

HIAWATHA.



THE mythological tales and legends of any nation, race, or time have always proved very instructive and and interesting to their readers, and the mythology of the North American Indians, the aboriginies of this continent is no exception to the general rule ; it has been read and re-read with intense interest and manifest pleasure by many thousands of people.

The Indian with his simple life and vague superstitions has found an excellent and faithful portrayal in that nearest approach to an epic to which Americans can lay any just claim, Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. Mr. Longfellow, after much patient toil and careful research, aided by his lively imagination and poetic instincts, has gathered up and woven together the traditions and legends of the Indians into the wierd and beautiful word-picture of the life and customs of the original Americans. He saw the absurdity of attempting to portray the Indian in the conventional style and ideas in which the Knickerbockers poets has written, and sought for some meter which should be entirely proper, but still would be different from any which had been used in the composition of any similar work. At length he determined to employ the meter used in the composition of the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, and that he did so with great success is very evident from a careful and intelligent perusal of the poem.

This meter was a rhymeless trochaic dimeter admirably adapted to *Hiawatha*, because "Indian traditions are but the myths of an untutored race, and would seem puerile and affected in any but the most primitive of chanting measures." Great strength was shown in this part, which is the most frequently criticised

piece of verse work, for he displayed a subtle sense of the requirements of his simple story of a primitive race, in choosing the most fluid of measures that lets the thought run through it in easy sing song style such as oral tradition would be sure to find on the lips of the story-tellers in the wigwams.

Longfellow's apparent mastery of the Indian tongue is wonderful, and his use of their dialect is charming, and is one of the most admirable and admired points upon which a criticism is based.

The simplicity of the style, and the seeming disregard in the matter of metrical precedents in the same line of work only lends additional charm to the natural music inherent in the words and meter. This strikes the reader from the very beginning to the last line of the poem. The rising and falling cadences of the lines elevates the peruser into almost an ecstasy of delight, and only relinquish their firm grasp upon him when with a sigh of regret he closes the book ; but even then he is cognizant that they have left a deep and indellible impress upon his mind.

A striking instance of this is had in the verses which contain the plaintive farewell of *Hiawatha* to *Minnehaha*, his wife, after her death.

Farewell, said he. *Minnehaha*,
Farewell, O my Laughing Water,
Come back not again to labor,
Where the famine and the fever
Wear the heart and waste the body.
Soon my task will be completed,
Soon your footsteps I shall follow,
To the Islands of the Blessed,
To the Kingdom of *Ponemah*,
To the land of the Hereafter.

The soft and melancholy music of these lines must often move a sympathetic reader to tears. And again in the response made by *Nokomis*, the grandmother of *Hiawatha*, in answer to his query as to what was the rainbow which