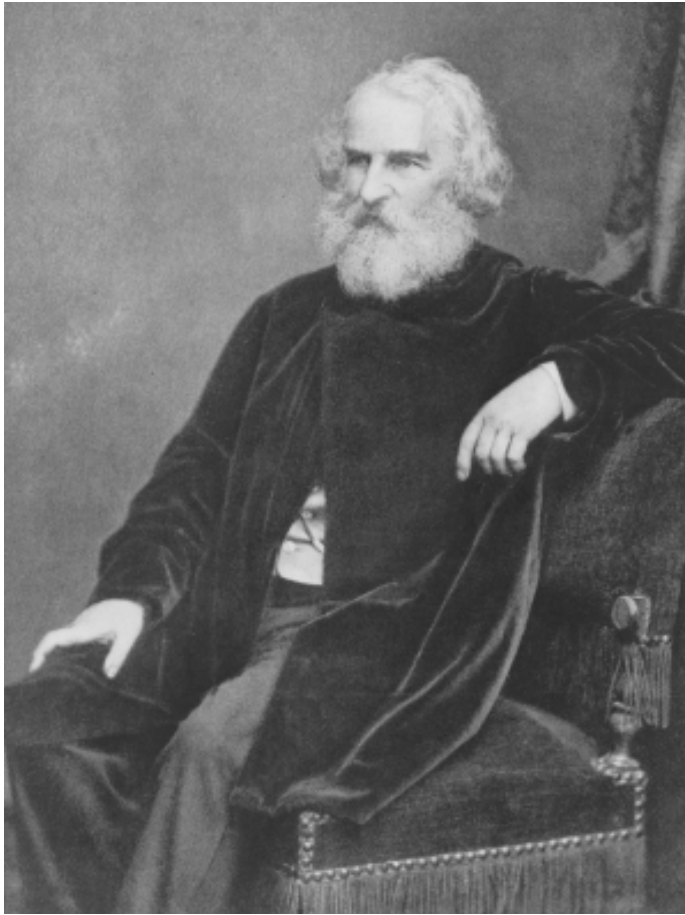


A Ballad of the French Fleet - Poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow - 1746



“A FLEET with flags arrayed Sailed from the port of Brest, And the Admiral’s ship displayed The signal: “Steer southwest.” For this Admiral D’Anville Had sworn by cross and crown To ravage with fire and steel Our helpless Boston Town. . . . Spread the tidings of dismay, I stood in the Old South, Saying humbly: “Let us pray! . . . The salvation of the Lord!” The heavens were black with cloud, The sea was white with hail, And ever more fierce and loud Blew the October gale. Like a potter’s vessel broke The great ships of the line; They were carried away as a smoke, Or sank like lead in the brine. O Lord! before thy path They vanished and ceased to be, When thou didst walk in wrath With thine horses through the sea!”

A Ballad of the French Fleet

October, 1746; Mr. Thomas Prince loquitur.

A fleet with flags arrayed
Sailed from the port of Brest,
And the Admiral's ship displayed
The signal: "Steer southwest."
For this Admiral D'Anville
Had sworn by cross and crown
To ravage with fire and steel
Our helpless Boston Town.

There were rumors in the street,
In the houses there was fear
Of the coming of the fleet,
And the danger hovering near.
And while from mouth to mouth
Spread the tidings of dismay,
I stood in the Old South,

Saying humbly: "Let us pray!

"O Lord! we would not advise;
But if in thy Providence
A tempest should arise
To drive the French fleet hence,
And scatter it far and wide,
Or sink it in the sea,
We should be satisfied,
And thine the glory be."

This was the prayer I made,
For my soul was all on flame,
And even as I prayed
The answering tempest came;
It came with a mighty power,
Shaking the windows and walls,
And tolling the bell in the tower,
As it tolls at funerals.

The lightning suddenly
Unsheathed its flaming sword,
And I cried: "Stand still, and see
The salvation of the Lord!"
The heavens were black with cloud,
The sea was white with hail,
And ever more fierce and loud
Blew the October gale.

The fleet it overtook,
And the broad sails in the van
Like the tents of Cushan shook,
Or the curtains of Midian.
Down on the reeling decks
Crashed the o'erwhelming seas;
Ah, never were there wrecks
So pitiful as these!

Like a potter's vessel broke
The great ships of the line;
They were carried away as a smoke,
Or sank like lead in the brine.
O Lord! before thy path
They vanished and ceased to be,
When thou didst walk in wrath
With thine horses through the sea!¹

Endnotes:

1. Maine Historical Society, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, http://www.hwlongfellow.org/poems_poem.php?pid=239

Photo, courtesy of the Library of Congress, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov>

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