

LONGFELLOW.

I.

OUR poet of grace and sentiment left us in the after-glow of an almost ideal career. He had lived at the right time, and with the gift of years; and he died before the years came for him to say, I have no pleasure in them. Not all the daughters of Music were brought low. He scarcely could have realized that people were calling his work elementary, that men whose originality had isolated them, like Emerson and Browning,—and even metrical experts, the inventors of new modes,—were gaining favor with a public which had somewhat outgrown him; that he was to be slighted for the very qualities which had made him beloved and famous, or that other qualities, too long needed, were to be over-valued as if partly for the need's sake.

But they are wrong, it seems to me, who now make light of Longfellow's service as an American poet. His admirers may form no longer a critical majority, yet he surely helped to quicken the New World sense of beauty, and to lead a movement second only to that which begets a national school. I think that the poet himself, reading his own sweet songs, felt the apostolic nature of his mission,—that it was religious, in the etymological sense of the word, the binding back of America to the Old World taste and imagination. Our true rise of Poetry may be dated from Longfellow's method of exciting an interest in it, as an expression of beauty and feeling, at a time when his countrymen were ready for something more various and human than the current meditations on Nature. It was inevitable that he should first set his face toward a light beyond the sea. Our poet's youthful legend aptly was *Outre-Mer*. An escape was in order from the asceticism which two centuries had both modified and confirmed. How could this be effected? Not at once by the absolute presentation of beauty. A Keats, pledged to this alone, could not have propitiated the ancestral spirit. Puritanism was opposed to beauty as a strange god, and to sentiment as an idle thing. Longfellow so adapted the beauty and sentiment of other lands to the convictions of his people, as to beguile their reason through the finer senses, and speedily to satisfy them that loveliness and righteousness may go together. His poems, like pictures seen on household walls, were a protest against barrenness and the symptoms of a new taste.

They made their way more readily, also, by their response to the inherited Anglo-Saxon instincts of his own region. His early predilections, strengthened during a stay in Germany, were chiefly for the poetry and romance of that land. He read his heart in its songs, which he so loved to translate for us. A new generation may be at a loss to conceive the effect of Longfellow's work when it first began to appear. I may convey something of this by what is at once a memory and an illustration. Take the case of a child whose Sunday outlook was restricted, in a decaying Puritan village, to a wooden meeting-house of the old Congregational type. The interior—plain, colorless, rigid with dull white pews and dismal galleries—increased the spiritual starvation of a young nature unconsciously longing for color and variety. Many a child like this one, on a first holiday visit to the town, seeing the vine-grown walls, the roofs and arches, of a graceful Gothic church, has felt a sense of something rich and strange; and many, now no longer children, can remember that the impression upon entrance was such as the stateliest cathedral now could not renew. The columns and tinted walls, the ceiling of oak and blue, the windows of gules and azure and gold,—the service, moreover, with its chant and organ-roll,—all this enraptured and possessed them. To the one relief hitherto afforded them, that of Nature's picturesqueness,—which even Calvinism endured without compunction,—was added a new joy, a glimpse of the beauty and sanctity of human art. A similar delight awaited the first readers of Longfellow's prose and verse. Here was a painter and romancer, indeed, who had journeyed far and returned with gifts for all at home, and who promised often yet to

“—sing a more wonderful song
Or tell a more marvelous tale.”

And thus it chanced that, well as he afterward sang of his own sea and shore, he now is said to have been the least national of our poets. His verse, it is true, was like a pulsatory cord, sustaining our new-born ideality with nourishment from the mother-land, until it grew to vigor of its own. Yet he was more widely read than his associates, and seemed to foreigners the American laureate. His native themes, like some of Tennyson's, were chosen with deliberation and as if for their

availability. But from the first he was a poet of sentiment, and equally a craftsman of unerring taste. He always gave of his best; neither toil nor trouble could dismay him until art had done its perfect work. It was a kind of genius,—his sure perception of the fit and attractive. Love flows to one whose work is lovely. Besides, he was a devotee to one calling,—not a critic, journalist, lecturer, or man of affairs,—and even his prose romances were unrhymed poems. A long and spotless life was pledged to song, and verily he had his reward. Successors may find a weakness in his work, but who can rival him in bearing and reputation? His worldly wisdom was of the gospel kind, so gently tempered as to breed no evil. His life and works together were an edifice fairly built,—the House Beautiful, whose air is peace, where repose and calm are ministrant, and where the raven's croak, symbol of the unrest of a more perturbed genius, is never heard. Thus the clerkly singer fulfilled his office,—which was not in the least creative,—and had the tributes he most desired: love and honor during his life-time, and the assurance that no song of his took flight but to rest again and again "in the heart of a friend."

II.

POETS, like the cicalas, have occasion to envy those who compass their song and sustenance together. Few can pledge with Longfellow their lives, or even frequent hours, to the labor they delight in. There was, in fact, an "opening,"—a need for just the service he could render. The circumstances of his birth and training were propitious and worked to one end. Neither he nor Hawthorne was the mere offspring of an environment. There was nothing special in the little down-east school of Bowdoin, sixty years ago, to breed the leaders of our imaginative prose and verse. But the time was ripe; there was an unspoken demand for richer life and thought, to which such natures, and the intellects of Channing and Emerson, were sure to respond. And the concurrence certainly was special: that Longfellow, descended from Pilgrim and Puritan stock, the child of a cultured household, should be born not only with a poet's voice and ear, but with an aptitude for letters amounting to a sixth sense,—a bookishness assimilative as that of Hunt or Lamb; that he should be reared in a typical Eastern town, open alike to polite influences and to the freshness and beauty of the northern sea; that such a youth, buoyant and manly, but averse to the coarser sports, gentle,

pure,—one who in France would have become at first an abbé,—should in New England be made a college professor at nineteen, and commissioned to visit Europe and complete his studies; that ten years later, having ended the pleasant drudgery of his apprenticeship, he should find himself settled for life at Harvard, the center of learning, and under few obligations that did not assist, rather than impede, his chosen ministry of song. Here he was to have health, friendship, ease, the opportunity for travel, abundant and equal work and fame, with scarcely an abrupt turn, or flurry, or drought or storm, to the very end. Even his duties served in the direction of a literary bent, confirming his mastery of languages whose poetry and romance were his treasure-house. He wrote his text-books at an age when most poets go a-gypsying. When twenty-six, he made his translation of the "Coplas de Manrique,"—a rendering so grave and sonorous that if now first printed it would be caught up like Fitz-Gerald's "Rubaiyat of Omar," instead of going to the paper mill. It indicated, more than his original work of this period, that a true poetic method was forming in a country where Berkeley's muse thus far had made no course of empire. A few essays, always on literature or the languages, complete the round of his miscellanies, the last being contributed to a review in 1840. After that time he gave up all critical writing whatsoever.

"Ostre-Mer," a young poet's sketch-book, reports his first transition from cloister life to travel and experience. It is a journey of sentiment, if not a sentimental journey, and made in the blithesome spirit of a troubadour. All the world was Arcady,—a land of beauty and romance; and these he found, caring for nothing else, in sunny nooks of France, Italy, and Spain, as deftly as the botanist picks out his ferns and forest flowers. Our poet's herbarium had a gift to keep its blossoms unfaded. His road-glasses illuminate the wayside: our modern travelers use stronger lenses, and see things through and through, but with the old illusions we have lost the best of all things—zest. "Hyperion" showed what changes four years can bring about while still the man is young: it is the thoughtful, and somewhat too fond, fantasy of the same pilgrim after more knowledge of the verities of life. The atmosphere of this book is that of Switzerland and Germany; but its shadows came from the maker's heart. He had been bereaved. The opening phrase is grief, a poet's grief, that consoles itself with imagery: "The setting of a great hope is like the setting of the sun. * * * We look forward into the coming lonely night. The soul withdraws into

itself. Then stars arise, and the night is holy" This precise, epicurean touch, the application of art to feeling, was new in our authorship. Void of real anguish or passion, it still suggested an ideal,—a purpose beyond mere book-craft. The sketches, diversified with not too frequent musing, the wedding of sound to sense, the daintiness of words, the feeble plot, all bear witness that "Hyperion" is the work of an idyllist. The vague manner, with its impression of rest sought in restlessness, and even the broken story, were borrowed, doubtless, from "Titan." The book naturally became the companion of all romantic pilgrims of the Rhine, for the true German spirit is here; its sentiment and fancy alike are seized by a master of the picturesque. He "knew the beauteous river all by heart,—every rock and ruin, every echo, every legend. The ancient castles, * * * they were all his; for his thoughts dwelt in them, and the wind told him tales." With Jean Paul we have Heine, also, who might have conceived the grotesque episode of Frau Kranich's "tea" in Ems. The romance and spooning of "Hyperion," and its moral conclusions, are food for adolescents; but it is easier to laugh at youth than to possess it. And this is Longfellow's youth throughout,—the frankest of confessions. Paul Fleming "buried himself in books; in old dusty books." Read the list of them, from the Nibelungenlied down, and see the diet that he garnished with grapes and Liebfrauenmilch and love-making and moonlight dreams. "How beautiful it is to love!" Ah! how happy to be young, and in love; to have known sorrow, and to use it as a foil; to visit and read the great world, yet not to be corrupted by it, still to keep a pure heart that has no taste for recklessness and vice; through all to recall one lesson: "Look not mournfully into the Past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the Present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy Future, without fear, and with a manly heart."

