

*The Courtship of Miles Standish.* By HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW. Boston: Ticknor & Fields. 1858.

THE introduction and acclimatization of the *hexameter* upon English soil has been an affair of more than two centuries. The attempt was first systematically made during the reign of Elizabeth, but the metre remained a feeble exotic that scarcely burgeoned under glass. Gabriel Harvey,—a kind of Don Adriano de Armado,—whose chief claim to remembrance is, that he was the friend of Spenser, boasts that he was the first to whom the notion of transplantation occurred. In his “*Four Letters*,” (1592,) he says, “If I never deserve any better remembrance, let mee rather be Epitaphed, the Inventour of the English Hexameter, whome learned M. Stanihurst imitated in his Virgill, and excellent Sir Phillip Sidney disdained not to follow in his *Arcadia* and elsewhere.” This claim of invention, however, seems to have been an afterthought with Harvey, for, in the letters which passed between him and Spenser in 1579, he speaks of himself more modestly as only a collaborator with Sidney and others in the good work. The Earl of Surrey is said to have been the first who wrote thus in English. The most successful person, however, was William Webb, who translated two of Virgil’s *Eclogues* with a good deal of spirit and harmony. Ascham, in his “*Schoolmaster*,” (1570,) had already suggested the adoption of the ancient hexameter by English poets; but Ascham (as afterwards Puttenham in his “*Art of Poesie*”) thought the number of monosyllabic words in English an insuperable objection to verses in which there was a large proportion of dactyles, and recommended, therefore, that a trial should be made with iambics. Spenser, at Harvey’s instance, seems to have tried his hand at the new kind of verse. He says,—“I like your late Englishe Hexameters so exceedingly well, that I also enure my penne sometimes in that kinde. . . . For the onely or chiefest hardnesse, whych seemeth, is in the Accente, which sometime gapeth, and, as it were, yawmeth illfaouredly, coming shorte of that it should, and sometime exceeding the measure of the Number, as in *Carpenter*; the middle sillable being vsed shorte in Speache, when it shall be read long in

Verse, seemeth like a lame Gosling that draweth one legge after hir: and *Heaven*, being used shorte as one sillable, when it is in Verse stretched out with a *Diastole*, is like a lame dogge that holdes up one legge. But it is to be wonne with Custome, and rough words must be subdued with Vse. For why a God’s name may not we, as else the Greekes, have the kingdome of our owne Language, and measure our Accentes by the Sounde, reserving the Quantitie to the Verse?” The amiable Edmonde seems to be smiling in his sleeve as he writes this sentence. He instinctively saw the absurdity of attempting to subdue English to misunderstood laws of Latin quantities, which would, for example, make the vowel in *debt* long, in the teeth of use and wont.

We give a specimen of the hexameters, which satisfied so entirely the ear of Master Gabriel Harvey,—an ear that must have been long by position, in virtue of its place on his head.

“Not the like *Discourser*, for Tongue and head to be found out;

Not the like *resolute Man*, for great and serious affayres;

Not the like *Lynx*, to spie out secretes and priuities of States;

Eyed like to *Argus*, Earde like to *Midas*,  
Nose like to *Naso*,

Wingd like to *Mercury*, fittst of a Thousand  
for to be employed.”

And here are a few from “worthy M. Stanyhurst’s” translation of the “*Æneid*.”

“Laocoon storming from Princelie Castel is  
hastning,

And a far of beloning: What fond phantastical  
harebraine

Madnesse hath enchaunted your wits, you  
townsmen unhappie?

Weene you (blind hodiepecks) the Greekish  
naueie returned,

Or that their presents want craft? is subtil  
Vlisses

So soone forgotten? My life for an haulipennie  
(Trojans),” etc.

Mr. Abraham Fraunce translates two verses of Heliodorus thus:—

“Now had fyery Phlegon his dayes reuolution  
ended,

And his snoring snowt with salt waues all  
to bee washed.”

Witty Tom Nash was right enough when he called this kind of stuff, “that drunken,

staggering kinde of verse which is all vp hill and downe hill, like the waye betwixt Stamford and Beechfeild, and goes like a horse plunging through the myre in the deep of winter, now soust up to the saddle, and straight aloft on his tiptocs." It will be noticed that his prose falls into a kind of tipsy hexameter. The attempt in England at that time failed, but the controversy to which it gave rise was so far useful that it called forth Samuel Daniel's "Defence of Ryme," (1603,) one of the noblest pieces of prose in the language. Hall also, in his "Satires," condemned the heresy in some verses remarkable for their grave beauty and strength.

The revival of the hexameter in modern poetry is due to Johann Heinrich Voss, a man of genius, an admirable metrist, and, Schlegel's sneer to the contrary notwithstanding, hitherto the best translator of Homer. His "Odyssey," (1783,) his "Iliad," (1791,) and his "Luise," (1795,) were confessedly Goethe's teachers in this kind of verse. The "Hermann and Dorothea" of the latter (1798) was the first true poem written in modern hexameters. From Germany, Southey imported that and other classic metres into England, and we should be grateful to him, at least, for having given the model for Canning's "Knife-grinder." The exotic, however, again refused to take root, and for many years after we have no example of English hexameters. It was universally conceded that the temper of our language was unfriendly to them.

It remained for a man of true poetic genius to make them not only tolerated, but popular. Longfellow's translation of "The Children of the Lord's Supper" may have softened prejudice somewhat, but "Evangeline," (1847,) though incumbered with too many descriptive irrelevancies, was so full of beauty, pathos, and melody, that it made converts by thousands to the hitherto ridiculed measure. More than this, it made Longfellow at once the most popular of contemporary English poets. Clough's "Bothie"—a poem whose singular merit has hitherto failed of the wide appreciation it deserves—followed not long after; and Kingsley's "Andromeda" is yet damp from the press.

