

**THE RIVERSIDE
LITERATURE SERIES;
THE GOLDEN LEGEND**

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The Riverside Literature Series; The Golden Legend by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow & Samuel Arthur Bent

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HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW & SAMUEL ARTHUR BENT

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The Riverside Literature Series

THE GOLDEN LEGEND

BY

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

WITH NOTES

BY

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PREFACE.

THE *Golden Legend* was first published in 1851. The title was derived from the epithet given to Voragine's *Legends of the Saints*, "*Aurea Legenda*," which was said by its admirers to exceed all other books, as gold passeth in value all other metals. So the story upon which this poem is founded "seems to me," says Longfellow, in his original note, "to surpass all other legends in beauty and significance. It exhibits amid the corruptions of the Middle Ages, the virtue of disinterestedness and self-sacrifice, and the power of Faith, Hope, and Charity, sufficient for all the exigencies of life and death."

The story was first told by a Minnesinger of the twelfth century, Hartmann von Aue, in the poem entitled *Der Arme Heinrich*. The hero, a man of wealth and noble birth, is suddenly stricken with leprosy, which he is told can only be cured by the sacrifice of the life of a maiden who may be willing to die for him. This maiden is found in the family of one of "Poor Henry's" tenants, who receives him after the world has cast him off. Her offer to die for her lord is accepted, and they travel to-

gether to Salerno, where the sacrifice is to be made. But at the last moment Henry refuses to accept life at this price, is miraculously cured, and returns home with the peasant girl, whom he makes his wife.

The *Golden Legend* forms the second part of Longfellow's *Trilogy of Christus*, of which *The Divine Tragedy*, or *Life of Christ*, is the first part, and *The New England Tragedies*, a picture of modern Christianity, the third. The notes to the present edition of *The Golden Legend* are intended to offer the general reader sufficient explanation of whatever may be obscure in the allusions to a time but little understood; while they will enable the student to pursue his investigation into the details of mediæval life presented in literary, artistic, and historical authorities within easy reach. He will at the same time be struck by the fidelity of the picture which the poet here draws, not merely of the century of the great awakening, the thirteenth, but of that entire transitional period which the French, more accurate than ourselves, call *le moyen âge* — the Middle Age. S. A. B.

Boston, July, 1886.

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PROLOGUE.

THE SPIRE OF STRASBURG CATHEDRAL.

Night and Storm. LUCIFER,* with the Powers of the Air,† trying
to tear down the Cross.

LUCIFER. Hasten! hasten!
O ye spirits!
From its station drag the ponderous
Cross of iron, that to mock us
* Is uplifted high in air!

VOICES. O, we cannot!
For around it
All the Saints and Guardian Angels

* *Lucifer.* The Light-bearer, applied by the ancients to Venus when morning-star. As the Chaldeans studied the stars, and claimed to be under their special protection, the name was given by Isaiah (xiv. 12) to Nebuchadnezzar in his pride and subsequent fall. Similar words of Christ (*St. Luke* x. 18), "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven," caused St. Jerome and other early Fathers to give the name Lucifer to Satan. (v. p. 66.) For the medieval conception of the Evil Spirit, v. Milman's *Latin Christ*. Bk. xiv. ch. 2.

† *Powers of the Air.* The idea that the air is filled with spiritual beings, good and evil, the region nearest the earth being the abode of the latter (v. *Epâ.* II. 2 and vi. 12), was derived from rabbinical sources, and was common to the Greeks and Romans. Connected with this was the prevalent notion that evil spirits have the power of raising storms and producing pestilences. (v. *King John*, III. 2.) The cross, then, seems to mock the evil spirits into whose element it is raised.

§ *Guardian Angels.* The belief in the guardianship of man by angels was general in the Middle Ages. (v. *Antony and Cleopatra*, II. 3; *Julius Cæsar*, III. 2.) Thus Luther says: "We should be in despair if we saw for how many angels one devil makes work to do." The guardian angel accompanied the soul to heaven. (v. *Hamlet*, v. 2, and *Littell's Living Age*, No. 1080, 1.) Dogs howl at the approach of death because they can see the guardian angel ready to bear away the soul of the departed. (v. p. 99, note.) The Church proved the existence of tutelary spirits by *Acts* xii. 15.