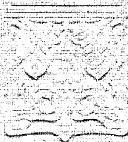


LITTLE
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34



Library of
Little Masterpieces



Henry W. Longfellow.

Library of
Little Masterpieces
In Forty-four Volumes

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Edited by
GEORGE ILES



VOLUME XXXIV

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PREFACE

FIRST in this band of writers is Longfellow, whose tenderness of spirit makes him the best beloved of American singers. Other poets, as Emerson, have on occasion taken a higher flight, only to be borne all the farther from homely joys and griefs. At the opposite pole from Longfellow is Poe, who seems always to write in the shadow, and this by sheer artistic preference for the effects of gloom. His verse is melancholy to the verge of morbidness; yet in "Annabel Lee," we have a love lyric more haunting than ever rang out from the harp of Scott or Moore. A distinct echo of Poe catches the ear in the stanzas of Tennyson, who offers us his one account of how he cast the facts of observation into the crucible of fancy.

A poet of quite other mould is Burns, who gave the English-speaking world its best songs, eloquent with virile passion and manly love of freedom. Burns did not fully unveil himself in his verse: the vigour, and depth of his intellect come out in his letters, chiefly those to Mrs. Dunlop. To peruse them is bitterly to regret that a mind so clear failed, after all, to grasp the helm of destiny, so that the career of Burns ended early and in darkness. Scott, next in this roll of honour, began as a poet, and then resigned verse for prose to become the chief creator of

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historical romances. He gives us glimpses of himself as a companion, an observer, and an author.

Returning to America we pass to Hawthorne, who undoubtedly was in essence a poet. His weird imagination, his skill in sounding the depths and shoals of human nature, mark him chief among American writers of fiction. There was little in common between this moody recluse of Salem and Charles Dickens, a comedian who took to the desk instead of the stage, and gave us melodrama, or rollicking farce, with here and there a scene of tragedy and pathos. The irrespressible vitality of the man comes out in his correspondence, and so does a cool, judicial quality, that might not be expected in the creator of Sam Weller and Sairey Gamp. Another vivid contrast appears as Dickens gives place to Charlotte Brontë, the shrinking little governess of the Yorkshire moors, whose letters show how much of her life went into her books. Next follows George Eliot, who was a great novelist because she was first of all a great woman, as richly endowed in heart as in mind. Her letters plainly declare how her incomparable sympathy reached the innermost springs of the men and women, who duly transfigured, became Adam Bede and Hetty Sorrel, Mr. Bulstrode and Dorothea Brooke. Next that great romancer, Robert Louis Stevenson, tells us what books influenced him most, and how he came seriously to devote himself to literature,

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despite the engineering traditions of his family. He adds a word of interesting comment on American writers. In parting we shake the hand of Henry George, who enlisted remarkable gifts of exposition in the field of economics. His story of struggle and success, of love, of religious trust, are of the transparent sincerity that marked every page he wrote.

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WRITERS

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

[Professor George E. Woodberry, an eminent poet and critic, in his "America in Literature," published by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1905, says this of Longfellow:

"His trust, his humility, his hospitality to the joys and sorrows of domestic life, his tenderness, his consolation, his noble nature, his just taste in what to say and what to leave unsaid about the crises of lives not tragic, but touched with human things that have been and may be again,' his companionableness for souls not over-strenuous, but full of all the pieties of life endearing life — these things give him long lease of fame. Within his unemphatic range he has an unsuspected variety, and thereby expresses without weariness, except to the life-jaded, an American nature of such sweetness, refinement, and purity, that it has become almost exemplary of an ideal of the literary life on this soil.

"Hiawatha, Evangeline, and Miles Standish, each remains the only successful poem of its kind — one of Indian life, one of the Colonial pastoral, one of the Puritan idyl — while the trials made by others have been numerous. In each of these, and especially in the first and second, there is in quality a marvellous purity of tone which, for those who are sensitive to it, is one of the rarest of poetic pleasures. . . ."

Referring to his shorter poems:

"If Heaven ever grants the prayer that a poet may write the songs of a people, it is surely in such poems as these that the divine gift reveals its presence. They are in the mouths of children and on the lips of boys, and it is well; but they are also strength and consolation to older hearts. They are read in quiet hours, they are murmured in darkened rooms, they blend with the sacred experiences of many lives. The Psalm of Life is a trumpet-call. A music breathes from Resignation in which the clod on the

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coffin-lid ceases to be heard and dies out of the ear at last with peace.”]

EARLY IMPRESSIONS

“OUT of my childhood,” wrote Mr. Longfellow, in later years, “rises in my memory the recollection of many things rather as poetic impressions than as prosaic facts. Such are the damp mornings of early spring, with the loud crowing of cocks and the cooing of pigeons on roofs of barns. Very distinct in connection with these are the indefinite longings incident to childhood; feelings of wonder and loneliness which I could not interpret and scarcely take cognisance of. But they have remained in my mind.”

ASPIRES AFTER EMINENCE IN LITERATURE

[TO HIS FATHER]

December 5, 1824.

[In his eighteenth year]

I take this early opportunity to write to you, because I wish to know fully your inclination with regard to the profession I am to pursue when I leave college.

