

LONGFELLOW AND THE CHILDREN.

BY LUCY LARCOM.

THE poets who love children are the poets whom children love. It is natural that they should care much for each other, because both children and poets look into things in the same way,—simply, with open eyes and hearts, seeing Nature as it is, and finding whatever is lovable and pure in the people who surround them, as flowers may receive back from flowers sweet odors for those which they have given. The little child is born with a poet's heart in him, and the poet has been fitly called "the eternal child."

Not that all children or all poets are alike in this. But of him who has just gone from us—the honored Longfellow—we think as of one who has always been fresh and natural in his sympathy for children, one who has loved them as they have loved him.

We wish he had given us more of the memories of his own childhood. One vivid picture of it comes to us in "My Lost Youth," a poem which shows us how everything he saw when a child must have left within him a life-long impression. That boyhood by the sea must have been full of dreams as well as of pictures. The beautiful bay with its green islands, widening out to the Atlantic on the east, and the dim chain of mountains, the highest in New England, lying far away on the north-western horizon, give his native city a roomy feeling not often experienced in the streets of a town; and the boy-poet must have felt his imagination taking wings there, for many a long flight. So he more than hints to us in his song:

"I can see the shadowy lines of its trees,
And catch, in sudden gleams,
The sheen of the far-surrounding seas,
And islands that were the Hesperides
Of all my boyish dreams.
And the burden of that old song,
It murmurs and whispers still:
'A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.'"

"I remember the black wharves and the slips,
And the sea-tides tossing free;
And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.
And the voice of that wayward song
Is singing and saying still:
'A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.'"

Longfellow's earliest volume, "The Voices of the Night," was one of the few books of American poetry that some of us who are now growing old

ourselves can remember reading, just as we were emerging from childhood. "The Reaper and the Flowers" and the "Psalm of Life,"—I recall the delight with which I used to repeat those poems. The latter, so full of suggestions which a very young person could feel, but only half understand, was for that very reason the more fascinating. It seemed to give glimpses, through opening doors, of that wonderful new world of mankind, where children are always longing to wander freely as men and women. Looking forward and aspiring are among the first occupations of an imaginative child; and the school-boy who declaimed the words:

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,"

and the school-girl who read them quietly by herself, felt them, perhaps, no less keenly than the man of thought and experience.

Longfellow has said that—

"Sublimity always is simple
Both in sermon and song, a child can seize on its meaning,"

and the simplicity of his poetry is the reason why children and young people have always loved it; the reason, also, why it has been enjoyed by men and women and children all over the world.

One of his poems which has been the delight of children and grown people alike is the "Village Blacksmith," the first half of which is a description that many a boy might feel as if he could have written himself—if he only had the poet's command of words and rhymes, and the poet's genius! Is not this one of the proofs of a good poem, that it haunts us until it seems as if it had almost grown out of our own mind? How life-like the picture is!—

"And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor."

No wonder the Cambridge children, when the old chestnut-tree that overhung the smithy was cut down, had a memento shaped into a chair from its boughs, to present to him who had made it an immortal tree in his verse! It bore flower and fruit for them a second time in his acknowledgment of the gift; for he told them how—

" There, by the blacksmith's forge, beside the street
Its blossoms white and sweet,
Enticed the bees, until it seemed alive,
And murmured like a hive.

" And when the winds of autumn, with a shout
Tossed its great arms about,
The shining chestnuts, bursting from the sheath,
Dropped to the ground beneath."

In its own wild, winsome way, the song of "Hiawatha's Childhood" is one of the prettiest fancies in poetry. It is a dream of babyhood in the "forest primeval," with Nature for nurse and teacher; and it makes us feel as if—were the poet's idea only a possibility—it might have been very pleasant to be a savage baby, although we consider it so much better to be civilized.

" At the door on summer evenings
Sat the little Hiawatha;
Heard the whispering of the pine-trees,
Heard the lapping of the water,
Sounds of music, words of wonder:

Light me with your little candle,
Ere upon my bed I lay me,
Ere in sleep I close my eyelids!
* * * * *

" Then the little Hiawatha
Learned of every bird its language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How they built their nests in summer,
Where they hid themselves in winter,
* * * * *

" Of all beasts he learned the language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How the beavers built their lodges,
Where the squirrels hid their acorns,
How the reindeer ran so swiftly,
Why the rabbit was so timid;
Talked with them when'er he met them,
Called them 'Hiawatha's Brothers.'"

