

* English *

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ENTRANCE LITERATURE.

RESIGNATION,

BY LONGFELLOW.



HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

I. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF "RESIGNATION."

RESIGNATION, while representing to us the chastened feelings of fathers and mothers in general on the loss of beloved children, acquires additional interest from its connection with the poet's own life. The poem is the impression of Longfellow's feelings on the death of his infant daughter Frances. In his journal he chronicles the incidents in her short life. "Oct. 30, 1847. Fanny was christened. . . . She looked charmingly and behaved well throughout. Sept. 4, 1848. Fanny very weak and miserable. Which way will the balance of life and death turn? 10th. A day of agony; the physicians have no longer any hope; I cannot yet abandon it. Motionless she lies; only a little moan now and then. 11th. Lower and lower. Through the silent, desolate rooms the clocks tick loud. At half-past four this afternoon she died. . . . Her breathing grew fainter, fainter, then ceased without a sigh, without a flutter,—perfectly painless. The sweetest expression was on her face. 12th. Our little child was buried to-day. From her nursery, down the front stairs; through my study and into the library, she was borne in the arms of her old nurse. And thence, after the prayer, through the long halls to her coffin and grave. For a long time I sat by her, alone, in the darkened library. The twilight fell softly on her placid face and the white flowers she held in her little hands. In the deep silence the bird sang from the hall a melancholy *requiem*. Nov. 12th. I feel very sad to-day. I miss very much my dear little Fanny. An unappeasable longing to see her comes over me at times, which I can hardly control.

II. EXPLANATIONS OF CERTAIN LINES OF THE POEM.

"Howso'er defended." However watchful the parent may be to guard against disease or accident.

"The heart of Rachel." Rachel is here taken as typical of a mother. That she may be so taken arises from the expressions in Jeremiah xxxi., 15, and Matthew ii. 18.

"Not from the ground arise." Death does not come because of the powers of the world.

"Celestial benedictions—dark disguise." The blessings that heaven bestows on us often come in the sad form of death—the silver lining to the dark cloud.

"We see but dimly . . . damps." The punctuation is faulty. Place a comma at "vapors" and

a semi-colon at "damps." We are so blinded by passions and prejudices (as we are physically, by mists, vapors, and damps) that we cannot see the true meaning of the calamities that befall us. Cp.

"Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until death tramples it to fragments."
—Shelley.

"Funereal tapers . . . lamps." The candles burning about the dead (custom of Roman Catholics), seem to our poor human vision the signs of a calamity. Could we see them with "larger, other eyes," they might seem the lights of heaven, guiding us to our celestial home.

"There is no death! . . . transition." Cp. Life, which, in its weakness or excess, Is still a gleam of God's omnipotence, Or death, which, seeming darkness, is no less The self-same light, although averted hence.

LONGFELLOW, *Birds of Killingworth*.

"Life of mortal breath." The life that we, as mortals, live.

"The suburb of the life Elysian." Suburb—part lying near (a city). The life Elysian—life in Paradise. The term Elysian fields (Elysium) was commonly used by the Greek poets to denote Paradise.

"School." This description of heaven is justified only by the thought that the child as she grows up is to be trained in all good graces. Note that the poet feels the weakness of the comparison; for, in the following stanza, he strengthens it by reference to the "great cloister's stillness and seclusion." Our notion of 'school' is thus elevated into that of something massive, ancient, inspiring awe and veneration, as are the great cloisters (really covered walks in monasteries, etc.; here, the monastery or nunnery itself) of Europe.

"Thus do we walk with her." Accompanying in our thought her movements day by day, knowing each change that takes place in her stature and character.

"The bond which nature gave." The bond of parental affection and relationship.

"Beautiful with all the soul's expansion." The poet holds the view that the countenance reveals the purity and grace of the spirit. "The soul's expansion" is the development of the spiritual nature, which the poet says takes place in heaven.

"Assuage the feeling . . . stay." We cannot wholly check our grief, yet we can and will moderate its outbursts.

"By silence sanctifying." The poet has pointed out that the death of his daughter is the work of Heaven, and that the departed one is in a brighter and better world than ours; hence to mourn is to be rebellious towards God. Nevertheless the impulse of grief is too strong to be wholly repressed. He therefore will purify and sanctify this grief by bearing it with patience and in silence.

