

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

THE SPIRIT OF POETRY

THERE is a quiet spirit in these woods,
That dwells where'er the gentle south-wind
blows;
Where, underneath the white-thorn in the
glade,
The wild flowers bloom, or, kissing the soft
air,
The leaves above their sunny palms out-
spread.
With what a tender and impassioned voice
It fills the nice and delicate ear of thought,
When the fast ushering star of morning
comes
O'er-riding the gray hills with golden
scarf;
Or when the cowled and dusky-sandalled
Eve,
In mourning weeds, from out the western
gate,
Departs with silent pace! That spirit
moves
In the green valley, where the silver brook,
From its full laver, pours the white cas-
cade;
And, babbling low amid the tangled woods,
Slips down through moss-grown stones with
endless laughter.
And frequent, on the everlasting hills,
Its feet go forth, when it doth wrap itself
In all the dark embroidery of the storm,
And shouts the stern, strong wind. And
here, amid
The silent majesty of these deep woods,
Its presence shall uplift thy thoughts from
earth,
As to the sunshine and the pure, bright
air
Their tops the green trees lift. Hence
gifted bards
Have ever loved the calm and quiet shades.
For them there was an eloquent voice in
all
The sylvan pomp of woods, the golden
sun,
The flowers, the leaves, the river on its
way,

Blue skies, and silver clouds, and gentle
winds,
The swelling upland, where the sidelong
sun
Aslant the wooded slope, at evening, goes,
Groves, through whose broken roof the sky
looks in,
Mountain, and shattered cliff, and sunny
vale,
The distant lake, fountains, and mighty
trees,
In many a lazy syllable, repeating
Their old poetic legends to the wind.
And this is the sweet spirit, that doth fill
The world; and, in these wayward days of
youth,
My busy fancy oft embodies it,
As a bright image of the light and beauty
That dwell in nature; of the heavenly
forms
We worship in our dreams, and the soft
hues
That stain the wild bird's wing, and flush
the clouds
When the sun sets. Within her tender
eye
The heaven of April, with its changing
light,
And when it wears the blue of May, is
hung,
And on her lip the rich, red rose. Her
hair
Is like the summer tresses of the trees,
When twilight makes them brown, and on
her cheek
Blushes the richness of an autumn sky,
With ever-shifting beauty. Then her
breath,
It is so like the gentle air of Spring,
As, from the morning's dewy flowers, it
comes
Full of their fragrance, that it is a joy
To have it round us, and her silver voice
Is the rich music of a summer bird,
Heard in the still night, with its passionate
cadence.

1825.

1827.

BURIAL OF THE MINNISINK¹

ON sunny slope and beechen swell,
The shadowed light of evening fell;
And, where the maple's leaf was brown,
With soft and silent lapse came down
The glory that the wood receives,
At sunset, in its golden leaves.

Far upward in the mellow light
Rose the blue hills. One cloud of white,
Around a far uplifted cone,
In the warm blush of evening shone;
An image of the silver lakes,
By which the Indian's soul awakes.

But soon a funeral hymn was heard
Where the soft breath of evening stirred
The tall, gray forest; and a band
Of stern in heart, and strong in hand,
Came winding down beside the wave,
To lay the red chief in his grave.

They sang, that by his native bowers
He stood, in the last moon of flowers,
And thirty snows had not yet shed
Their glory on the warrior's head;
But, as the summer fruit decays,
So died he in those naked days.

A dark cloak of the roebuck's skin
Covered the warrior, and within
Its heavy folds the weapons, made
For the hard toils of war, were laid;
The cuirass, woven of plaited reeds,
And the broad belt of shells and beads.

Before, a dark-haired virgin train
Chanted the death dirge of the slain;
Behind, the long procession came
Of hoary men and chiefs of fame,
With heavy hearts, and eyes of grief,
Leading the war-horse of their chief.

Stripped of his proud and martial dress,
Unurbid, unreined, and riderless,

¹ This poem, written when Longfellow was eighteen years old, is interesting as an early example of that love for Indian subjects which later produced 'Hiawatha.' It should be compared with Whittier's early poems on Indian subjects, 'Pentucket,' 'The Funeral Tree of the Sokokis,' 'Mary Garvin,' 'Mogg Megone,' etc.; with Lowell's 'Chippewa Legend,' and with Bryant's 'The Indian Girl's Lament,' 'Monument Mountain,' etc.

With darting eye, and nostril spread,
And heavy and impatient tread,
He came; and oft that eye so proud
Asked for his rider in the crowd.

They buried the dark chief; they freed
Beside the grave his battle steed;
And swift an arrow cleaved its way
To his stern heart! One piercing neigh
Arose, and, on the dead man's plain,
The rider grasps his steed again.

1825.

1826.

THE RETURN OF SPRING

FROM CHARLES D'ORLÉANS²

Now Time throws off his cloak again
Of ermined frost, and wind, and rain,
And clothes him in the embroidery
Of glittering sun and clear blue sky.
With beast and bird the forest rings,
Each in his jargon cries or sings;
And Time throws off his cloak again
Of ermined frost, and wind, and rain.

