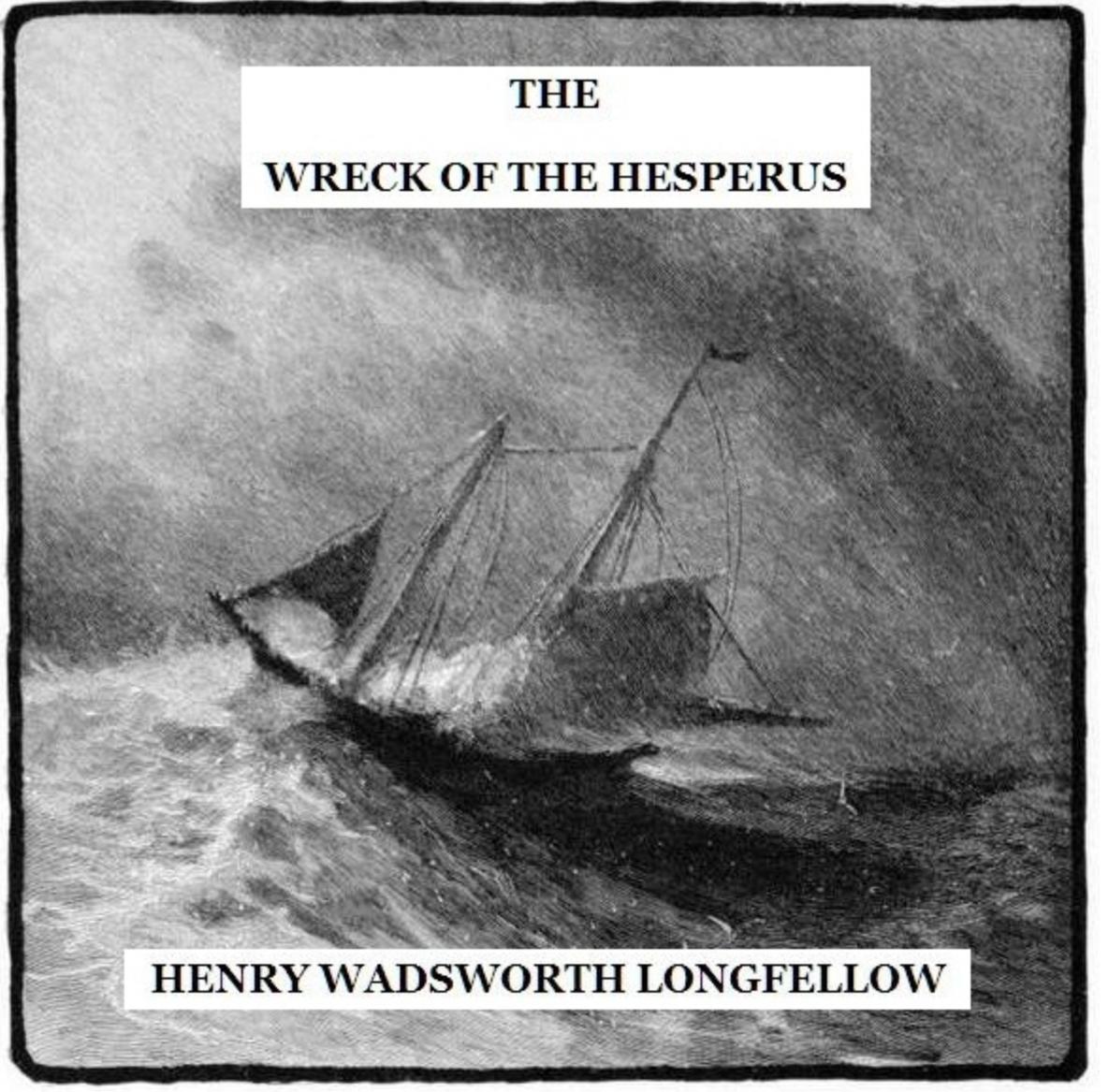


**THE
WRECK OF THE HESPERUS**



HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

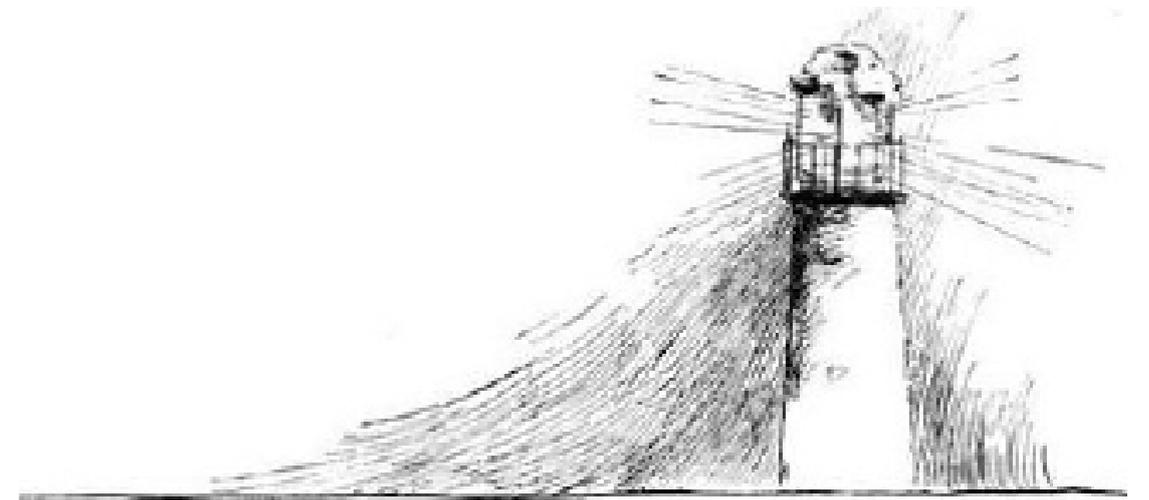


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a narrative poem by
