

HENRY WADSWORTH
LONGFELLOW

POEMS AND OTHER WRITINGS

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Belisarius

I am poor and old and blind;
 The sun burns me, and the wind
 Blows through the city gate,
 And covers me with dust
 From the wheels of the august
 Justinian the Great.

It was for him I chased
 The Persians o'er wild and waste,
 As General of the East;
 Night after night I lay
 In their camps of yesterday;
 Their forage was my feast.

For him, with sails of red,
 And torches at mast-head,
 Piloting the great fleet,
 I swept the Afric coasts
 And scattered the Vandal hosts,
 Like dust in a windy street.

For him I won again
 The Ausonian realm and reign,
 Rome and Parthenope;
 And all the land was mine
 From the summits of Apennine
 To the shores of either sea.

For him, in my feeble age,
 I dared the battle's rage,
 To save Byzantium's state,
 When the tents of Zabergan
 Like snow-drifts overran
 The road to the Golden Gate.

And for this, for this, behold!
 Infirm and blind and old,
 With gray, uncovered head,

Beneath the very arch
 Of my triumphal march,
 I stand and beg my bread!

Methinks I still can hear,
 Sounding distinct and near,
 The Vandal monarch's cry,
 As, captive and disgraced,
 With majestic step he paced,—
 “All, all is Vanity!”

Ah! vainest of all things
 Is the gratitude of kings;
 The plaudits of the crowd
 Are but the clatter of feet
 At midnight in the street,
 Hollow and restless and loud.

But the bitterest disgrace
 Is to see forever the face
 Of the Monk of Ephesus!
 The unconquerable will
 This, too, can bear;—I still
 Am Belisarius!

Three Friends of Mine

I.

When I remember them, those friends of mine,
 Who are no longer here, the noble three,
 Who half my life were more than friends to me,
 And whose discourse was like a generous wine,
 I most of all remember the divine
 Something, that shone in them, and made us see
 The archetypal man, and what might be
 The amplitude of Nature's first design.
 In vain I stretch my hands to clasp their hands;

victor allowed to inflict any punishment on the loser: Apollo was declared winner and flayed Marsyas alive.

623.2 "Be bold!] Cf. *The Faerie Queene*, Book III, xi, 54.

625.5 In mediæval Rome] A story drawn from Tale 107 of the *Gestæ Romanorum*, a collection of moralizing popular tales in Latin, compiled around 1300.

628.1 *Belisarius*] General (c. 505-65) of the Byzantine emperor Justinian (483-565); when accused of conspiring against the emperor, he was imprisoned, but within six months restored to favor. A later story tells of his having been blinded in punishment.

628.21 Ausonian realm] Italy; according to legend, the people of Italy were descendents of Auson, son of Ulysses and Calypso.

628.22 Parthenope] In ancient poetry, a name for Naples; from its founder, the siren Parthenope, who was cast up on its shores.

628.29 Zabergan] Zaberganes, Persian ambassador to Byzantium.

629.6 the Vandal monarch's] Gelimer, whom Belisarius defeated in A.D. 534.

629.18 Monk of Ephesus] Theodosius, adopted son of Belisarius, became the lover of Belisarius's wife, Antonina; according to the *Secret History* of Procopius, he became a monk at Ephesus to avoid danger.

629.22 *Three Friends of Mine*] Cornelius Conway Felton (1807-62), professor of Greek at Harvard, and afterward its president; Louis Agassiz (1807-73), who owned a summer house near Longfellow's at Nahant; and Charles Sumner (1811-74).

632.25 Musagetes] Literally "Leader of the Muses," an epithet of Apollo.

633.5 Mæonides] An epithet for Homer.

635.3 *Kéramos*] Greek word for potter's clay.

638.13 Palissy] Bernard Palissy (c. 1509-89), French potter and enamelist, noted for scientific and technical experiments; he devoted 16 years to developing a process to produce enamels.

639.26 Francesco Xanto] Aveli Xanto, Italian painter and ceramicist of the 16th century, who worked in Urbino 1530-42.

639.30 Maestro Giorgio] Giorgio di Pietro Andreoli (c. 1500), also called "Maestro Giorgio," Italian sculptor and ceramicist, whose pottery motifs were often inspired by Raphael. He developed a carmine tint for which the majolica of Gubbio became famous.

641.9 Ausonian] See note 628.21.

642.9 Thebaid] The Roman province of Upper Egypt.

642.20-21 Morgiana . . . ambushade] Ali Baba's faithful slave in *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, who discovers the hidden thieves and contrives to kill them all.

642.28 Emeth] Ammit or Ammut; in Egyptian religion, a monster stationed by the scales of judgment in Osiris's hall in the underworld.

643.13 King-te-tching] Jingdezhen, city in northeast Jiangxi (Kiangsi) province, China; its potteries first specialized in a celadon glaze, and later, after the Ming emperors made their capital in Nanking, it supplied ceramic wares to the court.

644.8 Tower of Porcelain] Octagonal tower, about 260 feet high, whose outer walls were cased with porcelain bricks; begun in 1413 by Emperor Yung Lo (1403-28), it was destroyed during the T'ai P'ing rebellion of the 1850s.

646.15 Inarimé] "Vitorria Colonna, on the death of her husband, the Marchese di Pescara, retired to her castle at Ischia (Inarimé), and there wrote the Ode upon his death which gained her the title of Divine." [Longfellow's note]

648.10 White Chief with yellow hair] General George A. Custer.

650.2 Thou ancient oak!] The oak, cut down in 1855, stood in Brighton, under Nonantum Hill, about three miles from Longfellow's Cambridge home.

650.11 Abraham at eventide] Cf. Genesis 18:1.

650.14 a language that hath died] John Eliot's translation of the Bible into the Massachusetts language was published in one volume in 1663.

651.17-26 Once upon . . . carved thereon] In his diary for November 13, 1864, Longfellow noted: "I am frequently tempted to write upon my work the inscription found upon an oar cast on the coast of Iceland,—*Oft var ek dasa durck dro thick*. Oft was I weary when I tugged at thee."

654.7 That old man desolate] Cf. II Samuel 18:33.

655.21 How cold are thy baths, Apollo!] Cf. Plutarch, *Marius*, Chapter 12.

656.17 Simon Magus] Samaritan sorcerer, whose cult combined Christian and pagan elements. Cf. Acts 8:9.

656.23 Queen Candace] Queen of the Ethiopians; cf. Acts 8:27.

659.1 *The Burial of the Poet*] Richard Henry Dana (1787-1879), poet and literary editor, died in Boston on February 2, 1879.