River, and fount, and tinkling brook
Wear in their dainty livery
Drops of silver jewelry;
In new-made suit they merry look;
And Time throws off his cloak again
Of ermined frost, and wind, and rain.

1830.

1831.

² Longfellow's work as a translator extended from almost the beginning to the end of his poetical career, included versions from the French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Latin, German, Danish, and Anglo-Saxon, and culminated in his rendering of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. This work unquestionably played an important part in his development, increasing the range and suppleness of his powers, and keeping the poet alive in him during the long period when he was completely absorbed by teaching, lecturing, prose writing, the composition and editing of text-books, and foreign travel. For twelve or thirteen years, between his early poems and the new beginning of his poetical work in the 'Psalm of Life,' he wrote practically nothing in verse except translations.

Toward the end of his life (in a letter of March 7, 1879) he said of translation: 'And what a difficult work! There is evidently a great and strange fascination in translating. It seizes people with irresistible power, and whirls them away till they are beside themselves. It is like a ghost beckoning one to follow.' (*Life*, vol. iii, p. 298.) (In all notes on Longfellow's poems, the 'Life' referred to is Samuel Longfellow's *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 3 volumes, 1887.)

ART AND NATURE

FROM FRANCISCO DE MEDRANO

THE works of human artifice soon tire
The curious eye; the fountain's sparkling
rill,
And gardens, when adorned by human
skill,
Reproach the feeble hand, the vain desire.
But oh! the free and wild magnificence
Of Nature, in her lavish hours, doth steal,
In admiration silent and intense,
The soul of him who hath a soul to feel.
The river moving on its ceaseless way,
The verdant reach of meadows fair and
green,
And the blue hills, that bound the sylvan
scene,
These speak of grandeur, that defies
decay,—
Proclaim the Eternal Architect on high,
Who stamps on all his works his own
eternity.

1832.

1832.

A PSALM OF LIFE¹WHAT THE HEART OF THE YOUNG MAN
SAID TO THE PSALMIST

TELL me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!—
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

¹ This poem has been called 'the very heart-beat of the American conscience.' When it was first published, anonymously, in the *Knickerbocker* magazine for October, 1838, it at once attracted attention. Whittier wrote of it in the *Freeman*: 'We know not who the author may be, but he or she is no common man or woman. These nine simple verses are worth more than all the dreams of Shelley, and Keats, and Wordsworth. They are alive and vigorous with the spirit of the day in which we live,—the moral steam engine of an age of action.' (Quoted by Professor Carpenter in his *Life of Whittier*.)

The writing of the 'Psalm' is recorded in Longfellow's *Journal* under the date of July 26, 1838. He afterwards said of it, 'I kept it some time in manuscript, unwilling to show it to any one, it being a voice from my inmost heart at a time when I was rallying from depression.' (*Life of Longfellow*, vol. i, p. 301.) In other passages of his *Journal* he speaks of writing 'another psalm,' 'a psalm of death,' etc. The 'psalmist' to whom the young man speaks, is therefore the poet himself. 'It was the young man's better heart answering and refuting his own mood of despondency.' (*Life*, vol. i, pp. 283-284.) See further the *Life of Longfellow*, vol. i, pp. 281-284; and vol. ii, pp. 186, 283. The poem has been translated into many languages, including Chinese and Sanscrit. (*Life*, vol. i, p. 376; vol. iii, pp. 43, 64.)

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

10

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

20

Trust no Future, how'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,—act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

30

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

1838.

1838.

THE LIGHT OF STARS²

THE night is come, but not too soon;
And sinking silently,
All silently, the little moon
Drops down behind the sky.

² 'This poem was written on a beautiful summer night. The moon, a little strip of silver, was just setting behind the grove at Mount Auburn, and the planet Mars blazing in the southeast. There was a singular light in the sky.' (H. W. L.) It was published in the same number of the *Knickerbocker* as the last, where it was headed *A Second Psalm of Life*. (*Cambridge Edition of Longfellow's Poetical Works*.)

There is no light in earth or heaven
But the cold light of stars;
And the first watch of night is given
To the red planet Mars.

Is it the tender star of love?
The star of love and dreams?
Oh no! from that blue tent above
A hero's armor gleams.

10

And earnest thoughts within me rise,
When I behold afar,
Suspended in the evening skies,
The shield of that red star.

O star of strength! I see thee stand
And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand,
And I am strong again.

20

Within my breast there is no light
But the cold light of stars;
I give the first watch of the night
To the red planet Mars.

The star of the unconquered will,
He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute, and still,
And calm, and self-possessed.

And thou, too, whosoe'er thou art,
That redest this brief psalm,
As one by one thy hopes depart,
Be resolute and calm.

30

Oh, fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long,
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong.

1838.

1838.

HYMN TO THE NIGHT¹

'Ασπασία, τριλλιστος

I HEARD the trailing garments of the Night
Sweep through her marble halls!
I saw her sable skirts all fringed with
light
From the celestial walls!

¹ No poem ever opened with a beauty more august, says Poe in his early review of the *Voices of the Night* (February, 1840). See his further criticism of the poem, line by line, in the *Virginia Edition* of his *Works*, vol. x, pp. 72-76.

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,
Stoop o'er me from above;
The calm, majestic presence of the Night,
As of the one I love.