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

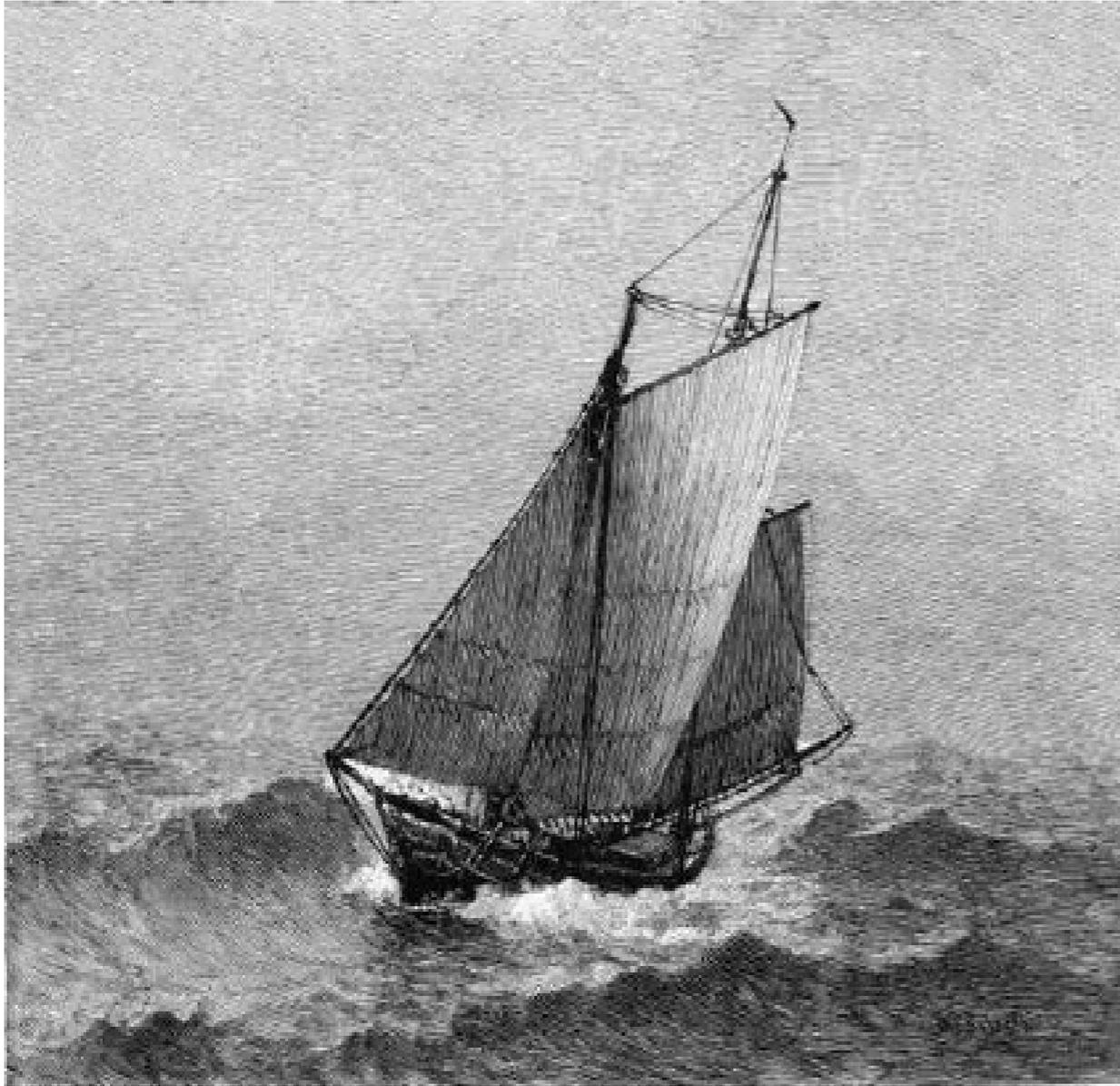
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The Wreck of the Hesperus
by
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

