CHAPTER XXXV

ON A PROPER ESTIMATE OF LONGFELLOW

WITHIN the last fifteen or twenty years it has become too much of a practice with the young scholars and many critics to speak disparagingly of the American poet Longfellow, who exercised over Tennyson's generation an influence and a charm second only to that of Tennyson himself. For this sudden reaction against Longfellow, the critics are only partly responsible; the character of the present generation may partly account for it. The critics say what is very true, that Longfellow is only a second class poet, because his versification was never brought to that high point which the greatest poetry demands. But this does not mean that he should not be studied. Second class poetry may often be quite as important in its way as first class poetry; it may possess emotional beauty that the first class poetry cannot show. Perfect verse means only perfect form, and form is not the most important quality of poetry by any means. Nevertheless, as soon as it had been shown that Longfellow's hexameters were faulty, young scholars set the fashion of sneering at Longfellow. This fashion has now become rather general; and I want to protest against it. Some of its utterances have been quite unreasonable, not to say unjust. I remember when the great publishers Macmillan brought out a beautiful edition of Longfellow some years ago, several English journals deplored the publication, saying that Longfellow was not worthy to figure in the great series of poets published by that firm. This was utter prejudice and utter nonsense. Except Tennyson, no other poet of the English language

had been so much read in England as Longfellow, and I think he will still be read and much loved, in spite of all sneering, by future generations of Englishmen. It is time to talk about his merits to-day, and to examine the causes of the reaction against him. If you have followed the course of the English literary movement, during the Victorian age, you will recognize that the reaction against Longfellow was almost coincident with the movement in favour of realism. Both in England and America there has been a realistic fashion for some time, a fashion perhaps inspired by the naturalistic movement in France. I cannot now dwell at any length upon the subject of realism or naturalism, and I shall only say that the two schools attempted to banish imagination and romance from fiction ; they tried the impossible feat of making a literature that should reflect life with the exactness and the ugliness of a photograph. In some respects the realistic movement did good : it corrected much extravagance ; it simplified style ; it taught the value of restraint, the beauty of severity. But its avowed object was impossible, and that is now generally recognized. There is even already a reaction against the realistic, and this reaction is perhaps the beginning of a new romantic period.

Now during the realistic enthusiasm, it was natural that Longfellow should have been for a moment despised. Of all the poets of the age, none was so completely romantic as Longfellow, so ideal, so fond of the spiritual and the impossible. He is the most dreaming of dreamers, the least real among romantics. But with the present reaction I believe that he will, for this very reason, rise into world-wide favour again. I cannot think that genius of this sort can possibly be pushed aside for any length of time, merely because some of his verse happens to be defective in construction.

Now let us speak about the good qualities in his work, and try to discover what its distinguishing characteristic is. He has been for nearly two generations the favourite poet

of youth; and there must be a good reason for that. He has written a great many things which stay in memory for ever after you have once read them; and there must be a good reason for that. His appeal, nevertheless, is not an appeal to sense or passion, such as Byron was once able to make. Neither can he be called an innovator such as Sir Walter Scott was; I mean that he had not the advantage of coming before the world with an entirely new story to tell. On the contrary, he is particularly a poet of old thoughts and old customs and old legends. Yet there are very few persons with any taste for poetry who have not been charmed by him in their youth; and if I meet a grown-up scholar to-day, no matter how great, who has read Longfellow during boyhood and now denies the charm of his poetry, I am quite sure that there is something defective in that man's organization. Very possibly he may be a great mathematician or a great linguist or a great commentator of classic texts, but I am quite sure that he cannot have the nature of a poet, the feeling of a poet, the emotions of a poet. He must be more or less of a cold and unsympathizing character. Really I believe that it is a very good test of any Englishman's ability to feel poetry, simply to ask him, "Did you like Longfellow when you were a boy?" If he says "No," then it is no use to talk to him on the subject of poetry at all, however much he might be able to tell you about quantities and metres.

Notice particularly this fact about Longfellow, that he is no more an American poet or an English poet than he is a Swedish, Danish, or German poet. Certainly he has written some charming poems of which the subjects and the scenery are American; but the great mass of his poetry refers neither to America nor to England, but to other parts of Europe. Neither were his taste and feelings in harmony with American or English life. It has been well said by the leading English critics of to-day, that to classify Longfellow at all we must put him with the Swedish and Danish poets, not with the English; for his whole feeling is of the

north, of the far north, — the north of the old sagas and runes. You must imagine him as a Scandinavian without Scandinavian hardness, but with the great capacity of that race for idealism and tenderness extraordinarily developed within him.

What I have just said I do not think you will be able to understand fully, because without having had much experience of European differences of character, race-character, you can scarcely comprehend in what the Scandinavian peoples differ from other western peoples. Yet there is one thing which you will certainly be able to understand,—that the freshness of youth remains longer with the man or woman of the north than with the man or woman of the south. At the age of forty a Scandinavian woman may still be very beautiful; at the age of fifty a man may still be considered young. At nineteen or twenty the youth is still a boy; elsewhere he would be a man. And this physical freshness is accompanied by a great freshness also of mind and heart. All this helps to explain a something in northern character that is quite different even from English or German character, and incomparably different from French or Italian character.

