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THE POETS AND
POETRY OF EUROPE



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THE
POETS AND POETRY
OF
EUROPE.

WITH
INTRODUCTIONS AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES.

BY
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

FROM HELICON'S HARMONIOUS SPRINGS
A THOUBAND BILLS THEIR MARY PROGRESS TAKE.
GRAY.

UNIVERSITY
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GOTTFRIED AUGUST BÜRGER.

THIS poet was born in 1748, at Wolmerswende, near Halberstadt, where his father was preacher. The development of his powers was slow and not very promising at first, though he began early to make verses on the model of the hymn-books. At the age of ten he went to Aschersleben to reside with his grandfather, who undertook his support; thence he was sent to school in Halle, and, in 1764, began the study of theology in the University there; but, in 1768, he removed to Göttingen for the purpose of studying law. The irregularities of his conduct were such that his grandfather withdrew his support; but he received assistance from several distinguished young men, with whom he lived on terms of intimacy, and in conjunction with whom he studied the ancient classics, the literature of France, Italy, Spain, and England, giving particular attention to Shakpeare and the old English ballads. In 1772, he received a small judicial office in Altleichen, near Göttingen, and devoted himself assiduously to the cultivation of poetry. He maintained a close connection with the Göttingen circle of poets, and attracted much attention by his writings. In 1774, he married, but his marriage proved unhappy. His wife died a few years after, and he married her sister, for whom he had long cherished a violent passion. This second wife was his celebrated *Molly*; she died within a year of her marriage, in 1786. In 1789, he was appointed Professor Extraordinary in Göttingen. In 1790, he was married a third time, to a young lady in Swabia, who had publicly offered him her hand in a poem. This marriage also proved unhappy, and he was divorced two years after. His misery was increased by pecuniary embarrassments, from which he had never been free; and he died, in 1794, in circumstances of great wretchedness.

Bürger is a poet of fiery and original genius. His ballads are among the noblest in the German language. His great aim was to make poetry popular, and his success in this respect was brilliant. Schiller, however, criticised him with a severity, which is now admitted to have been unjust. He is chiefly known as a writer of ballads, of which his "Ellenore" is the best. This remarkable composition has been rendered familiar to English readers by the translations of Taylor and Scott. Others also have tried their hands upon it.

Menzel * says of him: "It was Bürger, pre-eminently, who cultivated the reviving taste for ballads, introduced by Stolberg; but he stuck fast, at the same time, in the honest old gentleman's nightcap, and even partly in the Græcomania. He was not born for so vigorous an opposition as Schubart; and the more refined development of the legendary po-

* German Literature, Vol. III. pp 138, 139.

etry he had to leave to the school of Tieck and Schlegel. He is an interesting phenomenon on the boundary line between the heterogeneous parties which marked the progress of romanticism. His poetical forms are distinguished by a beautiful rhythm. Some of his ballads, particularly 'Ellenore,' ate sure of immortality. He has excited a universal sympathy, inasmuch as he became a victim to poetry. It was a part of the false poetical enthusiasm of his age to sacrifice common sense for a few verses. A maiden made proposals of marriage to poor Bürger by a poem; enchanted with this, he fancied the marriage of a poet and poetess must be a paradise on earth; and he was — deceived."

Bürger's works were published at Göttingen in 1794; again in 1829-34; again in 1835; and, finally, in 1841. A sketch of his life was published by Althoff, Göttingen, 1798.

ELLENORE.

At break of day from frightful dreams

Upstarted Ellenore:

"My William, art thou slayn," she sayde,
"Or dost thou love no more?"

He went abroade with Richard's host
The paynim foes to quell;
But he no word to her had writt,
An he were sick or well.

With blore of trump and thump of drum
His fellow-soldyers come,
Their belms bedeckt with oaken boughs,
They seeke their long'd-for home.

And evry road and evry lane
Was full of old and young,
To gaze at the rejoycing band,
To haile with gladsom tounge.

"Thank God!" their wives and children
sayde,
"Welcome!" the brides did saye;
But greet or kiss gave Ellenore
To none upon that daye.

And when the soldyers all were bye,
She tore her raven hair,
And cast herself upon the growne,
In furious despair.