It was the schooner Hesperus
That sailed the wintry sea;
And the skipper had taken his little daughter
To bear him company.



Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax,
Her cheeks like the dawn of day.

And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds
That ope in the month of May.

The skipper he stood beside the helm,
His pipe was in his mouth,

And he watched how the veering flaw did blow
The smoke now west, now south.



Then up and spake an old sailor,
Had sailed to the Spanish Main,
“I pray thee, put into yonder port,
For I fear a hurricane.”



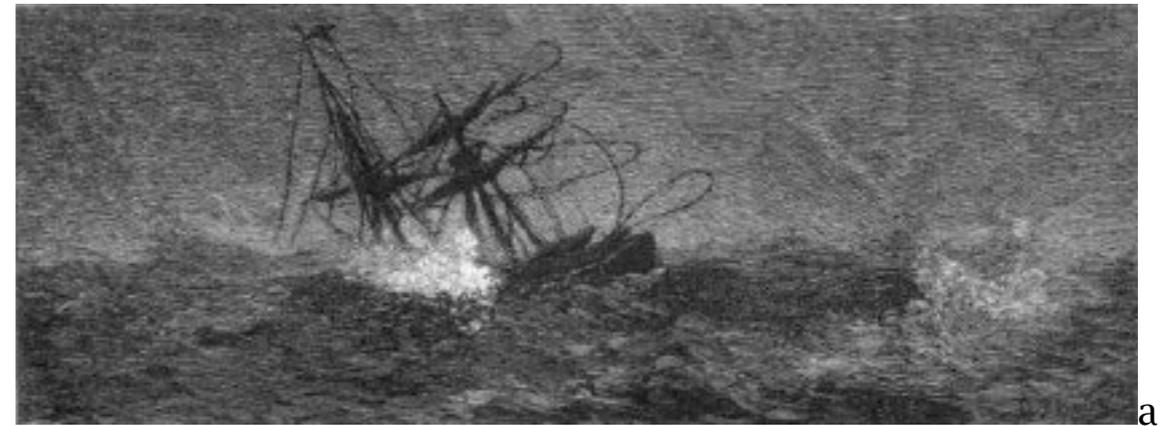
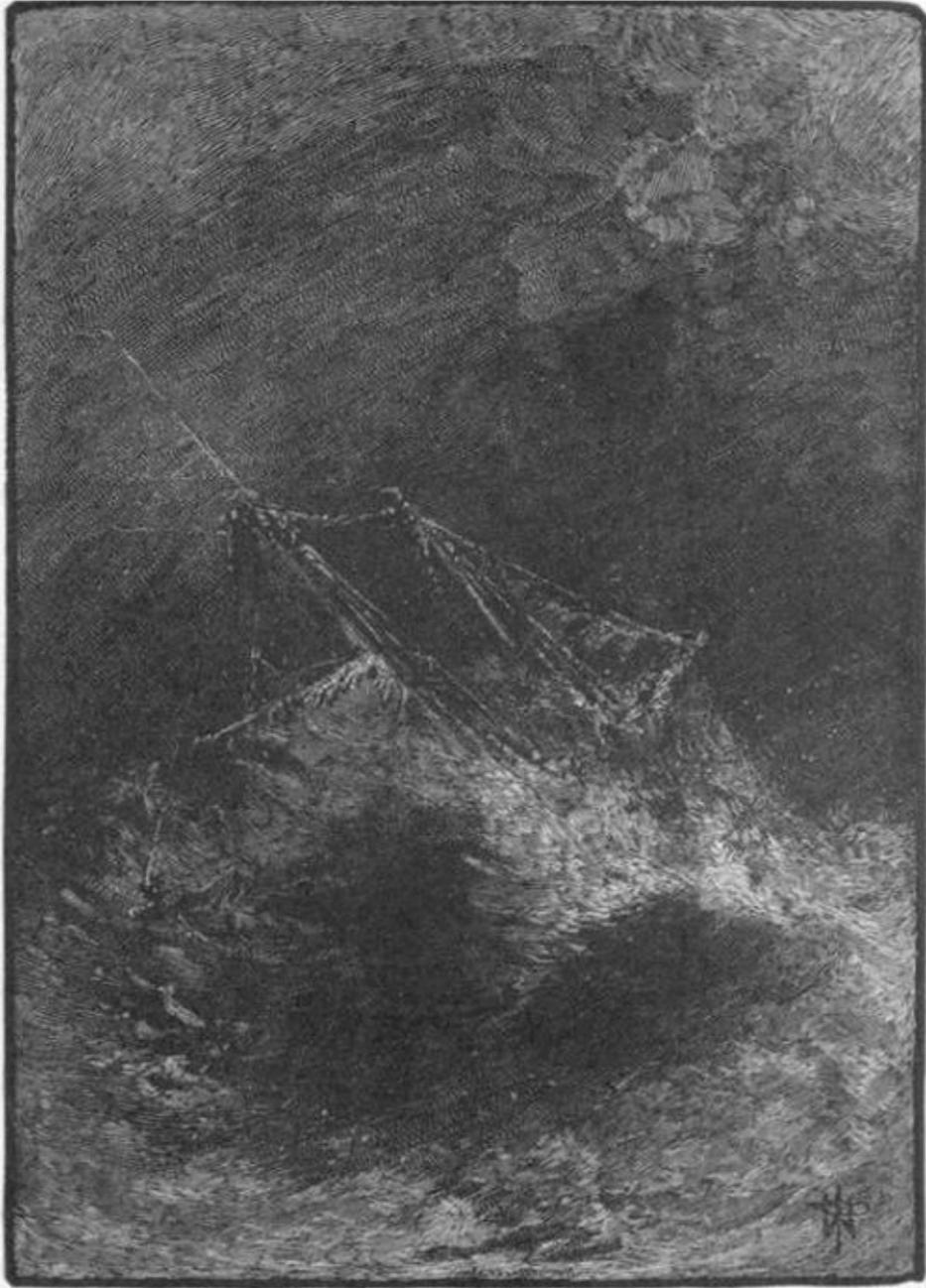
"Last night, the moon had a golden ring,
And to-night no moon we see!"