Now consider the feelings of boyhood and the thoughts of boyhood as compared with those of mature experience. How beautiful they are! In boyhood we believe everything good about ourselves and about the world. We also believe in other worlds than the present. We see everywhere about us the beautiful, and the future seems full of golden promise. Best of all, in boyhood we do not know our weaknesses, and we believe ourselves able to do thousands of things which we could never really do; we are full of happy confidence. This condition encourages us to dream day-dreams —dreams of glory and power and love and fame, and ever so much that as men we cannot dare to think about at all. This happiness and self-confidence and love of dreaming that belongs to youth everywhere, belongs even to manhood, however, in the far north; it is particularly charac-

teristic of the people there. Gloom and melancholy we often find in them, no doubt, but even in their dark moments they remain idealists, always disinclined to consider the materialistic side of existence. European idealism is almost entirely of the north. Southern races have never been imaginative in the same degree. I have dwelt so long upon this characteristic only because I think that it helps to explain Longfellow's power to charm young men. Always he remained a young man, even when he had passed, long passed, his sixtieth year; his heart and his thought never grew up, though his power as a poet constantly grew. And in his vast reading (probably no modern poet read more than Longfellow) he was eternally seeking and finding subjects or ideas in accord with this beautiful youthfulness of spirit. Therefore he remains, especially among nineteenth century poets, the poet of young men. This alone should establish him in the love of generations to come.

But if you should ask me what particular quality makes the charm of Longfellow, in his work itself, I should answer "ghostliness." There is something of ghostliness in the work of nearly all our great poets, but it is not so frequently met with in such thrilling form as we find it in Longfellow. In his most trifling pieces there is always some suggestion of the spirit behind the matter, the ghost beyond the reality. Now young people always like this, and Longfellow has given it to them better than anybody else. It has been said that he is deficient in music; yet English boys learn his poems by heart, and sing them, and shed tears of delight with the enthusiasm that they excite. Surely this is the best answer to all doubts of his value in melody. He could not have written some of Tennyson's blank verse; he could not have finished a ballad so exquisitely as Rossetti; but I doubt whether these two great poets could have done many things that he has done. For instance, "The Bells of Lynn." You know that Tennyson wrote a famous line about "the lin-lan-lone of evening bells." Yet no poem on bells, written

since Poe's day, can give such a sensation as Longfellow's "Bells of Lynn."

O curfew of the setting sun! O Bells of Lynn!
O requiem of the dying day! O Bells of Lynn!

From the dark belfries of yon cloud-cathedral wafted,
Your sounds aerial seem to float, O Bells of Lynn!

Borne on the evening wind across the crimson twilight,
O'er land and sea they rise and fall, O Bells of Lynn!

. . . . . .

The distant lighthouse hears, and with his flaming signal
Answers you, passing the watchword on, O Bells of Lynn!

And down the darkening coast run the tumultuous surges,
And clap their hands, and shout to you, O Bells of Lynn!

Till from the shuddering sea, with your wild incantations,
Ye summon up the spectral moon, O Bells of Lynn!

And startled at the sight, like the weird woman of Endor,
Ye cry aloud, and then are still, O Bells of Lynn!

Lynn is a little town on the coast of Massachusetts, and its old church possesses a fine peal of bells, whose ringing at sundown can be heard to a great distance. The somewhat irregular versification is made in imitation of the chiming of the bells; and the simile at the end of the poem is very fine. The story of the Witch of Endor is from the Book of Samuel in the Bible. The King went to her to ask whether he should or should not win a battle that he was going to fight upon the morrow, and she called up the dead to answer him. Then the King was afraid, for he heard from the lips of the dead that he would be killed the next day and his army destroyed. The poet has represented the the bells as uttering an incantation — that is, a magical chant, such as can summon up the spirit of the dead, and the moon rises up out of the sea, like a ghost in answer. And then the bells give one more outcry and are silent, as if afraid. Notice also the beautiful use of the participle

"shuddering," used here as an adjective. I do not mean to say that this is great poetry; but it is good poetry, and if you should hear a good reader with a sonorous voice read that poem as it was intended to be read — imitating the clang of the bells — you would perhaps think it a very powerful bit of work.

Everybody knows something about the longer poems of Longfellow—such as "Evangeline" and "Hiawatha," the last being a very successful imitation of Finnish verse, especially of the "Kalevala." But it is not about these that I wish to speak at all; the supreme merit of Longfellow is not to be found in them, though they are beautiful in their own way. The value of Longfellow is that of a composer of hundreds of short poems, short poems of a kind different from anything else written during the age. It is in these short poems that you will especially find the ghostly quality about which I have spoken, and it is by these short poems that Longfellow became a great educator, not only of the American, but also of the English public. By "educator" here I mean a teacher of new beauties and new values and new ideas. Before his time very little was known about the charm of many foreign poets whose work he first either translated or paraphrased. Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Finnish, Russian, and even Persian poetry of the popular school, together with some specimens of Tartar verse — all these were presented to English readers for the first time in a way that could please the mind and touch the heart of the simplest person. How much variety of matter does this range of selection suggest! But this represents only a part of what has been given to us in the short poems. Almost every episode of European history, ancient, mediæval and modern, is represented in these brief compositions. Thousands of young persons were first persuaded to study with interest the old heroic stories of Spanish and German and Norwegian history by reading something about them in the pages of Longfellow. If only for this reason, Longfellow should be more valued than he

would now seem to be. Yet again, his own original work in these directions is not a fourth part of his work in the same direction as an editor. You will find in your library a collection of thirty-one volumes, entitled "Poems of Places" —examples of poetry written about all the famous places in all parts of the world, from England to Japan, from northern Asia to southern Australia. There is no other work of this kind in the English language, and its value can scarcely be too highly spoken of. Almost all the poets of the world are represented there. Besides, you must recollect that Longfellow made perhaps the best metrical translation of Dante that has ever been made in modern times. Surely these productions ought to compel recognition of his importance as an educator in the best sense of the word. And now, turning back to the subject of the ghostly element in his short poems, let us consider together examples of this quality here and there. It infuses the entire mass of his shorter work; yet it has not been at all properly noticed by critics.