How Longfellow loved the very little ones can be seen in such verses as the "Hanging of the Crane," and in those earlier lines "To a Child," where the baby on his mother's knee gazes at the painted tiles, shakes his "coral rattle



LONGFELLOW'S HOUSE—ONCE WASHINGTON'S HEAD-QUARTERS AT CAMBRIDGE.

' Minne-wawa!' said the pine-trees;
' Mudway-aushka!' said the water.
Saw the fire-fly, Wah-wah-taysee,
Flitting through the dusk of evening,
With the twinkle of its candle
Lighting up the brakes and bushes.
And he sang the song of children,
Sang the song Nokomis taught him:
' Wah-wah-taysee, little fire-fly,
Little, flitting, white-fire insect,
Little dancing, white-fire creature,

with the silver bells," or escapes through the open door into the old halls where once

" The Father of his country dwelt."

Those verses give us a charming glimpse of the home-life in the historic mansion which is now so rich with poetic, as well as patriotic associations. Other glimpses of it he has given us also. Some

years ago, many households in our land were made happy by the pictured group of Longfellow's three children, which he allowed to be put into circula-



A CORNER IN LONGFELLOW'S STUDY.

tion,—three lovely little girls, who became known to us through the poet's words as—

Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
And Edith with golden hair."

How beautiful it was to be let in to that twilight library scene described in the "Children's Hour":

"A sudden rush from the stair-way,
A sudden raid from the hall!
By three doors left unguarded,
They enter my castle wall!

"They climb up into my turret,
O'er the arms and back of my chair;
If I try to escape, they surround me;
They seem to be everywhere.

"Do you think, O blue-eyed banditi,
Because you have scaled the wall,
Such an old moustache as I am
Is not a match for you all?

"I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeon
In the round-tower of my heart.

"And there will I keep you forever,
Yea, forever and a day,
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin
And moulder in dust away!"

Afterward, when sorrow and loss had come to the happy home, in the sudden removal of the mother of those merry children, the father who loved them so had a sadder song for them, as he looked onward into their orphaned lives:

"O little feet, that such long years
Must wander on, through hopes and fears,
Must ache and bleed beneath your load,
I, nearer to the wayside inn,
Where toil shall cease, and rest begin,
Am weary, thinking of your road!"

And later, as if haunted by a care for them that would not leave him, he wrote the beautiful sonnet beginning:

"I said unto myself, if I were dead,
What would befall these children? What would be
Their fate, who now are looking up to me
For help and furtherance? Their lives, I said,
Would be a volume wherein I have read
But the first chapters, and no longer see
To read the rest of their dear history,
So full of beauty and so full of dread."

Very sweet to those children must be the memory of such a father's love!

Longfellow loved all children, and had a word for them whenever he met them.

At a concert, going early with her father, a little girl espied Mr. Longfellow sitting alone, and begged that she might go and speak to him. Her father, himself a stranger, took the liberty of introducing his little daughter Edith to the poet.

"Edith?" said Mr. Longfellow, tenderly. "Ah! I have an Edith, too; but *my* baby Edith is twenty years old." And he seated the child beside him, taking her hand in his, and making her promise to come and see him at his house in Cambridge.

"What is the name of your sled, my boy?" he said to a small lad, who came tugging one up the road toward him, on a winter morning.

"It's 'Evangeline.' Mr. Longfellow wrote 'Evangeline.' Did you ever see Mr. Longfellow?" answered the little fellow, as he ran by, doubtless wondering at the smile on the face of the pleasant gray-haired gentleman.