The chief import of the poet's romances was their bearing upon his own purpose. He fixed his rules of life by writing them down. His second maxim is found in "Kavanagh," a tale with less freshness than "Hyperion," but fashioned with the hand of greater cunning, that of a writer in his prime. Its personages are more distinctly drawn, and it was his brief and nearest approach to a novel. We have a transcript of New England village life, an atmosphere of breeding and refinement, and some pertinent criticism on literary and social topics. As before, the gist of the tale is in a text, placed, with due regard to convention, at the beginning:

"The flighty purpose never is o'ertook
Unless the deed go with it."

This bit of wisdom had been deeply considered by the author. By way of strengthening himself against a dreamer's temptation to be derelict, he worked it, one might say, into this "sampler" of a tale. Those who are fond of citing the formula, that Genius is only a talent for persistent work, have reason to place our poet well in the van of their examples. Yet I fancy that only men of talent will heartily subscribe to this definition. Be this as it may, Longfellow's prose tales show us his equipment, and give the clew to his well-adjusted life. It was plain, also, that he was a born romanticist, in full sympathy with the German school. We shall see that, as a poet, he followed a romantic method, to the disapproval of those who feel that nothing in the New World should be done as it has been done elsewhere. It is difficult, however, to explain why even things at home should not be treated according to the genius of the designer. After strange experiments, we just now are discovering that the colonial architecture, so much like that of Cromwell's England, is of all our styles the best adapted to the Atlantic States; and it still becomes us to be modest in defining the types that American art and poetry finally will assume. The critical question, I take it, is not what fashion should be outlawed, but whether the thing done is good of its kind.

Nothing afterward tempted Longfellow from poetic composition, except the illustrations of the "Poetry of Europe," many of which were his own translations, and, late in life, the diversion of editing "Poems of Places," and the heroic labor of his complete version of "The Divine Comedy," a work to which I shall refer again.

III.

LONGFELLOW'S juvenile poems have been collected recently. Those printed, before his graduation, in the "Literary Gazette," resemble the verse of Bryant and Percival, the former of whom he looked upon as his master. Tracings of browsing in the usual pasture grounds are strangely absent: I sometimes wonder if he had an early taste for the Elizabethan poets, or, indeed, for any English worthy, since no modern author has shown fewer signs of this in youth. The "Voices of the Night," his own first collection, was postponed until after a long experience of translation and prose work. It appeared in his thirty-third year, and met with instant favor. Only nine new pieces were in

the book; these, with the translations following, have characteristics that his verse continued to display. The Prelude recalls that of Heine's third edition of the "Reisebilder" (*Das ist der alte Märchenwald*), then just published. Later pieces show that Longfellow caught the manner of this poet, whose principles he severely condemned. The German's rhythm and reverie were repeated in "The Day is Done," "The Bridge," "Twilight," etc., but not his passion and scorn. The influence of Uhland is equally manifest elsewhere. Prototypes of Longfellow's maturer work are found in "The Reaper," "The Psalm of Life," and "The Beleaguered City." "The Midnight Mass for the Dying Year," against which Poe brought a mincing charge of plagiarism, is as strong and conjuring as anything its author lived to write. The Translations deserved high praise. The stately "Coplas" re-appears. Various renderings from German lyric poets, such as "The Happiest Land," "Beware," and "Into the Silent Land," were new originals, examples of a talent peculiarly his own. Given a task which he liked,—with a pattern supplied by another,—and few could equal him. He made his copies in various measures and from many tongues. An essay in hexameter, the version of Tegnér's "Children of the Lord's Supper," preceded his original poems in that form. Even after completing his "Dante," he loved to toy with such work. I have heard him say that he longed to make an English translation of Homer, upon the method which Voss had used to such advantage.

His volume of 1841, "Ballads and Other Poems," may be likened to Tennyson's volume of the ensuing year, in that it confirmed its author's standing and indicated the full extent of his genius as a poet. It was choice in its way, suggesting taste rather than fertility; choicely presented, also, for with it came the fashion, new to this country, of printing verse attractively and in a shape that seeks the hand. The poet's matter, if often gleaned from foreign literatures, was novel to his readers, and his style distinct from that of any English contemporary. The book contains examples of all the classes into which his poems seem to divide themselves, and may be examined with its successors. One sees, forthwith, that Longfellow's impulse was to make a poem, above all, "interesting." He was no word-monger, no winder of coil upon coil about a subtle theme. He changed his topics, for some topic he must have, and one that suited him. A cheerful acceptance of the lessons of life was the moral, suggested in many lyrics, which commended him to all virtuous, home-keeping folk, but in the end poorly served him with the critics. He often

is judged by his least poetic work,—verse whose easy lessons are adjusted to common needs; by the "Psalm of Life," "Excelsior," "Prometheus," and "The Ladder of St. Augustine,"—little sermons in rhyme that are sure to catch the ear and to become hackneyed as a sidewalk song. He often taught, by choice, the primary class, and the upper form is slow to forget it. Next above these pretty homilies are his poems of sentiment and twilight brooding. "The Reaper and the Flowers," "Footsteps of Angels," "Maidenhood," "Resignation," and "Haunted Houses" came home to pensive and gentle natures. Lowell has written a few kindred pieces, such as "The Changeling" and "The First Snowfall." A still higher class, testing Longfellow's eye for the suggestive side of a theme and his art to make the most of it, includes "The Fire of Drift-Wood," "The Lighthouse," "Sand of the Desert," "The Jewish Cemetery," and "The Arsenal." In poems of this sort he was a skilled designer, yet they were something more than art for art's sake. Owing to the tenderness seldom absent from his work, he often has been called a poet of the Affections. It must be owned that he was a poet of the Tastes as well. He combined beauty with feeling in lyrical trifles which rival those of Tennyson and other masters of technique, and was almost our earliest maker of verse that might be termed exquisite. "The Bells of Lynn" and "The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls," show that the hand which polished "Curfew" and "The Arrow and the Song" was sensitive to the last.

Among obvious tests of a poet are his voice, facility, and general aim. Longfellow's verse was refined and pleasing; his purpose, evidently not that of a doctrinaire. The anti-slavery poems did not come, like Whittier's, from a fiery heart, or rival Lowell's in humor and disdain. They simply manifest his recognition and artistic treatment of an existing evil. The ballad of "The Quadroon Girl" is a poem, not a prophecy, with a pathos beautified by certain "values," as a painter might term them,—the tropic shore, the lagoon, the island planter's daughter and slave. Of the higher tests of poetic genius,—spontaneity, sweep, intellect, imaginative power,—what examples has he left us? At times the highest of all, imagination, in passages where he outleaps the conceits and fancies that so possessed him. We have it in the "Midnight Mass"; in "Sir Humphrey Gilbert"; in "The Spanish Jew's Tale," when

"—straight into the city of the Lord
The Rabbi leaped with the Death-Angel's sword,
And through the streets there swept a sudden breath
Of something there unknown, which men call death."

At times also we have what is of almost equal worth, imaginative treatment. This is felt in the effect of his very best lyrics, a series of Ballads, with "The Skeleton in Armor" at their front both in date and in merit. This vigorous poem opens with a rare abruptness. The author, full of the Norseland, was inspirited by his novel theme, and threw off a ringing carol of the sea-rover's training, love, adventure. The cadences and imagery belong together, and the measure, that of Drayton's "Agincourt," is better than any new one for its purpose. Even the poet's conceits are braver than their wont:

"Then from those cavernous eyes
Pale flashes seemed to rise,
As when the northern skies
Gleam in December;
And, like the water's flow
Under December's snow,
Came a dull voice of woe
From the heart's chamber."

Elsewhere he is as resonant as the bard of England's "King Harry":

"And as to catch the gale
Round veered the flapping sail,
Death! was the helmsman's hail,
Death without quarter!
Midships with iron keel
Struck we her ribs of steel;
Down her black hulk did reel
Through the black water!"