I heard the sounds of sorrow and delight,
The manifold, soft chimes,
That fill the haunted chambers of the
Night,
Like some old poet's rhymes.

From the cool cisterns of the midnight
air
My spirit drank repose;
The fountain of perpetual peace flows
there,—
From those deep cisterns flows.

O holy Night! from thee I learn to bear
What man has borne before!
Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,
And they complain no more.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this
prayer!
Descend with broad-winged flight,
The welcome, the thrice-prayed for, the
most fair,
The best-beloved Night!

1839.

1839.

FOOTSTEPS OF ANGELS²

WHEN the hours of Day are numbered,
And the voices of the Night
Wake the better soul, that slumbered,
To a holy, calm delight;

Ere the evening lamps are lighted,
And, like phantoms grim and tall,
Shadows from the fitful firelight
Dance upon the parlor wall;

² A slightly different version of the first, second, third, sixth, seventh and eighth stanzas, with the title 'Evening Shadows,' is to be found in Longfellow's *Journal* under the date of February 27, 1838. (*Life*, vol. i, pp. 287-288.) The poem was finished March 26, 1839 (*Life*, vol. i, pp. 327-328). The fourth stanza alludes to his brother-in-law and closest friend, George W. Pierce, of whose death he had heard in Germany on Christmas Eve of 1835, and of whom he wrote nearly twenty years later: 'I have never ceased to feel that in his death something was taken from my own life which could never be restored. I have constantly in my memory his beautiful and manly character, frank, generous, impetuous, gentle.' The sixth and following stanzas allude to Mrs. Longfellow, who died at Rotterdam, November 29, 1835.

Then the forms of the departed
Enter at the open door; 10
The beloved, the true-hearted,
Come to visit me once more;

He, the young and strong, who cherished
Noble longings for the strife,
By the roadside fell and perished,
Wearied with the march of life!

They, the holy ones and weakly,
Who the cross of suffering bore,
Folded their pale hands so meekly,
Spake with us on earth no more! 20

And with them the Being Beauteous,
Who unto my youth was given,
More than all things else to love me,
And is now a saint in heaven.

With a slow and noiseless footstep
Comes that messenger divine,
Takes the vacant chair beside me,
Lays her gentle hand in mine.

And she sits and gazes at me
With those deep and tender eyes, 30
Like the stars, so still and saint-like,
Looking downward from the skies.

Uttered not, yet comprehended,
Is the spirit's voiceless prayer,
Soft rebukes, in blessings ended,
Breathing from her lips of air.

Oh, though oft depressed and lonely,
All my fears are laid aside,
If I but remember only

Such as these have lived and died! 40
1838, 1839. 1839.

THE BELEAGUERED CITY

I HAVE read, in some old, marvellous
tale,¹
Some legend strange and vague,

¹ During his visit to his friend Ward, in New York, in August, strolling into the library one day after breakfast, he took carelessly from the shelf a volume of Scott's *Border Minstrelsy*, and opened at one of the notes, containing the tradition about the city of Prague upon which this poem is founded: 'Similar to this was the *Nacht Lager*, or midnight camp, which seemed nightly to beleaguer the walls of Prague, but which disappeared upon the recitation of certain magical words.' (*Life*, vol. i, p. 344, note.)

That a midnight host of spectres pale
Beleaguered the walls of Prague.

Beside the Moldau's rushing stream,
With the wan moon overhead,
There stood, as in an awful dream,
The army of the dead.

White as a sea-fog, landward bound,
The spectral camp was seen, 10
And, with a sorrowful, deep sound,
The river flowed between.

No other voice nor sound was there,
No drum, nor sentry's pace;
The mist-like banners clasped the air
As clouds with clouds embrace.

But when the old cathedral bell
Proclaimed the morning prayer,
The white pavilions rose and fell
On the alarmèd air. 20

Down the broad valley fast and far
The troubled army fled;
Up rose the glorious morning star,
The ghastly host was dead.

I have read, in the marvellous heart of man,
That strange and mystic scroll,
That an army of phantoms vast and wan
Beleaguer the human soul.

Encamped beside Life's rushing stream,
In Fancy's misty light, 30
Gigantic shapes and shadows gleam
Portentous through the night.

Upon its midnight battle-ground
The spectral camp is seen,
And, with a sorrowful, deep sound,
Flows the River of Life between.

No other voice nor sound is there,
In the army of the grave;
No other challenge breaks the air,
But the rushing of Life's wave. 40

And when the solemn and deep church-bell
Entreats the soul to pray,
The midnight phantoms feel the spell,
The shadows sweep away.

Down the broad Vale of Tears afar
The spectral camp is fled;

Faith shineth as a morning star,
Our ghastly fears are dead. 1839.

THE WRECK OF THE HESPERUS¹

It was the schooner Hesperus,
That sailed the wintry sea;
And the skipper had taken his little daugh-
ter, 10
To bear him company.

Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax,
Her cheeks like the dawn of day,
And her bosom white as the hawthorn
buds,
That ope in the month of May.

The skipper he stood beside the helm,
His pipe was in his mouth, 10
And he watched how the veering flaw did
blow
The smoke now West, now South.