I began with one poem about church bells; here is another. It happens to be the last thing he wrote before he died. First I must tell you that the place mentioned is a little town upon the Coast of Mexico. There used to be many monks there, but with the decay of Spanish power, the little town also decayed, and a republican government drove the priests and the monks away, and nothing was left of their work but an old ruined church, which has now almost fallen to pieces. The bells of the church tower, however, remained swinging there, and sometimes when great winds were blowing, the bells would sound in a melancholy way over the sea, out of the dead Spanish town. Longfellow therefore wrote this poem.

What say the Bells of San Blas
To the ships that southward pass
    From the harbour of Mazatlan?
To them it is nothing more
Than the sound of surf on the shore,—
    Nothing more to master or man.

But to me, a dreamer of dreams,
To whom what is and what seems
Are often one and the same,—
The Bells of San Blas to me
Have a strange, wild melody,
And are something more than a name.

For bells are the voice of the church;
They have tones that touch and search
The hearts of young and old;
One sound to all, yet each
Lends a meaning to their speech,
And the meaning is manifold.

They are a voice of the Past,
Of an age that is fading fast,
Of a power austere and grand;
When the flag of Spain unfurled
Its folds o'er this western world,
And the Priest was lord of the land.

The chapel that once looked down
On the little seaport town
Has crumbled into the dust;
And on oaken beams below
The bells swing to and fro,
And are green with mold and rust.

"Is, then, the old faith dead,"
They say, "and in its stead
Is some new faith proclaimed,
That we are forced to remain
Naked to sun and rain,
Unsheltered and ashamed?

"Once, in our tower aloof,
We rang over wall and roof
Our warnings and our complaints;
And round about us there
The white doves filled the air,
Like the white souls of the saints.

"The saints! Ah, have they grown
Forgetful of their own?
Are they asleep, or dead,
That open to the sky
Their ruined Missions lie,
No longer tenanted?

"Oh, bring us back once more
The vanished days of yore,
When the world with faith was filled;
Bring back the fervid zeal,
The hearts of fire and steel,
The hands that believe and build.

"Then from our tower again
We will send over land and main
Our voices of command,
Like exiled kings who return
To their thrones, and the people learn
That the Priest is lord of the land!"

O Bells of San Blas, in vain
Ye call back the Past again;
The Past is deaf to your prayer!
Out of the shadows of night
The world rolls into light;
It is daybreak everywhere.

The allusion to "the hearts of fire and steel" is to the Spanish soldiers of the old time, fanatical and fearless; the allusion to "the hands that believe and build" is to the pious men who without money built with their own hands the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages. By "the shadows of night" the poet refers to the Middle Ages — which, he notes, were called also "the dark ages," and the entering of the world into light signifies the advent of the present period of intellectual and political freedom.

Is this great poetry? No; but it is beautiful, and it touches the emotions, and it can serve the student in a way that Tennyson's poetry cannot serve him — at least, cannot

so well serve him. I mean that he can suggest to any Japanese student ideas for poetical composition which he cannot find in some still greater poets. For example, the student who has felt the beauty of these verses would be very likely, I think, to write a good poem about a temple bell, deserted and silent, in some secluded place in Japan. He would be tempted to imagine for himself what the old bell would say, if it had a voice and a soul, and could talk. In hundreds of small ways Longfellow can teach you how to make poems of a kind which never have been made before in the Japanese language and which are nevertheless well worth making, because they are close to Japanese feeling. I could choose for you a great number of passages in Longfellow that very closely resemble, in their best qualities, the compositions of old Japanese poets. But I do not think I could do so in the work of Tennyson, who is too English. Longfellow is neither English nor American; at his best he is without nationality and without personal idiosyncrasy. Even when he takes up a foreign subject, with which we cannot be naturally expected to feel sympathy, he can make us feel it, by insisting upon some human element that belongs to it. Take, for example, his poem about Peter the Great of Russia, or at least, the spirit of Peter the Great. Do we sympathize much with the known facts of the history of Peter the Great? I do not think we do. And I do not think we can feel any particular reverence for the Russian emperors of later days. Russian emperors may become our enemies; they cannot become, in the natural state of things, our friends. But even in England, where the mention of things Russian is likely to evoke expressions of dislike, Longfellow's poem about the great emperor of Russia delighted thousands of people. And this is simply because he made the reader feel for a moment as the Russian peasant feels toward his sovereign—inasmuch as the feeling of loyalty is not peculiar to any one country or time or people. I think you will see the beauty of a few verses.

THE WHITE CZAR

Dost thou see on the rampart's height
That wreath of mist, in the light
Of the midnight moon? O, hist!
It is not a wreath of mist;
It is the Czar, the White Czar,
Batyushka! Gosudar!

He has heard, among the dead,
The artillery roll o'erhead;
The drums and the tramp of feet
Of his soldiery in the street;
He is awake! the White Czar,
Batyushka! Gosudar!

He has heard in the grave the cries
Of his people: "Awake! arise!"
He has rent the gold brocade
Whereof his shroud was made;
He is risen, the White Czar,
Batyushka! Gosudar!

Here it is the simple peasant who speaks, the peasant who believes that the spirit of the great dead emperor is still watching over the people, helping them, protecting them, guiding the race to its unknown destiny. In spite of ourselves we are touched by this brute love and childish belief, even in people not of our race, and quite incapable of sympathizing with us in many things. But after all, the older and deeper feelings of humanity are the same in all countries. Faith and trust are the same; and Longfellow ever dwells upon them, with the result of creating sympathy for all that is beautiful, independently of language or country.