The skipper, he blew a whiff from his pipe,
And a scornful laugh laughed he.

Colder and louder blew the wind,
A gale from the Northeast,

The snow fell hissing in the brine,
And the billows frothed like yeast.



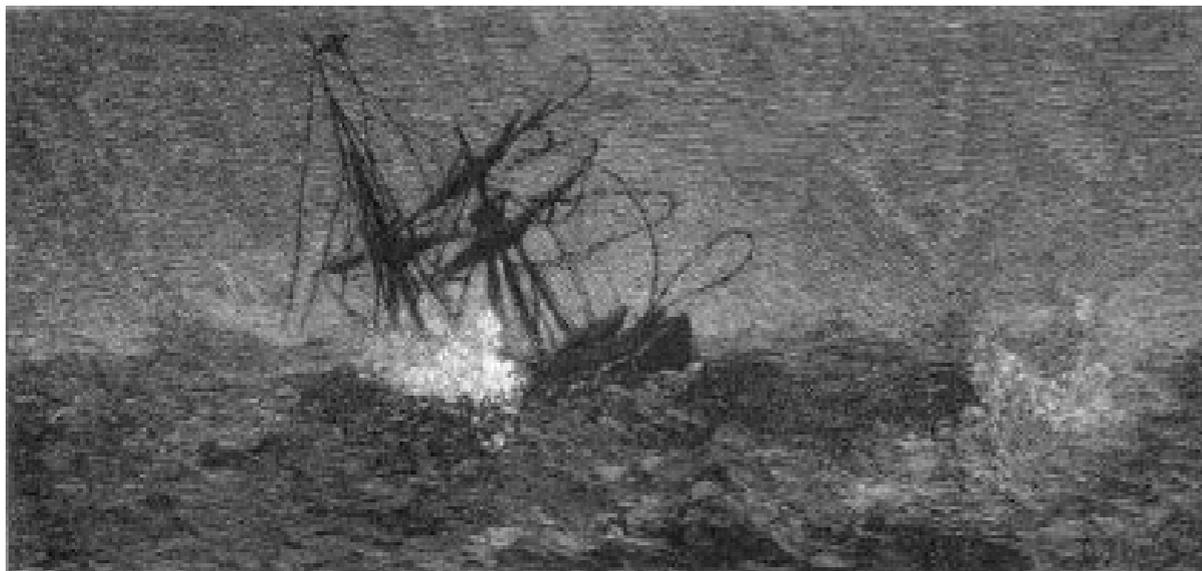


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Down came the storm, and smote amain
The vessel in its strength;
She shuddered and paused, like a frightened steed,
Then leaped her cable's length.



“Come hither! come hither, my little daughter,
And do not tremble so;
For I can weather the roughest gale,
That ever wind did blow.”
He wrapped her warm in his seaman’s coat,
Against the stinging blast;
He cut a rope from a broken spar,
And bound her to the mast.



“O father! I hear the church-bells ring;
O say, what may it be?”--

“‘Tis a fog-bell on a rock-bound coast!”--
And he steered for the open sea.

