

**THE COURTSHIP OF
MILES STANDISH:
ELIZABETH**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649022519

The Courtship of Miles Standish: Elizabeth by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

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The Riverside Literature Series

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STANDISH: ELIZABETH

BY

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES



HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY

Boston: 6 Park Street; New York: 11 East Seventeenth Street

Chicago: 28 Lakeside Building

The Riverside Press, Cambridge

1888

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The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.
Electrotyped and Printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.

THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH.

THIS poem, like *Evangeline*, written in hexameters, has a lighter movement, due to the more playful character of the narrative. A slight change of accent in the first line prepares one for this livelier pace, and the reader will find that the lights and shades of the story use whatever elasticity there is in the hexameter, crisp, varying lines alternating with the steady pulse of the dactyl. The poet has built upon a slight tradition which has come down to us from the days of the Plymouth settlement, a story which depicts in a succession of scenes the life of the Old Colony. In doing this he has not cared to follow explicitly the succession of events, but has been true to the general history of the time, and has in each picture copied faithfully the essential characteristics of the original. He has taken the somewhat dry and unimaginative chronicles of the time, and touched them with a poetic light and warmth, and the reader of this poem who resumes such a book as Dr. Young's *Chronicles of the Pilgrims* will find the simple story of the early settlers to have gained in beauty. The poem was published in 1858.

I

MILES STANDISH.

IN the Old Colony days, in Plymouth the land of the
Pilgrims,
To and fro in a room of his simple and primitive
dwelling,

1. The *Old Colony* is the name which has long been applied to that part of Massachusetts which was occupied by the Plymouth colonists whose first settlement was in 1620. Massachusetts Bay was the name by which was known the later collection of settlements made about Boston and Salem.

2. The first houses of the Pilgrims were of logs filled in with mortar and covered with thatch.

Clad in doublet and hose, and boots of Cordovan
 leather,
 Strode, with a martial air, Miles Standish the Puritan
 Captain.
 Buried in thought he seemed, with his hands behind
 him, and pausing
 Ever and anon to behold his glittering weapons of
 warfare,
 Hanging in shining array along the walls of the cham-
 ber, —
 Cutlass and corselet of steel, and his trusty sword of
 Damascus,
 Curved at the point and inscribed with its mystical
 Arabic sentence,
 While underneath, in a corner, were fowling-piece,
 musket, and matchlock. 10

3. Cordova in Spain was celebrated for a preparation of goat-skin which took the name of Cordovan. Hence came cordwain, or Spanish tanned goat-skin, and in England shoemakers are still often called cordwainers. In France, too, the same word gave *cordonnier*.

8. The corselet was a light breastplate of armor. One of Standish's grandsons is said to have been in possession of his coat-of-mail. His sword is in the cabinet of the Massachusetts Historical Society. As "the identical sword-blade used by Miles Standish" is also in possession of the Pilgrim Society of Plymouth, the antiquary may take his choice between them, or credit Standish with a change of weapons. Damascus blades are swords or cimeters presenting upon their surface a variegated appearance of watering, as white, silvery, or black veins in fine lines and fillets. Such engraved blades were common in the East, and the most famous came from Damascus; the exact secret of the workmanship has never been fully discovered in the West.

10. A *fowling-piece* is a light gun for shooting birds; a *match-lock* was a musket, the lock of which held a match or piece of twisted rope prepared to retain fire. As late as 1687 matchlocks were used instead of flint-locks, which had then come into

Short of stature he was, but strongly built and athletic,

Broad in the shoulders, deep-chested, with muscles and sinews of iron ;

Brown as a nut was his face, but his russet beard was already

Flaked with patches of snow, as hedges sometimes in November.

Near him was seated John Alden, his friend and household companion,

Writing with diligent speed at a table of pine by the window ;

Fair-haired, azure-eyed, with delicate Saxon complexion,

Having the dew of his youth, and the beauty thereof, as the captives

general use. In Bradford and Winslow's Journal (*Young's Chronicles of the Pilgrims*, p. 125), we are told of a party setting out "with every man his musket, sword, and corselet, under the conduct of Captain Miles Standish." That these muskets were matchlocks, appears from another passage in the same journal (p. 142) : "Then we lighted all our matches and prepared ourselves, concluding that we were near their dwellings."

15. Bradford, the historian of the Plymouth Plantation, says that John Alden, who was one of the Mayflower company, "was hired for a cooper at Southampton, where the ship victualled ; and being a hopeful young man, was much desired, but left to his own liking to go or stay when he came here [to Plymouth, that is] ; but he stayed and married here." In this picture of Miles Standish and John Alden, some have professed to see a miniature likeness to Oliver Cromwell and John Milton.

18. The story of the first mission to heathen England is referred to here. A monk named Gregory, in the sixth century, passed through the slave-market at Rome, and there amongst other captives he saw three fair-complexioned and fair-haired boys, in striking contrast to the dusky captives about them. He asked whence they came, and was answered, "From Britain," and that

Whom Saint Gregory saw, and exclaimed, "Not Ang-
gles but Angels."

X Youngest of all was he of the men who came in the
Mayflower. 20

Suddenly breaking the silence, the diligent scribe
interrupting,

Spake, in the pride of his heart, Miles Standish the
Captain of Plymouth.

"Look at these arms," he said, "the warlike weapons
that hang here

Burnished and bright and clean, as if for parade or
inspection!

This is the sword of Damascus I fought with in Flan-
ders; this breastplate, 23

Well I remember the day! once saved my life in a
skirmish;

Here in front you can see the very dint of the
bullet

Fired point-blank at my heart by a Spanish arcabu-
cero.

they were called *Angli*, which was the Latin form of the name by which they called themselves, and from which Anglo, England, and English are derived. "*Non Angli sed Angeli*," replied Gregory; "they have the face of angels, not of Angles, and they ought to be fellow heirs of heaven." Years afterward, the story runs, when Gregory was pope, he remembered the fair captives, and sent St. Augustine to carry Christianity to them. The story will be found at length in E. A. Freeman's *Old English History for Children*, p. 44.

25. The history of Miles Standish is not clearly known, but he was a soldier in the Low Countries during the defence of the Netherlands against the Spanish power, and the poet has made much of this little knowledge that we have.

28. *Arcabucero* is Spanish for archer, and the same term passed over, as weapons changed, into a musketeer and gunsmith.