**SHODDY COURT READING: WORKERS REIMAGINE LONGFELLOW AND TENNYSON**

**LONGFELLOW**

**Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ‘A Psalm of Life,’ first published 1838**

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,

   Life is but an empty dream!

For the soul is dead that slumbers,

   And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!

   And the grave is not its goal;

Dust thou art, to dust returnest,

   Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,

   Is our destined end or way;

But to act, that each to-morrow

   Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,

   And our hearts, though stout and brave,

Still, like muffled drums, are beating

   Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world’s broad field of battle,

   In the bivouac of Life,

Be not like dumb, driven cattle!

   Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe’er pleasant!

   Let the dead Past bury its dead!

Act,— act in the living Present!

   Heart within, and God o’erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us

   We can make our lives sublime,

And, departing, leave behind us

   Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,

   Sailing o’er life’s solemn main,

A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

   Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,

   With a heart for any fate;

Still achieving, still pursuing,

   Learn to labor and to wait.

**Longfellow, ‘Excelsior’, first published 1841**

The shades of night were falling fast,

As through an Alpine village passed

A youth, who bore, 'mid snow and ice,

A banner with the strange device,

      Excelsior!

His brow was sad; his eye beneath,

Flashed like a falchion from its sheath,

And like a silver clarion rung

The accents of that unknown tongue,

      Excelsior!

In happy homes he saw the light

Of household fires gleam warm and bright;

Above, the spectral glaciers shone,

And from his lips escaped a groan,

      Excelsior!

"Try not the Pass!" the old man said;

"Dark lowers the tempest overhead,

The roaring torrent is deep and wide!"

And loud that clarion voice replied,

      Excelsior!

"Oh stay," the maiden said, "and rest

Thy weary head upon this breast! "

A tear stood in his bright blue eye,

But still he answered, with a sigh,

      Excelsior!

"Beware the pine-tree's withered branch!

Beware the awful avalanche!"

This was the peasant's last Good-night,

A voice replied, far up the height,

      Excelsior!

At break of day, as heavenward

The pious monks of Saint Bernard

Uttered the oft-repeated prayer,

A voice cried through the startled air,

      Excelsior!

A traveller, by the faithful hound,

Half-buried in the snow was found,

Still grasping in his hand of ice

That banner with the strange device,

      Excelsior!

There in the twilight cold and gray,

Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay,

And from the sky, serene and far,

A voice fell like a falling star,

      Excelsior!

**William J. Currie (Selkirk millworker), ‘Forward- Never Despair’, in *Doric Lilts* (Galashiels, n.d.)** [first 6 stanzas]

Toiling brother, strong and hopeful,

Fearless tread the path of life:

Faint or weary, be not driven

From true manhood in the strife.

Know that there is One who knoweth

All we meet with here below”

Life is ours—to make or mar it,

Reaping joy or suffering woe.

Courage, brother! life is worthy

Of our highest, noblest aims;

Tis no idle dream of fancy,

That our heart’s best effort claims.

Struggling souls are round us ever,

Groping blindly in the way:

Be it ours the task to lead them

To the Rock that lasts for aye.

Steady, brother! be not selfish;

Love must rule us in the fight,

If we would prove truly noble

We must know no aim but Right.

Carping souls may jibe and jeer us

With their words that bitter seem;

Heed them not, but working, show them

“Life is not an empty dream.”

**H., ‘A Psalm of Labour’ (After Longfellow), *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 18 March 1892**

Tell me not in scornful numbers,

Workers still should be your slaves;

They are rousing from their slumbers,

And for freedom each one craves.

Yes! The battle’s real and earnest

That the toilers long to fight;

And methinks twill be the sternest

Ever waged for truth and right.

Not hard labour, suffering, sorrow,

Is their destined end or way;

But to strive that each to-morrow

May be happier than to-day.

Mammon’s power, thank God, is fleeting,

Though its votaries still are brace,

Labour’s heart, with new hope beating,

Will hence cease to be its slave.

In the world’s broad field of battle

Gross injustice still survives,

And vast numbers, e’en like cattle,

In hard toil wear out their lives.

Workers, these things but remind us

We can’t make our lives sublime,

While we let cant gull and blind us

To our interests for all time.

Put no trust, however pleasant

All their promises may be,

In the class who rule at present,

Or you never will be free.

Honest toilers, help each other,

Sailing o’er life’s solemn main;

All unkindly feelings smother,

Trying heaven on earth to gain.

Working men, be up and doing,

To this good cause be ye true:

Justice, truth, and right pursuing,

Labour’s cause keep aye in view.

