

# The Wrong will Fail, The Right Prevail, With Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men

by Lynne Belluscio

While doing research for the Christmas Candlelight Tours at LeRoy House I was looking for some poems from the 1860s that the Ingham students could read, and I came across the words to the Christmas carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." It was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who was popular with the Ingham students. While at Ingham, Ida Taylor, painted "The Courtship of Miles Standish" another popular poem by Longfellow. And although there is no record of the students reciting the Christmas poem, it certainly is feasible. The poem was written



on Christmas day in 1864 and was published two years later. It wasn't until 1872 that it was put to music, and at some point verses four and five were omitted and that story is very interesting.

Longfellow was an outspoken abolitionist and when the Civil War broke out, his oldest son joined the Union army without his father's permission and subsequently was severely wounded. Longfellow was a tragic figure. His first wife had died during a miscarriage. His second wife, died when her clothes caught fire. Henry, was burned trying to save her and wore a beard for the rest of his life to hide the scars.

The death of his wife, the fate of his son and the uncertainty of the war weighed heavily on the poet, and from the depths of depression he penned this poem. The words perhaps are as relevant today as they were one hundred and fifty years ago.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old, familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom

Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime,  
A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearth-stones of a continent,  
And made forlorn  
The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth," I said;  
"For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail,

The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

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