To old-fashioned people this heroic ballad, written over forty years ago, is worth a year's product of Kensington-stitch verse. A few others, mostly of the sea, count high in any estimate of Longfellow. "The Wreck of the Hesperus," though not without blemishes, "Sir Humphrey Gilbert," "Victor Galbraith," and "The Cumberland" are treated, I think, imaginatively. Boker's noble stanzas on the sinking of the Cumberland follow more closely the old ballad style, but Longfellow plainly found a style of his own. His "occasional" poems were equally felicitous: witness the touching, sympathetic imagery of "The Two Angels," the joyous grace of the chanson for Agassiz's birthday. "Hawthorne," "Bayard Taylor," and "Killed at the Ford" are examples of the fitness with which his emotion and poetic quality corresponded, each to each. But neither war nor grief ever too much disturbed the artist soul. Tragedy went no deeper with him than its pathos; it was another element of the beautiful. Death was a luminous transition. "The Warden of the Cinque Ports" is all melody and association. He made a scenic threnody, knowing the laureate would supply an intellectual characterization of the Iron Duke. His fancy dwells

upon the ancient and high-sounding title, the mist and sunrise of the Channel, and the rolling salute from all those rampart guns, that yet could not arouse the old Field-Marshal from his slumber. Tennyson fills his grander strophes with the sturdy valor and wisdom of the last great Englishman, but within our poet's bounds the result is just as undeniably a poem.

Longfellow, employing regular forms of verse, was flexible where many are awkward, — at ease in his fine clothes. "Rain in Summer," "To a Child," and a few longer poems yet to be examined, such as "The Building of the Ship," are written with a free hand. In his latter period he often used an anapestic movement, first discoverable in "The Saga of King Olaf" and "Enceladus," afterward in "Belisarius," "The Chamber over the Gate," and "Helen of Tyre." The impression conveyed is that we listen to one whose day for elaborate song is past, but whose voice still warbles in the fresh break of spring or the melting twilight of thankfulness and rest. With age, his natural tenderness grew upon him, as men's traits will for good and bad. "The Children's Hour" is one of the inimitable fireside songs that made this "old moustache" the children's poet. Another delightful lyric, "My Lost Youth," was the utterance of a man who in middle age looked in his own heart to write, and found it warm and true. To comprehend its charm and sincerity, one, perchance, must also have loitered in youth along the piers, sending his hopes far across the whispering ocean to the untried world; must himself remember

"— the black wharves and the slips,
And the sea-tides tossing free;
And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea."

Some breezy dome of trees, with sounds and shadows like those of Deering's woods, must still haunt his memory, if he would recall

"The song and the silence in the heart,
That in part are prophecies, and in part
Are longings wild and vain;
And the voice of that fitful song
Sings on, and is never still:
'A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.'"

Of all these poems, the swallow-flights of many seasons, not one falls short of a certain standard of grace and correctness; and the same may be said of the author's more pretentious works, to which we now come. Meanwhile it is to be noted that he was the

first American to compose sustained narrative-poems that gained and kept a place in literature. In fact, since the Georgian period, there has been no other poet of our tongue, save Tennyson, whose longer productions have been greeted by the public with the interest bestowed upon the successive works of novelists in the front rank.

IV.

"EVANGELINE," the first of these tales in verse, was written—as I have said of "In Memoriam," that very different production—when its author had reached the age of forty, with his powers in full maturity, and remains his typical poem. Like "Hermann and Dorothea," it is composed in hexameter, as befits a bucolic love story. Longfellow's choice of this measure, in defiance of a noble army of censors, proves that he had, much as he shrank from discussion, the full courage of his convictions upon a point in literary art. He lived for poetry; his tastes were definite, and he felt himself justified in respecting them.

Within a recent period several noteworthy extensions have been made to the technical range of English verse. Among these are: the use by Tennyson of the stanzaic form of "In Memoriam"; the example of a long poem in unrhymed trochaics, by Longfellow; Swinburne's forcible handling of anapestic measures; more recently, the revival of elegant romance-forms, by the new English school. Preceding these in date we have Longfellow's success in familiarizing the "English hexameter," the measure of "Evangeline" and "Miles Standish." The popularity of those idyls assuredly proved that the common folk, in spite of critics, do not find the verse a stumbling-block. They read it, when gracefully written, without suspecting that it is not a musical and natural English form. The question of hexameter has been argued to little purpose, in consequence of a mist which has hid the true issue from the perception of both parties to the dispute. The verse usually is examined, by its friends and opponents, from the scholar's point of view. To Mr. Swinburne, hexameters are "ugly bastards of verse"; even those of Mr. Arnold have "no metrical feet at all," but sound like "anapests broken up and driven wrong"; Clough's are admirable "studies in graduated prose"; Hawtrey's, "faultless, English, hexametrical," but only "a well played stroke," not continuable; Kingsley's "Andromeda," the "one good poem extant in that pernicious metre," and

even Kingsley's feet are but "loose, rhymeless anapests." Now "Andromeda," a delicious poem for poets, never will commend its measure to the multitude, since it never will reach them. But if such lines as these,

"Far through the wine-dark depths of the crystal,
the gardens of Nereus,
Coral and sea-fan and tangle, the blooms and the
palms of the ocean,"

are essentially anapestic, it is because one chooses to read them so; and any dactylic verse of Homer may be transposed in the same way by reading it accentually and ignoring the first and last syllables. When Mr. Swinburne adds, "Such as pass elsewhere for English hexameter, I do hope, are impossible to Eton," he strikes the key-note of the misunderstanding. The same premise is always implied, to wit: that classical analogies should govern our opinion of this measure. Unfortunately, I say, even the arguments of its defenders are based on the notion that the modern verse may approximate to the antique, in which effort, of course, it always must fail. Poe, in his turn, opposed Longfellow's hexameters because they were not classical; yet he unconsciously paid tribute to them as an English form of verse, when he said that their admirers were "deceived by the facility with which some of these verses may be read!" Lord Derby anticipated Mr. Swinburne's "pernicious metre," in denouncing "that pestilent heresy of the so-called English hexameter," which "can only be pressed into the service by a violation of every rule of prosody." Whether or not the noble translator, deprived of rules of prosody, would have found it hard to write *versé* at all, it is plain that here again crops out the fallacy of the discussion. Fixed rules of quantitative or classical verse must be put out of mind. The question ought to be, simply: Is the verse, in six feet, of "Evangeline" or "Andromeda" a good and readable measure for an English poem?

Bryant, a good writer of blank verse, disliked a measure which he found unsuited to his slow and dignified movement. Professor Lewis took the ground of Mr. Bryant, whose Homer he so much praised. Mr. Lang is on the same side, and has said that not even Professor Arnold can alter his opinion. Yet the late Professor Hadley, an almost matchless scholar, advocated this verse for Homeric translation. Messrs. Lowell, Higginson, and Stoddard are among its friends. Matthew Arnold, in the delightful papers "On Translating Homer," has made his strongest plea for the English hexameter by unconsciously

granting that its close approximation to the antique type must be the result of adroit labor, not of unstudied expression. Such a result justly might be deemed an artifice, distinct from natural English verse. And Mr. Arnold, in view of the reception awarded "Evangeline," also sees that the dislike of our present English hexameter is "rather among the professional critics than the general public." A liking for it, on the part of many poets, is evident from their successive experiments. Longfellow's foreign studies influenced his own decision in its favor; since then we have had Kingsley's "Andromeda," Clough's "Bothie," Howells's "Clement" Taylor's rhythmic "Pastorals," and, more recently, Mr. Munby's idyl of "Dorothy" in the elegaic measure, and its Hellenic counter-type, the "Delphic Days" of Mr. Snider. But while there are both faith and practice in favor of the hexametric verse, it is still in a stage of growth. Mr. Arnold a second time reaches the mark when he implies that its capabilities are not yet evident; that, "even now, if a version of the Iliad in English hexameter were made by a poet who, like Mr. Longfellow, has that indefinable quality which renders him popular,—something attractive in his talent which communicates itself to his verses,—it would have a great success among the general public." He expected yet to see an improved type of this verse, which should excel Voss's by as much as Shakspeare's blank verse excels that of Schiller. This may or may not be; but the capabilities of the measure will not be understood until some fine poet—combining the simplicity of Longfellow and the vigor of Clough, and free from the sing-song of the one and the roughness of the other—shall make it the vehicle of passion, incident, imagination. To bring out its full rhythm, while depending chiefly on accent,—the natural basis of English verse,—the ear will pay regard to such effects of quantity as the language proffers. Purely quantitative English verse, at any length, is out of the equation. To the samples of it often printed by amateurs in "Blackwood" and elsewhere, Canning's outburst, "Dactyls call'st thou them? God help thee, silly one!" may be justly applied, but not to the hexameter of Kingsley and Bayard Taylor. Call the new measure what you will—something else, if possible, than the term applied to the verse of Homer and Lucretius, for it assuredly is not composed of quantitative dactyls and spondees. But it will have six feet, and natural breaks and cæsuras, and will be more or less dactylic; it may also have anapestic variations, and trochees quite as often as spondees. To sum up all, its music, sweep,

and inspiring effect will depend entirely upon the genius of the poet who writes it.