Several English poets have written great poems about the death of the Duke of Wellington. Tennyson wrote one, which is very famous, and which you have read. Rossetti wrote another. Other poets might seem to have exhausted

the subject. But with the exception of those wonderful lines in Tennyson's ode—

> Here, in streaming London's central roar,
> Let the sound of those he wrought for,
> And the feet of those he fought for,
> Echo round his bones for evermore,—

I do not think he touches us more than does Longfellow in "The Warden of the Cinque Ports."

> A mist was driving down the British Channel,
> The day was just begun,
> And through the window-panes, on floor and panel,
> Streamed the red autumn sun.
>
> It glanced on flowing flag and rippling pennon,
> And the white sails of ships;
> And, from the frowning rampart, the black cannon
> Hailed it with feverish lips.
>
> Sandwich and Romney, Hastings, Hithe, and Dover,
> Were all alert that day,
> To see the French war-steamers speeding over,
> When the fog cleared away.
>
> Sullen and silent, and like couchant lions,
> Their cannon, through the night,
> Holding their breath, had watched, in grim defiance,
> The sea-coast opposite.
>
> And now they roared at drum-beat from their stations
> On every citadel;
> Each answering each, with morning salutations,
> That all was well.
>
> And down the coast, all taking up the burden,
> Replied the distant forts,
> As if to summon from his sleep the Warden
> And Lord of the Cinque Ports.

Him shall no sunshine from the fields of azure,
No drum-beat from the wall,
No morning gun from the black fort's embrasure,
Awaken with its call!

. . . . . .

Meanwhile, without, the surly cannon waited,
The sun rose bright o'erhead;
Nothing in Nature's aspect intimated
That a great man was dead.

This was at the time when it was thought possible that the French might try to invade England, and the Duke of Wellington, who had been made Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, had repeatedly warned the government of the possible danger. The Duke died suddenly in the night. I have quoted enough to show the picturesque and solemn beauty, and I have put the last two lines in italics in order to make you think about them. They contain a very fine touch of deep poetry, simple as they seem. After the death of any person beloved, the beauty of the day, if the day happens to be fine, appears to us unnatural; even the sunshine seems cruel. Then we think about—we are forced to think about—how little nature cares for man or his griefs. A great French poet became famous for expressing a kindred thought in a still more touching way. This French poet is Sully-Prudhomme, a member of the Academy. Long ago he made a beautiful poem entitled "Les Yeux" ("Eyes"), of which the first verse is very much like the stanza of Longfellow's poem.

Bleus ou noirs, tous aimés, tous beaux,
Des yeux sans nombre ont vu l'aurore;
Ils dorment au fond des tombeaux,
Et le soleil se leve encore!

"Blue or black (*dark* better), — all loved, all beautiful, innumerable eyes have looked upon the dawn. They sleep in the depths of the grave—yet the sun continues to rise!" This is very beautiful, and made the man who wrote it

famous even with people who did not know much about great poetry,—because it represented a universal thought, a common thought that is not less deep because it happens to be common. It is the same thought about the indifference of nature to the pain of man that Longfellow expressed in the poem that we have just read.

Now a very good way of testing Longfellow's value is to compare some of his poems with those of other great poets who have written on the same subject. You will seldom find that he is really great; but you will find that he can touch the heart just as well as the great poets can do, and by very much simpler means. For example, take the subject of Belisarius. There are ever so many English poems about Belisarius; there are also French, German, Italian poems about Belisarius. For this story of Belisarius is one of the saddest stories in the whole history of the world, and people have been moved by it wherever it has been read. Perhaps some of you may have forgotten the story itself. Belisarius was one of the last of the great Roman generals (you must remember that in his time the eastern or Greek empire or Byzantine empire had become a Roman empire; and the Cæsars did not live at Rome, but in Constantinople). Belisarius was a great soldier, a great patriot, and a most kindly man. But he had the misfortune to incur the anger of the empress Theodora, who had been a dancing girl, and who was a very unscrupulous empress. She prejudiced the emperor against Belisarius. You will find the whole story fully related in Gibbon; enough to say that Belisarius, who had saved the empire many times from the attacks of the enemy, was most cruelly treated by his imperial master. His wife was taken from him; his property was confiscated; his rank was cancelled; and he was obliged to beg in the streets for his living. In one of the streets a grand arch, a triumphal arch, had been erected to celebrate the very victory which he had gained; and it is said that he used to beg, standing by the arch, of the people who passed by, saying, "Have you not a copper coin

to give to blind Belisarius?"—for it is said that he also became blind. Knowing this sad story, I think you will admire the fine way in which Longfellow represents the thoughts of Belisarius.

I am poor and old and blind;
The sun burns me, and the wind
    Blows through the city gate
And covers me with dust
From the wheels of the august
    Justinian the Great.

It was for him I chased
The Persians o'er wild and waste,
    As General of the East;
Night after night I lay
In their camps of yesterday;
    Their forage was my feast.

For him, with sails of red,
And torches at mast-head,
    Piloting the great fleet,
I swept the Afric coasts
And scattered the Vandal hosts,
    Like dust in a windy street.

. . . . .

For him, in my feeble age,
I dared the battle's rage,
    To save Byzantium's state,
When the tents of Zabergan,
Like snow-drifts overran
    The road to the Golden Gate.

And for this, for this, behold!
Infirm and blind and old,
    With gray, uncovered head,
Beneath the very arch
Of my triumphal march,
    I stand and beg my bread!

Methinks I still can hear,
Sounding distinct and near,
    The Vandal monarch's cry,
As, captive and disgraced,
With majestic step he paced,—
    "All, all is Vanity!"

Ah! vainest of all things
Is the gratitude of kings;
    The plaudits of the crowd
Are but the clatter of feet
At midnight in the street,
    Hollow and restless and loud.

But the bitterest disgrace
Is to see for ever the face
    Of the Monk of Ephesus!
The unconquerable will
This, too, can bear;—I still
    Am Belisarius!