**W. ‘Lines on the “Excelsior” National Association of Tinplate Makers,’ *The Miner and Workman’s Advocate*, 6 February 1864**

Ye Britain’s sons, with brawny hand,

Come forward, and your rights demand;

And let our motto ever be

Held up, that all the world might see—

Excelsior!

No more our neighbour undermine,

But let us one and all combine;

For tyrants long have ruled the day,

But now our banner we must sway –

Excelsior!

Onward, onward, let us go,

We’ll face the world and every foe;

And when oppression we subdue,

Our song will be forever new –

Excelsior!

So hand in hand we’ll travel on,

Until the victory we have won;

And when our long-lost rights we claim,

Still let our motto be the same—

Excelsior!

Let prudence be our sword and shield,

And strong defence our banner wield;

And when our glorious battle’s o’er,

Higher let our banner soar—

Excelsior!

And when we’re touched by death’s cold hand,

May we all reach a better land!

And as we bid this world adieu,

Still let our motto be in view—

Excelsior!

**William Allan [Stoneywood Works, Aberdeen], “Excelsior,” *Sprays from the Mill* (Aberdeen, 1889)**

Fu’ mony a thocht an’ weary care puir mortals hae tae dree,

Fu’ mony a lifetime tae repent what moments pat agree!

There’s mony a langsome backward tramp for loups ta’en i’ the dark,

For, wow! The feckless heid aft gi’es the feet a routh o’ wark.

Fu’ mony a word maist scant o’ thocht sinks deep intil the hert,

Fu’ mony a whispered sophistry works like a venomed dairt;

And mony a bleedin’, wearied fit wad still keep ploddin’ on,

If but some kindly word or smile upon their efforts shone.

Among the hedgerows all unseen fu’ mony a wild flower grows

Worthy in beauty nigh to stand beside the queenly rose;

Sae from the ranks o’ honest worth faint hearts wad earn their prize,

Were but convention more disposed to aid than criticise.

O! strange, mysterious are the fates that gird our ways around;

The silent wheels of destiny move on without a sound,

But through the shade and in the light the beacon sheds its gleam,

That bids the toilers bravely fight, for life is not a dream.

**TENNYSON**

**From ‘Locksley Hall’, first published 1842 (the embittered speaker has returned to his childhood home, and muses on how the woman he loved married another; this is the second half of the poem)**

Can I but relive in sadness? I will turn that earlier page.

Hide me from my deep emotion, O thou wondrous Mother-Age!

Make me feel the wild pulsation that I felt before the strife,

When I heard my days before me, and the tumult of my life;

Yearning for the large excitement that the coming years would yield,

Eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father's field,

And at night along the dusky highway near and nearer drawn,

Sees in heaven the light of London flaring like a dreary dawn;

And his spirit leaps within him to be gone before him then,

Underneath the light he looks at, in among the throngs of men:

Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new:

That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do:

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,

Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,

Pilots of the purple twilight dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew

From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,

With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm;

Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd

In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,

And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.

So I triumph'd ere my passion sweeping thro' me left me dry,

Left me with the palsied heart, and left me with the jaundiced eye;

Eye, to which all order festers, all things here are out of joint:

Science moves, but slowly, slowly, creeping on from point to point:

Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion, creeping nigher,

Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly-dying fire.

Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,

And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns.

What is that to him that reaps not harvest of his youthful joys,

Tho' the deep heart of existence beat for ever like a boy's?

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the shore,

And the individual withers, and the world is more and more.

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and he bears a laden breast,

Full of sad experience, moving toward the stillness of his rest.

Hark, my merry comrades call me, sounding on the bugle-horn,

They to whom my foolish passion were a target for their scorn:

Shall it not be scorn to me to harp on such a moulder'd string?

I am shamed thro' all my nature to have loved so slight a thing.

Weakness to be wroth with weakness! woman's pleasure, woman's pain—

Nature made them blinder motions bounded in a shallower brain:

Woman is the lesser man, and all thy passions, match'd with mine,

Are as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine—

Here at least, where nature sickens, nothing. Ah, for some retreat

Deep in yonder shining Orient, where my life began to beat;

Where in wild Mahratta-battle fell my father evil-starr'd,—

I was left a trampled orphan, and a selfish uncle's ward.

Or to burst all links of habit—there to wander far away,

On from island unto island at the gateways of the day.

Larger constellations burning, mellow moons and happy skies,

Breadths of tropic shade and palms in cluster, knots of Paradise.

Never comes the trader, never floats an European flag,

Slides the bird o'er lustrous woodland, swings the trailer from the crag;

Droops the heavy-blossom'd bower, hangs the heavy-fruited tree—

Summer isles of Eden lying in dark-purple spheres of sea.

There methinks would be enjoyment more than in this march of mind,

In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind.