The use of this measure for translation from the Greek and Latin poets I have discussed in a notice of Bryant. Longfellow could not be the supreme translator of Homer; but if there was nothing of the Grecian in him, there was much of the Latinist, and with Virgil's polished muse he might have been quite at ease. Meanwhile, the popularity of our new hexameter with simple readers who know little of the Homeric roll, the Sicilian *psithurisma*, or Virgil's liquid flow, has been demonstrated against all theorists by the record of "Evangeline." The poet's friends told him he must take a familiar meter, that hexameters "would never do." He found, as reported by David Macrae, that his "thoughts would run in hexameter," and declared that the measure would "take root in English soil." "It is a measure," he said, "that suits all themes. It can fly low like a swallow, and at any moment dart skyward. * * * What fine hexameters we have in the Bible: *Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them*; and this line, *God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet*. Nothing could be grander than that!" Over-dactylic, and therefore monotonous, as Longfellow's hexameters often are, they have the merit of being smooth to read without analysis, like any other English verse. This primary, easy lilt was needed for an introduction, until, stage by stage, the popular ear shall be wonted to more varied forms, and the scholar brought to realize that here is a true and idiomatic English verse, however distinct from that which he learned in the classes.

Notwithstanding its primitive and loose construction, the verse of "Evangeline" is at times vigorously wrought and sonorous:

"Wild through the dark colonnades and corridors
leafy the blast rang,
Breaking the seal of silence, and giving tongues to
the forest.
Soundless above them the banners of moss just stirred
to the music.
Multitudinous echoes awoke and died in the distance,
Over the watery floor, and beneath the reverberant
branches."

And with the measure that came to him, the poet had chanced upon an idyllic story, seemingly made for its use, and wholly after his liking. A beautiful, pathetic tradition of American history, remote enough to gather a poetic halo, and yet fresh with sweet humanities; tinged with provincial color which he knew and loved, and in its course taking on the changing atmospheres of his own land; pastoral at first, then broken into action, and

afterward the record of shifting scenes that made life a pilgrimage and dream. There are few dramatic episodes; there is but one figure whom we follow,—that one the most touching of all, the betrothed Evangeline searching for her lover, through weary years and over half an unknown world. There are chance pictures of Acadian fields, New World rivers, prairies, bayous, forests, by moonlight and starlight and midday; glimpses, too, of picturesque figures, artisans and farmers, soldiery, trappers, boatmen, emigrants, priests. But the poem already is a little classic, and will remain one, as surely as "The Vicar of Wakefield," "The Deserted Village," or any other sweet and pious idyl of our English tongue; yet we find its counterpart more nearly, I think, in some faultless miniature of the purest French school. Evangeline, as she

"Sat by some lonely grave, and thought that perchance in its bosom
He was already at rest, and she longed to slumber beside him,"

though the subject of artists, needs no other painter than her poet, through whose verse the music of her name and the legend of her wanderings will be so long perpetuated. There are flaws and petty fancies and homely passages in "Evangeline"; but this one poem, thus far the flower of American idyls, known in all lands, I will not approach in a critical spirit. There are rooms in every house where one treads with softened footfall. Accept it as the poet left it, the mark of our advance at that time in the art of song,—his own favorite, of which he justly might be fond, since his people loved it with him, and him always for its sake.

The advantage of a new field, to which later authors, like Harte and Cable, are somewhat indebted, was of full service to our poet, not only on his provincial excursions, but also in the one successful attempt that has been made to treat in numbers the customs and legends of our Indian tribes. This gain was strengthened by the novelty of the rhymeless trochaic dimeter used for "Hiawatha," a measure then practically unknown to English verse. He probably would not have ventured to compose his *Algic Edda* in this monotonous time-beat, had he not made sure of its effect in the Norse literatures, and mainly, as was noted at the time, in the Finnish epic of "Kalevala." The result, on the whole, justified his course. "Hiawatha" is a forest-poem; it is fragrant with the woods, fresh with the sky and waters of the breezy north. The Indian traditions, like those of the Scandinavians, are the myths of an un-

tutored race; they would seem puerile and affected in any but the most primitive of chanting measures. As it is, one feels that the nicest skill was required to protect the verse from gathering an effect of burlesque or commonplace; yet this it never does. The fable is not of a stimulating kind. Grown-up readers, I suspect, seldom go through it consecutively. To read here and there and at odd times, it is in every way pleasurable. It was, in a sense, the poet's most genuine addition to our native literature. Previous endeavors to make imaginative verse from aboriginal material had signally failed: witness the ludicrous heroics of the Knickerbocker poets, whose conventional ideals were utterly discarded by Longfellow. He alone had the gift to blend the kindred myths of Indian fancy in mellow and artistic simplicity; to cull from Schoolcraft what was really essential, and make it more charming for us than a sheer invention possibly could be. He made the field his own, with little room for after-comers. "Hiawatha" is the one poem that beguiles the reader to see the birch and ash, the heron and eagle and deer, as they seem to the red man himself, and to join for the moment in his simple creed and wonderment. Such is the half-dramatic merit of the work, and it was only by a true exercise of the imagination that a poet, himself no familiar of the wild-wood life, could sit in his study and utilize the books relating to it: an equally true exercise, I think, though upon a less majestic basis, with that of the poet who mastered the Arthurian legends of his own historic race and island, and wrote the "Idylls of the King." Longfellow's use of the Indian dialect and names is delightful. These cantos remind us that poetry is the natural speech of primitive races; the "song" of Hiawatha has the epic quality that pertains to early ballads, the highest enjoyment of which belongs to later ages and to the creature that Whitman terms the civilizee. He alone can relish to the full the illusions which the poet has recaptured for his episode of "The Building of the Canoe," the death of Minnehaha, and Hiawatha's mystical farewell.

When a companion-piece to "Evangeline" appeared, every one made haste to acquaint himself with the love experience of the demure Priscilla, loyal John Alden, and bluff Captain Miles. Even now, if we had some young Tennysons and Longfellows, poetic ideals might not wholly give way to the novelist's photographs of every-day life. The author's tact guided him to the prettiest tradition of Pilgrim times. We have a romantic picture of the Plymouth settlement, with its far-away round of human life and action, through

which the tide of love went flowing then as now. The bucolic wedding-scene at the close is a fine subject for the pastoral canvas. "The Courtship of Miles Standish" was an advance upon "Evangeline," so far as concerns structure and the distinct characterization of personages. A merit of the tale is the frolicsome humor here and there, lighting up the gloom that blends with our conception of the Pilgrim inclosure, and we see that comic and poetic elements are not at odds in the scheme of a bright imagination. The verse, though stronger, is more labored than that of "Evangeline"; some of the lines are prosaic, almost inadmissible. There are worse, however, in the poet's last example of hexameter, the Quaker story of "Elizabeth,"—which was written rather to fill out the "Tales of a Wayside Inn" than from any special inspiration. Nor does the Plymouth idyl show much sympathy on the part of the author with the ancestral environment, but chiefly a cavalier perception of what romance and grace there might have been in the good old colony time.

His works in dramatic form plainly represent the craving of a versatile poet to win laurels in every province of his art. But to compose a living drama requires just that special faculty, if not the highest, which is denied to nine out of ten. Longfellow, perchance, might have made himself either a dramatist or a novelist, if he had gone into training as doggedly as others, born essayists or poets, who have gained the secret of novel-writing through practice, aided by popular encouragement. He made a fair beginning as a romancer with "Hyperion," and even as a dramatist by the clever play of "The Spanish Student,"—equipped with the properties of a country and literature so well understood by him. As a drama, that remains his best achievement. When the desire to better it possessed him, the outcome was a motley series of writings in the form under review: one, a frigid contribution to the pseudo-antique verse at which all college-bred poets feel competent to try their hands. Nothing with the true Grecian flavor could come out of his Italian and Gothic tendencies. "Pandora," besides reminding us of Taylor's version of the Second Part of Faust, is in every way a forced effort, and, like "Judas Maccabæus," would go a-begging if the work of a new man. The Trilogy of "Christus," as a whole, is a disjointed failure. Parts First and Third, "The Divine Tragedy" and "The New England Tragedies," exhibit the skill to choose imposing subjects and build a framework, but little of the power required for their treatment. We have the form, the personages, and situations,

rarely the action and noble fire. The author's shortcomings are even more conspicuous than Tennyson's, and by as much as his intellectual power was the less absolute. His theory that the Scriptural language should be reproduced grew out of the fact that he could invent no other, and resulted in a barren paraphrase of what is fine in its own place. What sublime themes!—the life and passion of Christ, the Golden Legend of Christendom, the tragedy of Puritan superstition,—and how tamely the first and last of these are handled! Their consolidation was manifestly an after-thought, to give a semblance of strength to the whole. Where we have the poet's own style, as in the soliloquies of Mary, Simon, Helen, it is a subjective utterance of the Cambridge scholar at his desk. The Interludes are put in to brace the effect, like the sham buttresses of a faulty building. He should not have preëmpted the sable field of the Quaker and witch persecutions, unless he felt in his utmost fiber the nerve to occupy it. The temptation was strong; the result, contrasted with Hawthorne's prose treatment of kindred subjects, is deplorable.