Professor Monti, who witnessed the pretty scene, tells the story of a little girl who last Christmas inquired the way to the poet's house, and asked if she could just step inside the yard; and he relates how Mr. Longfellow, being told she was there, went to the door and called her in, and showed her the "old clock on the stairs," and many other interesting things about the house, leaving his little guest with beautiful memories of that Christmas day to carry all through her life. This was characteristic of the poet's hospitality, delicate and courteous and thoughtful to all who crossed his threshold. Many a trembling young girl, frightened at her own boldness in having ventured into his presence, was set at ease by her host in the most genial way; he would make her forget herself in the interesting mementos all about her, devoting himself to her entertainment as if it were the one pleasure of the hour to do so.

It is often said, and with reason, that we Americans do not think enough of manners—that politeness of behavior which comes from genuine sympathy and a delicate perception of others' feelings. Certainly our young people might look to Mr. Longfellow as a model in this respect. He was a perfect gentleman, in the best sense of that term, always considerate, and quick to see where he might do a kindness, or say a pleasant word.

A visitor one day told him in conversation of a young lady relative or friend, who had sent to Mr. Longfellow the message that he was the one man in the world she wanted to see.

"Tell her," said the poet, instantly, "that she is the one young lady in the world whom I want to see."

Some young girls, from a distant part of the country, having been about Cambridge sight-seeing, walked to Mr. Longfellow's house, and venturing within the gate, sat down upon the grass. He passed them there, and turning back, said:

"Young ladies, you are uncomfortably seated. Wont you come into the house?"

They were overjoyed at the invitation, and on entering, Mr. Longfellow insisted upon their taking lunch with him. They saw that the table was set for four, and were beginning to be mortified at finding themselves possible intruders upon other guests. They so expressed themselves to their host, who put them at ease at once, saying that it was only his regular lunch with his children, and that they would be happy to wait.

One of a group of school-girls whom he had welcomed to his house sent him, as a token of her gratitude, an iron pen made from a fetter of the Prisoner of Chillon, and a bit of wood from the frigate "Constitution," ornamented with precious stones from three continents. He wrote his thanks in a poem which must be very precious to the giver,—*"Beautiful Helen of Maine,"*—to whom he says of her gift that it is to him—

"As a drop of the dew of your youth
On the leaves of an aged tree."

Longfellow's courtesy was as unfailing as the demands upon it were numerous and pressing. Very few imagine what a tax it is upon the time of our more prominent authors simply to write the autographs which are requested of them. He almost invariably complied with such requests, when made in a proper manner, wearisome as it must often have been to do so. Not long since, he had a letter from a Western boy, who sent his name,

desiring him to translate it into every language he knew, and send it back to him with his autograph! The poet was much amused at the request, but it is doubtful whether he found time to gratify that boy.

Still another incident related of him is that he was one day walking in a garden with a little five-years maiden who was fond of poetry and occasionally "made up some" herself.

"I, too, am fond of poetry," he said to her. "Suppose you give me a little of yours this beautiful morning?"

"Think," cried he, afterward, to a friend, throwing up his hands, his eyes sparkling with merriment,—*"think what her answer was! She said: 'Oh, Mr. Longfellow, it does n't always come when you want it!' Ah me,—how true, how true!"*

The celebration of Longfellow's seventy-fifth birthday by school-children all over the country is something that those children must be glad to think of now—glad to remember that the poet knew how much they cared for him and for what he had written. Even the blind children, who have to read with their fingers, were enjoying his songs with the rest. How pleasant that must have been to him! Certainly, as it seems to me, the best tribute that the young people of the country can pay to his memory is to become more familiar with his poems.

Of our older poets, whose greatness time has tested, only a few remain. One of them, writing of Longfellow's departure, says sadly: *"Our little circle narrows fast, and a feeling of loneliness comes over me."*

We should not wait until a great and good man has left us before giving him honor, or trying to understand what he has done for us. A dreary world ours would be, if there were no poets' songs echoing through it; and we may be proud of our country that it has a poetry of its own, which it is for us to know and possess for ourselves.

Longfellow has said:

"What the leaves are to the forest
With light and air and food,
Ere their sweet and tender juices
Have been hardened into wood,
That to the world, are children":

and something like this we may say of his songs. There is in all true poetry a freshness of life which makes the writer of it immortal.

The singer so much beloved has passed from sight, but the music of his voice is in the air, and, listening to it, we know that he can not die.