The splendour of the poem is in this last exclamation. It is like a very famous saying in one of the ancient Greek tragedies, the great tragedy of Medea. Medea has killed her brother to save her husband. She has betrayed her father for the sake of her husband. She has lost her home, her country, her friends for the sake of this husband. He has betrayed her at last, and she is not a woman to bear wrong without revenging it. She will kill the new wife in a most terrible way. She will kill her own children — because they are the children of the man she hates, and because she can best wound his heart by killing them. But the chorus in the play asks her what she will do after that. "What will be left to you, when you have lost parents, brother, friends, home, country, husband, children? What will be left to you?" Then she makes the famous answer that has remained celebrated through all time, the answer of the strong will: "Myself!" She is self-sufficient, she will always conquer. And it is the same thought that

Longfellow puts into the words of Belisarius: "I can bear any pain, *because* I am Belisarius — because I know myself greater than all those who persecute me." Nevertheless I must tell you that Belisarius had his weak side. He loved the wrong kind of woman, who betrayed him with a monk; and when he wished to revenge himself she got the empress Theodora to protect her, and Belisarius was obliged to leave his disgrace unrevenged. Both the empress and the wife of Belisarius, Antonina, had been public dancers before becoming wives, and they helped each other in after times to do much that was wicked. The whole story is very horrible, for the son of Belisarius was most cruelly treated by this unnatural mother. Belisarius, in the poem, very properly observes that the recollection of moral pain is more difficult to bear than the loss of honours, wealth, rank, and even sight. But you will be glad to hear that the best historians do not believe the tradition that Belisarius became blind or was made blind. On the contrary, there is reason to think that he was forgiven by the emperor just before his death. Still, the poet was quite right in choosing the most tragical form of the legend; because he could in this way better manifest the heroism of the man.

Leaving the subject of history, let us take one or two poems of legendary character derived from strange sources. There are no stranger stories in the world than the old Rabbinical stories to be found in the Jewish Talmud. I may mention here that there are two Talmuds—the Jerusalem and the Babylonian, in which the most wonderful stories are; and some of them are believed with good reason to have been taken from the ancient beliefs of the people of Babylon. The Babylonian Talmud is much larger than the other; both have been translated within the last fifteen years — the Jerusalem Talmud into French, and the Babylonian into English. Yet it was not until very recently that there was any popular knowledge of these wonderful books, except such as came to the general reader through the work of a few poets like Longfellow. A vast number of

the Talmudic stories are monstrous, or so strange as to be unsuited to modern poetry. But a few of them are very beautiful, with a beauty all of their own; and Longfellow knew how to pick out these. He selected among others the legend of Sandalphon, and gave to it a new interpretation.

Have you read in the Talmud of old,
In the Legends the Rabbins have told
  Of the limitless realm of the air,
Have you read it,—the marvellous story
Of Sandalphon, the Angel of Glory,
  Sandalphon, the Angel of Prayer?

How, erect, at the outermost gates
Of the City Celestial he waits,
  With his feet on the ladder of light,
That, crowded with angels unnumbered,
By Jacob was seen, as he slumbered
  Alone in the desert at night?

The Angels of Wind and of Fire
Chant only one hymn, and expire
  With the song's irresistible stress;
Expire in their rapture and wonder,
As harp-strings are broken asunder
  By music they throb to express.

But serene in the rapturous throng,
Unmoved by the rush of the song,
  With eyes unimpassioned and slow,
Among the dead angels, the deathless
Sandalphon stands listening breathless
  To sounds that ascend from below;—

From the spirits on earth that adore,
From the souls that entreat and implore
  In the fervour and passion of prayer;
From the hearts that are broken with losses,
And weary with dragging the crosses
  Too heavy for mortals to bear.

And he gathers the prayers as he stands,
And they change into flowers in his hands,
  Into garlands of purple and red;
And beneath the great arch of the portal,
Through the streets of the City Immortal
  Is wafted the fragrance they shed.

It is but a legend, I know,—
A fable, a phantom, a show,
  Of the ancient Rabbinical lore;
Yet the old mediæval tradition,
The beautiful, strange superstition,
  But haunts me and holds me the more.

When I look from my window at night,
And the welkin above is all white,
  All throbbing and panting with stars,
Among them majestic is standing
Sandalphon the angel, expanding
  His pinions in nebulous bars.

And the legend, I feel, is a part
Of the hunger and thirst of the heart,
  The frenzy and fire of the brain,
That grasps as the fruitage forbidden,
The golden pomegranates of Eden,
  To quiet its fever and pain.

It is impossible to read the poem once and ever forget it. Not only is it beautiful music; it is one of the most successful of Longfellow's short poems in the beauty of its images and fancies. The man who cannot feel the charm of it cannot feel at all. Perhaps I had better make a few notes about those thoughts of it which seem to need a little explanation.

The reference to Jacob's dream you will find in the Book of Genesis—he saw in that dream a ladder rising from earth to heaven, and angels going up and down this ladder. The Talmud has many other stories about the ladder, and