Then up and spake an old Sailôr,
Had sailed to the Spanish Main,
'I pray thee, put into yonder port,
For I fear a hurricane.

'Last night, the moon had a golden ring,
And to-night no moon we see!'
The skipper, he blew a whiff from his
pipe,
And a scornful laugh laughed he. 20

Colder and louder blew the wind,
A gale from the Northeast,
The snow fell hissing in the brine,
And the billows frothed like yeast.

¹ Longfellow wrote in his *Journal* on December 17, 1839: 'News of shipwrecks horrible on the coast. Twenty bodies washed ashore near Gloucester, one lashed to a piece of the wreck. There is a reef called Norman's Woe where many of these took place; among others the schooner Hesperus. Also the Sea-flower on Black Rock. I must write a ballad upon this.'

The ballad was actually written twelve days later, on the night of December 29: 'I wrote last evening a notice of Allston's poems. After which I sat till twelve o'clock by my fire, smoking, when suddenly it came into my mind to write the "Ballad of the Schooner Hesperus;" which I accordingly did. Then I went to bed, but could not sleep. New thoughts were running in my mind, and I got up to add them to the ballad. It was three by the clock. I then went to bed and fell asleep. I feel pleased with the ballad. It hardly cost me an effort. It did not come into my mind by lines but by stanzas.' (*Journal*, December 30.)

Down came the storm, and smote amain
The vessel in its strength;
She shuddered and paused, like a frightened
steed,
Then leaped her cable's length.

'Come hither! come hither! my little
daughter,
And do not tremble so; 30
For I can weather the roughest gale
That ever wind did blow.'

He wrapped her warm in his seaman's coat
Against the stinging blast;
He cut a rope from a broken spar,
And bound her to the mast.

'O father! I hear the church-bells ring,
Oh say, what may it be?'
'T is a fog-bell on a rock-bound coast!' —
And he steered for the open sea. 40

'O father! I hear the sound of guns,
Oh say, what may it be?'
'Some ship in distress, that cannot live
In such an angry sea!'

'O father! I see a gleaming light,
Oh say, what may it be?'
But the father answered never a word,
A frozen corpse was he.

Lashed to the helm, all stiff and stark,
With his face turned to the skies, 50
The lantern gleamed through the gleaming
snow
On his fixed and glassy eyes.

Then the maiden clasped her hands and
prayed
That saved she might be;
And she thought of Christ, who stilled the
wave,
On the Lake of Galilee.

And fast through the midnight dark and
drear,
Through the whistling sleet and snow,
Like a sheeted ghost, the vessel swept
Tow'rd's the reef of Norman's Woe. 60

And ever the fitful gusts between
A sound came from the land;
It was the sound of the trampling surf
On the rocks and the hard sea-sand.

The breakers were right beneath her bows,
She drifted a dreary wreck,
And a whooping billow swept the crew
Like icicles from her deck.

She struck where the white and fleecy waves
Looked soft as carded wool, 70
But the cruel rocks, they gored her side
Like the horns of an angry bull.

Her rattling shrouds, all sheathed in ice,
With the masts went by the board;
Like a vessel of glass, she stove and sank,
Ho! ho! the breakers roared!

At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach,
A fisherman stood aghast,
To see the form of a maiden fair,
Lashed close to a drifting mast. 80

The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
The salt tears in her eyes;
And he saw her hair, like the brown sea-
weed,
On the billows fall and rise.

Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,
In the midnight and the snow!
Christ save us all from a death like this,
On the reef of Norman's Woe!
1839. 1840.

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH¹

UNDER a spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man. 10

¹ Longfellow at first called 'The Village Blacksmith' a 'new Psalm of Life,' but later it was included among the *Ballads*. See the *Life*, vol. i, pp. 345, 374 and note.

In 1876 the 'spreading chestnut-tree' was cut down to give room for the widening of Brattle Street, and from its wood was made the armchair presented to Longfellow by the schoolchildren of Cambridge. See p. 255.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door; 20
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice. 30

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more
How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling, — rejoicing, — sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close; 40
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy
friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught!
Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought.
1839. 1840.

THE SKELETON IN ARMOR²

Speak! speak! thou fearful guest!
Who, with thy hollow drest,
Still in rude armor drest,
Comest to daunt me!

² Longfellow wrote in his *Journal* on May 3, 1838: 'I have been looking at the old Northern Sagas, and

Wrapt not in Eastern balms,
But with thy fleshless palms
Stretched, as if asking alms,
Why dost thou haunt me?

Then, from those cavernous eyes
Pale flashes seemed to rise, 10
As when the Northern skies
Gleam in December;

thinking of a series of ballads or a romantic poem on the deeds of the first bold viking who crossed to this western world, with storm-spirits and devil-machinery under water. New England ballads I have long thought of. This seems to be an introduction. I will dream more of this.'

A few months later, returning to Cambridge from Newport, where he had doubtless seen the 'Round Tower,' he passed through Fall River just after the skeleton in armor had been unearthed. These two things fitted in with his previous conception, and on May 24, 1839, he speaks of his 'plan for a heroic poem on the Discovery of America by the Northmen, in which the Round Tower at Newport and the Skeleton in Armor have a part to play.' In a letter to his father, of December 13, 1840, after the ballad was written, he speaks of having himself seen the skeleton: 'I suppose it to be the remains of one of the old Northern sea rovers who came to this country in the tenth century. Of course I make the tradition myself.'