Her mother ran and lyfte her up,
And clasped in her arm:
"My child, my child, what dost thou ail?
God shield thy life from harm!"

"O mother, mother! William's gone!
What's all besyde to me?
There is no mercie, sure, above!
All, all were spar'd but he!"

"Kneele downe, thy paternoster saye,
'T will calm thy troubled spright:

The Lord is wise, the Lord is good;
What he hath done is right."

"O mother, mother! saye not so;
Most cruel is my fate:
I prayde, and prayde; but watte awaylde?
'T is now, alas! too late."

"Our Heavenly Father, if we praye,
Will help a suffering child:
Go, take the holy sacrament;
So shal thy grief grow mild."

"O mother, what I feele within
No sacrament can staye;
No sacrament can teche the dead
To bear the sight of daye."

"May-be, among the heathen folk
Thy William false doth prove,
And put away his faith and troth,
And take another love.

"Then wherefor sorrowe for his loss?
Thy moans are all in vain:
But when his soul and body parte,
His falsehode brings him pain."

"O mother, mother! gone is gone:
My hope is all forlorn;
The grave my only safeguard is:
O, had I ne'er been born!

"Go out, go out, my lamp of life,
In grizely darkness die!
There is no mercie, sure, above!
For ever let me lie!"

"Almighty God! O, do not judge
My poor unhappy child!
She knows not what her lips pronounce,
Her anguish makes her wild.

"My girl, forget thine earthly woe,
And think on God and bliss;
For so, at least, shal not thy soul
Its heavenly bridegroom miss."

"O mother, mother! what is bliss,
And what the fiendis cell?
With him 't is heaven anywhere;
Without my William, hell.

"Go out, go out, my lamp of life,
In endless darkness die!
Without him I must loathe the earth,
Without him scorne the skie."

And so despair did rave and rage
Athwarte her boiling veins;
Against the providence of God
She hurld her impious strains.

She bet her breast, and wrung her hands,
And rollde her tearless eye,
From rise of morn, til the pale stars
Again overspred the skye.

When, harken! abroad she herde the tramp
Of nimble-hoofed steed;
She herde a knight with clank alighte,
And climbe the stair in speed.

And soon she herde a tinkling hand,
That twirled at the pin;
And thro her door, that open'd not,
These words were breathed in: —

“What ho! what ho! thy door undo:
Art watching or asleepe?
My love, dost yet remember me?
And dost thou laugh or weepe?”

“Ah! William here so late at night?
O, I have wachte and wak'd!
Whense art thou come? For thy return
My heart has sorely ak'd.”

“At midnight only we may ride;
I come ore land and see:
I mounted late, but soone I go;
Aryse, and come with mee.”

“O William, enter first my bowre,
And give me one embrace:
The blasts athwarte the hawthorn hiss;
Awayte a little space.”

“Tho blasts athwarte the hawthorn hiss,
I may not harbour here;
My spurs are sett, my coursers pawes,
My hour of flight is nere.

“All as thou lyst upon thy couch,
Aryse, and mount behinde;
To-night we'le ride a thousand miles,
The bridal bed to finde.”

“How? ride to-night a thousand miles?
Thy love thou dost bemock:
Eleven is the stroke that still
Rings on within the clock.”

“Looke up; the moon is bright, and we
Outstride the earthly men:
I'le take thee to the bridal bed,
And night shal end but then.”

“And where is, then, thy house, and home,
And bridal bed so meet?”

“T is narrow, silent, chilly, low,
Six planks, one shrouding sheet.”

“And is there any room for me,
Wherein that I may creepe?”
“There's room enough for thee and me,
Wherein that we may sleepe.”

“All as thou lyst upon thy couch,
Aryse, no longer stop;
The wedding-guests thy coming wayte,
The chamber-door is open.”

All in her sarke, as there she lay,
Upon his horse she sprung;
And with her lily hands so pale
About her William clung.

And hurry-skurry off they go,
Unheeding wet or dry;
And horse and rider snort and blow,
And sparkling pebbles fly.

How swift the flood, the mead, the wood,
Aright, aleft, are gone!
The bridges thunder as they pass,
But earthly sowne is none.

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speede;
“Splash, splash, across the see:
“Hurrah! the dead can ride apace;
Dost feare to ride with mee?”

