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“I HEARD THE BELLS ON  
CHRISTMAS DAY”  
WRITTEN BY HENRY WADSWORTH  
LONGFELLOW ON CHRISTMAS  
DAY 1864

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*Britannica Online, Academic edition:* “Born Feb. 27, 1807, Portland, Mass. [now in Maine], U.S.—died March 24, 1882, Cambridge, Mass.), the most popular American poet in the 19th century.”

Knowing the “backstory” of Longfellow’s life, as this study unearths, allows the meaning of the carol to be significantly made more rich. Dr. Steven G.W. Moore after hearing me speak on this carol sent to me the following quotation from Longfellow: “If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.” That is, when we know more fully, and truly, the fuller reality of a man, we find ourselves in relation to them.

The Poetry Foundation notes about Longfellow: “The only American<sup>1</sup> writer honored in the Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey [in 1884]”<sup>2</sup>. And, Roberto Rob writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Actually there are three Americans installed at the Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey: T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, and H.W. Longfellow.

<sup>2</sup> There was established an American Poet’s Corner, inducting three people as its first class of Poets in 1984: Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), Walt Whitman (1819-1892), and Washington Irving (1819-1859). It is located in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. It notes: “Visitors come to the Cathedral’s American Poets Corner, located in the Arts Bay on the north side of the nave, curious to see who’s honored, to admire the stones, to pay homage. Poets, fiction writers, essayists, and dramatists: the American Poets Corner memorializes the literature of our nation in all its surprise, wit and beauty. The Cathedral’s Poets Corner is modeled on the Poets’ Corner at Westminster Abbey, and in fact we have two poets in common: T. S. Eliot, an American who became a British citizen, and W. H. Auden, an

**“Americans owe a great debt to Longfellow because he was among the first of American writers to use native themes.** He wrote about the American scene and landscape, the American Indian ('Song of Hiawatha'), and American history and tradition ('The Courtship of Miles Standish', 'Evangeline'). At the beginning of the 19th century, America was a stumbling babe as far as a culture of its own was concerned. **The people of America had spent their years and their energies in carving a habitation out of the wilderness and in fighting for independence. Literature, art, and music came mainly from Europe and especially from England. Nothing was considered worthy of attention unless it came from Europe.** But "the flowering of New England," as Van Wyck Brooks terms **the period from 1815 to 1865**, took place in Longfellow's day, and he made a great contribution to it. He lived when giants walked the New England earth, giants of intellect and feeling who established the New Land as a source of greatness. **Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and William Prescott were a few of the great minds and spirits among whom Longfellow took his place as a singer and as a representative of America.**

1.

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!

2.

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!

3.

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Englishman who took American citizenship. (Longfellow is the only other American poet memorialized at the Abbey.)”

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!

4.

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!

5.

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!

6.

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!"

7.

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!"