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EVANGELINE

BY

HENRY W. LONGFELLOW

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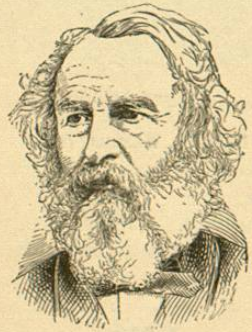

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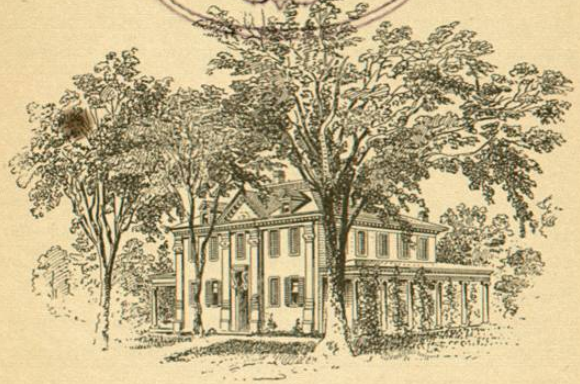

CRAIGIE HOUSE, LONGFELLOW'S HOME, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

LIFE OF LONGFELLOW.

THOSE scientists who hold that genius is a morbid distillation from a tainted ancestry would be puzzled to account for Longfellow's undeniable genius. He was descended from two Yorkshire families, whose natural healthiness of mind and body had been developing for several generations in the bracing air of New England. The Longfellows, his father's family, were a sturdy race, who had always done their duty without inquiring into their metaphysical motives for doing it; and his mother's family, the Wadsworths, traced their descent to John Alden,—as wholesome an old Puritan warrior as could well be found.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the poet, was born at Portland, Maine, February 27th, 1807. Like Emerson and Hawthorne, he was a quiet boy, fond of books, and averse to taking part in the sports of his schoolfellows. His

nerves shrank from all loud noises. There is a tradition of his having begged a servant on a glorious Fourth of July to put cotton in his ears to deaden the roar of the cannon, and in later life one of his book-plates bore the motto "Non Clamor, sed Amor."

At the age of fifteen this shy, studious lad was sent to Bowdoin College at Brunswick, Maine, after Portland Academy had taught him all it knew. He came prepared to make the most of his opportunities, and after four years of hard work graduated with distinction, and with the promise of a professorship after a year of travel had broadened his mental horizon.

The next summer found Longfellow at Paris with all Europe before him. He wandered through England, France, Germany, Italy, Holland, and Spain; everywhere studying the languages, and absorbing the rich associations of foreign places. His impressions of what he saw were in later years embodied in the prose works *Outre-Mer* and *Hyperion*. On his return he at once assumed the duties of his professorship, finding little time for literature. In 1831 he married an acquaintance of former years, Mary Storer Poller, with whom he lived most happily until her premature death in 1835. In 1834 a pleasant surprise came in the shape of an offer of the Chair of Modern Languages at Harvard, an offer which Longfellow was only too glad to accept. The new professor's official duties were light, and he had leisure for the literary pursuits which had ever been his delight. *Hyperion*, a romance in two volumes, and *The Voices of the Night*, a volume of poems containing "The Reaper and the Flowers," and "The Psalm of Life," were published in 1839. Two years later appeared *Ballads and other Poems*, containing the "Wreck of the Hesperus," "The Village Blacksmith," and "Excelsior"; and in the following year *Poems on Slavery*. This quiet life of work

was interrupted in 1842 by a visit to Dickens in London, but speedily resumed. In July, 1843, Longfellow married his second wife, a Miss Appleton, whose acquaintance he had made for the first time during his Swiss tour. Longfellow's ambition was to be the national poet of America,—an ambition to which he was spurred on by Margaret Fuller, probably the most intellectual woman of the time in America. She called his poems exotic flowers, with no smell of American soil about them. The outcome of this criticism was the writing of *Evangeline*, followed later by *Hiawatha* and *Miles Standish*, all refreshingly American in flavor. *Hiawatha*, a poem founded on Indian myths, is cast in the form of the Eddas, the ancient epics of Finland, a form with which Longfellow had become familiar in his studies of the Scandinavian languages. *The Courtship of Miles Standish* pictures the deeds and sufferings of the early Plymouth colony, a recital enlivened only by the description of the courting of Priscilla by proxy. It is not to be understood that Longfellow's fame rested on these American poems alone: he had already written a quantity of poetry which had established his reputation as a poet, but it was on these that he based his claim to be considered the national poet of America.