“The moon is bright, and blue the night;
Dost quake the blast to stem?
Dost shudder, mayd, to seeke the dead?”
“No, no, but what of them?”

How glumly sownes yon dirgy song!
Night-ravens flappe the wing:
What knell doth slowly tolle ding dong?
The psalms of death who sing?

Forth creepes a swarthy funeral train,
A corse is on the biers;
Like croke of todes from lonely moores,
The chauntinge meete the eere.

“Go, beare her corse, when midnight's past,
With song, and tear, and wail;
I've gott my wife, I take her home,
My hour of wedlock hail!”

“Leade forth, O clark, the chaunting quire,
To swelle our spousal-song:
Come, preest, and reade the blessing soone;
For our dark bed we long.”

The bier is gon, the dirges hush;
His bidding all obaye,
And headlong rush thro briar and bush,
Beside his speedy waye.

Halloo! halloo! how swift they go,
Unheeding wet or dry!
And horse and rider snort and blow,
And sparkling pebbles fly.

How swift the hill, how swift the dale,
Aright, aleft, are gon!
By hedge and tree, by thorp and town,
They gallop, gallop on.

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speede;
“Splash, splash, across the see:
“Hurrah! the dead can ride apace;
Dost feare to ride with mee?”

"Look up, look up! an airy crew
In roundel daunces reele:
The moon is bright, and blue the night,
Mayst dimly see them wheele.

"Come to, come to, ye ghostly crew,
Come to, and follow me,
And daunce for us the wedding daunce,
When we in bed shal be."

And brush, brush, brush, the ghostly crew
Came wheeling ore their heads,
All rustling like the witherd leaves
That wide the whirlwind spreads.

Halloo! halloo! away they go,
Unheeding wet or dry;
And horse and rider snort and blow,
And sparkling pebbles fly.

And all that in the moonshyne lay
Behind them fled afar;
And backward scudded overhead
The skie and every star.

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speede;
Splash, splash, across the see:
"Hurrah! the dead can ride apace;
Dost feare to ride with mee?"

"I weene the cock prepares to crowe;
The sand will soone be run:
I snuffe the early morning air;
Downe, downe! our work is done

"The dead, the dead can ride apace:
Our wed-bed here is fit:
Our race is ridde, our journey ore,
Our endless union knit."

And, lo! an yron-grated gate
Soon biggens to their view:
He crackde his whyppe; the locks, the
bolts,
Cling, clang! assunder flew.

They passe, and 't was on graves they
trodde:

"'T is hither we are bound":
And many a tombstone ghastly white
Lay in the moonshyne round.

And when he from his steed alytte,
His armure, black as cinder,
Did moulder, moulder all awaye,
As were it made of tinder.

His head became a naked skull;
Nor hair nor eyne had he:
His body grew a skeleton,
Whilome so blithe of ble.

And at his dry and boney heel
No spur was left to bee:
And in his witherd hand you might
The scythe and hour-glass see.

And, lo! his steed did thin to smoke,
And charnel-fires outbreathe;
And pal'd, and bleachde, then vanishde
quite
The mayd from underneathe.

And hollow howlings hung in air,
And shrekes from vaults arose:
Then knewe the mayd she might no more
Her living eyes unclose.

But onward to the judgment-seat,
Thro mist and moonlight dreare,
The ghostly crew their flight persewe,
And hollowe in her eare:

"Be patient; tho thyne herte should breke,
Arrayne not Heaven's decree:
Thou nowe art of thy bodie refl,
Thy soul forgiven bee!"

THE BRAVE MAN.

HIGH sounds the song of the valiant man,
Like clang of bells and organ-tone.
Him, whose high soul brave thoughts control,
Not gold rewards, but song alone.
Thank Heaven for song and praise, that I can
Thus sing and praise the valiant man!

The thaw-wind came from southern sea,
Heavy and damp, through Italy,
And the clouds before it away did flee,
Like frighted herds, when the wolf they see.
It sweeps the fields, through the forest breaks,
And the ice bursts away on streams and lakes.

On mountain-top dissolved the snow;
The falls with a thousand waters dashed;
A lake did o'erflow the meadow low,
And the mighty river swelled and splashed.
Along their channel the waves rolled high,
And heavily rolled the ice-cakes by.