While we acknowledge that the victory thus won by "Evangeline" is a striking proof of the genius of the author, we con-

fess that we have never been able to overcome the feeling that the new metre is a dangerous and deceitful one. It is too easy to write, and too uniform for true pleasure in reading. Its ease sometimes leads Mr. Longfellow into prose,—as in the verse

"Combed and wattled gules and all the rest  
of the blazon,"—

and into a prosaic phraseology which has now and then infected his style in other metres, as where he says

"Spectral gleam their snow-white dresses,"—

using a word as essentially unpoetic as *surtout* or *pen-jacket*. We think one great danger of the hexameter is, that it gradually accustoms the poet to be content with a certain regular recurrence of accented sounds, to the neglect of the poetic value of language and intensity of phrase.

But while we frankly avow our infidelity as regards the metre, we as frankly confess our admiration of the high qualities of "Miles Standish." In construction we think it superior to "Evangeline"; the narrative is more straightforward, and the characters are defined with a firmer touch. It is a poem of wonderful picturesqueness, tenderness, and simplicity, and the situations are all conceived with the truest artistic feeling. Nothing can be better, to our thinking, than the picture of Standish and Alden in the opening scene, tinged as it is with a delicate humor, which the contrast between the thoughts and characters of the two heightens almost to pathos. The pictures of Priscilla spinning, and the bridal procession, are also masterly. We feel charmed to see such exquisite imaginations conjured out of the little old familiar anecdote of John Alden's vicarious wooing. We are astonished, like the fisherman in the Arabian tale, that so much genius could be contained in so small and leaden a casket. Those who cannot associate sentiment with the fair Priscilla's maiden name of Mullins may be consoled by hearing that it is only a corruption of the Huguenot Desmoulins,—as Barnum is of the Norman Vernon.

Indifferent poets comfort themselves with the notion that contemporary popularity is no test of merit, and that true poetry must always wait for a new generation to do it justice. The theory is not

true in any general sense. With hardly an exception, the poetry that was ever to receive a wide appreciation has received it at once. Popularity in itself is no test of permanent literary fame, but the kind of it is and always has been a very decided one. Mr. Longfellow has been greatly popular because he so greatly deserved it. He has the secret of all the great poets,—the power of expressing universal sentiments simply and naturally. A false standard of criticism has obtained of late, which brings a brick as a sample of the house, a line or two of condensed expression as a gauge of the poem. But it is only the whole poem that is a proof of the poem, and there are twenty fragmentary poets, for one who is capable of simple and sustained beauty. Of this quality Mr. Longfellow has given repeated and striking examples, and those critics are strangely mistaken who think that what he does is easy to be done, because he has the power to make it seem so. We think his chief fault is a too great tendency to moralize, or rather, a distrust of his readers, which leads him to point out the moral which he wishes to be drawn from any special poem. We wish, for example, that the last two stanzas could be cut off from "The Two Angels," a poem which, without them, is as perfect as anything in the language.

Many of the pieces in this volume having already shone as captain jewels in Maga's carcanet, need no comment from us; and we should, perhaps, have avoided the delicate responsibility of criticizing one of our most precious contributors, had it not been that we have seen some very unfair attempts to depreciate Mr. Longfellow, and that, as it seemed to us, for qualities which stamp him as a true and original poet. The writer who appeals to more peculiar moods of mind, to more complex or more esoteric motives of emotion, may be a greater favorite with the few; but he whose verse is in sympathy with moods that are human and not personal, with emotions that do not belong to periods in the development of individual minds, but to all men in all years, wins the gratitude and love of whoever can read the language which he makes musical with solace and aspiration. The present volume, while it will confirm Mr. Longfellow's claim to the high rank he has won among lyric

poets, deserves attention also as proving him to possess that faculty of epic narration which is rarer than all others in the nineteenth century. In our love of stimulants, and our numbness of taste, which craves the red pepper of a biting vocabulary, we of the present generation are apt to overlook this almost obsolete and unobtrusive quality; but we doubt if, since Chaucer, we have had an example of more purely objective narrative than in "The Courtship of Miles Standish." Apart from its intrinsic beauty, this gives the poem a claim to higher and more thoughtful consideration; and we feel sure that posterity will confirm the verdict of the present in regard to a poet whose reputation is due to no fleeting fancy, but to an instinctive recognition by the public of that which charms now and charms always,—true power and originality, without grimace and distortion; for Apollo, and not Milo, is the artistic type of strength.

*Thoughts on the Life and Character of Jesus of Nazareth.* By W. H. FURNESS, Minister of the First Congregational Unitarian Church in Philadelphia. Boston: Phillips, Sampson, & Co. 1859.

HERE is a book, written, not for "orthodox believers," but for those whom the orthodox creeds have wholly repelled from its subject. It is quite distinct from three other books on the same general theme, by the same author. It has, indeed, some objects in view, at which neither of those books directly aimed.

It will overwhelm with horror such readers as may stumble upon it, who do not know, till they meet it, that there is any view of Jesus Christ but that which is presented in the widely circulated issues of the Tract Society and similar institutions. Our attention has already been called to one very absurd and unjust attack upon it, in a Philadelphia paper, intended to catch the prejudices of such persons. But the views by which we found this attack accompanied, in the same journal, led us to suspect that some political prejudice against the author's anti-slavery had more to do with the onslaught than any deeply seated love of Orthodox Christianity. To another class of readers, who have been wholly repelled from