they say that Sandalphon always stands at the top of the steps. There he receives the prayers of men as they rise up to heaven; and as he touches them they are changed into celestial flowers and are passed on into Paradise, to make beautiful the ways. According to the old legends there were angels for every element, — angels of water and fire, rain and snow, light and heat, angels for each of the seasons, for each of the virtues, for each of the different branches of knowledge. In short, all good or useful things were ruled by angels, and all evil things were presided over by demons. Among the angels of air, — angels outside heaven yet above earth, there were some who died almost as soon as they came into existence — died of happiness after their first song. Such were the angels of fire and of wind; you can see for yourselves the symbolism here, explaining the action of these elements as the action of intelligent life. Fire and wind were to old Jewish fancy, intelligences. But Sandalphon was an immortal angel, always remaining unmoved, busy only with the prayers of men. In the eighth verse I want you to notice the beauty of the suggestion. The poet tells us, "Whenever I look out of my window at night, into the clear sky, I fancy that I can see the figure of Sandalphon, standing on the milky way as upon the ladder of light, and spreading out his wings in *nebulous bars*." This is a very fine expression. The word "nebulous," you know, means cloudy or vapoury: but here the vapour is the vapour of light. "Bars" signifies parallel lines; so that the phrase "nebulous bars" really means bright vapoury lines. The phrase at once brings before the mind the image of an angel's wing as represented in the old art of the church; the lines, or bars, are of course the lines of wing feathers as seen when the wings are expanded either vertically or horizontally. The last verse may not be so easily understood, for it is a little mystical. You will remember that the fruit of the garden of Paradise, of which man was forbidden to eat, was the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Now, paraphrased, the full meaning of the

verse would be: "I feel that this story was inspired by the longing of man's heart for divine love and sympathy—inspired also, perhaps, by the passionate desire of men for knowledge of what never can be known; because the secret of the universe must always be for us the forbidden fruit of Paradise." And the suggestion is that if we did know what we cannot know, we might not be so happy even as we are. But we imagine, or want to imagine, that we know something; and thus these beautiful fables about heaven and angels really help to make us more contented in this world, so long as we can think they are true, — just as fretful children can be made happy by telling them fairy-tales. One thing more I should like you to notice—the fine value which Longfellow gives in the seventh stanza to the word "superstition" by placing before it the adjectives "beautiful and strange." This is a classically correct use of the word. Many of you may have thought that the word "superstition" necessarily means something ignorant or vulgar or contemptible in itself; and on the lips of vulgar people it does have that meaning. But the original meaning refers only to a supernatural belief, and the word had a much more generous signification. In any event it is well to observe that much of those beliefs which we call superstitions, are worthy of, not only our respect, but even our affection. Whether they are true or not true, makes no difference at all. They are the foundation of what is poetical and beautiful in literature, in art, and even in religion. But it is not every poet who has the noble courage to speak of a beautiful superstition as Longfellow has done.

Very soft and dreamy are these selections which I have given; and softness and dreaminess and ghostliness make most of the charm of Longfellow. Yet with these tender and almost ethereal ways of utterance he can often wake the strongest kind of enthusiasm. Mere force of words does not always produce forcible effects; the sense of beauty may be more powerful than any recognition of strength, on the same principle that an electric shock may effect even more

than the blow of a sledge-hammer. I suppose you have read "The Leap of Roushan Beg;" it is in some of the school texts. The verse is just as soft, as dreamy, as the verse of "Sandalphon;" but the emotion produced is of a very different kind. Roushan Beg was a Kurdish robber who really lived; and there is a collection of Persian poems about him which are even more interesting than the English ballads of Robin Hood. One day a force of cavalry was sent after him by the government, and he had to ride before them. He had the best horse in the world, called Kyrat; and while Kyrat had a chance to run, no other horse could overtake him. The Persian cavalry could not overtake Kyrat. But their leader was very cunning; and he managed the pursuit in so clever a way that Roushan Beg at last found himself following a road that ended suddenly at a precipice. The bridge was gone. What was he to do? With another steed the situation would have been hopeless, but the robber knew his horse. He coaxed him, caressed him, flattered him, in the old Persian way, which is very pretty as the poet tells it, and further has the merit of being almost an exact translation of the real language used, for I had the pleasure of reading the original of the story. It is, I may remark here, a custom with the men of several oriental races to talk to their horse as if they were talking to a person who could understand. Perhaps the horse really does understand sometimes. But is not this pretty?—

Gently Roushan Beg caressed
Kyrat's forehead, neck, and breast;
  Kissed him upon both his eyes;
Sang to him in his wild way,
As upon the topmost spray
  Sings a bird before it flies.

"O my Kyrat, O my steed,
Round and slender as a reed,
  Carry me this peril through!

Satin housings shall be thine,
Shoes of gold, O Kyrat mine,
O thou soul of Kurroglou!

"Soft thy skin as silken skein,
Soft as woman's hair thy mane,
Tender are thine eyes and true;
All thy hoofs like ivory shine,
Polished bright; O, life of mine,
Leap, and rescue Kurroglou!"

Of course we expect the horse to do something grand after having been petted like this; and he does.

Kyrat, then, the strong and fleet,
Drew together his four white feet,
Paused a moment on the verge,
Measured with his eye the space,
And into the air's embrace
Leaped as leaps the ocean surge.

As the ocean surge o'er sand
Bears a swimmer safe to land,
Kyrat safe his rider bore;
Rattling down the deep abyss
Fragments of the precipice
Rolled like pebbles on a shore.

It was a clear leap of thirty feet across a chasm hundreds of feet deep. Thirty feet for a horse carrying a man on his back is a great leap; you must remember that in order to make it the horse must really clear a space about thirty-five feet. It has been done, no doubt.

Roushan's tasselled cap of red
Trembled not upon his head,
Careless sat he and upright;
Neither hand nor bridle shook,
Nor his head he turned to look,
As he galloped out of sight.

Flash of harness in the air,
Seen a moment like a glare
  Of a sword drawn from its sheath;
Thus the phantom horseman passed,
And the shadow that he cast
  Leaped the cataract underneath.