For a full account of the finding of the skeleton, see the *American Monthly Magazine* of January, 1836, from which the following description is taken: —

'In digging down a hill near the village, a large mass of earth slid off, leaving in the bank and partially uncovered a human skull, which on examination was found to belong to a body buried in a sitting posture; the head being about one foot below what had been for many years the surface of the ground. The surrounding earth was carefully removed, and the body found to be enveloped in a covering of coarse bark of a dark color. Within this envelope were found the remains of another of coarse cloth, made of fine bark, and about the texture of a Manila coffee bag. On the breast was a plate of brass, thirteen inches long, six broad at the upper end, and five in the lower. This plate appears to have been cast, and is from one eighth to three thirty-seconds of an inch in thickness. It is so much corroded that whether or not anything was engraved upon it has not yet been ascertained. It is oval in form, the edges being irregular, apparently made so by corrosion. Below the breastplate, and entirely encircling the body, was a belt composed of brass tubes, each four and a half inches in length, and three sixteenths of an inch in diameter, arranged longitudinally and close together, the length of the tube being the width of the belt. The tubes are of thin brass, cast upon hollow reeds, and were fastened together by pieces of sinew. Near the right knee was a quiver of arrows. The arrows are of brass, thin, flat, and triangular in shape, with a round hole cut through near the base. The shaft was fastened to the head by inserting the latter in an opening at the end of the wood and then tying with a sinew through the round hole, a mode of constructing the weapon never practised by the Indians, not even with their arrows of thin shell. Parts of the shaft still remain on some of them. When first discovered, the arrows were in a sort of quiver of bark, which fell to pieces when exposed to the air.'

Poe calls 'The Skeleton in Armor' 'a pure and perfect thesis artistically treated.' See his review of Longfellow's *Ballads and Other Poems*, April, 1842, in the *Virginia Edition* of his *Works*, vol. xi.

And, like the water's flow
Under December's snow,
Came a dull voice of woe
From the heart's chamber.

'I was a Viking old!
My deeds, though manifold,
No Skald in song has told,
No Saga taught thee! 20
Take heed, that in thy verse
Thou dost the tale rehearse,
Else dread a dead man's curse;
For this I sought thee.

'Far in the Northern Land,
By the wild Baltic's strand,
I, with my childish hand,
Tamed the gersfalcon;
And, with my skates fast-bound,
Skimmed the half-frozen Sound, 30
That the poor whimpering hound
Trembled to walk on.

'Oft to his frozen lair
Tracked I the grisly bear,
While from my path the hare
Fled like a shadow;
Oft through the forest dark
Followed the were-wolf's bark,
Until the soaring lark
Sang from the meadow. 40

'But when I older grew,
Joining a corsair's crew,
O'er the dark sea I flew
With the marauders.
Wild was the life we led;
Many the souls that sped,
Many the hearts that bled,
By our stern orders.

'Many a wassail-bout
Wore the long Winter out; 50
Often our midnight shout
Set the cocks crowing,
As we the Berserk's tale
Measured in cups of ale,
Draining the oaken pail,
Filled to o'erflowing.

'Once as I told in glee
Tales of the stormy sea,
Soft eyes did gaze on me,
Burning yet tender; 60

And as the white stars shine
On the dark Norway pine,
On that dark heart of mine
Fell their soft splendor.

'I wooed the blue-eyed maid,
Yielding, yet half afraid,
And in the forest's shade
Our vows were plighted.
Under its loosened vest
Fluttered her little breast, 70
Like birds within their nest
By the hawk frightened.

'Bright in her father's hall
Shields gleamed upon the wall,
Loud sang the minstrels all,
Chanting his glory;
When of old Hildebrand
I asked his daughter's hand,
Mute did the minstrels stand
To hear my story. 80

'While the brown ale he quaffed,
Loud then the champion laughed,
And as the wind-gusts waft
The sea-foam brightly,
So the loud laugh of scorn,
Out of those lips unshorn,
From the deep drinking-horn
Blew the foam lightly.

'She was a Prince's child,
I but a Viking wild,
And though she blushed and smiled, 90
I was discarded!
Should not the dove so white
Follow the sea-mew's flight,
Why did they leave that night
Her nest unguarded?

'Scarce had I put to sea,
Bearing the maid with me,
Fairest of all was she 100
Among the Norsemen!
When on the white sea-strand,
Waving his armed hand,
Saw we old Hildebrand,
With twenty horsemen.

'Then launched they to the blast,
Bent like a reed each mast,
Yet we were gaining fast,
When the wind failed us;

And with a sudden flaw
Came round the gusty Skaw, 110
So that our foe we saw
Laugh as he hailed us.

'And as to catch the gale
Round veered the flapping sail,
"Death!" was the helmsman's hail,
"Death without quarter!"
Mid-ships with iron keel
Struck we her ribs of steel;
Down her black hulk did reel 120
Through the black water!

'As with his wings aslant,
Sails the fierce cormorant,
Seeking some rocky haunt,
With his prey laden,—
So toward the open main,
Beating to sea again,
Through the wild hurricane,
Bore I the maiden.