In 1854, after about eighteen years of academic work, Longfellow felt warranted in resigning his Harvard professorship, to be free for purely literary pursuits. His home at Cambridge was the large Craigie House, which could boast of having once been the headquarters of Washington. Here, surrounded by a brilliant circle of friends, he lived in all the flush of a happy, successful life until 1861,—that fatal year,—when his peace was invaded by a frightful calamity: Mrs. Longfellow, while playing with her children, set fire to her dress, and was mortally injured by the flames. The poet never recovered from the shock of this bereave-

ment, although he continued his work with unabated vigor until the time of his death in March 1882.

After Tennyson, Longfellow has been the most popular poet of his day. Some critics have said that had Tennyson never written the *Idylls*, or *In Memoriam*, his inferiority to Longfellow would have been manifest, but the power displayed in these high realms of poetry was quite beyond Longfellow's reach. His range is domestic. He lacks the power of depicting deep passion, or of robing purely imaginative subjects with ideal grace and color. The forces necessary to the execution of an heroic poem are not his, but on the other hand, in such a description of quiet love and devoted patience as he gives us in Evangeline, Longfellow may be ranked with the greatest of poets.

Chronological List of the Principal Works of Longfellow.

Coplas de Manrique	1833	Tales of a Wayside Inn	1863
Outre-Mer	1835	Flower-De-Luce	1867
Hyperion	1839	Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri	1867–70
Voices of the Night	1839	New England Tragedies	1868
Ballads and other Poems	1841	Divine Tragedy	1871
Poems on Slavery	1842	Three Books of Song	1872
Spanish Student	1843	Christus	1872
Poets and Poetry of Europe	1845	Aftermath	1873
Belfry of Bruges	1846	Hanging of the Crane	1874
Evangeline	1847	Masque of Pandora	1875
Kavanagh	1849	Kéramos	1878
Seaside and the Fireside	1850	Ultima Thule	1880
Golden Legend	1851	In the Harbor [Ultima Thule, Pt. ii.]	1882
Hiawatha	1855	Michael Angelo	1884
Miles Standish	1858		

Critical Opinions.

Child of New England, and trained by her best influences; of a temperament singularly sweet and serene, and with the sturdy rectitude of his race; refined and softened by wide contact with other lands and many men; born in prosperity, accomplished in all literatures, and himself a literary artist of consummate elegance,—he was the fine flower of the Puritan stock under its changed modern conditions. Out of strength had come forth sweetness. The grim iconoclast, "humming a surly hymn," had issued in the Christian gentleman. Captain Miles Standish had risen into Sir Philip Sidney. The austere morality that relentlessly ruled the elder New England reappeared in the genius of this singer in the most gracious and captivating form. . . . The foundations of our distinctive literature were largely laid in New England, and they rest upon morality. Literary New England had never a trace of literary Bohemia. The most illustrious group, and the earliest, of American authors and scholars and literary men, the Boston and Cambridge group of the last generation,—Channing, the two Danas, Sparks, Everett, Bancroft, Ticknor, Prescott, Norton, Ripley, Palfrey, Emerson, Parker, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Agassiz, Lowell, Motley,—have been sober and industrious citizens, of whom Judge Sewall would have approved. Their lives as well as their works have ennobled literature. They have illustrated the moral sanity of genius.