This is the finest stanza in the poem, and it shows the true genius of poetic fancy. Of course when the horseman leaps the chasm, his shadow also makes the leap—but how many poets would have thought of describing it? It is this reference to the shadow that makes the scene intensely vivid to the reader. The enemies watching below do not hear the echo of a horse's hoofs far above, as he springs from precipice to precipice; they only see him passing above their heads, and the flash of the rider's armour, quick as the flash of a sword; and they see the shadow of the leaper passing over the cataract below. Here Longfellow takes nothing from the Persian; the description is his own. But this conclusion is from the ancient story:

Reyhan the Arab held his breath
While this vision of life and death
  Passed above him. "Allahu!"
Cried he. "In all Koordistan
Lives there not so brave a man
  As this Robber Kurroglou!"

And this is exactly what the reader feels after finishing the poem. The emotional power of it is in the contrast, chiefly. The caressing of the horse, with all those poetical phrases, a scene of affection and trust in the face of death, is suddenly followed by the triumph of strength and daring; so that the reader, at first filled with fear and pity, is quite suddenly forced into an attitude of exalted admiration. But it is done, as I showed you, with very soft and simple language, and the use of incidents in contrast is made to do more than any word.

There was a very wonderful French artist, Gustave

Doré, of whom you all have doubtless heard. He was perhaps the greatest illustrator of modern times, but he was great in a particular way; he could put soul or spirit into rocks, stones, trees, clouds, and foam of water, so when you look at the clouds in his picture, you see them taking terrible shapes, of dragons, giants, monsters of various kinds —yet they always look like clouds. When you look at the roots of the pine trees, you see them moving like serpents, with heads and eyes and fangs. The forms of his mountains also are forces and bodies; and in the crest and foam of his waves you can distinguish the shapes of the spirits of the drowned. But he does not ever seem unnatural. When he is painting gloomy scenery, the ghostly suggestion of that scenery is gloomy. But when he is painting beautiful scenery, his spectral fancies are often very charming. He felt nature much as a child feels it,—an imaginative child, who believes that everything is alive and can think. Now every great poet ought to have this childish power of imagination, and to have it very much in the same way that the great French artist had it. Longfellow was not a great poet of the first rank, but he did have this faculty. I could easily show you a hundred proofs by quotation. But a few examples will do. Perhaps you may have read the poem of Sir Humphrey Gilbert. Sir Humphrey Gilbert was really one of the old English navigators, who died in a strange and terrible way. His ship was surrounded by icebergs and crushed in the middle of the night — at least, there is evidence justifying this theory of his disappearance. When he was seen by the people of another ship for the last time, he is said to have exclaimed, on being warned of his danger, "It matters nothing — one can go to heaven by water as well as by land" — and he sat down on deck to read his Bible. It is a famous story, and Longfellow has told it very weirdly. The thing to remark about his treatment of it is that he makes a picture of the icebergs just as Doré might have done. They take life,—become shapes of animated terror.

Southward with fleet of ice
  Sailed the corsair Death,

—thus finely begins the poem. Death, so personified, comes from the north as a corsair—that is, a pirate, to pursue Sir Humphrey Gilbert. But it is in the description of the white fleet that the Doresque quality appears.

His lordly ships of ice
  Glisten in the sun;
On each side, like pennons wide,
  Flashing crystal streamlets run.

His sails of white sea-mist
  Dripped with silver rain;
But where he passed there were cast
  Leaden shadows o'er the main.
. . . . . .
In the first watch of the night,
  Without a signal's sound,
Out of the sea, mysteriously,
  The fleet of Death rose all around.

The moon and the evening star
  Were hanging in the shrouds;
Every mast, as it passed,
  Seemed to rake the passing clouds.

They grappled with their prize,
  At midnight black and cold!
As of a rock was the shock;
  Heavily the ground-swell rolled.

The words are very simple; but several of them are nautical terms, and these give picturesqueness to the verse. "Grapple," you know, is a naval term; also "prize"; also "shrouds" (meaning the upper rigging); also "rake," to scrape or touch in passing. Perhaps "ground-swell" may be a new word to some of you; it means a peculiar motion of the sea, — not from the surface, but from the bottom.

Waves made by a ground-swell are terrible as tidal waves, for you can see the surface of the water smooth as glass, but close to shore the waves may be forty or fifty feet high.

Of course, to appreciate the full power of the fancy, one should see icebergs moving. Rising out of the water sometimes to the height of several hundred feet, all aglitter in the sun, they do bear, at a great distance, a strange resemblance to the outline of an enormous ship, with all sails. When the poet speaks of the moon and the evening star seeming to hang up in the ghostly rigging of the ship of Death, he is only picturing an effect of moonlight in the neighbourhood of an iceberg which many voyagers have noticed. The word "hanging" suggests to us the lanterns of a real ship suspended to the upper masts. In the ice ship the stars of heaven seem to be occupying the place of such lanterns.

Of sea-pictures there are many equally weird scattered through Longfellow, who loved the sea and knew it well. One can never forget, after reading them, such lines as these—

> I 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,*

or the famous lines about the coming of the storm in the "Ballad of the French Fleet"—

> It came with a mighty power,
> Shaking the windows and walls,
> And tolling the bells in the tower,
> As it tolls at funerals,

or the stanzas describing sea and sky before King Olaf's last battle—

* *My Lost Youth.*

Louder and louder the war-horns sang
Over the level floor of the flood;
All the sails came down with a clang,
And there in the mist overhead
The sun hung red
As a drop of blood.

All through the poems you will find the flashing of surf and hear the murmuring of waves. I think Longfellow was especially a sea poet.

