

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

TO AN OLD
DANISH SONG-BOOK

Welcome, my old friend,
Welcome to a foreign fireside,
While the sullen gales of autumn
Shake the windows.

The ungrateful world
Has, it seems, dealt harshly with thee,
Since, beneath the skies of Denmark,
First I met thee.

There are marks of age,
There are thumb-marks on thy margin,
Made by hands that clasped thee rudely,
At the alehouse.

Soiled and dull thou art;
Yellow are thy time-worn pages,
As the russet, rain-molested
Leaves of autumn.

Thou art stained with wine
Scattered from hilarious goblets,
As the leaves with the libations
Of Olympus.



Yet dost thou recall
Days departed, half-forgotten,
When in dreamy youth I wandered
By the Baltic,—
Once some ancient Scald,
In his bleak, ancestral Iceland,
Chanted staves of these old ballads
To the Vikings.

When I paused to hear
The old ballad of King Christian
Shouted from suburban taverns
In the twilight.
Once in Elsinore,
At the court of old King Hamlet
Yorick and his boon companions
Sang these ditties.

Thou recallest bards,
Who in solitary chambers,
And with hearts by passion wasted,
Wrote thy pages.
Once Prince Frederick's Guard
Sang them in their smoky barracks;—
Suddenly the English cannon
Joined the chorus!

Thou recallest homes
Where thy songs of love and friendship
Made the gloomy Northern winter
Bright as summer.
Peasants in the field,
Sailors on the roaring ocean,
Students, tradesmen, pale mechanics,
All have sung them.

Thou hast been their friend;

Quiet, close, and warm,

They, alas! have left thee friendless!

Sheltered from all molestation,

Yet at least by one warm fireside

And recalling by their voices

Art thou welcome.

Youth and travel.

And, as swallows build

In these wide, old-fashioned chimneys,

So thy twittering songs shall nestle

In my bosom,—