

**FIVE PROPHETS OF TO-DAY:  
CURTIS, WHITTIER, AND  
LONGFELLOW; RENAN AND  
TENNYSON; SAMUEL  
LONGFELLOW**

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Five Prophets of To-day: Curtis, Whittier, and Longfellow; Renan and Tennyson; Samuel Longfellow by Edward E. Hale & William H. Lyon & Charles G. Ames

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**EDWARD E. HALE & WILLIAM H. LYON & CHARLES G. AMES**

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# FIVE PROPHETS OF TO-DAY.

CURTIS, WHITTIER, AND LONGFELLOW.

*EDWARD E. HALE.*

RENAN AND TENNYSON.

*WILLIAM H. LYON.*

SAMUEL LONGFELLOW.

*CHARLES G. AMES.*

BOSTON, OCTOBER 9, 1892.

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## CURTIS, WHITTIER, AND LONGFELLOW.

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"The Lord hath made all things; and to the godly hath he given wisdom.

"Let us now praise famous men — men renowned for their power, giving counsel by their understanding, leaders of the people by their counsels, wise and eloquent in their instructions: such as found out musical tunes, and recited verses in writing. All these were honored in their generations, and were the glory of their times. There be of them, that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported. The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will shew forth their praise."

ECCLESIASTICUS xliii., xlv.

IF a minister leaves the large family, which he calls his parish, for two or three months, it is always with a certain anxiety as to what may come in so many homes while he is away.

Absent from America nine weeks this summer, I had the great pleasure, when I returned, to find that among the thousand persons most closely connected with us, there had been no stroke of death while I was gone.

But, as always appears, death, which is most uncertain in any one day or any given week, is the most certain of all contingencies in a longer period. And now, in the six weeks since I returned, I have been called three times to look my last on the still faces of members of this church. So many times have I asked the good God to teach us the lessons of life in the light of bereavement, as we met together here on Sunday. I shall try to take fit occasion to say, in the right place, something of what the three lives have been which have closed for earth.

In the same short period three other lives have closed, of persons not immediately connected with this congregation, but in very close communion with the Unitarian church of America. It is worth more than passing remark, that this Unitarian church of America, not very large in numbers, has been honored by the sympathy and help of three men so widely known and so highly prized through this whole nation. As it happens, I was honored, in a somewhat intimate way, with the friendship, and I believe I may say the confidence, of all three. From the grave of one of them — Samuel Longfellow — I have just returned. And I break what would have been my

choice of subjects here as the year begins, to say something of the gifts which have been rendered to America by George William Curtis, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Samuel Longfellow, whose lives, closely united in general purpose and in personal sympathy, have closed for earth so nearly at the same time.

I have known Mr. Curtis somewhat intimately for more than forty years. I saw him last, and heard one of his matchless speeches, at Saratoga last September, when he presided at the annual conference of the Unitarian church of America. The president, chosen at the previous meeting of that conference, was Judge Miller, I think the senior member, as he was certainly the leading member, of the Supreme Court of the United States. Judge Miller had died in the interval of two sessions, and Mr. Curtis, as the first vice-president, took his place, and he was chosen his successor. Our conference is again left without a president, by his death.

His presence on that occasion, the intelligent and thorough sympathy he always showed in our united work, were wholly in accord with the every-day habit of his life. For year after year — at his home on Staten Island — he regularly



conducted the public services of the Unitarian church. I think he did not often write sermons, and I am not sure that he often delivered his own sermons. But from his unrivalled knowledge of the literature of the world, he had brought the best he could find in that line to read for the congregation which assembled to meet him. He conducted all the service with seriousness and dignity which made it most attractive. And as the congregation grew larger and larger, with such ministrations of one of its laymen, it always proved, not unnaturally, that they preferred such service to any which could be rendered them by any professional minister.

Here is one of the finest visible or concrete illustrations we have of the original Puritan-congregational or Quaker theory of men's union in the worship or service of God. It is a service in which one worshipper has the same right and privilege as another. "Ye are all kings and all priests." This is no bit of poetry, but the square, practical fact. It is, by the way, the special truth of church administration which seemed to Winthrop and his companions so important that they left England, which would not give it, and came to New England, that they might give it form and estab-

lishment here. And here, in the first church of Boston, when the silver-tongued John Cotton had said what he had to say, Winthrop would stand up, or Atherton, or Henry Vane, and say what he had to say, were it for the mere purpose of testifying that the Holy Spirit spoke by one worshipper as certainly as by another.

In the case of Mr. Curtis, this is only an incident, and in comparison not a very important incident, of the moral service which, from boyhood to the time of his death, he was rendering to the community. And this, as we cannot say often enough, without taking public office, without going into what we call administration. I suppose that in General Grant's time he was often, perhaps always, confidentially consulted on important points by leading members of General Grant's cabinet. But he was never in Congress or in the cabinet. He sat with a pen in his hand, and he spoke by that pen to millions who never heard his voice or obeyed his matchless command in oratory. I heard, myself, his great speech at Delmonico's before the Pilgrim Association in 1880. I believe — and I have elsewhere tried to show how — that that one speech saved this country from civil war, in the settlement of the Tilden-Hayes question. Of this matchless power

what is to be remembered now, is, that he could not have swayed those men so had he been in the administration. He could not speak as he did — an impartial Minos, looking fairly upon both sides — had he technically belonged to one side. And again, it is to be observed that the moral weight of the man, his absolute purity, his clear, sheer indifference to self, — purity and indifference known to all men, — raised him to that place in men's esteem. Here was a man to whom it was wise to listen. Here was a man who said what he thought. Here was a man, then, who led and did not follow other men.

Of Mr. Whittier's place in literature I should not think of speaking here. The hold which he has upon the American people is very interesting, — on the whole, it is very satisfactory, — as an index of what the American people are and what they admire. But of his position as a great religious teacher I ought to speak here, and am glad to speak. It is not a little thing that a man has, really unconsciously, written hymns which will be sung for a hundred years in that part of the Church of Christ which sings English songs. I say "unconsciously" has written hymns, for Whittier was, to the end of his days, one of the Society of