But coming back to the subject of his power of describing inanimate things in the language of animation, I want to give you an example from the beginning of his famous poem "Evangeline." I do not think that any one who has not been in America could perfectly understand it. There is one part of America where the scenery is unlike almost anything else in the world. It is not such scenery as the tropics can give us; but it is much more weird than anything in the tropics. I mean some of the forest scenery in the southern states, and especially in Louisiana and in Florida. There are extraordinary mosses in those forests — at least, people call them mosses. They are really air plants. When very young they are pale green. When they mature they become silver grey. You do not find them on the ground; they grow only high up, on the trees, and they look like mosses of long white hair hanging down from every branch and twig of the tree. Indeed, these mosses look so much like an old man's beard that the French settlers who succeeded the Spaniards in those countries called those mosses by the name of *Barbe Espagnole*, or "Spanish Beard." I have travelled hundreds of miles through American forests hung with this strange kind of moss, making every tree look like a ghost or a goblin. You never forget the sight. Even by day it is uncanny; at night, seen by the torch fire, it is simply awful. Now I have heard Englishmen find fault with Longfellow, because he compared the trees of the primeval forest to old men,—old poets with long white beards.

The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct
in the twilight,
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic,
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on
their bosoms.

I have actually heard that an English critic said that trees covered with moss do not at all look like old men with long white beards. But the person who makes such a criticism has never seen Spanish-moss in American forests. Longfellow could not have made a better comparison. Many of the trees do really look like harpers of old—Druids as they are represented in art, — all wrapped about in long grey garments, and with beards reaching down below their waists.

Do you know the little poem called "The Golden Mile-Stone"? Perhaps some of you may not know the exact meaning of the title. There led into Ancient Rome, from every part of the world, military roads—the best roads that ever were made; and these roads united Rome with no less than eleven hundred great cities. So you could walk from Rome thousands of miles, far into Asia, if you wished to do so; and you could return to Rome by hundreds of different ways. All over these roads stones were set up marking the distances in miles; and all these distances were calculated from Rome or to Rome. But every road ended in the middle of Rome itself; and there, in the heart of the city, was set up the golden milestone from which all distances were recorded.

So much for the title of the poem. You will perceive that there is a beautiful suggestion in it.

Now once on a winter day the poet looks out upon the landscape at sunset and he sees beauty—

Leafless are the trees; their purple branches
Spread themselves abroad, like reefs of coral,
Rising silent
In the Red Sea of the winter sunset.

You must have studied nature closely to observe the truth of this little picture. Dark objects, as seen against the red line of sunset, often take a purple colour. This makes the poet think of branches of red coral in the sea; and the vast space of crimson light then appears to him like a sea. Presently he notices the smoke ascending from the houses of the country people against the same bright light. The air is very still, so that the smoke goes up straight like a pillar. And he begins to think how every man, when far away from home, remembers the aspect of his native place, and remembers the smoke rising up from his own roof. Those pillars of smoke, after many years, represent the happiness of his family—the warmth and comfort of the parental dwelling; and, all of a sudden, he remembers the story about the golden milestone of Rome—

> Each man's chimney is his Golden Mile-stone;
> Is the central point, from which he measures
> Every distance
> Through the gateways of the world around him.
>
> In his farthest wanderings still he sees it;
> Hears the talking flame, the answering night-wind,
> As he heard them
> When he sat with those who were, but are not.

This is an example of the ability to make beautiful poetry out of the commonest sights and sounds. A still better example of the same power is to be found in a poem called "The Ropewalk." A ropewalk, as it is called in America, is a place where ropes are made. It is very pretty to see them made, — but the poet, watching the spinners, suddenly begins to think about what will be done with all those ropes, after they have been sent away and sold. Some of them will be used for swings, for happy children. Some will be used for well-ropes, for drawing water; and the poet sees a girl pulling up a brimming bucket from the well and watching the reflection of her own pretty face in

the bucket as she drinks. Some of them will be used for ringing church bells; some of them will be used for ships; some of them used to discover the depth of the sea when a dangerous coast is approached. Some will be used in theatres, as tight ropes for gymnasts to dance upon; and the poet fancies the figure of a tired girl dangerously balancing herself upon a rope in order to amuse the people. And some, alas! will be used in prison to hang people with — which saddens the poet to think of. What a succession of pictures have been suggested to him by simply looking at the labour of the rope maker!

In all these citations from Longfellow and comments on them, I have wanted only one thing—to give you a correct idea of how Longfellow should be fairly judged. He is not a painter in oil-colours. He is only an artist in water-colours; but so far as poetry can be really spoken of as water-colour painting, I do not know of any modern English poet of his own rank who can even compare with him. Think of him, therefore, if you can as one who paints very charming pictures in very charming aquarelle. Secondly, remember that he is a ghost-like story-teller. There are many story-tellers among the poets of this age, besides the great story-tellers of the first rank, such as Tennyson or Rossetti. There was Morris, for example, writing stories in verse quite as skilful as Sir Walter Scott's. Longfellow I should nevertheless put very much above Morris. Sometimes his verse is not so correct as that of Morris; but Morris is often tiresome, and Longfellow never is. I think the great merit of Longfellow as a story-teller is that he always knows when to stop.

And thirdly, Longfellow perceived the beauty of the world in quite a special way, feeling the ghostliness of nature in all her manifestations, and reflecting it in his simple verse, without calling to his help any religious sentiment. Now this is not a common virtue. Most of the poets who are great nature lovers and take nature seriously have been very apt to mingle religious idealism with their

pictures. Longfellow does not do this. There is no narrow religious feeling to be found in any of his work. Indeed, he was the most generous-minded of poets — looking everywhere for beauty and finding it everywhere, and always indifferent as to whether it was Christian or pagan, domestic or foreign, old or new. All he required was that it should be beautiful in itself, morally or otherwise.

And now I shall conclude this lecture with this simple observation, that I hope you will give fresh attention to this poet in the future rather than allow yourselves to be influenced by some recent English criticisms upon him. If we listened to the critics only, we should very soon believe that there is nothing in the world which is good.