"The Golden Legend," however, should be judged by itself, and is an enchanting romance of the Middle Age cast in the dramatic mold. Brought out years before the "Tragedies," it finally was merged in the "Christus" by way of toning up the whole, the poet well knowing that this was his choicest distillation of Gothic mysticism and its legendary. It is composite rather than inventive; the correspondences between this work and Goethe's masterpiece, not to speak of productions earlier than either, are interesting. There is decided originality in its general affect, and in the taste wherewith the author, like a modern maker of stained glass, arranged the prismatic materials which he knew precisely where to collect. The Prologue, not wholly a new conception, is none the less imaginative: a scene of night and storm, with Lucifer and the Powers of the Air vainly assaulting the Strasburg Cross, baffled by the voices of the Bells, which repeat the sacred words graven on their sides. The Legend is a striking instance of an effort by which mediæval rituals, chants, and wonder-tales are boldly seized and molten to an alloy, whose color and tensile qualities are due to the solvent of the alchemist. Here and there are unmistakable lusters of the poet's own vein. This would be recognized at sight:

"His gracious presence upon earth
Was as a fire upon a hearth;
As pleasant songs, at morning sung,
The words that dropped from his sweet tongue
Strengthened our hearts."

And this, also, is after his best fashion :

“I have my trials. Time has laid his hand
Upon my heart, gently, not smiting it,
But as a harper lays his open palm
Upon his harp, to deaden its vibrations.”

The humor of Lucifer's soliloquies, in the Church and elsewhere, is characteristic of both Goethe and Longfellow, and therefore German with a difference. But all phases of our poet's verse and fancy are to be observed in this brilliant conglomerate. And what rare materials are brought together! Here are revived the oft-told jest of Brother Felix, Walter the Minnesinger, Lucifer and the Black Paternoster, the monkish chants and anthems, the Miracle Play, the disputes at the School of Palermo! The richest passages are those contrasting the Cellar and Refectory scenes with the prayer-like labor of Brother Pacificus illuminating the Gospel in the Scriptorium above. These, with many beautiful counterparts, lighting page after page, move one to accord with those who regard “The Golden Legend” as a piece in which the poet's versatile genius is seen at its best. Though not the work of a natural dramatist, it is vastly superior to the prosaic fabrics which are attached to it, and which fail to grow upon the reader in spite of this forced association.

A posthumous drama, “Michael Angelo,” while having the dignity that becomes its theme, does not change our view of the author's limitations. It contains elevated passages, mostly the soliloquies of the great artist, of whom in his old age it may be termed a sympathetic study, and is worth pursuing, even for something more than the perfect sonnet which forms the Dedication.

Were I to select one from the poet's long succession of books to fitly illustrate his traits, I might name the little volume of 1849, with its two divisions, “By the Seaside” and “By the Fireside.” “The Building of the Ship” is the best example of his free-hand metrical style,—musical, wholesome, and suggestive of an imagination that takes heat from its own action. This celebration of a manly and poetic form of handicraft is simply cast, yet full of energy and spirit. At the close, a sunburst of patriotism, the superb apostrophe to the Union, outvies that ode of Horace on which it was modeled. In conception and structure the poem, while thoroughly national, is akin to Schiller's “Lay of the Bell.” I think that the minor lyrics in this volume, from “Chrysaor” to “Gaspar Becerra,” warrant my liking for it, and are peculiarly representative. The author long afterward supplied companion-pieces, “The Hanging of the Crane” and “Keramos,” to his idyl of the ship-yard.

His reputation now made the production of each of these a literary event; just as any late and brief work of a favorite composer sends a murmur of interest through the musical world. Such afterpieces earn for artists, in the ripeness of their fame, a more sudden reward than greater efforts which preceded them. All things come around at last, and often come too late. But Longfellow again and again received his crown of praise; and this the more frequently in return for service in which he was easily first,—the art which gained for an old-time minstrel a willing largess, that of the recounter, the teller of bewitching tales. His station as a poet was not advanced by the different installments of the “Tales of a Wayside Inn,” but it was much to have the delight of giving delight, as often as each appeared, to a host of unseen readers. And so in the end they formed his most extended work: a series of short stories, mostly gathered from older literatures, translated into his varying and crystalline verse, and linked together, like the tales of Boccaccio and Chaucer, by a running commentary of the poet's own. The selections are good of themselves, and the conceit of the gathering of the poet's friends at the Sudbury Inn brought them near to the interest of his audience. Nothing could be better than the prelude. A transfiguring portraiture from life is that of the musician, Ole Bull. The tales here told in song for the first time, all of them Colonial, are but four in number,—few indeed, among so many gleaned from the Decameron, the Gesta Romanorum, “the chronicles of Charlemagne,” and “the stories that recorded are by Pierre Alphonse.” Here is the semblance of a master effort, but in fact a succession of minor ones; we perceive that no great outlay of imaginative force was required for this kind of work. With Longfellow's lyrical facility of putting a story into rippling verse, almost as lightly as another would tell it in prose, we find ourselves assured of as many poems as he had themes. Less subtle and refined than Morris, he was a better recounter. This was due to a modern and natural style, the sweet variety of his measures, and to his ease in dialogue. He intersperses many realistic passages, and by other ways avoids the monotony of the “idle singer of an empty day.” As for poetic atmosphere and all the essentials of a select work of beauty, the “Tales” cannot enter into comparison with “The Earthly Paradise.” Longfellow's frequent gayety, and constant sense of the humanities, make him a true story-teller for the multitude; not, like Morris, an exquisite, dreamy singer for companions of his own guild.

His version of "The Divine Comedy" is one of the most signal results of American labor in the department of translation. There was nothing in the work of his predecessors to prevent the task from being not only a matter of attraction, but a duty; no one, on the score of talent or acquirements, was better fitted to renew an attempt which from its conditions never can be perfectly successful. His life-long study of Dante's text had brought to this natural translator that knowledge of it which was more than half the achievement. The theory of his version was the modern one (which it helped to confirm),—that of recent and noted English translations, and of Taylor's "Faust,"—to wit, a literal and lineal rendering. Unlike Taylor, Longfellow had but one measure to reproduce, and he discarded the rhymes altogether, while striving to convey the rhythm and deeper music of the sublime original. It was fitting that the neighborhood of Cambridge, whose poets and scholars were for the most part sympathetic lovers of Dante, should furnish a new translation of the *Commedia*, and that Longfellow—less brilliant than Lowell, whether as a poet or a student, but his superior in patient industry and evenness of taste—should be the one to make it. We are told that his work received, from time to time, the criticism of a pleiad of his friends. Certainly it was brought to birth with heralding by Norton,—the classical translator of "Vita Nuova,"—Howells, Greene, and others of the group. As for the discussions which ensued upon its merits, my impression is that points were well taken on both sides. Various other translations of Dante were appearing about this time—the six-hundredth anniversary of the Tuscan's birth: in Great Britain, those of Dayman, Ford, and Rossetti; in America, Dr. Parsons's "Inferno" was before the public,—seventeen, cantos in the rhymed pentameter quatrain not so literal as Longfellow's, but the noble performance that one might expect from the author of the "Lines on a Bust of Dante." The best of the English triad was that of Rossetti. It bears the stamp of a master-hand, yet has so many blemishes, and is here and there so awkward, as to be on the whole less satisfactory than Longfellow's, to which it is kindred in principle and method.