Longfellow shares this trait with them all. It is the moral purity of his verse which at once charms the heart; and in his first most famous poem, the "Psalm of Life," it is the direct inculcation of a moral purpose. Those who insist that literary art, like all other art, should not concern itself positively with morality, must reflect that the heart

of this age has been touched as truly by Longfellow, however differently, as that of any time by its master-poet. This, indeed, is his peculiar distinction. Among the great poetic names of the century in English literature, Burns, in a general way, is the poet of love; Wordsworth, of lofty contemplation of nature; Byron, of passion; Shelley, of aspiration; Keats, of romance; Scott, of heroic legend; and not less, and quite as distinctively, Longfellow, of the domestic affections. He is the poet of the household, of the fireside, of the universal home feeling. The infinite tenderness and patience, the pathos and the beauty, of daily life, of familiar emotion, and the common scene,—these are the significance of that verse whose beautiful and simple melody, softly murmuring for more than forty years, made the singer the most widely beloved of living men.—*George William Curtis.*

He is in a high sense a literary man; and next a literary artist; and thirdly, a literary artist in the domain of poetry. It would not be true to say that his art is of the intensest kind or most magical potency; but it is art, and imbues whatever he performs. In so far as a literary artist in poetry is a poet, Longfellow is a poet, and should (to the silencing of all debates and demurs) be freely confessed and handsomely installed as such. How far he is a poet in a further sense than this remains to be determined.

Having thus summarily considered "the actual quality of the work" as derived from the endowments of the worker, I next proceed to "the grounds upon which the vast popularity of the poems has rested." One main and in itself all-sufficient ground has just been stated: that the sort of intelligence of which Longfellow is so conspicuous an example includes pre-eminently "a great susceptibility to the spirit of the age." The man who meets the spirit of the age half-way will be met half-way by that; will be adopted as a favorite child, and warmly reposited in the heart. Such has been the case with Longfellow. In sentiment, in perception, in culture, in selection, in utterance, he represents, with adequate and even influential but not overwhelming force, the tendencies and adaptabilities of the time; he is a good type of the "bettermost," not the exceptionally very best, minds of the central or later-central period of the nineteenth century; and, having the gift of persuasive speech and accomplished art, he can enlist the sympathies of readers who approach his own level of intelligence, and can dominate a numberless multitude of those who belong to lower planes, but who share none the less his own general conceptions and aspirations.

Evangeline, whatever may be its shortcomings and blemishes, takes so powerful a hold of the feelings that the fate which would at last merge it in oblivion could only be a very hard and even a perverse one. Who that has read it has ever forgotten it? or in whose memory does it rest as other than a long-drawn sweetness and sadness that has become a portion, and a purifying portion, of the experiences of the heart?—*William Michael Rossetti.*

Mr. Longfellow was easily first amongst his own countrymen as a poet, and in certain directions as a prose writer; but he was also a good deal more than this. There has been a tendency to doubt whether he was entitled to a place in the first rank of poets; and the doubt, although we are not disposed to think it well founded, is perhaps intelligible. Some of the qualities which gave his verse its charm and its very wide popularity and influence also worked, not to perplex—for the essence of his style was simplicity—but perhaps to vex, the critical mind. There is no need to dwell now upon various pieces of verse by Mr. Longfellow, which no doubt owed much of their fame to qualities that were less prominent in some of his productions which perhaps were, not unnaturally, less popular. . . . But it may be said as a general rule, that when Longfellow was commonplace in sentiment he was far from

commonplace in expression. His verse was full of grace, and, if one may use the word in this connection, of tact; and it cannot perhaps be said to have been want of tact that prevented him from correcting the one odd blunder that he made after it had gone forth to the world and become somewhat surprisingly popular. That he could be and generally was much the reverse of commonplace, will hardly be denied by any one who has made a real study of his work. He had a keen observation, a vivid fancy, a scholarlike touch, a not too common *gentillesse*, and a seemingly easy command of rhyme and rhythm. . . .