III. QUESTIONS.

Much of the foregoing might and should be elicited from the pupil by patient questioning and discussion. In the teachers talk with the class on the general substance of the poem, some such line of thought as the following might be pursued:

Does a lamb die in every flock? Does death enter every herd? Does death come because the shepherd does not guard his flock from accident, or take care to feed it? What happens similar in human life? What picture is called up by the word "fireside"? Who is missing? Has death come because the parents were not careful to guard their children from disease and harm? Do you know any "firesides" where there are vacant chairs? How common does the poet think death is? Does he take comfort from the thought of the frequency of death? (Do not think he does. Remember Tennyson's lines in *In Memoriam* :

One writes that 'Other friends remain,'
That loss is common to the race—
And common is the commonplace,
And vacant chaff well meant for grain.

That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more:
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break).

What feelings has the mother on the death of a child? What attitude towards this sad world does

the poet take? Why does he exhort us to stand thus? (Note the poem from this point on indicates the reasons for resignation). Show that death may not be the result of the action of the powers of this world. How could a calamity ever be a blessing in disguise? Give any instance to show that we poor mortals are not always able to judge the actions of Providence justly. What is death according to the Christian faith? How does the poet picture life, death and immortality, when he uses the terms 'suburb,' 'portal,' 'life Elysian?' If there is no real death, are we right to mourn? (This completes the first step towards resignation. Death is really life). But has any ill befallen the dead child in the Elysian fields? What is her state there compared with her state if she had remained on earth? Does she need to be 'defended' there? Who is her guide and counsellor? What kind of life does she lead? Should the parents grieve on her account? (This completes the second step. The child is happy in heaven). But does she cease to be a daughter because of her being in heaven? How do the parents still maintain their relationship to her? Does she, do you think, know that they think of her? How will she have changed when the parents join her in heaven? How will she receive them? If she is still to be their daughter and to love them, should the parents grieve? (This completes the third step. The child is ever their daughter). But alas? the parents know and feel all this, yet love, the longing mother's love, cries out for the lost babe, and the sad heart swells with its grief, sobbing like the ocean tide upon a lonely shore. Yet be calm, sad heart, before God's will and work; think of the child in Paradise, still your daughter. Bear in patient resignation thy grief.

IV. THE MEMORIZING.

The poem should be committed to memory, as indicated in other articles.

LESSONS IN RHETORIC.

BY J. E. WETHERELL, B.A.

FIGURES OF CONTRAST.

IT is a common device of language to place opposites in juxtaposition, in order to make a clear impression or to heighten effect. As all forms of similitudes are not figures, so there are some forms of contrast so simple and natural that they should not, perhaps, be designated as figurative. It is difficult, however, to draw the line between literal and figurative antitheses. It will be seen by a study of the following examples that there are many modes of antithesis; some more highly figurative and effective than others; some, illustrations of extreme contrast, and others only secondary contrasts, the contrasted terms not being opposites of each other; some, examples of the simple figure, and others gaining point and pungency by a union with other figures and devices:

- (1) This boy is clever, but his brother is dull.
- (2) The Roman had an aquiline nose, the Greek a straight nose.
- (3) I am your servant but not your slave.
- (4) The cup that cheers but not inebriates.
- (5) A small leak will sink a great ship.
- (6) Blessings are upon the head of the just, but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.
- (7) Open rebuke is better than secret love.
- (8) Cæsar died a violent death, but his empire remained; Cromwell died a natural death, but his empire vanished.
- (9) It is every day in the power of a mischievous person to inflict innumerable annoyances. It is every day in the power of an amiable person to confer little services.
- (10) At the commencement of the trial there had been a strong and indeed unreasonable feeling against Hastings. At the close of the trial there was a feeling equally strong and equally unreasonable in his favor.
- (11) The Puritans hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.
- (12) It is an unquestionable and a most instructive fact that the years during which the political power of the Anglican hierarchy was in the zenith were precisely the years during which national virtue was at the lowest point.
- (13) There were gentlemen and there were seamen in the navy of Charles the Second. But the