The reader of Longfellow's pages is secure of a faithful reproduction of the original order and meaning and of Dante's manner—so far as the latter depends on linear arrangement. All these are of the highest value, if the vital and pervading style of the lofty Florentine can likewise be transferred. The ideal translator will reproduce all these—the

sense, the metrical arrangement, the grandeur of tone. Until his arrival, if one of these must be sacrificed, it cannot be the first, and it should be, I think, the second rather than the third. One would prefer a prose rendering of the same rank with Mr. Lang's "Homer" and "Theocritus" to a feebly correct transcription in English verse. Longfellow certainly aimed to meet all the foregoing requirements, and in his case a complete failure was scarcely possible, even with respect to the third. But his gifts as a translator never were more conspicuous than when, in youth, he paraphrased and almost recreated so many lyrics from the German and other tongues. Applying a literal method to the *Commedia*, his genius is less evident than his talent and conscientious self-restraint. What he did was to translate the whole work, line for line, almost as literally as a class recitation, and this, barring a few archaisms, with much simplicity and smoothness. Except in the more abstruse cantos, the appearance of ease is so marked that one gives credit to the story that the poet, with his facility and mastery of the text, accomplished his task in a few years by writing a stated number of verses each morning, while waiting for his coffee to boil. If this were the fact, it would not do to estimate the feat by it. Where a man's genius lies, there he works with ease, and often undervalues the result; elsewhere, he "labors." There is nothing labored in Longfellow's translation; the fault is of another kind: we lose, amid all its simplicity, the "grand manner," as Mr. Arnold would call it, of the divine master. A neophyte misses what he expected to realize of the unflinching strength and terror of the *Inferno*, the palpitating splendor of the *Paradiso*. The three divisions seem leveled, so to speak, to the grade of the *Purgatorio*, midway between the zenith and nadir of Dante's song. This shortcoming is to be felt, rather than proved, and tells in favor of Parsons's translation, and of others greatly inferior to this as a whole. Even Cary's old-fashioned paraphrase, full of Miltonic inversions and epithets, and thoroughly open to Bentley's strictures on Pope's "Homer," has exalted passages that justify its survival to our day. Longfellow's genuine scholarship led him to pursue his method, once determined on, without the slightest protrusion of skill and learning. Grace is added by the frequent use of feminine endings,—a habit natural to Longfellow, and increasing the likeness of his own to the original verse. But his rendition of many Italian words by English derivatives, which often have quite lost the etymological meaning, is an error made in the interest of extreme fidelity and really

telling against it. A kindred one is the use of derivatives in which the primitive meaning is not lost, but which do not translate the text to English ears so effectively as their Saxon synonyms. For instance, most of the translators—Wright, Cayley, Ford, Rossetti, etc.—have made havoc with the inscription over the gate of hell :

“ Per me si va nella città dolente;
Per me si va nell’ eterno dolore;
Per me si va tra la perduta gente.”

Longfellow’s rendering is superior to all the rest:

“ Through me the way is to the city dolent;
Through me the way is to eternal dole;
Through me the way among the people lost.”

Yet here is a forced translation of the word “dolente” by a derivative which, to English readers, is not an *equivalent*. Besides, a more effective expression of anguish can be gained by the use of a Saxon word. One step further would have made Mr. Longfellow’s rendering perfect: he might have escaped an inversion, and have matched the verbal repetition in the first two lines, after this wise :

“ Through me the way is to the woful city;
Through me the way is to eternal woe.”

Reading the whole work, and accepting the late Mr. Greene’s opinion that the characteristics of Dante are Variety and Power, I think that the evenness of Longfellow’s method robs us of the former; and as for the latter, it is the one thing which the lay reader of this translation, unrivaled as it is in many respects, does not adequately feel.

The reflex influence of this labor was apparent in the elevated nature of his later poems. It is true that he occasionally used his new diction in a prosaic or weary manner. Of this, such a line as “The spiritual world preponderates,” from the sonnet to Whittier, is an extreme instance. Otherwise, a firmer poetic quality was observable after this date. The sonnets which he now wrote, few as they are, entitle him to a place in the most select circle of modern poets. They rank with the best written in our century. Where, in fact, throughout the whole galaxy of English sonnets, is there a group surpassing the six which accompanied the Dante volumes? Rhythmic, perfect in structure, and full of beauty, they have captured the spirit of the Divine Song. A series written in the poet’s old age, his tributes to the memory of comrades gone before, has a pathetic charm. Still later was composed the sonnet “Nature,” which must be accounted one of the choicest in any lan-

guage upon the theme to which its title is but a pass-word :

“As a fond mother, when the day is o’er,
Leads by the hand her little child to bed,
Half willing, half reluctant to be led,
And leave his broken playthings on the floor,
Still gazing at them through the open door,
Nor wholly re-assured and comforted
By promises of others in their stead,
Which, though more splendid, may not please
him more;
So Nature deals with us, and takes away
Our playthings one by one, and by the hand
Leads us to rest so gently, that we go
Scarce knowing if we wish to go or stay,
Being too full of sleep to understand
How far the unknown transcends the what we
know.”

This is, however, singularly like the translation, by Leigh Hunt, of Filicaja’s sonnet on Providence, quoted by Longfellow himself in the notes to the *Paradiso*. With lessening use, the poet’s touch lost little of its delicacy and poise. The few pieces brought together in “Ultima Thule” indicate that his ruling sense of art was clear as ever; nor was it finally dulled, like Emerson’s bright intelligence, by a veil of darkness slowly drawn. He ceased from service almost without forewarning, and because his work was done.

V.

FEW poets have been more restricted to fixed habits of composition. His mode was perfectly obvious and unchanged, save by greater refinement, during fifty years. Everything suggested an image, except when his imagery suggested the thought of which he made it seem a reflection. He tells us that

“Bent like a laboring oar that toils in the surf of
the ocean,
Bent, but not broken, by age was the form of the
notary public”;

and we feel that the image really grew out of a poet’s conception of his personage. But again, looking upon “drifting currents of the river,” or finding the day “cold and dark and dreary,” or listening to the belfry-chimes, he hunts about for some emotion or phase of life which these things aptly illustrate. This process not seldom becomes a vice of style. He constantly applied his imagery in a formal way,—the very *ut . . . ita* of the Latins, the *as . . . so* of the eighteenth century. But whether his metaphors came of themselves, or with prayer and fasting, they always came, and often were novel and poetic. A more trying habit was that inbred, as it seems, with the New England poets,

most of whom have preached too much in verse. He tacked a didactic moral, like a corollary of Euclid, on many a lovely poem. No one better knew that "nothing is poetry which could as well have been expressed in prose," but the habit formed in youth seemed beyond his control. Still, it was through this habit that he became the most popular of University poets, and as a moralist no one could make commonplace more attractive. Lastly, the bookish flavor of his work is at once its strength and weakness: the former, because the very life of his genius depended on it; the latter, because poetry that is over-literary is so much the less creative, and is otherwise open to the objections brought against literary art. Browning's fondness for black-letter is redeemed by dramatic vigor. In reading Longfellow, we see that the world of books was to him the real world. From first to last, if he had been banished from his library, his imagination would have been blind and deaf and silent. It is true that he fed upon the choicest yield of literature; his gathered honey was of the thyme and clover, not the rude buckwheat. Take, for instance, the "Morituri Salutamus," read before his surviving classmates on the fiftieth anniversary of their graduation. Was there ever anything more beautiful, in view of the occasion? Is not the title itself a stroke of genius? But the title also defines the method of the poem: there are more than twenty learned references in this piece of less than three hundred lines, including one entire tale from the "Gesta Romanorum." He had, we see, this way of working, and for once it resulted in a poem that is the model of its kind.

As for Nature, he usually saw it as polarized by reflection from the mirror Art. Whether in or out of his study, he had not Emerson's interpretative eye, and his report of landscape and the country life was less genuine than Lowell's or Whittier's, not to mention the younger poets. He rarely ventured beyond the simple outlook from his mansion door. The effect of the rain, the mist, the night-fall, upon his own spirit, is what he gives us, in the manner of some landscape of the French subjective school. A starry event, the occultation of Orion, at once becomes a glorious image of the triumph of Love over Force. In "Evangeline" there are refined pictures of scenery that was familiar to him, with just as pleasing descriptions of that which he knew only through his books. He painted the landscape of half Europe in the same way, always a cosmopolitan, never the genius of the place. The flower-de-luce, with its heraldic associations, is the emblem after which he names a volume. . But with respect

to still life and common life, the true *genre* touch of "The Old Clock" and "The Village Blacksmith" grows firmer in "Miles Standish," where he draws so well the Plymouth interiors, the Puritan maiden at her wheel, the elders, and men-at-arms. And look! how he describes what of all is nearest his heart, an olden volume:

"Open wide on her lap lay the well-worn psalm-book of Ainsworth,
Printed in Amsterdam, the words and the music together,
Rough-hewn, angular notes, like stones in the walls of a church-yard,
Darkened and overhung by the running vine of the verses.
Such was the book from whose pages she sang the old Puritan anthem."

