The Chambered Nautilus

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,

   Sails the unshadowed main,—

   The venturous bark that flings

On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings

In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings,

   And coral reefs lie bare,

Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;

   Wrecked is the ship of pearl!

   And every chambered cell,

Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,

As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,

   Before thee lies revealed,—

Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil

   That spread his lustrous coil;

   Still, as the spiral grew,

He left the past year’s dwelling for the new,

Stole with soft step its shining archway through,

   Built up its idle door,

Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,

   Child of the wandering sea,

   Cast from her lap, forlorn!

From thy dead lips a clearer note is born

Than ever Triton blew from wreathèd horn!

   While on mine ear it rings,

Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that sings:—

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,

   As the swift seasons roll!

   Leave thy low-vaulted past!

Let each new temple, nobler than the last,

Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,

   Till thou at length art free,

Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting sea!

The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The tide rises, the tide falls,

The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;

Along the sea-sands damp and brown

The traveller hastens toward the town,

      And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,

But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;

The little waves, with their soft, white hands,

Efface the footprints in the sands,

      And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls

Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;

The day returns, but nevermore

Returns the traveller to the shore,

      And the tide rises, the tide falls.