Samuel Longfellow Biography

Samuel Longfellow

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Samuel Longfellow

Samuel Longfellow (18 June 1819-3 October 1892), Unitarian clergyman, hymn writer, and essayist, is best known as the biographer of his oldest brother, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He was born in Portland, Maine, attended the Portland, Academy, and in 1835 entered Harvard College. Upon graduation in 1838, he taught school and tutored for a time, and in 1842 entered the Harvard Divinity School, where he became deeply interested in Transcendentalism and liberal theology in general. In 1848 he was ordained Unitarian minister at Fall River, Massachusetts, and in 1853 he assumed the pastorate at the Second Unitarian Church in Brooklyn, New York. Here he first introduced the vesper service to the Unitarian Church, emphasized the solving of social problems, and wrote a series of hymns. After 1860 he travelled, held various temporary pastorates, and devoted his time to writing. In 1886 he published the two-volume *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: Ticknor), and in 1887, *Final Memorials of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: Ticknor). He died in Portland. In 1854, with Thomas Wentworth Higginson, he had published *Thalatta: A Book for the Seaside* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed & Fields), in 1860, *A Book of Hymns and Tunes* (New York: Gray), and in 1864, with Samuel Johnson, *Hymns of the Spirit* (Boston: James R. Osgood). His hymns are fervid, very beautiful, and nondenominational, and a few are still being sung today. He was known as a pure Theist who was somewhat radical even for a Unitarian. An incident in Henry W. Longfellow's novel, *Kavanagh* (1849), is based on the consequences of Samuel Longfellow's opposition from the pulpit to the Mexican War.