When the qualities which we have touched upon are united in a man who has come before the world as a poet, evidently in consequence of the promptings of his nature, and not of malice prepense and with carefully devised affectation, it seems somewhat rash to deny him the high place which the great bulk of his admirers would assign to him, because he has, perhaps too frequently, lapsed into thought, if not into diction, which may seem unworthy of such a writer at his best.

Nor, perhaps, is it fair in this regard to leave out of account that Longfellow began his poetic career as the poet—the poet *par excellence*—of a country which had its literature to make. . . . His position as the spokesman in poetry of a young country had its advantages and its drawbacks. He was more free from the disadvantages of critical severity and opposition than an English writer could well have been; but such a freedom has its dangers, and to this it might not be too fanciful to trace the lapses of which some mention has been made. That it was to these lapses that he owed a considerable portion of his influence with the mass of the reading or devouring public in England was not his fault; and this fact should not, we think, be allowed to obscure in any way the exceptionally fine qualities which he undoubtedly possessed and cultivated."

—*London Saturday Review.*

THE essence of Longfellow's writings might be defined thus: domestic morals, with a romantic coloring, a warm glow of sentiment, and a full measure of culture. The morals are partly religious, hardly at all sectarian, pure, sincere, and healthy. The romance is sufficiently genuine, yet a trifle factitious, nicely apprehended rather than intense. The sentiment is heart-felt, but a little ordinary—by the very fact of its being ordinary all the more widely and fully responded to—at times with a somewhat false ring, or at least an obvious shallowness; right-minded sentiment, which the author perceives to be creditable to himself, and which he aims, as if by an earnest and "penetrated" tone of voice, to make impressive to his reader. The culture is broad and general; not that of a bookworm or student, but of a receptive and communicative mind, of average grasp and average sympathies. . . . Longfellow had much clearness and persuasiveness, some force, and a great aptitude for "improving the occasion;" but he had not that imaginative strength, that spacious vision, that depth of personal individuality which impress somewhat painfully at first, but which alone supply in the long-run the great startling and rousing forces that possess a permanent influence.—*London Athenæum.*

LONGFELLOW has a perfect command of that expression which results from restraining rather than cultivating fluency; and his manner is adapted to his theme. He rarely, if ever, mistakes emotions for conceptions. His words are often pictures of his thought. He selects with great delicacy and precision the exact phrase which best expresses or suggests his idea. He colors his style with the skill of a painter. The warm flush and bright tints, as well as the most evanescent hues, of language he uses with admirable discretion. In that higher department of his art, that of so combining his words and images that they make music to the soul as well as to the ear, and convey not only his feelings and thoughts, but also the very tone and condition of

the soul in which they have being, he likewise excels. . . . . His imagination, in the sphere of its activity, is almost perfect in its power to shape in visible forms, or to suggest, by cunning verbal combinations, the feeling or thought he desires to express ; but it lacks the strength and daring, and the wide sweep, which characterize the imagination of such poets as Shelley. He has little of the unrest and frenzy of the bard. We know, in reading him, that he will never miss his mark ; that he will risk nothing ; that he will aim to do only that which he feels he can do well. An air of repose, of quiet power, is around his compositions. He rarely loses sight of common interests and sympathies. He displays none of the stinging earnestness, the vehement sensibility, the gusts of passion, which characterize poets of the impulsive class. His spiritualism is not seen in wild struggles after an ineffable Something, for which earth can afford but imperfect symbols, and of which even abstract words can suggest little knowledge. He appears perfectly satisfied with his work. Like his own "Village Blacksmith," he retires every night with the feeling that something has been attempted, that something has been *done*. . . . His sense of beauty, though uncommonly vivid, is not the highest of which the mind is capable. He has little perception of its mysterious spirit ; of that beauty, of which all physical loveliness is but the shadow, which awes and thrills the soul into which it enters, and lifts the imagination into regions "to which the heaven of heavens is but a veil." His mind never appears oppressed, nor his sight dimmed, by its exceeding glory. He feels and loves, and creates what is beautiful ; but he hymns no reverence, he pays no adoration, to the Spirit of Beauty. He would never exclaim with Shelley, "O awful Loveliness!"—*E. P. Whipple.*

EVANGELINE.