I more than half recant the statement that Longfellow was not a poet of Nature, bethinking myself how justly others have maintained that he was by eminence our poet of the Sea. He clung to the coast: looking inland, he cared most for the tide-meadows of his neighborhood; looking oceanward, his fancy thrived upon the omens, the mysteries, the perpetual fascinations of "sea from shore." He loved his mighty rock-girt bay, the lights and beacons, the mist and fog-bells, the sleet and surge of winter, the coastwise vessels; and its memories were the drift-wood with which he kindled "thoughts that burned and glowed within." His imagination goes out to "the ocean old," the "gray old sea" of storms and calms; to its winged frequenters, the ancient galleons, the fleets of conquest and embassy and traffic. The names of sunny isles and far-off lands were music to him. If by chance our fireside magician drowned his books deeper than did ever plummet sound, and sang from a poet's heart alone, it was when he returned again and again to capture and repeat for us the haunting "secret of the sea."

Reviewing our survey of his work, I observe that each of his best known efforts has led to the mention of prose or verse by some other hand which it resembles. In view of the possible inference, we now may ask, Was Longfellow, then, with his great reputation and indisputable hold upon our affections, not an original poet? It must be acknowledged, at the outset, that few poets of his standing have profited more openly by examples that suited their taste and purpose. The evidence of this is seen not in merely three or four, but in a great number of his productions,—in his briefest lyrics, in his elaborate narrative poems. Like greater bards before him, he was a good borrower. Dependence on his equipment led to unconscious assimilation of its treasures.

But originality is of more than one kind. As we say of some people that they have a genius for friendship, so his sympathy with the beautiful, wherever he found it, was unique and tantamount to a special inspiration. The proof of his originality, however, even where he was least inventive, hardly requires this paradox: it did not consist in word or motive, but in the distinctive tone of the singer, the sentiment of voice which made his performances in a sense new songs; in an air, a suffused quality, which rendered every phrase unmistakable. If he borrowed freely, he was freely drawn upon by others in their turn. Scores of followers have caught a manner that shows to poor advantage when transferred; but his position for years, at the head of even a sentimental school, indicated that Longfellow was not without a genius of his own.

Apart from certain exceptions already noted, his bent was cosmopolitan. He had the Anglo-Saxon longing of the pine for the palm, a love for the softer winds and skies, the pliant languages, of Italy and Spain. Besides the example of his works, we have his written theory of what our literature should be. His Mr. Churchill, in "Kavanagh," declares that in literature "Nationality is a good thing to a certain extent, but universality is better. All that is best in the great poets of all countries is not what is national in them, but what is universal. Their roots are in their native soil; but their branches wave in the unpatriotic air that speaks the same language unto all men. * * * I prefer what is natural. Mere nationality is often ridiculous." And again, "Our literature is not an imitation, but a continuation of the English." He insists upon originality, but "without spasms and convulsions." * * * "A national literature is not the growth of a day. Centuries must contribute their dew and sunshine to it. * * * As for having it so savage and wild as you want it, * * * all literature, as well as all art, is the result of culture and intellectual refinement. * * * As the blood of all nations is mingling with our own, so will their thoughts and feelings finally mingle in our literature. We shall draw from the Germans tenderness, from the Spanish passion, from the French vivacity, to mingle more and more with our English solid sense. And this will give us universality, so much to be desired." With regard to all this, it may be said that Longfellow's service, important as it was in his time, is not that required of his successors. The greatest poets have been those who conveyed the spirit of their respective nationalities. That poetry is truest which is universal in its passion and thought, but national in motive and in all properties of the

craft. The final outcome of American idealism will depend on conditions which our best thinkers are investigating, and which give rise to conflicting theories. Herbert Spencer's recent utterance is somewhat in accordance with Longfellow's views: "Because of its size, and the heterogeneity of its components, the American nation will be a long time in evolving its ultimate form, but its ultimate form will be high." And again: "From biological truths it is to be inferred that the eventual mixture of the allied varieties of the Aryan race forming the population, will produce a finer type of man than has hitherto existed." This agreeable prediction may seem too optimistic; but the future type of poetry certainly will represent the future type of man. Without debating the question whether we now are forming loam for a distinct growth, or whether our literature is to be a "continuation" merely, we may be sure that both here and in foreign lands new types of genius will appear, we know not how or why, and add new species to the world's *flora symbolica* of art and song. Longfellow, if not a prophet, was a pioneer,—by choice an apostle of the best traditional culture. His verse is not of a kind to make its admirers indifferent to any other,—an effect, whether for good or ill, sometimes produced by Browning's, Emerson's, and Whitman's,—but that which, however elementary, promotes a taste for higher ideals. It is due to such as he that we have passed the age of nursing, and are now less satisfied with what is not primarily our own. That the best equipped section of the country should produce him was in the order of events: other things being equal, that region is most American which has been so the longest, and the frontier steadily grows to resemble it.

In England, Longfellow has been styled the poet of the middle classes. Those classes include, however, the majority of intelligent readers, and Tennyson had an equal share of their favor. The English middle classes furnish an analogue to the one great class of American readers, among whom our poet's success was so evident. This was because he used his culture not to veil the word, but to make it clear. He drew upon it for the people in a manner which they could relish and comprehend. Would not any poet whose work might lack the subtlety that commends itself to professional readers be relegated by University critics to the middle-class wards? Caste and literary priesthood have something to do with this. Were it not for "Lucretius" and "In Memoriam," the author of "The May Queen" and "Locksley Hall" and "Enoch Arden" would be in the same category; as it is, he scarcely escapes it in the

judgment of both the psychologic and neo-Romantic schools. Yet the poetry of analytics has not outlasted, in the past, that which came without gloss or obscurity, and whose melody and meaning appealed to one and all. That a poet's verse should require a commentary in its own day is not, all things considered, the best omen for its hold upon the future. But the point taken with respect to Longfellow is not unjust. So far as comfort, virtue, domestic tenderness, and freedom from extremes of passion and incident are characteristics of the middle classes, he has been their minstrel. And it is true that a cold, or even temperate quality is deadening to the higher forms of art. The creative soul abhors ennui; it glows in dramatic self-abandonment. Poets "of passion and of pain" concentrate their lives in some burning focus whose dazzling heat devours them; they suffer, but mount on their own flame. Without passion and its expiations, without the mad waste of life, and even crime and terror, where are our noble tragedies, our high dramatic themes? The compensation of man's anguish is that it lifts him beyond the ordinary. Superlative joy and woe alike were foreign to the verse of Longfellow. It came neither from the heights nor out of the depths, but along the even tenor of a fortunate life. I do not mean that he was exempt from mortal ills; he had his dark experiences, but at the mature age that has learned "what life and death is," and of them he gave little sign. If sorrow and rapture are from within, rather than from without, it may be that our benignant poet, alike through circumstance and temperament, was spared the full extremity of discipline signified in the translation from Goethe:

"Who ne'er his bread in sorrow ate,
Who ne'er the mournful midnight hours
Weeping upon his bed has sate,
He knows you not, ye Heavenly Powers."

Not his the agony and bloody sweat. We may conjecture that, aside from one or two fierce episodes, he was less tried in the furnace than poets are wont to be. From the first he had what he desired,—congenial work and associations, advancement, the love of women and friends, appreciative criticism, the pure wheat and sweet waters of life in plenitude. He had lovely things about him, and gratified his artist nature to the full, while so many makers of the beautiful are condemned to Vulcan's cavern of toil and smoke. He had the best, as by right; and in truth the world, if it only knew it, can afford to keep a poet or artist in some luxury, like a flower for its perfume, a hound for beauty, a bird for song. If Longfellow's regard fell

upon ugliness and misery, it certainly did not linger there. "The cry of the human" did not haunt his ear. When he avails himself of a piteous situation, he does so as tranquilly as the nuns who broider on tapestry the torments of the doomed in hell. He wrote few love poems, none full of longing, or "wild with all regret"; but this might come from the absolute content of his soul,—he had gained the woman whom he idolized, and songs of passion are the cry of unfulfilled desire. His song flows on an equal course, from sunny fountain-head to darkling sea; and even upon that sea he finds repose, for its billows rock to sleep, and no cradle is more peaceful than the grave. Thus fair, gentle, fortunate,—could such a poet answer to the deepest needs of men? Allowing for the factor of imagination, we still see that Longfellow shrank from efforts that would react too keenly upon his sensibilities. He touched the average heart by the sympathetic quality of a voice adjusted to the natural scale. People above or apart from the average—sufferers, aspirants, questioners—are irked by his acceptance of life as it is and his enjoyable relations to it. There is something exasperating to serious minds in his placid waiver of things grievous or distasteful. They ask what cause he has advanced, how has he enlarged the province of thought, what conflict has he sung? Where are his rapture, his longing, his infinitudes? They see his fellow-poet, less prosperous and accomplished, who defied obloquy, and rose to passion in denouncing wrong,—a man of peace, yet valiant as Great-Heart in behalf of freedom and the rights of man. Here was another, who sought out the inmost laws of spiritual life. But why expect a poet to be other than he is? Recognize the instinct that defined his range, and value the range at its worth. Longfellow spoke according to his voice and vision. The attempt to do otherwise ends all. A critic must accept what is best in a poet, and thus become his best encourager.