There the passions cramp'd no longer shall have scope and breathing space;

I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race.

Iron-jointed, supple-sinew'd, they shall dive, and they shall run,

Catch the wild goat by the hair, and hurl their lances in the sun;

Whistle back the parrot's call, and leap the rainbows of the brooks,

Not with blinded eyesight poring over miserable books—

Fool, again the dream, the fancy! but I *know* my words are wild,

But I count the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child.

I, to herd with narrow foreheads, vacant of our glorious gains,

Like a beast with lower pleasures, like a beast with lower pains!

Mated with a squalid savage—what to me were sun or clime?

I the heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of time—

I that rather held it better men should perish one by one,

Than that earth should stand at gaze like Joshua's moon in Ajalon!

Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us range,

Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.

Thro' the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day;

Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

Mother-Age (for mine I knew not) help me as when life begun:

Rift the hills, and roll the waters, flash the lightnings, weigh the Sun.

O, I see the crescent promise of my spirit hath not set.

Ancient founts of inspiration well thro' all my fancy yet.

Howsoever these things be, a long farewell to Locksley Hall!

Now for me the woods may wither, now for me the roof-tree fall.

Comes a vapour from the margin, blackening over heath and holt,

Cramming all the blast before it, in its breast a thunderbolt.

Let it fall on Locksley Hall, with rain or hail, or fire or snow;

For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go.

**Alexander Smith [Glasgow pattern-designer], from *A Life-Drama and Other Poems* (Glasgow 1853)**

[This is an extract from an inset poem in the closet drama ‘A Life-Drama’, recited by the hero Walter, an aspiring poet]

In the street, the tide of being, how it surges, how it rolls!

God! what base ignoble faces! God! what bodies wanting souls!

‘Mid this stream of human being, banks by houses tall and grim,

Pale I stand this shining morrow with a pant for woodlands dim,

To hear the soft and whispering rain, feel the dewy cool of leaves,

Watch the lightnings dart like swallows round the brooding thunder-eaves,

To lose the sense of whirling streets, ‘mong breezy crests of hills,

Skies of larks and hazy landscapes, with fine threads of silver rills,

Stand with forehead bathed in sunset on a mountain’s summer crown,

And look up and watch the shadow of the great night coming down;

One great life in my myriad veins, in leaves, in flowers, in cloudy cars,

Blowing, underfoot, in clover; beating, overhead, in stars!

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God! Our souls are aproned waiters! God! Our souls are hired slaves:

Let us hide from Life, my Brothers! let us hide us in our graves.

O! why stain our holy childhoods? why sell all for drinks and meats?

Why degrade, like those old mansions, standing in our pauprer streets,

Lodgings *once* of kings and nobles, silken stirs and trumpet’s din,

*Now*, where crouch ‘mong rags and fever, shapes of squalor and of sin?

Like a mist this wail surrounds me; Brothers, hush! The Lord Christ’s hands

Even now are stretched in blessing o’er the sea and o’er the lands.

Sit not like a mourner, Brother! by the grave of that dear Past,

Throw the Present! ‘tis thy servant only when ‘tis overcast, -

Give battle to the leagued world, if thou’rt worthy, truly brace,

Thou shalt make the hardest circumstance a helper or a slave,

As when thunder wraps the setting sun, he struggles, glows with ire,

Rifts the gloom with golden furrows, with a hundred bursts of fire,

Melts the black and thund’rous masses to a sphere of rosy light,

Then on edge of glowing heaven smiles in triumph on the night.

**Alexander Anderson, ‘Surfaceman’, opening of ‘A Song of Labour’, *Songs of the Rail* (1878)**

‘Respectfully dedicated to my fellow-workers with pick and shovel everywhere’

Let us sing, my toiling Brothers, with our rough, rude voice a song

That shall live behind, nor do us in the after ages wrong,

But forever throb and whisper strength to nerve our fellow kind

As they rise to fill our footsteps and the space we leave behind.

What though hand and form be rugged? Better then for Labour’s mart—

I have never heard that Nature changed the colour of the heart—

For the God above hath made us one in flesh and blood with kings,

But the lower use is ours, and all the force of rougher things.

Then, my Brothers, sing to Labour, as the sun-brown’d giant stands

Like an Atlas with this planet shaking in his mighty hands’

Brawny arm’d, and broad, and swarthy, keeping in with shout and groan,

In the arch of life the keystone, that the world may thunder on;

Ever toiling, ever sweating, ever knowing that to-day

Is the footstool for the coming years to reach a higher sway.

Up, then, we, his rugged children, as the big hours move and pant,

For that cannot but be noble what he claims and cannot want:

Sing, and let his myriad voices bear the burden far along,

While we hail the mighty engine as the spirit of our song!