

OUR BIOGRAPHICAL BUREAU.

[Written for THE FAMILY CIRCLE.]

LONGFELLOW.

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"There in that silent room below
The dead lay in his shroud of snow;
And in the hush that followed the prayer
We heard the old clock on the stair,—
'Forever—never!
Never—forever!'"

Still stands the old clock on the stair, while the ear that could catch in its ticking the voice of eternity, as it could catch the sound of song in the whisperings of the "forest primeval, the murmuring pines and the hemlocks," and "accents disconsolate in the sound of the deep voiced ocean," now hears no more, and the world mourns over a lost friend; for of Longfellow, as of Ibycus of old, it may be said that "every heart has lost him."

One of the greatest of the many poets of our age, his death leaves but few belonging to the same class as he, and they too are on the verge of the tomb. Men are led to ask who are to be the great poets of the present generation when the few who belong in time, if not in spirit, to the last generation shall have passed over to the silent majority. The old harpers are dropping off apace, and there seems to be no worthy successor to tune anew the silent strings.

In the case of Longfellow the loss of the man is felt almost as keenly as the loss of the poet. This cannot be said of all the poets, nor indeed of many of them. The blameless, active, useful life he led, his genial and sensitive nature, his kind and tender heart, and his want of selfishness, made him a teacher, companion and friend not soon to be forgotten by those with whom he came in contact. Lacking that jealousy so unfortunately common among literary men that are to some extent rivals, he has always kindly words to speak of his great contemporaries—Tennyson, Lowell, Hawthorne, Sumner, Whittier, and the rest. He even willingly acknowledges superiority where it exists.

As a poet, Longfellow is among the best known and most universally liked. His simple style, picturesqueness, graceful language and musical verse are calculated to give pleasure to the majority; the great variety of his subjects—for he left nothing untouched—gives something suited to the taste of each; and his thoughts strike an answering chord in the hearts of all. He is said by some to be a poet without strong emotions and almost without power. If emotion means the excitement of inward feelings such as sympathy for those in trouble or sorrow, pity, awe, and the like; and if by power is meant the ability to stir up these feelings of the heart and soul, or to soothe them—then his poetry is emotional and he is by no means without power. Although he is not a poet of the greatest power, that quality is certainly present in his ballads, especially "The Skeleton in Armor," and "The Wreck of the Hesperus." Both of these show, too, his power of imagination, for "no Saga taught him:"

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

Then launched they to the blast,
Bent like a reed each mast,
Yet we were gaining fast,
When the wind failed us;
And with a sudden flaw
Came round the gusty Skaw,
So that our foe we saw
Laugh as he hailed us.

And as to catch the gale
Round veered the flapping sail,
Death! was the helmsman's hail,
Death! without quarter!

Midships with iron keel
Struck we her ribs of steel:
Down her black hulk did reel
Through the black water."

It is hardly necessary to quote from "The Wreck of the Hesperus," which is so familiar to all. Other poems might be alluded to as showing the poet's power; it will be sufficient to mention "Evangeline" and "Hiawatha." He must indeed have the heart of a stoic who can without emotion, even to tears, follow the wandering of the despairing, heart-broken exiles

"From the bleak shores of the sea to the lands where the
Father of Waters,
Seizes the hills in his hands and drags them down to the
Ocean,"

or go with Evangeline urged by that restless longing to see her lover again, and refusing the hand of another suitor, through churchyards, by nameless graves, over the great west, till, after many disappointments and years of waiting fidelity, she at length finds her Gabriel, as

"Motionless, senseless, dying he lay, and his spirit exhausted,
Seemed to be sinking down through infinite depths in the
darkness."

Nor need we pass the same poem to find the verbal expression of the strong, true, pure love of woman:

"And she beheld the face of Gabriel pale with emotion,
Tears then filled her eyes, and, eagerly running to meet him,
Clasped she his hands and laid her head on his shoulder, and
whispered;

'Gabriel, be of good cheer; for if we love one another,
Nothing in truth can harm us, whatever mischances may
happen.'"

And again, in grief and disappointment, the voice of the true heart cries out of the depths:

"O! Gabriel! O, my beloved!
Art thou so near unto me, and yet I cannot behold thee!
Art thou so near unto me, and yet thy voice cannot reach
me!"

Was ever truer picture of pure and constant love drawn by poet's hand? It may be that Longfellow had not the power of a Byron, but he had a power bearing a much closer resemblance to the calm power that could say to the stormy waves of the Lake of Galilee, "Peace be still." That calm influence which has made its way to the hearts of the masses is particularly felt in his odes. It is true that there is little humor or satire in his poetry, but these, too, are found in his dramas. That these are not the elements most pleasing to the majority is proved by the fact that comparatively few read his dramas. In power of description Longfellow is not deficient. It is necessary to mention only "Hiawatha" as an example. In this poem his characteristic phrases and epithets are almost Homeric. As we read his verses we can see the curling smoke of wigwags and peace pipes "ever rising, rising, rising;" we can hear the "rushing of great rivers with their frequent repetitions and their wild reverberations, as of thunder in the mountains;" our ear catches the sound of "singing pine trees, green in summer, white in winter, ever sighing, ever singing." He brings around us gentlest whispers, softest music, sweetest odors, smiles of sunshine, hissing snowflakes, wailing winds, icy breaths, snow besprinkled tresses, forest wild-flowers, prairie lilies, flitting fire-flies, rippling streams, until we feel that we are verily in fairyland, and that the hand of Gitche Manito, the mighty, is near us.

It is probable that Longfellow's immortality will rest, not so much on his dramas, although they are not without power and interest, nor on his translations of northern legends and southern odes and epics—although that of Dante is the best ever produced—as upon his two original epics, "Evangeline" and "Hiawatha," and upon his odes, many of which have become household words. While life shall last men shall sing his "Psalm of Life" to stir themselves and others up to noble action. While man shall "eat bread in the sweat of his face" the sons of toil will be happier and better for the poet's cheering words in the "Village Blacksmith." The maiden, "standing with reluctant feet where the brook and river meet," is encouraged to go on and "send the dew of youth into wounds that cannot heal," and the "smile of truth, like