WHAT shall we say of "Evangeline"? It holds a place entirely by itself in our literature, in so far as immortal praise is due to its author not only, and not so much for his manner of treating the subject, as for his discovery and conception of the subject itself. The idea of a girl who has been torn from her lover by enemies who have invaded their home settlement, and embarked them in ships to two different ports in America ; her search after him through the provinces of that continent, down its great rivers, and through its interminable forests—again and again finding traces of him, only to end in disappointment ; catching a vain hope from the smoke that ascends above every encampment in the wilderness ; refusing to part with life's earliest dream, and still believing that God will direct her steps through those labyrinths of nature to the object of her love ; the unutterable longings ; the sickness of hope deferred, till youth at last passed away, and her tresses became gray in this mysterious love-journey—this is a form of calamity that was never conceived of in the imagination of any other bard, and the bare presentation of which to the reader is so suggestive of the highest poetry, of all that is trying in situation and tragical in sentiment, as to amount in the simple conception of it to a triumph of genius. . . .

In the poem before us the vastnesses of the American continent are with us and before us throughout, while the interest of tenderness is awakened by the utter inability of this lover in her maiden helplessness to contend with them; for it is the very magnificence of nature in its forests and prairies and rolling rivers that is against her—it is the wideness of space that overwhelms her. . . .

He commences the poem with a simple narrative of the days when Evangeline and Gabriel were happy youthful lovers at Grand Pré, in their own beloved Nova Scotia.

We are apt to consider the description needlessly detailed, even commonplace and prosy. Ignorant souls that we are! Unconsciously, insensibly, are we prepared with infinite skill for the coming catastrophe. There must be first a picture of the perfect peace of that home settlement—quiet but humble—the nest as God made it, moss-fashioned, softly lined with the loves that are in it. We must first have visited and looked into it, then we shall feel the tragedy of the hour when this sanctuary was ravished and violated by ruthless hands. In the very commonplaceness of Evangeline's first prospects, well-to-do on her father's farm, no bar of poverty, no obstacle to her heart's affection, everything holding out the likelihood of a life monotonous, but perfectly level with her desires, there is a dreadful preparation planned by contrast for the extraordinary fate that awaited her. The tame and unattractive landscape, too, of Nova Scotia, so dear to her heart by the loves of Gabriel and her old father—how does it contrast with the gorgeous scenery through which she is afterwards led—the pomp and prodigality of nature which was to mock her heart! How well does the poet sustain the picture of perfect peace and love happiness that reigned at Grand Pré up to the very last moment before the thunder-storm burst upon it!—*The Religion of Our Literature*, by GEORGE MCCRIE.

THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF THE POEM.

IN 1755 Nova Scotia—or Acadia—which for more than thirty years had been nominally a British province, was inhabited by some thousands of French colonists, who were exempt from military service under France, and were termed "French Neutrals." Their real sympathies lay with the land of their birth, not with the Government under whose half-contemptuous protection they lived. In Europe, commissioners had for some time been trying to settle a satisfactory boundary between New France and Nova Scotia, when matters were brought to a crisis by the

French in America, who erected two forts on a neck of land at the head of the Bay of Fundy. Massachusetts—this was before the Revolution, be it remembered—sent out three thousand men to capture these forts, and the thing was done. In the garrisons were found three hundred of the Neutrals, and therefore the Acadians were held condemned as rebels against the English Crown. What was to be done with them? The Governor of Nova Scotia, the Chief Justice of the province, and two British Admirals, met in council in July, and resolved that the entire population must be cleared out of that part of the country, and this deportation was to be carried out in such a way as to disperse the captives among the English of the other provinces. Of course it was not easy to execute an edict like this upon a widely-scattered population; but stratagem prevailed with these simple people, who had lived peacefully for two hundred years in this land, feeding sheep and tilling the soil rudely. Governor Lawrence issued a proclamation ordering all the males of the colony, "both old and young men, as well as all the lads of ten years of age," to assemble at the church of Grand-Pré on a certain Friday, to learn His Majesty's pleasure, "on pain of forfeiting goods and chattels in default of real estate." On the Friday appointed, September 5, 1755, four hundred and eighteen unarmed men met within the church. The doors were closed upon them, and guarded by soldiers; and then this mandate was read to the snared farmers: "It is His Majesty's orders, and they are peremptory, that the whole French inhabitants of these districts be removed. Your lands and tenements, cattle of all kinds, and live-stock of all sorts, are forfeited to the Crown, with all your other effects, saving your money and household goods; and you yourselves are to be removed from this province. I shall do everything in my power that your goods be secured to you, and that you are not molested in carrying them off; also, that whole families shall go in the same vessel, and that this removal be made as easy as His Majesty's service