'Three weeks we westward bore,
And when the storm was o'er, 130
Cloud-like we saw the shore
Stretching to leeward;
There for my lady's bower
Built I the lofty tower,
Which, to this very hour,
Stands looking seaward.

'There lived we many years;
Time dried the maiden's tears;
She had forgot her fears, 140
She was a mother;
Death closed her mild blue eyes,
Under that tower she lies;¹
Ne'er shall the sun arise
On such another!

'Still grew my bosom then,
Still as a stagnant fen!
Hateful to me were men, 150
The sunlight hateful!
In the vast forest here,
Clad in my warlike gear,
Fell I upon my spear,
Oh, death was grateful!

¹ The 'Round Tower' at Newport, sometimes called the Old Mill, is of a style of architecture belonging to the eleventh century, and is thought by some to have been built by the Northmen. This is exceedingly doubtful, however.

'Thus, seamed with many scars,
Bursting these prison bars,
Up to its native stars
My soul ascended!
There from the flowing bowl
Deep drinks the warrior's soul,
Skool! to the Northland! skool!'¹
Thus the tale ended. 160

1840. 1841.

SERENADE

FROM 'THE SPANISH STUDENT'

STARS of the summer night!
Far in yon azure deeps,
Hide, hide your golden light!
She sleeps!
My lady sleeps!
Sleeps!

Moon of the summer night!
Far down yon western steeps,
Sink, sink in silver light!
She sleeps!
My lady sleeps!
Sleeps!

Wind of the summer night!
Where yonder woodbine creeps,
Fold, fold thy pinions light!
She sleeps!
My lady sleeps!
Sleeps!

Dreams of the summer night!
Tell her, her lover keeps
Watch! while in slumbers light
She sleeps!
My lady sleeps!
Sleeps!

1840. 1842.

ENDYMION

THE rising moon has hid the stars;
Her level rays, like golden bars,
Lie on the landscape green,
With shadows brown between.

¹ In Scandinavia, this is the customary salutation when drinking a health. I have slightly changed the orthography of the word [skool] in order to preserve the correct pronunciation. (LONGFELLOW.)

And silver white the river gleams,
As if Diana, in her dreams
Had dropt her silver bow
Upon the meadows low.

On such a tranquil night as this,
She woke Endymion with a kiss, 10
When, sleeping in the grove,
He dreamed not of her love.

Like Dian's kiss, unmasked, unsought,
Love gives itself, but is not bought;
Nor voice, nor sound betrays
Its deep, impassioned gaze.

It comes,—the beautiful, the free,
The crown of all humanity,—
In silence and alone 20
To seek the elected one.

It lifts the boughs, whose shadows deep
Are Life's oblivion, the soul's sleep,
And kisses the closed eyes
Of him who slumbering lies.

O weary hearts! O slumbering eyes!
O drooping souls, whose destinies
Are fraught with fear and pain,
Ye shall be loved again!

No one is so accursed by fate,
No one so utterly desolate, 30
But some heart, though unknown,
Responds unto his own.

Responds,—as if with unseen wings,
An angel touched its quivering strings;
And whispers, in its song,
'Where hast thou stayed so long?'
1841. 1841.

THE RAINY DAY

THE day is cold, and dark, and dreary:
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
The vine still clings to the mouldering
wall,
But at every gust the dead leaves fall,
And the day is dark and dreary.

My life is cold, and dark, and dreary;
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
My thoughts still cling to the mouldering
Past,

But the hopes of youth fall thick in the
blast,
And the days are dark and dreary.

Be still, sad heart! and cease repining;
Behind the clouds is the sun still shin-
ing;

Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.

1841. 1841.

MAIDENHOOD¹

MAIDEN! with the meek, brown eyes,
In whose orbs a shadow lies
Like the dusk in evening skies!

Thou whose locks outshine the sun,
Golden tresses, wreathed in one,
As the braided streamlets run!

Standing, with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet!

Gazing, with a timid glance, 10
On the brooklet's swift advance,
On the river's broad expanse!

Deep and still, that gliding stream
Beautiful to thee must seem,
As the river of a dream.

Then why pause with indecision,
When bright angels in thy vision
Beckon thee to fields Elysian?

Seest thou shadows sailing by,
As the dove, with startled eye, 20
Sees the falcon's shadow fly?

Hearst thou voices on the shore,
That our ears perceive no more,
Deafened by the cataract's roar?

Oh, thou child of many prayers!
Life hath quicksands, — Life hath snares!
Care and age come unawares!

¹ Longfellow wrote to his father on December 18, 1841: "The *Ballads and Other Poems* will be published to-morrow. . . . I think the last two pieces ["Maidenhood" and "Excelsior"] the best, — perhaps as good as anything I have written." (*Life*, vol. i, p. 109.)

Like the swell of some sweet tune,
Morning rises into noon,
May glides onward into June. 30

Childhood is the bough, where slumbered
Birds and blossoms many-numbered; —
Age, that bough with snows encumbered.

Gather, then, each flower that grows,
When the young heart overflows,
To embalm that tent of snows.

Bear a lily in thy hand;
Gates of brass cannot withstand
One touch of that magic wand.