LONGFELLOW'S LAST AFTERNOON WITH CHILDREN.

BY HEZEKIAH BUTTERWORTH.

"He is dead, the sweet musician!
He the sweetest of all singers!
He has gone from us forever:
He has moved a little nearer
To the Master of all music,
To the Master of all singing."

"I saw her bright reflection
In the waters under me,
Like a golden goblet falling
And sinking into the sea.

"And far in the hazy distance
Of that lovely night in June,
The blaze of the flaming furnace
Gleamed redder than the moon."

In the early part of March, some lads belonging to the Dwight School, Boston, wished to visit Professor Longfellow, with whose poems they were becoming familiar.

"Let us write to him," said one of the boys, "and ask his permission to call on him some holiday afternoon."

They consulted their teacher, who favored the plan, and the following note was sent to the poet:

"HENRY W. LONGFELLOW—*Dear Sir*: Would it be agreeable to you to receive a call from four boys of the Dwight School? . . ."

Four names were signed to the note.

In a few days the following answer was returned:

"Mr. Longfellow would be pleased to meet the boys of the Dwight School on Saturday afternoon."

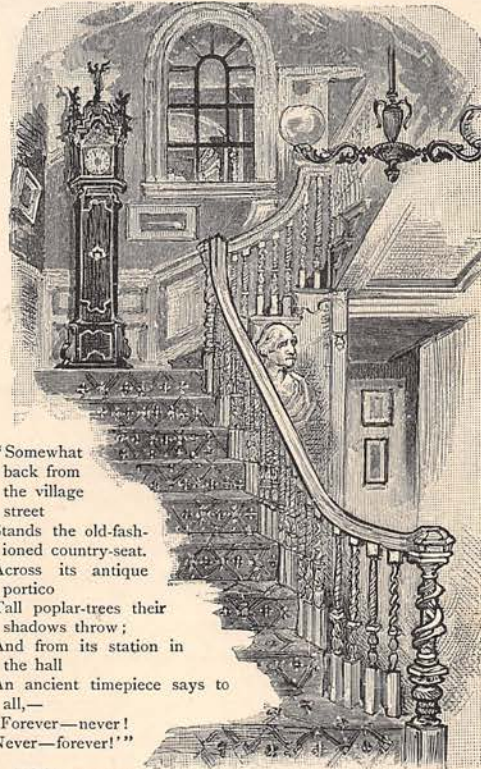
The boys were delighted. They procured a choice bouquet of flowers to give to the poet, and on Saturday afternoon, March 18th, went to Cambridge, and made the last visit to Longfellow that he ever received. Soon after they left him, he walked on the piazza of the ancient house, and being there exposed to the raw March winds, and being there exposed to the raw March winds, he contracted the sudden illness that ended his life.

On their way to Cambridge, the boys left Boston by the Charles River bridge, over which incessantly day and night a procession of footsteps goes and returns, as restless as the tide that ebbs and flows among the wooden piers and there makes its ceaseless murmur.

Many years ago, in loneliness and despondency, the great poet himself had been accustomed to go over the wooden bridge in the same place; and often he went at night, when the city clocks around Beacon Hill solemnly announced the hours. There was a great furnace then on the Brighton Hills, and its red light glowed weirdly in the shadowy distance. That sad time and lonely scene were in his mind when he wrote:

"I stood on the bridge at midnight,
As the clocks were striking the hour,
And the moon rose o'er the city,
Behind the dark church-tower.

A horse-car ride of half an hour took the boys past Harvard College, where the poet had spent many happy years as a professor, to his home—the mansion that Washington made famous in history as his head-quarters. It resembles the one described in "The Old Clock on the Stairs":



"Somewhat
back from
the village
street
Stands the old-fash-
ioned country-seat.
Across its antique
portico
Tall poplar-trees their
shadows throw;
And from its station in
the hall
An ancient timepiece says to
all,—
'Forever—never!
Never—forever!'"