So far as good fortune may be supplemented by human wisdom, Longfellow was a man after the preacher's own heart. His was one of those happy natures which, as Thackeray says, are softened by prosperity and kindness. He was saved the torment that the envious feel:

"He did not find his sleep less sweet
For music in some neighboring street;
Nor rustling hear in every breeze
The laurels of Miltiades."

We have seen his tact in the choice and use of things pertaining to his work, his carefully restrained decoration, his knowledge of limitations, which prevented him, except in

the dramatic experiments, from groping for impracticable means and results. The forms which he introduced or revived were as successful as Tennyson's; in fact, his product represents the full advance of American taste and feeling, during the period covered by it, though not our most significant thought. He was a lyrical artist, whose taste outranked his inspiration; and assuredly, if he had been a Minister of the Fine Arts, he never would have abolished an *École* at the dictation of the "impressionists," nor have adopted as a motto the phrase "Beware of the Beautiful." We have noted his industry and the self-control with which he devoted his life to poetry alone. Yet the report of his library talk shows that his brain was alert upon many topics; that in private, at least, he did not reserve his talents for his publisher,—an economy which a French critic declares to be "a bad sign, and the proof that one makes a trade of literature, and that one does not

really have the impressions he assumes to have in his books." His verse is peculiarly open to the test of Milton's requirement, that poetry should be simple, sensuous, passionate. Simple, even elementary, it manifestly is, despite the learning which he put to use. It is sensuous in much that charms the ear and eye, and in little else; for the extreme of sensuousness is deeply felt, and feeling results in passion, and passionate the verse of Longfellow was not, nor ever could be. His song was a household service, the ritual of our feastings and mournings; and often it rehearsed for us the tales of many lands, or, best of all, the legends of our own. I see him, a silver-haired minstrel, touching melodious keys, playing and singing in the twilight, within sound of the rotes of the sea. There he lingers late; the curfew bell has tolled and the darkness closes round, till at last that tender voice is silent, and he softly moves unto his rest.

Edmund C. Stedman.

THROUGH WATERSPOUT AND TYPHOON.

WE had just left the Philippine Islands,—the clipper *Wasatch*, bound for New York, with some fifteen hundred tons of sugar,—and were then bowling easily across the Celebes Sea toward the Straits of Macassar, with the last of the south-west monsoon. Very little wind seemed left in the bag, for as the ship lifted on the remnants of the long Pacific rollers, the sails lost their snowy fullness, and slapped shudderingly against the spars and rigging; the reef-points rattled like hail, the masts creaked in their fidings, and the yards jerked uneasily at the braces. The whole ship had a rattling, unsteady, loose-jointed motion, until she rolled ponderously to windward again and tautened everything with a quick jerk that seemed powerful enough to carry away the lighter spars. We had a long voyage before us with much of this rattle-and-bang sort of sailing, until we reached the steady trade winds of the Indian Ocean; so all hands were busy making and putting on chafing-mats to protect those parts of the rigging most exposed to wear in this continual shaking. As we were only a few degrees north of the Line, the weather was decidedly warm. The hot sun overhead and not a cloud in the sky, the light reflected from the myriad ripples in the water as though from mirrors, the planks hot enough to blister our feet, with the pitch starting from the seams

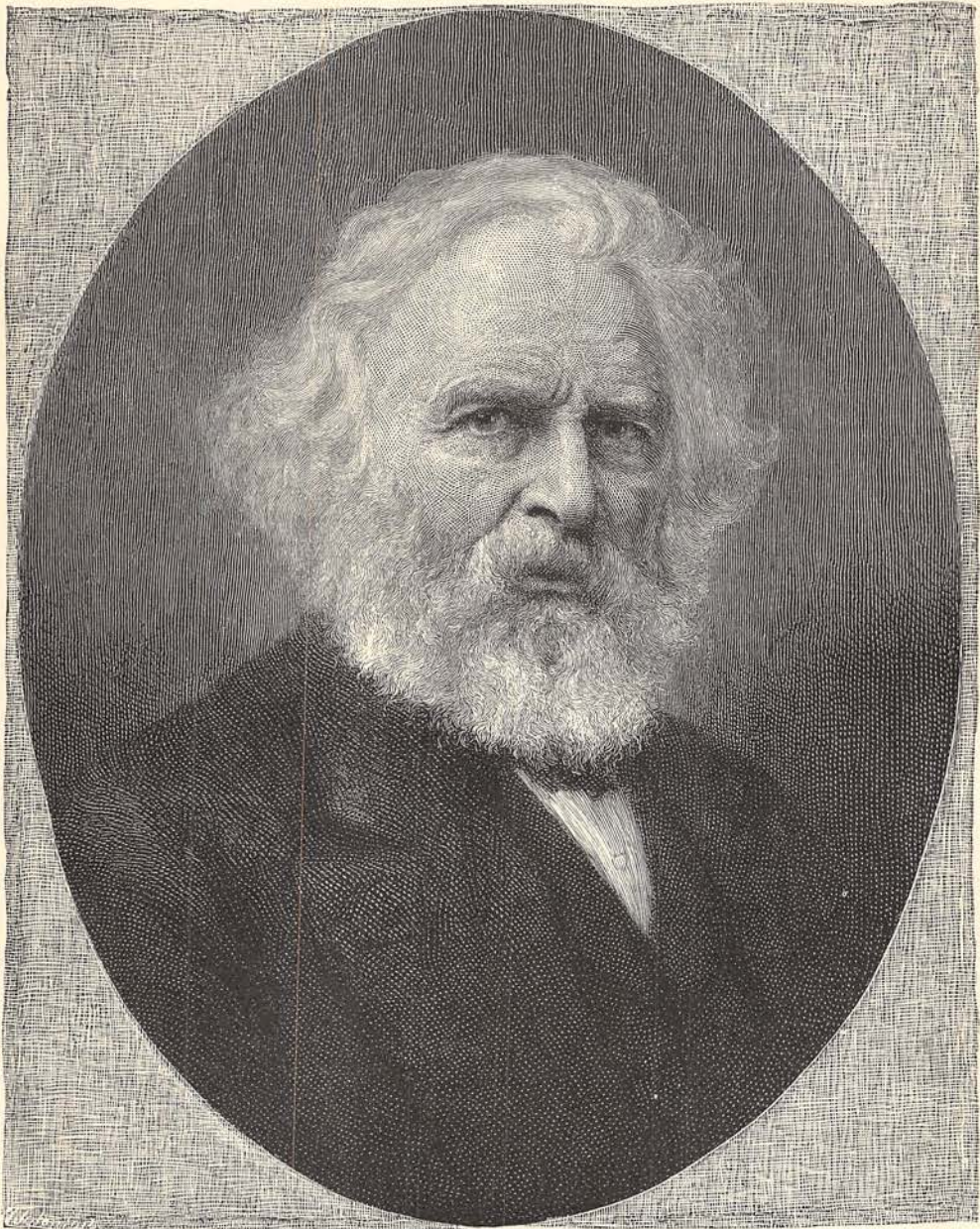
and knots, all combined to make the intermittent fanning of the shaking sails very acceptable.

The monsoon was about breaking up; and although the sky was now as serene as possible, unsettled weather, with violent squalls, was to be expected.

It was with such surroundings that I left the ship when I went below at eight bells, turned into my bunk, and soon fell asleep.

I was roused by the boatswain thrusting his head hurriedly in at the door and saying, "All hands shorten sail, Mr. Ratline. A water-spout to windward, sir!" Bounding up, I soon jumped into the few clothes necessary in that latitude, and ran on deck.

What a sight! To leeward the sky, air, and water were, as before, hot, breathless, and glittering; but to windward a vault of billowy black nimbus cloud, rent by incessant lightning and acting as an immense reverberator for the thunder which rolled along over the water, crash after crash, shaking the ship like a leaf, until it was almost deafening. The lower surfaces of the clouds were torn into white and ragged fragments, and these were spun and blown about by the resistless currents of the whirlwind, while in the center of the mass, like a sturdy Jewish column supporting the vast dome, writhed an enormous water-spout. Within a radius of many



Sammy M. Longfellow