“O father! I hear the sound of guns;
O say, what may it be?”--

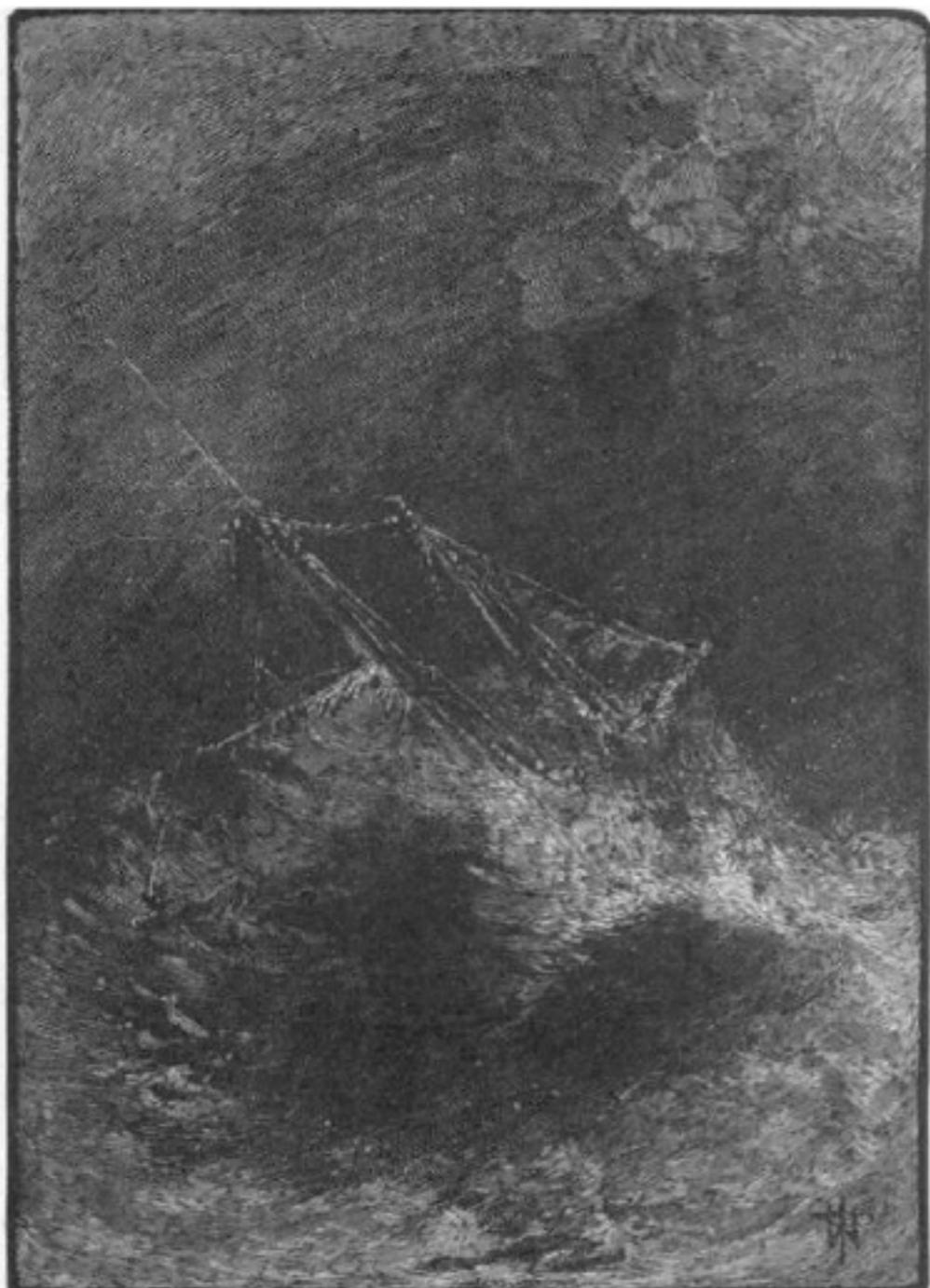
“Some ship in distress, that cannot live
In such an angry sea!”



“O father! I see a gleaming light;
O say, what may it be?”
But the father answered never a word,--
A frozen corpse was he.
Lashed to the helm, all stiff and stark.
With his face turned to the skies.
The lantern gleamed through the gleaming snow,
On his fixed and glassy eyes.



Then the maiden clasped her hands and prayed
That saved she might be;
And she thought of Christ, who stilled the wave,
On the Lake of Galilee.



And fast through the midnight dark and drear,
Through the whistling sleet and snow,

Like a sheeted ghost, the vessel swept
Towards the reef of Norman's Woe.

And ever the fitful gusts between,
A sound came from the land;

It was the sound of the trampling surf,
On the rocks and the hard sea-sand.

The breakers were right beneath her bows;
She drifted a dreary wreck,

And a whooping billow swept the crew
Like icicles from her deck.



She struck where the white and fleecy waves
Looked soft as carded wool;

But the cruel rocks, they gored her side
Like the horns of an angry bull.