This poem was suggested by the French words, "*Toujours! jamais! Jamais! toujours!*"

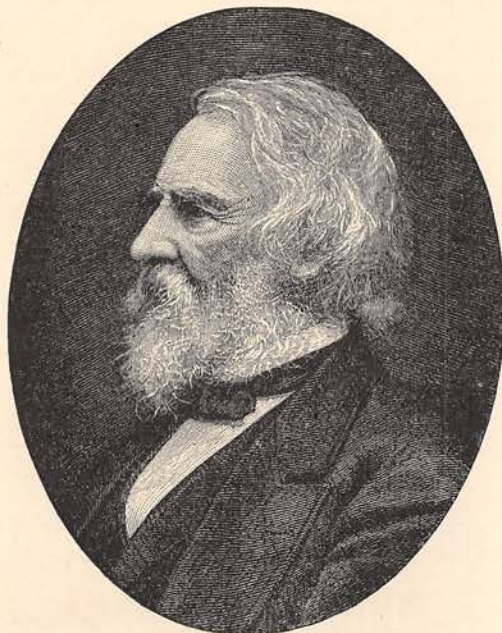
In that house the "Psalm of Life" was written. This poem, which to-day is known and admired wherever the English language is spoken, was at

THE OLD CLOCK ON THE STAIRS.

first not intended for publication, but was merely an expression of the poet's own views and purposes.

Longfellow once told the writer of this article the story of the composition of this poem, and added the following pleasing incident:

"As I was returning from my visit to the Queen



Henry W. Longfellow

in London, a laborer came up to my carriage and extended his hand. 'I wish,' he said, 'to shake hands with the author of "The Psalm of Life!"' Few incidents of my life have been more pleasing. *That* was a compliment I could appreciate!"

In this house, too, "Evangeline" was written, the story being given to the poet by his friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Here, also, was written "Excelsior," after the poet had been reading a letter, from Charles Sumner, full of noble sentiments; here, besides, Longfellow wrote the "Wreck of the Hesperus," when the sad news of the loss of the Gloucester fishing-fleet, and the mournful words "Norman's Woe," so haunted him that he could not sleep. Here were produced nearly all of his poems that have become household words in many lands.

The poet received the boys most cordially and graciously, accepted their present of flowers, and expressed his pleasure in it. He then showed them the historic rooms, and the articles associated with Washington's residence there. He was accus-

tomed to exhibit to older visitors a piece of Dante's coffin, Coleridge's inkstand, and Thomas Moore's waste-paper basket.

The old poet, crowned with his white hair, chatted pleasantly awhile with the four boys, whose faces wore the beauty and inquisitive intelligence of the years that had vanished from him forever.

One of the lads, a Master Lane, then asked him a question which must have revived tender memories: "In your poem on the River Charles," he said, "there is a stanza beginning in some books with the line 'Four long years of mingled feeling.' In other books it begins with 'For long years with mingled feeling.' Will you please tell me which is right?"

"'Four long years,'" answered the poet, thoughtfully.

"Is that the River Charles?" asked one of the boys, pointing outside.

The poet looked out on the flowing stream. It was almost the last time that he gazed upon it; perhaps *the* last time that his attention was directed to it. "Yes," said he, mournfully, in answer, "that is the Charles."

Years before, when his manhood was in its prime, he had sung of this river:

"Thou hast taught me, Silent River!
Many a lesson, deep and long;
Thou hast been a generous giver:
I can give thee but a song.

"Oft in sadness and in illness,
I have watched thy current glide,
Till the beauty of its stillness
Overflowed me, like a tide.

"And in better hours and brighter,
When I saw thy waters gleam,
I have felt my heart beat lighter,
And leap onward with thy stream.

"Not for this alone I love thee,
Nor because thy waves of blue
From celestial seas above thee
Take their own celestial hue.

"Where yon shadowy woodlands hide thee,
And thy waters disappear,
Friends I love have dwelt beside thee,
And have made thy margin dear.

"More than this; — thy name reminds me
Of three friends, all true and tried;
And that name, like magic, binds me
Closer, closer to thy side.

"Friends my soul with joy remembers!
How like quivering flames they start,
When I fan the living embers
On the hearth-stone of my heart!"

