

For the Season

SPECIAL STUDY FOR THE MONTH—LONGFELLOW

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the Children's Poet, was born on the 27th February, 1807, in Portland, Maine. He was always a quiet, studious boy, not fond of rough games or sports, but always to be found with a book, of which there were many of the best in his home. His mother encouraged him to read the best poetry of the day, and he was particularly fond of Irving's "Sketch Book." When he was quite a little boy he wrote several short poems. During his college years he contributed articles and poems to some of the American magazines, but this did not interfere with his studies, and in 1825 he stood so well in his class that he was offered the post of Professor of Modern Languages. In order to fit himself for this position he spent some time in Europe, studying the life and romance of the Old World. Longfellow was married in 1831, and a few years after this he was invited to become Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard University. While travelling in Europe before making his home in Cambridge, Longfellow lost his wife. After her death he settled in Heidelberg, where he made a study of German literature in its various phases.

In 1836 he returned to Cambridge, where he was shortly established in the famous Craigie House. This was a beautiful old colonial house, with hospitable verandahs on either side and quaint green shutters against its white walls. The house stood in the centre of terraced lawns, and was surrounded by beautiful old elm trees. George Washington once made this house his headquarters, and slept in the room afterwards used by Longfellow as his study, and about which he wrote a poem in which these lines appear:

Up and down these echoing stairs,
Heavy with the weight of cares,
Sounded his majestic tread;

Yes, within this very room,
Sat he in those hours of gloom,
Weary both in heart and head.

In 1842 Longfellow paid his third visit to Europe, and it was while there that he received the inspiration for some of his best known poems. On his return he was married to a Miss Appleton, of Boston. She was the mother of the children "grave Alice and laughing Allegra, and Edith with golden hair." Longfellow had always loved children, and his own five seem to have been an intense delight and an inspiration to him always. After eighteen years of happy married life, Longfellow's wife lost her life in a tragic manner, her dress catching fire from a match on the floor. The tender-hearted poet was almost crushed by this terrible bereavement, and he sought solace in the translation of Dante's great poem.

During the remainder of his life Longfellow devoted himself exclusively to his writing, having resigned his professorship some time before his wife's death.

It is hardly necessary to enumerate his work. Who has not been touched by the musical pathos of "Evangeline," interested and amused by "Miles Standish"? Who has not swayed to the rhythm of "Hiawatha" his happiness and sorrow, his work and play?

Longfellow died on the 24th March, 1882, truly mourned by his country, and by thousands of readers the world over. In his death his country lost an influence for all that is best, sweetest and most wholesome, and the world lost a sweet singer of songs, whose memory will remain with children yet unborn.

The international genius of Longfellow was acknowledged at his death by the placing of a bust to his memory in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.