On heavy piers and arches strong,
Below and above of massive stone,
A bridge stretched wide across the tide,
And midway stood a house thereon.
There dwelt the tollman, with child and wife;
O tollman! tollman! flee, for thy life!

And it groaned and droned, and around the house
Howled storm and wind with a dismal sound;
And the tollman aloof sprang forth on the roof,
And gazed on the tumult around:
"O merciful Heaven! thy mercy show!
Lost, lost, and forlorn! who shall rescue me
now?"

Thump! thump! the heavy ice-cakes rolled,
And piled on either shore they lay;
From either shore the wild waves tore
The arches with their piers away.
The trembling tollman, with wife and child,
He howled still louder than storm-winds wild.

Thump ! thump ! the heavy ice-cakes rolled,
 And piled at either end they lay ;
 All rent and dashed, the stone piers crashed,
 As one by one they shot away.
 To the middle approaches the overthrow !
 O merciful Heaven ! thy mercy show !

High on the distant bank there stands
 A crowd of peasants great and small ;
 Each shrieking stands, and wrings his hands,
 But there 's none to save among them all.
 The trembling tollman, with wife and child,
 For rescue howls through the storm-winds wild.

When soundest thou, song of the valiant man,
 Like clang of bells and organ-tone ?
 Say on, say on, my noble song !
 How namest thou him, the valiant one ?
 To the middle approaches the overthrow !
 O brave man ! brave man ! show thyself now !

Swift galloped a count forth from the crowd,
 On a gallant steed, a count full bold.
 In his hand so free what holdeth he ?
 It is a purse stuffed full of gold.
 "Two hundred pistoles to him who shall save
 Those poor folks from death and a watery grave!"

Who is the brave man ? Is it the count ?
 Say on, my noble song, say on !
 By Him who can save ! the count was brave,
 And yet do I know a braver one.
 O brave man ! brave man ! say, where art thou ?
 Fearfully the ruin approaches now !

And ever higher swelled the flood,
 And ever louder roared the blast,
 And ever deeper sank the heart of the keep-
 er ; —
 Preserver ! preserver ! speed thee fast !
 And as pier after pier gave way in the swell,
 Loud cracked and dashed the arch as it fell.

"Halloo ! halloo ! to the rescue speed !"
 Aloft the count his purse doth wave ;
 And each one hears, and each one fears ;
 From thousands none steps forth to save.
 In vain doth the tollman, with wife and child,
 For rescue howl through the storm-winds wild.

See, stout and strong, a peasant man,
 With staff in hand, comes wandering by ;
 A kirtle of gray his limbs array ;
 In form and feature, stern and high.
 He listened, the words of the count to hear,
 And gazed on the danger that threatened near.

And boldly, in Heaven's name, into
 The nearest fishing-boat sprang he ;
 Through the whirlwind wide, and the dashing
 tide,
 The preserver reaches them happily.
 But, alas ! the boat is too small, too small,
 At once to receive and preserve them all !

And thrice he forced his little boat
 Through whirlwind, storm, and dashing wave ;
 And thrice came he full happily,
 Till there was no one left to save.
 And hardly the last in safety lay,
 When the last of the ruins rolled away.

Who is, who is the valiant man ?
 Say on, my noble song, say on !
 The peasant, I know, staked his life on the
 throw,
 But for the sake of gold 't was done.
 Had the count not promised the gold to him,
 The peasant had risked neither life nor limb.

"Here," said the count, "my valiant friend,
 Here is thy guerdon, take the whole !"
 Say, was not this high-mindedness ?
 By Heaven ! the count hath a noble soul !
 But higher and holier, sooth to say,
 Beat the peasant's heart in his kirtle gray.

"My life cannot be bought and sold :
 Though poor, I 'm not by want oppressed :
 But the tollman old stands in need of thy gold ;
 He has lost whatever he possessed."
 Thus cried he, with hearty, honest tone,
 And, turning away, went forth alone.

High soundest thou, song of the valiant man,
 Like clang of bells and organ-tone.
 Him, whose high soul brave thoughts control,
 Not gold rewards, but song alone.
 Thank Heaven for song and praise, that I can
 Thus sing and praise the valiant man !