Bear through sorrow, wrong, and ruth, 40
In thy heart the dew of youth,
On thy lips the smile of truth.

Oh, that dew, like balm, shall steal
Into wounds that cannot heal,
Even as sleep our eyes doth seal;

And that smile, like sunshine, dart
Into many a sunless heart,
For a smile of God thou art.

1841. 1841.

EXCELSIOR²

THE shades of night were falling fast,
As through an Alpine village passed

² "Excelsior" was inspired by the motto on the shield of New York State, which Longfellow happened to see copied as the heading of a newspaper. The significance of the poem is well expressed by Poe at the end of his review of Longfellow's *Ballads and Other Poems*, in a passage beginning, "It depicts the earnest upward impulse of the soul, — an impulse not to be subdued even in death." Longfellow himself has described his purpose fully in a letter to C. K. Tuckerman: —

"I have had the pleasure of receiving your note in regard to the poem 'Excelsior,' and very willingly give you my intention in writing it. This was no more than to display, in a series of pictures, the life of a man of genius, resisting all temptations, laying aside all fears, heedless of all warnings, and pressing right on to accomplish his purpose. His motto is *Excelsior*, 'higher.' He passes through the Alpine village — through the rough, cold paths of the world — where the peasants cannot understand him, and where the watchword is an 'unknown tongue.' He disregards the happiness of domestic peace and sees the glaciers — his fate — before him. He disregards the warning of the old man's wisdom and the fascinations of woman's love. He answers to all, 'Higher yet!' The monks of St. Bernard are the representatives of religious forms and ceremonies, and with their oft-repeated prayer mingles the sound of his voice, telling them there is something higher than forms and ceremonies. Filled with these aspirations, he perishes; without having reached the

A youth, who bore, 'mid snow and ice,
A banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

His brow was sad; his eye beneath,
Flashed like a falchion from its sheath,
And like a silver clarion rung
The accents of that unknown tongue,
Excelsior!

In happy homes he saw the light
Of household fires gleam warm and bright;
Above, the spectral glaciers shone,
And from his lips escaped a groan,
Excelsior!

'Try not the Pass!' the old man said;
'Dark lowers the tempest overhead,
The roaring torrent is deep and wide!'
And loud that clarion voice replied,
Excelsior!

'Oh stay,' the maiden said, 'and rest
Thy weary head upon this breast!'
A tear stood in his bright blue eye,
But still he answered, with a sigh,
Excelsior!

'Beware the pine-tree's withered branch!
Beware the awful avalanche!'
This was the peasant's last Good-night,
A voice replied, far up the height,
Excelsior!

At break of day, as heavenward
The pious monks of Saint Bernard
Uttered the oft-repeated prayer,
A voice cried through the startled air,
Excelsior!

A traveller, by the faithful hound,
Half-buried in the snow was found,
Still grasping in his hand of ice
That banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

There in the twilight cold and gray,
Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay,

perfection he longed for; and the voice heard in the air is the promise of immortality and progress ever upward.

The manuscript of the poem, containing many alterations, is kept on exhibition in the Art Room of the Harvard University Library. It is written on the back of a letter from Charles Sumner, and dated 'September 23, 1841. Half-past three o'clock, morning.' See H. E. Scudder's *Men and Letters*, pp. 137-146: 'The Shaping of Excelsior.'

And from the sky, serene and far,
A voice fell, like a falling star,
Excelsior!

1841. 1841.

MEZZO CAMMIN¹

HALF of my life is gone, and I have left
The years slip from me and have not fulfilled
The aspiration of my youth, to build
Some tower of song with lofty parapet.
Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret
Of restless passions that would not be
stilled,

But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,
Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past
Lying beneath me with its sounds and
sights, —

A city in the twilight dim and vast,
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleam-
ing lights, —
And hear above me on the autumnal blast
The cataract of Death far thundering from
the heights.

1842. 1886.

THE SLAVE'S DREAM²

BESIDE the ungathered rice he lay,
His sickle in his hand;
His breast was bare, his matted hair
Was buried in the sand.
Again, in the mist and shadow of sleep,
He saw his Native Land.

Wide through the landscape of his dreams
The lordly Niger flowed;

¹ Longfellow's health was so seriously impaired by his close work as teacher, lecturer, editor, and author, that in the spring of 1842 he took six months' leave of absence, and spent most of the time at the 'water-cure' of Marienberg. While there he wrote no verse except this sonnet, dated August 25, just before leaving for England on his way home. It was first published in the *Life*.

² Longfellow wrote all his *Poems on Slavery* during his voyage home in 1842, and they were published in a small volume of thirty-one pages in December of that year. The intense sincerity of Whittier's poems against slavery is lacking in Longfellow's sentimental and 'romantic' treatment of the subject; but it meant much for him to take the side which he did, so early as 1842. See the *Life*, vol. i, pp. 443-453, vol. ii, pp. 7-10, 20-21; and T. W. Higginson's *Life of Longfellow*, pp. 163-167. Compare the notes on Lowell's 'Stanzas on Freedom' and on Whittier's 'To William Lloyd Garrison.'

