

## Travels by the Fireside, 1874

The ceaseless rain is falling fast,  
And yonder gilded vane,  
Immovable for three days past,  
Points to the misty main.

It drives me in upon myself  
And to the fireside gleams,  
To pleasant books that crowd my shelf,  
And still more pleasant dreams.

I read whatever bards have sung  
Of lands beyond the sea,  
And the bright days when I was young  
Come thronging back to me.

In fancy I can hear again  
The Alpine torrent's roar,  
The mule-bells on the hills of Spain,  
The sea at Elsinore.

I see the convent's gleaming wall  
Rise from its groves of pine,  
And towers of old cathedrals tall,  
And castles by the Rhine.

I journey on by park and spire,  
Beneath centennial trees,  
Through fields with poppies all on fire,  
And gleams of distant seas.

I fear no more the dust and heat,  
No more I feel fatigue,  
While journeying with another's feet  
O'er many a lengthening league.

Let others traverse sea and land,  
And toil through various climes,  
I turn the world round with my hand  
Reading these poets' rhymes.

From them I learn whatever lies  
Beneath each changing zone,  
And see, when looking with their eyes,  
Better than with mine own.



Henry Longfellow in Study, c. 1872 - 74

## The Slave in the Dismal Swamp, 1842

*Longfellow felt very strongly that slavery should be abolished. He published a small book of poems about the evils of slavery in 1842, long before the Civil War. This poem is one of eight from that collection.*

In dark fens of the Dismal Swamp  
The hunted Negro lay;  
He saw the fire of the midnight camp,  
And heard at times a horse's tramp,  
And a bloodhound's distant bay.

Where the will-o'-the wisps and glowworms shine,  
In bulrush and in brake;  
Where the waving mosses shroud the pine,  
And the cedar grows, and the poisonous vine  
Is spotted like the snake;

Where hardly a human foot could pass,  
Or a human heart would dare,  
On the quaking turf of the green morass  
He crouched in the rank and tangled grass,  
Like a wild beast in his lair.

A poor old slave, infirm and lame;  
Great scars deformed his face;  
On his forehead he bore the brand of shame,  
And the rags, that hid his mangled frame,  
Were the livery of disgrace.

All things above were bright and fair;  
All things were glad and free;  
Lithe squirrels darted here and there,  
And wild birds filled the echoing air  
With songs of liberty!

On him alone was the doom of pain,  
From the morning of his birth;  
On him alone the curse of Cain  
Fell, like a flail on the garnered grain,  
And struck him to the earth!



Portrait of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, by Lawrence, 1854.  
Drawn after Longfellow heard about the Fugitive Slave Law (1850).

*“If anybody wants to break a law, let  
him break the Fugitive Slave Law.  
That is all it is for.”*

H. W. Longfellow, May 1858

## Haunted Houses, 1852

All houses wherein men have lived and died  
Are haunted houses. Through the open doors  
The harmless phantoms on their errands glide,  
With feet that make no sound upon the floors.

We meet them at the doorway, on the stair,  
Along the passages they come and go,  
Impalpable impressions on the air,  
A sense of something moving to and fro.

There are more ghosts at the table than the hosts  
Invited; the illuminated hall  
Is thronged with quiet, inoffensive ghosts,  
As silent as the pictures on the walls.

The stranger at my fireside cannot see  
The forms I see, nor hear the sounds I hear;  
He but perceives what is; while unto me  
All that has been is visible and clear.

We have not title-deeds to house or lands;  
Owners and occupants of earlier dates  
From graves forgotten stretch their dusty hands,  
And hold in mortmain still their old estates.

The spirit-world around this world of sense  
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere  
Wafts through these earthly mists and vapors dense  
A vital breath of more ethereal air.

Our little lives are kept in equipoise  
By opposite attractions and desires;  
The struggle of the instinct that enjoys,  
And the more noble instinct that aspires.

These perturbations, this perpetual jar  
Of earthly wants and aspirations high,  
Come from the influence of an unseen star,  
An undiscovered planet in our sky.

And as the moon from some dark gate of cloud  
Throws o'er the sea a floating bridge of light,  
Across whose trembling planks our fancies crowd  
Into the realm of mystery and night, -

So from the world of spirits there descends  
A bridge of light, connecting it with this,  
O'er whose unsteady floor, that sways and bends,  
Wander our thoughts above the dark abyss.



## The Builders, 1846

All are architects of Fate,  
Working in these walls of Time;  
Some with massive deeds and great,  
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;  
Each thing in its place is best;  
And what seems but idle show  
Strengthens and supports the rest.

For the structure that we raise,  
Time is with materials filled;  
Our to-days and yesterdays  
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these;  
Leave no yawning gaps between;  
Think not, because no man sees,  
Such things will remain unseen.

In the elder days of Art,  
Builders wrought with greatest care  
Each minute and unseen part;  
For the Gods see everywhere.