Her rattling shrouds, all sheathed in ice,
With the masts went by the board;

Like a vessel of glass, she strove and sank.
Ho! Ho! the breakers roared.



At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach,
A fisherman stood aghast,
To see the form of a maiden fair,
Lashed close to a drifting mast.
The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
The salt tears in her eyes;
And he saw her hair, like the brown sea-weed,
On the billows fall and rise.
Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,
In the midnight and the snow!
Christ save us all from a death like this,
On the reef of Norman's Woe!

About *The Wreck of the Hesperus*

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

Frequently Asked Questions

? What is the publication date?

1841. Longfellow evidently wrote the first draft in 1839 and continued editing the poem off and on until his death. He remarked that the first draft was incredibly easy to write because it came to him in whole stanzas, rather than words or lines.

? Is "Norman's Woe" a real place?



Yes. Norman's Woe is a rocky headland on the coast of Massachusetts between Gloucester and Magnolia. [Satellite Map](#).

? Was the *Hesperus* an actual ship that wrecked off Norman's Woe?

Yes and No. In the fall and winter of 1839 severe storms caused several tragic sinkings off the New England coast. On December 17th, 1839, Longfellow wrote in his journal:

News of shipwrecks horrible, on the coast. Forty bodies washed ashore near Gloucester, one lashed to a piece of the wreck. There is a reef called Norman's Woe, where many of these took place; among others the schooner Hesperus.

According to news accounts, a woman's body was found lashed "to a broken masthead" after the sinking of the ship *Favorite* off Norman's Woe. The ship *Hesperus* sank off the coast of Boston.

Longfellow seems to have combined details from various sinkings to construct his narrative.

? What type of poem is this?

Ballad. Longfellow, a nineteenth century American poet, is a Romantic in the classical, literary sense of the word. He often based his poems on folk lore and focused on the power of Nature. He wrote in the classical tradition of stanzas, meter, and rhyme.



Extended Learning

The Parlour Song

In the late nineteenth Victorian Period, parlour songs were immensely popular. They were easily played at parties, sometimes as sing-alongs.

Many of the popular narrative poems were transcribed into a parlour song, including poems by Longfellow and Edgar Allan Poe.



Hear the parlour song, “The Wreck of the Hesperus” performed by Professor Derek Scott on the VictorianWeb website..





