

Paul Revere's Ride

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

1 Listen, my children, and you shall hear
2 Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
3 On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-Five:
4 Hardly a man is now alive
5 Who remembers that famous day and year.

6 He said to his friend, "If the British march
7 By land or sea from the town to-night,
8 Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry-arch
9 Of the North-Church-tower, as a signal-light,—
10 One if by land, and two if by sea;
11 And I on the opposite shore will be,
12 Ready to ride and spread the alarm
13 Through every Middlesex village and farm,
14 For the country-folk to be up and to arm."

15 Then he said "Good night!" and with muffled oar
16 Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,
17 Just as the moon rose over the bay,
18 Where swinging wide at her moorings lay
19 The Somerset, British man-of-war:
20 A phantom ship, with each mast and spar
21 Across the moon, like a prison-bar,
22 And a huge black hulk, that was magnified
23 By its own reflection in the tide.

24 Meanwhile, his friend, through alley and street
25 Wanders and watches with eager ears,
26 Till in the silence around him he hears
27 The muster of men at the barrack door,
28 The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,
29 And the measured tread of the grenadiers
30 Marching down to their boats on the shore.

31 Then he climbed to the tower of the church,
32 Up the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,
33 To the belfry-chamber overhead,
34 And startled the pigeons from their perch
35 On the sombre rafters, that round him made
36 Masses and moving shapes of shade,—
37 By the trembling ladder, steep and tall,
38 To the highest window in the wall,
39 Where he paused to listen and look down
40 A moment on the roofs of the town,
41 And the moonlight flowing over all.

42 Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,
43 In their night-encampment on the hill,
44 Wrapped in silence so deep and still
45 That he could hear, like a sentinel's tread,
46 The watchful night-wind, as it went
47 Creeping along from tent to tent,
48 And seeming to whisper, "All is well!"
49 A moment only he feels the spell
50 Of the place and the hour, and the secret dread
51 Of the lonely belfry and the dead;
52 For suddenly all his thoughts are bent
53 On a shadowy something far away,
54 Where the river widens to meet the bay, —
55 A line of black, that bends and floats
56 On the rising tide, like a bridge of boats.

57 Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,
58 Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride,
59 On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.
60 Now he patted his horse's side,
61 Now gazed on the landscape far and near,
62 Then impetuous stamped the earth,
63 And turned and tightened his saddle-girth;
64 But mostly he watched with eager search
65 The belfry-tower of the old North Church,
66 As it rose above the graves on the hill,
67 Lonely and spectral and sombre and still.
68 And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height,
69 A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!
70 He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,
71 But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
72 A second lamp in the belfry burns!

73 A hurry of hoofs in a village-street,
74 A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,
75 And beneath from the pebbles, in passing, a spark
76 Struck out by a steed that flies fearless and fleet:
77 That was all! And yet, through the gloom and the light,
78 The fate of a nation was riding that night;
79 And the spark struck out by that steed, in his flight,
80 Kindled the land into flame with its heat.

81 He has left the village and mounted the steep,
82 And beneath him, tranquil and broad and deep,
83 Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides;
84 And under the alders, that skirt its edge,
85 Now soft on the sand, now load on the ledge,
86 Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.

87 It was twelve by the village clock
88 When he crossed the bridge into Medford town.
89 He heard the crowing of the cock,
90 And the barking of the farmer's dog,
91 And felt the damp of the river-fog,
92 That rises when the sun goes down.

93 It was one by the village clock,
94 When he galloped into Lexington.
95 He saw the gilded weathercock
96 Swim in the moonlight as he passed,
97 And the meeting-house windows, blank and bare,
98 Gaze at him with a spectral glare,
99 As if they already stood aghast
100 At the bloody work they would look upon.

101 It was two by the village clock,
102 When he came to the bridge in Concord town.
103 He heard the bleating of the flock,
104 And the twitter of birds among the trees,
105 And felt the breath of the morning breeze
106 Blowing over the meadows brown.
107 And one was safe and asleep in his bed
108 Who at the bridge would be first to fall,
109 Who that day would be lying dead,
110 Pierced by a British musket-ball.

111 You know the rest. In the books you have read,
112 How the British Regulars fired and fled,—
113 How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
114 From behind each fence and farmyard-wall,
115 Chasing the red-coats down the lane,
116 Then crossing the fields to emerge again
117 Under the trees at the turn of the road,
118 And only pausing to fire and load.

119 So through the night rode Paul Revere;
120 And so through the night went his cry of alarm
121 To every Middlesex village and farm,—
122 A cry of defiance, and not of fear,
123 A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
124 And a word that shall echo forevermore!
125 For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
126 Through all our history, to the last,
127 In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
128 The people will waken and listen to hear
129 The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
130 And the midnight message of Paul Revere.