And again, after the death of his friend Charles Sumner, when age had silvered his hair:

"River, that stealest with such silent pace
 Around the City of the Dead, where lies
 A friend who bore thy name, and whom these eyes
 Shall see no more in his accustomed place,
 Linger and fold him in thy soft embrace
 And say good-night, for now the western skies
 Are red with sunset, and gray mists arise
 Like damps that gather on a dead man's face.
 Good-night! good-night! as we so oft have said
 Beneath this roof at midnight, in the days
 That are no more and shall no more return.
 Thou hast but taken thy lamp and gone to bed;
 I stay a little longer, as one stays
 To cover up the embers that still burn."

The poet bade the lads an affectionate farewell, and for the last time he saw the forms of children depart from his door. He gave them his autograph, and copies of the poem he had written for the children of Cambridge, after they had presented to him a chair made from a tree that stood near the shop of the village blacksmith, whose honest history he had taken for the subject of one of his poems.

The last view of the River Charles and of happy children! How the scene must have awakened in the poet's mind memories of the past, even although he could not then know that the shadow of death was so near!

The hand that wrote "The Children's Hour" now rests in sweet Auburn, Boston's city of the

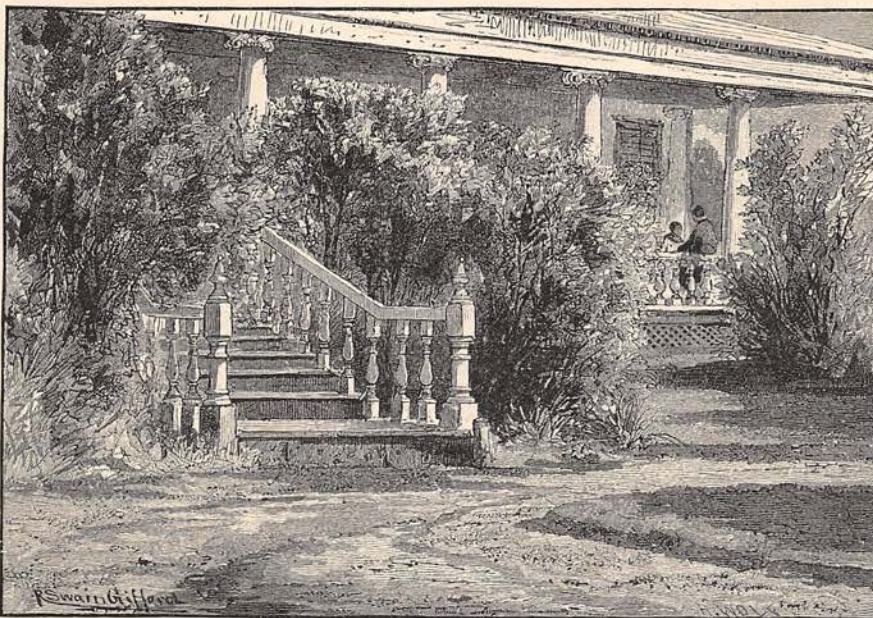
dead. The River Charles flows by, and its banks will still grow bright with every spring-time. Charles Sumner, for whose name the poet loved the river, sleeps there, and Cornelius Felton, of Harvard College, whom also the poet loved. There, too, rests the universally loved and honored Louis Agassiz, another of those "three friends," each of whom left him for years but a "majestic memory."

The birds will come there in summer, and sing among the oaks and the fountains. The children will go there, too, and never by them will their own poet be forgotten. They may love to remember that his last reception was given to children, and that with them, when the friends of other years had passed away, he looked for the last time upon the River Charles.

"Come to me, O ye children!
 And whisper in my ear
 What the birds and the winds are singing
 In your sunny atmosphere.

"For what are all our contrivings,
 And the wisdom of our books,
 When compared with your caresses,
 And the gladness of your looks?"

"Ye are better than all the ballads
 That ever were sung or said;
 For ye are living poems,
 And all the rest are dead."



THE WESTERN ENTRANCE OF LONGFELLOW'S HOUSE. (FROM THE PLAZZA THERE IS A VIEW OF THE RIVER CHARLES, BRIGHTON, AND THE DISTANT HILLS.)