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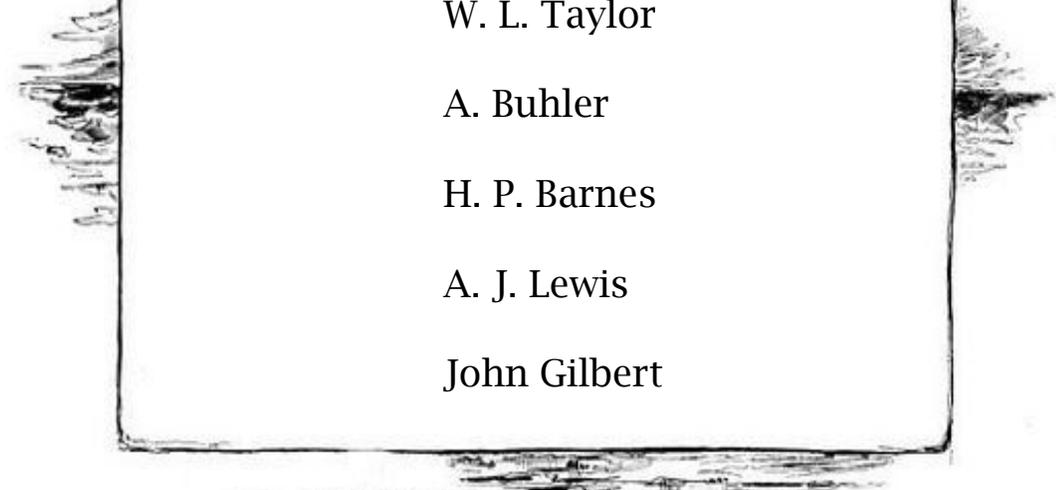
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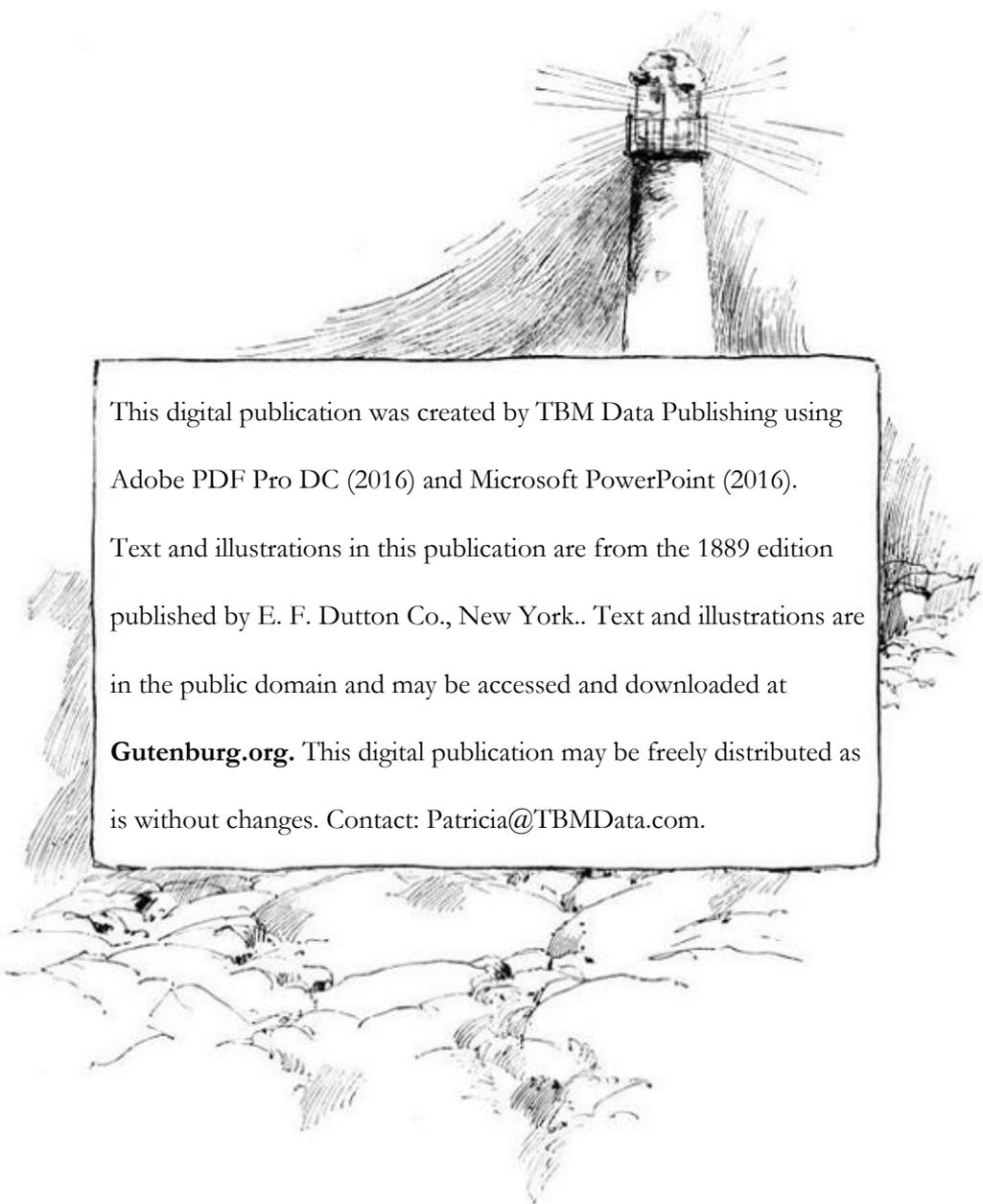
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Satellite image of Normans Woe Cove and Normans Woe Rock

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