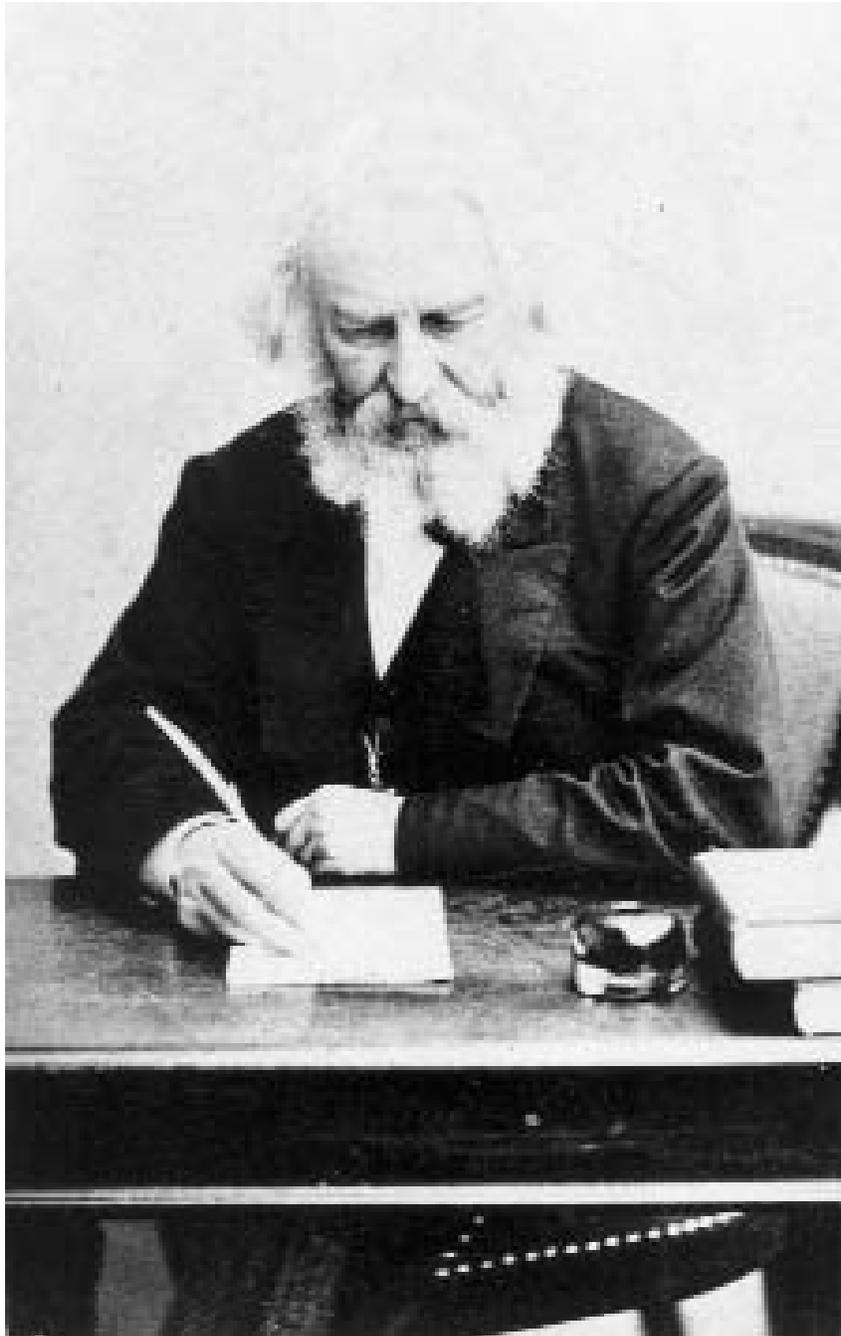
Let us do our work as well,  
Both the unseen and the seen;  
Make the house, where Gods may dwell,  
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

Else our lives are incomplete,  
Standing in these walls of Time,  
Broken stairways, where the feet  
Stumble as they seek to climb.

Build to-day, then, strong and sure,  
With a firm and ample base;  
And ascending and secure  
Shall to-morrow find its place.

Thus alone can we attain  
To those turrets, where the eye  
Sees the world as one vast plain,  
And one boundless reach of sky.

*“Our to-days and yesterdays  
Are the blocks with which we build...”*  
The Builders, 1846



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, c. 1870 - 76

## Charles Sumner, 1874

*A poem written for Charles Sumner and read at his funeral in 1874.*

Garlands upon his grave,  
And flowers upon his hearse,  
And to the tender heart and brave  
The tribute of this verse.

His was the troubled life,  
The conflict and the pain,  
The grief, the bitterness of strife,  
The honor without stain.

Like Winkelried, he took  
Into his manly breast  
The sheaf of hostile spears, and broke  
A path for the oppressed.

Then from the fatal field  
Upon a nation's heart  
Borne like a warrior on his shield!--  
So should the brave depart.

Death takes us by surprise,  
And stays our hurrying feet;  
The great design unfinished lies,  
Our lives are incomplete.

But in the dark unknown  
Perfect their circles seem,  
Even as a bridge's arch of stone  
Is rounded in the stream.

Alike are life and death,  
When life in death survives,  
And the uninterrupted breath  
Inspires a thousand lives.

Were a star quenched on high,  
For ages would its light,  
Still travelling downward from the sky,  
Shine on our mortal sight.

So when a great man dies,  
For years beyond our ken,  
The light he leaves behind him lies  
Upon the paths of men.

## Charles Sumner

The friendship between Charles Sumner and Henry Longfellow lasted from the time they met as young professors at Harvard in 1837 until Sumner's death in 1874. Sumner is best known as an anti-slavery activist and a Senator from Massachusetts.

*"...he stands six feet, two, in his stockings. A colossus holding his burning heart in his hand, to light up the sea of Life...He is a very lovely character...full of talent with a most keen enjoyment of life; simple, energetic, hearty, good with a great deal of poetry and no nonsense in him."*

Henry Longfellow, 1838

(from a letter to George Washington Greene)

*"Longfellow's reputation is rising, rising, soon I prophecy to illumine the whole horizon."*

Charles Sumner, 1842

*"Sumner...in fact breathes in quite another atmosphere."*

Henry Longfellow, 1846



Charles Sumner and Henry Longfellow,  
December 1863