will admit. And I hope that, in whatever part of the world you may fall, you may be faithful subjects, a peaceful and happy people. Meanwhile you are the king's prisoners, and will remain in security under the inspection and direction of the troops I have the honor to command."

Unbroken silence greeted this cruel edict, until after the lapse of a few minutes a moan broke from the stunned Acadians, and their cry of grief was echoed in bewilderment by the anxious women waiting with their children outside. On the 10th of September the inhabitants of Grand-Pré—nineteen hundred and twenty in number—were marched to the water's side at the point of the bayonet, and embarked in Government ships. In spite of some show of care on the part of the authorities many parents were separated from their families and driven into different vessels; husbands and wives lost each other, and maidens parted from their lovers forever. The vessels were not able to accommodate all the emigrants, so some of these remained till fresh transports carried them away from their homes in cheerless December, and then Acadia was left desolate, and the Acadians never gathered together again. Small knots of the wanderers settled, and have left descendants, at Clare, at Minudie, in parts of Prince Edward's Island, and on the north coast of New Brunswick. In these days we English hear much of the Crofter question; but we never spoiled humble folk of land as we did in 1755, by the help of Massachusetts guns.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (how pleasant it always is to come upon these two great American men of letters together!) one day dined at Craigie House, and brought with him a clergyman. The clergyman happened to remark that he had been vainly endeavoring to interest Hawthorne in a subject that he himself thought would do admirably for a story. He then related the history of a young Acadian girl who had been turned away with her people in that dire "'55," thereafter became separated from her lover, wandered for many years in search of him, and finally found him

in a hospital, dying. And Hawthorne saw nothing in this! That Longfellow at once took to the lovely legend is not so striking a fact as that Hawthorne, true to the strange taste of his "miasmatic conscience," felt the want of a sin to study in the story, and so would have none of it. "Let me have it for a poem, then," said Longfellow, and he had the leave at once. He raked up historical material from Haliburton's "Nova Scotia," and other books, and soon was steadily building up that idyl that is his true Golden Legend. After he had wormed his way through the chronicles of that doomed land, he wrote to Hawthorne and suggested that the romancer should take up as a theme the early history and later wanderings of these Acadians; but with Acadia Hawthorne would have nothing to do on any terms.—From ROBERTSON'S *Life of Longfellow*.

THE METER OF EVANGELINE.

THE selection of hexameter lines for "Evangeline" was of course a bold experiment. The great precedent Longfellow had in his mind when he resolved to try hexameters was Goethe's "Hermann and Dorothea;" and this was enough to justify his attempt to compromise between the exactions of classic scansion and the rhythmical license of English meters. His success was as wonderful as the attempt was bold. By employing a style of meter that carries the ear back to times in the world's history when grand simplicities were sung, the poet naturally was able to enhance the epic qualities of his work, and remove Acadia and its people to the necessary extent from touch with a part of the world in which human history's developments were raw and unattractive. And once persuaded that it was possible to avoid "sing-song" monotony in English hexameters, Longfellow was right in thinking that the rhythm he chose was well suited for the telling of a long story into which nothing abruptly dramatic was to enter, but which was to derive its chief interest from broadly-worked pictures.