's ribs: "I shall write
quite a notice of [your edition of Browning] and very favorable;
but none of your five dollar bribes if you please: I do nothing
for less than fifty."

In perspective, this tempest was a sign that though newspaper
and book publishing had both become large industries by 1855,
neither had faced realistically its relation to the other. Though
publishers provided a sizable proportion of newspaper adver-
tising, the papers had failed to realize the news value of com-
petent and responsible book reporting. The publisher, on the
other hand, having failed to develop publicity as a legitimate
business technique, tried to keep up the pretense that reviews
were the uninfluenced opinions of critics working in the interest
of the public. The solution still lay far in the future. For the
newspaper it was to depend upon the establishment of a regular
literary department, under responsible management, with signed
reviews, book-note columns, and lists of new publications. For
the publisher it called for proper selection of advertising media,
the newspaper to be used only for those works which had a
general or topical appeal.

Able though Fields was, conditions were no longer such that
one man could handle the multifarious needs of publicity by
the personal approach. It is significant that after 1855 there is less and less evidence that Fields bothered with the writing and placing of reviews; he concentrated, instead, on building up the general reputation of his group of stars, whose devotion to him is evidence that he had their interests at heart as well as those of his firm. By the time he retired in 1871, Ticknor and Fields publications had become the core of the American canon of classics. His later career, including his editorship of the *Atlantic*, still remains to be studied; but it is probably a good guess that if some of the New England writers enjoyed, in the latter part of the century, a reputation beyond their deserts, it was in part due to the behind-the-scenes activities of James T. Fields, public relations counsel.

2. March 16, 1866, MS, Harvard College Library.
4. W. A. Jones, in *Arcturus*, I (February, 1941), 149: "A newspaper criticism is generally a puff or a libel."
5. Ripley to J. S. Dwight, July, 1849, MS, Boston Public Library.
8. Ibid., p. 175. John R. Thompson of the *Southern Literary Messenger* asked Longfellow to intercede with Fields, who had apparently taken the *Messenger* off his editorial list because it did not do justice to his books. Fields wrote Longfellow (November, 1849, MS, Craigie House) that hereafter Thompson would receive good books for very poor notices. Griswold curried favor with Whipple by placing the *Boston Times* on Carey and Hart's editorial list (Griswold to Whipple, January 17, 1842, MS, Yale Library).
11. September 17, 1849, MS, Massachusetts Historical Society.
12. March 16, 1856, MS, Huntington Library.
14. April 10, 1849, MS, Huntington Library. In December, 1849, Fields asked Longfellow to send the editor of the *Boston Sentinel* a poem “to be headed by an article touching the new Bk. which I will write for him” (MS, Craigie House).
15. Baird, in a letter to Griswold, December 16, 1848, said he had written a notice of Griswold's *Poets* “which Mr. Hart thinks will do. I am just commencing, and require practice” (MS, Boston Public Library).
16. “He was for some time connected with the Harpers, as their literary critic, taster, and man-of-all-work in that department.” (MS, annotated: “George Ripley thus refers to Saunders in his newspaper correspondence, 14 Dec. 1849”; Griswold Papers, Boston Public Library.)
17. April 13, 1843, MS, Harvard College Library.
18. Griswold, *Correspondence*, p. 223.
19. Ibid., p. 50.
20. Ibid., p. 233.
21. Hart to Griswold, November 10, 1847, MS, Boston Public Library.
22. MS, Huntington Library.
24. Fields to Griswold, May 6, 1842, MS, Boston Public Library.
27. Ibid.
29. MS contract dated February 18, 1847, Boston Public Library.
30. Ibid.
31. Childs to Griswold, October 23, 1856, and November 22, 1856, MSS, Boston Public Library.
32. Hooker to Griswold, January 6, 1855, MS, Boston Public Library.
33. Epes Sargent to Whipple, January 18, 1842, MS, Harvard College Library.
35. Griswold, *Correspondence*, p. 224.
36. December 26, 1848, MS, Huntington Library.
37. April 10, 1849, MS, Huntington Library.
38. MS journal, April 18, 1849, Craigie House.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., December, 1849.
41. Ibid., March, 1849. Fields gave Whittier similar instructions (May 1, 1857, MS, Harvard College Library).
42. November, 1849, MS, Craigie House.
43. November, 1849, MS, Craigie House.
44. Griswold, Correspondence, p. 293.
45. August 24, 1855, MS, Huntington Library.
46. March 11, 1856, MS, Huntington Library.
47. September 13, 1856, MS, Huntington Library.
48. January 10, 1863, MS, Huntington Library.
49. August 25, 1858, MS, Huntington Library.
50. Andrews and Punchard to Griswold, May 24, 1852, MS, Boston Public Library.
51. March 28, 1856, MS, Massachusetts Historical Society.
52. December 22, 1855, MS, Huntington Library.
53. December 13, 1855, MS, Huntington Library.
54. That Fields, during the later years of the firm's history, had a fund for "entertainment" purposes is suggested by the articles of agreement governing the company (beginning in 1864), in which he is allowed "the sum of One Thousand Dollars per annum as consideration for his personal services . . . to be charged to the expense account of the firm." Information from Professor W. S. Tryon, who is writing a history of the firm of Ticknor and Fields (Parnassus Corner [Boston, 1963]—Ed.).