For my part, I have already hinted to you what would best please me. I want to spend one year at Cambridge for the purpose of reading history, and of becoming familiar with the best authors in polite literature; whilst at the same time I can be acquiring a knowledge of the Italian language, without an acquaintance with

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which I shall be shut out from one of the most beautiful departments of letters. The French I mean to understand pretty thoroughly before I leave college. After leaving Cambridge I would attach myself to some literary periodical publication, by which I could maintain myself and still enjoy the advantages of reading. Now, I do not think that there is anything visionary or chimerical in my plan thus far. The fact is — and I will not disguise it in the least, for I ought not — I most eagerly aspire after future eminence in literature; my whole soul burns most ardently for it, and every earthly thought centres in it. There may be something visionary in *this*, but I flatter myself that I have prudence enough to keep my enthusiasm from defeating its own object by too great haste. Surely, there never was a better opportunity offered for the exertion of literary talent in our own country than is now offered. To be sure, most of our literary men thus far have not been professedly so, until they have studied and entered the practice of Theology, Law, or Medicine. But this is evidently lost time. I do believe that we ought to pay more attention to the opinion of philosophers, that “nothing but Nature can qualify a man for knowledge.”

Whether Nature has given me any capacity for knowledge or not, she has at any rate given me a very strong predilection for literary pursuits, and I am almost confident in believing, that, if I can ever rise in the world, it must be

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by the exercise of my talent in the wide field of literature. With such a belief, I must say that I am unwilling to engage in the study of the law.

Here, then, seems to be the starting point: and I think it best to float out into the world upon that tide and in that channel which will the soonest bring me to my destined port, and not to struggle against both wind and tide and by attempting what is impossible lose everything.

“WRECK OF THE HESPERUS”

(DIARY)

December 30, 1839. — I wrote last night 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.

“THE BELFRY OF BRUGES”

(DIARY)

May 30, 1824. — In the evening took the railway from Ghent to Bruges. Stopped at

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“La Fleur de Blé,” attracted by the name, and found it a good hotel. It was not yet night; and I strolled through the fine old streets and felt myself a hundred years old. The chimes seemed to be ringing incessantly; and the air of repose and antiquity was delightful. . . . Oh those chimes, those chimes, how deliciously they lull one to sleep! The little bells, with their clear liquid notes, like the voices of boys in a choir, and the solemn bass of the great bell tolling in, like the voice of a friar!

31st.—Rose before five and climbed the high belfry which was once crowned by the gilded copper dragon now at Ghent. The carillon of forty-eight bells; the little chamber in the tower; the machinery like a huge barrel organ, with keys like a musical instrument for the *carillonneur* (ringer); the view from the tower; the singing of swallows with the chimes; the fresh morning air; the mist in the horizon; the red roofs far below; the canal, like a silver clasp, linking the city with the sea — how much to remember!

“EVANGELINE”

(DIARY)

December 15, 1846. — Stayed at home, working a little at *Evangeline*; planning out the second part, which fascinates me, — if I can but give complete tone and expression to it. Of materials for this part there is superabundance. The difficulty is to select, and to give unity to variety.

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17th.—Finished this morning, and copied, the first canto of the second part of *Evangeline*. The portions of the poem which I write in the morning, I write chiefly standing at my desk here by the window, so as to need no copying. What I write at other times is scrawled with a pencil on my knee in the dark, and has to be written out afterward. This way of writing with a pencil and portfolio I enjoy much, as I can sit by the fireside and do not use my eyes. I see a panorama of the Mississippi advertised. This comes very apropos. The river comes to me instead of my going to the river; and as it is to flow through the pages of the poem, I look upon this as a special benediction.

TO A SYMPATHETIC REVIEWER

[TO JOHN S. DWIGHT]

December 10, 1847.

I should have written sooner to thank you for your most friendly and cordial notice of *Evangeline* in the *Harbinger*, but by some adverse fate I could not get a copy of the paper until some ten or fifteen days after its publication. It would hardly be modest in me to tell you how much satisfaction it gave me. But, setting modesty aside, I thank you for it very heartily, and this rather for the sympathy than the praise. There are so many persons who rush forward in front of one, and seizing one's Pegasus

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by the rein give him such a jerk as to make his mouth bleed, that I always feel grateful to any one who is willing to go a few paces side by side with me. I think you will agree with me that what a writer asks of his reader is not so much to *like* as to *listen*. You I have to thank for both.

THE TOIL OF TEACHING AT HARVARD

(DIARY)

April 3, 1848. — It seems like folly to record the college days — the working in the crypts of life, the underground labour. Pardon me, O ye souls who seeing education only from afar speak of it in such glowing words! You see only the great pictures hanging in the light; not the grinding of the paint and oil, nor the pulling of hair from the camel's back for the brushes.

DEATH OF HIS MOTHER

(DIARY)

March 12, 1851. — As I was going to college this afternoon, I met a boy bringing a telegraphic despatch from Portland. My heart failed me at the sight and foretold its contents. They were, "Your mother died to-day suddenly." In a few minutes I was on my way to Portland, where I arrived before midnight. In the chamber where I last took leave of her lay my mother, to welcome and take leave of me no more. I sat all that night alone with her —