Beneath the palm-trees on the plain
Once more a king he strode; 10
And heard the tinkling caravans
Descend the mountain road.

He saw once more his dark-eyed queen
Among her children stand;
They clasped his neck, they kissed his
cheeks,
They held him by the hand! —
A tear burst from the sleeper's lids
And fell into the sand.

And then at furious speed he rode
Along the Niger's bank; 20
His bridle-reins were golden chains,
And, with a martial clank,
At each leap he could feel his scabbard of
steel
Smiting his stallion's flank.

Before him, like a blood-red flag,
The bright flamingoes flew;
From morn till night he followed their
flight,
O'er plains where the tamarind grew,
Till he saw the roofs of Caffre huts,
And the ocean rose to view. 30

At night he heard the lion roar,
And the hyena scream,
And the river-horse, as he crushed the
reeds
Beside some hidden stream;
And it passed, like a glorious roll of
drums,
Through the triumph of his dream.

The forests, with their myriad tongues,
Shouted of liberty;
And the Blast of the Desert cried aloud,
With a voice so wild and free, 40
That he started in his sleep and smiled
At their tempestuous glee.

He did not feel the driver's whip,
Nor the burning heat of day;
For Death had illumined the Land of
Sleep,
And his lifeless body lay
A worn-out fetter, that the soul
Had broken and thrown away!
1842- 1842.

THE ARSENAL AT SPRING- FIELD¹

THIS is the Arsenal. From floor to ceil-
ing,
Like a huge organ, rise the burnished
arms;
But from their silent pipes no anthem peal-
ing
Startles the villages with strange alarms.

Ah! what a sound will rise, how wild and
dreary,
When the death-angel touches those
swift keys!
What loud lament and dismal Miserere
Will mingle with their awful sympho-
nies!

I hear even now the infinite fierce cho-
rus,
The cries of agony, the endless groan, 10
Which, through the ages that have gone
before us,
In long reverberations reach our own.

On helm and harness rings the Saxon ham-
mer,
Through Cimbric forest roars the Norse-
man's song,
And loud, amid the universal clamor,
O'er distant deserts sounds the Tartar
gong.

I hear the Florentine, who from his pal-
ace
Wheels out his battle-bell with dreadful
din,
And Aztec priests upon their teocallis
Beat the wild war-drums made of ser-
pent's skin; 20

¹ Longfellow was married to Frances Appleton in 1843. On their wedding journey Mr. and Mrs. Longfellow visited the Arsenal at Springfield, in company with Charles Sumner. This visit, and the origin of the poem, are described in the *Life*: "While Mr. Sumner was endeavoring to impress upon the attendant that the money expended upon these weapons of war would have been much better spent upon a great library, Mrs. Longfellow pleased her husband by remarking how like an organ looked the ranged and shining gun-barrels which covered the walls from floor to ceiling, and suggesting what mournful music Death would bring from them. "We grew quite warlike against war," she wrote, "and I urged H. to write a peace poem." From this hint came "The Arsenal at Springfield," written some months later." (Vol. ii, pp. 2, 3.) See also Lowell's *Letters*, vol. i, p. 97, letter of Aug. 13, 1845.

THE DAY IS DONE¹

THE day is done, and the darkness
Falls from the wings of Night,
As a feather is wafted downward
From an eagle in his flight.

I see the lights of the village
Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me
That my soul cannot resist:

A feeling of sadness and longing,
That is not akin to pain, 10
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles the rain.

Come, read to me some poem,
Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
And banish the thoughts of day.

Not from the grand old masters,
Not from the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
Through the corridors of Time. 20

For, like strains of martial music,
Their mighty thoughts suggest
Life's endless toil and endeavor;
And to-night I long for rest.

Read from some humbler poet,
Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of summer,
Or tears from the eyelids start;

Who, through long days of labor,
And nights devoid of ease, 30
Still heard in his soul the music
Of wonderful melodies.

Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer.

Then read from the treasured volume
The poem of thy choice,
And lend to the rhyme of the poet
The beauty of thy voice. 40

¹ Originally written as the proem to a volume of selections from minor poets, called *The Wain*, and edited by Longfellow.

The tumult of each sacked and burning
village;
The shout that every prayer for mercy
drowns;
The soldiers' revels in the midst of pil-
lage;
The wail of famine in beleaguered
towns;

The bursting shell, the gateway wrenched
asunder,
The rattling musketry, the clashing
blade;
And ever and anon, in tones of thunder
The diapason of the cannonade.

Is it, O man, with such discordant noises,
With such accursed instruments as
these, 30
Thou drownest Nature's sweet and kindly
voices,
And jarrest the celestial harmonies?

Were half the power that fills the world
with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on
camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from
error,
There were no need of arsenals or forts:

The warrior's name would be a name ab-
horred!
And every nation, that should lift again
Its hand against a brother, on its fore-
head
Would wear forevermore the curse of
Cain! 40

Down the dark future, through long gener-
ations,
The echoing sounds grow fainter and
then cease;
And like a bell, with solemn, sweet vibra-
tions,
I hear once more the voice of Christ say,
'Peace!'

Peace! and no longer from its brazen por-
tals
The blast of War's great organ shakes
the skies!
But beautiful as songs of the immortals,
The holy melodies of love arise.