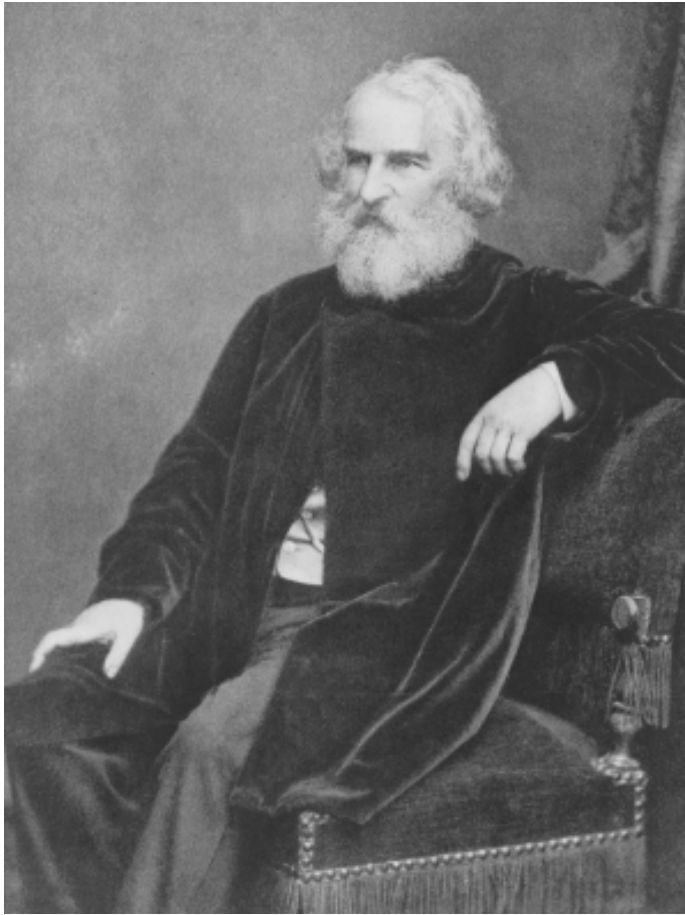


## A Ballad of the French Fleet - Poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow - 1746



“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!<sup>1</sup>

Endnotes:

1. Maine Historical Society, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, [http://www.hwlongfellow.org/poems\\_poem.php?pid=239](http://www.hwlongfellow.org/poems_poem.php?pid=239)

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

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When a people lose their history, they lose a part of who they are.  
Reclaim your heritage, pass this on to a friend or family member.

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