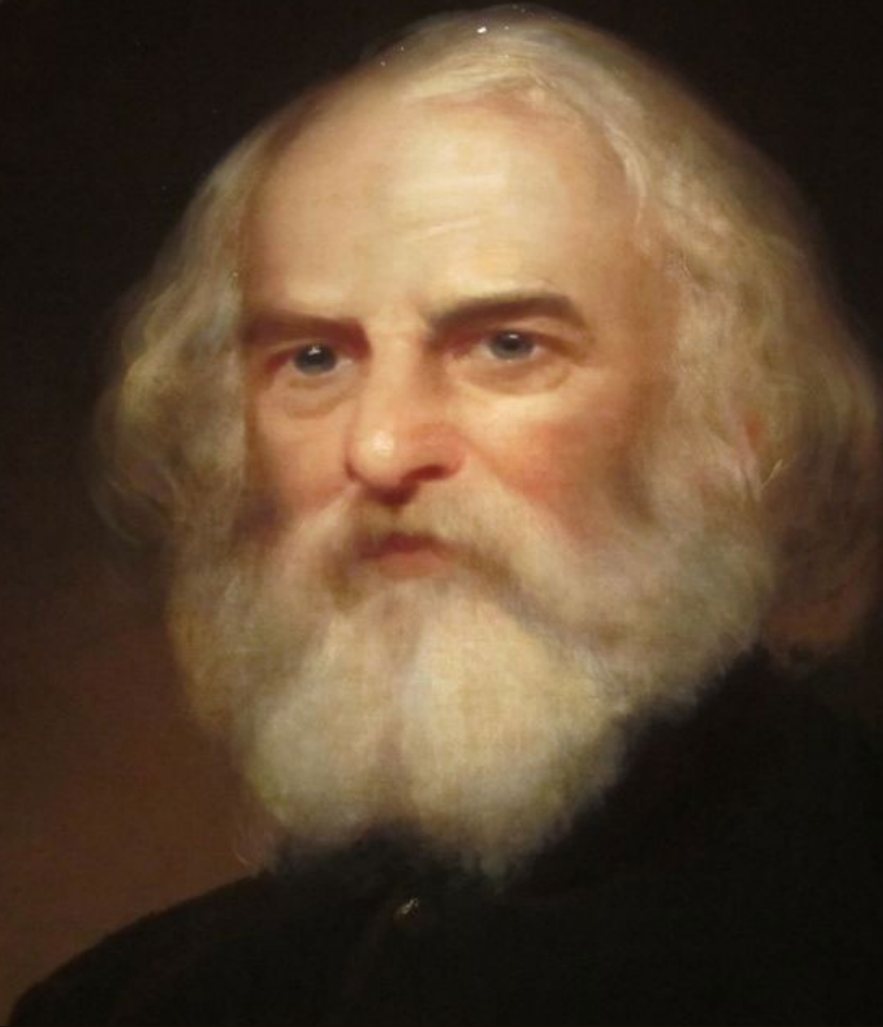


HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW
- ANNOTATED STUDENT'S EDITION -



EVANGELINE

Evangeline

A Tale of Acadie

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO EVANGELINE

IN Hawthorne's American Note-Books is the following passage:

" H. L. C. heard from a French Canadian a story of a young couple in Acadie. On their marriage-day all the men of the Province were summoned to assemble in the church to hear a proclamation. When assembled, they were all seized and shipped off to be distributed through New England, among them the new bridegroom. His bride set off in search of him wandered about New England all her life-time, and at last when she was old, she found her bridegroom on his death-bed. The shock was so great that it killed her likewise."

This is the story, as set down by the romancer, which his friend, the Rev. H. L. Conolly, had heard from a parishioner. Mr. Conolly saw in it a fine theme for a romance, but for some reason Hawthorne was disinclined to undertake it. One day the two were dining with Mr. Longfellow, and Mr. Conolly told the story again and wondered that Hawthorne did not care for it. If you really do not want this incident for a tale," said Mr. Longfellow to his friend, " let me have it for a poem." Just when the conversation took place we cannot say, but the poem was begun apparently just after the completion of the volume, *The Belfry of Bruges and other Poems*. The narrative of its development can best be told by the passages in Mr. Longfellow's diary which note the progress of the poem.

November 28, 1845. Set about *Gabrielle*, my idyll in hexameters, in earnest. I do not mean to let a day go by without adding something to it, if it be but a single line. F. and Sumner are both doubtful of the measure. To me it seems the only one for such a poem.

November 30. In. the night, rain, rain, rain. A pleasant sound. Lying awake I mused thus:

Pleasant it is to hear the sound of the rattling rain upon the roof,

Ceaselessly falling through the night from the clouds that pass so far aloof;

Pleasant it is to hear the sound of the village clock that strikes the hour,

Dropping its notes like drops of rain from the darksome belfry in the tower.

December 7. I know not what name to give to not my new baby, but my new poem. Shall it be Gabrielle, or Celestine, or Evangeline?

January 8, 1846. Striving, but alas, how vainly! to work upon Evangeline. One interruption after another, till I long to fly to the desert for a season.

January 12. The vacation is at hand. I hope before its close to get far on in Evangeline. Two cantos are now done; which is a good beginning.

April 5. After a month's cessation resumed Evangeline, the sister of mercy. I hope now to carry it on to its close without break.

May 20. Tried to work at Evangeline. Unsuccessful. Gave it up.

May 25. The days die and make no sign. The Castalian fount is still. It has become a pool which no descending angel troubles.

July 9. Idly busy days; days which leave no record in verse; no advance made in my long-neglected yet dearly loved Evangeline. The cares of the world choke the good seed. But these stones must be cleared away.

October 11. I am in despair at the swift flight of time, and the utter impossibility I feel to lay hold upon anything permanent. All my hours and days go to perishable things. College takes half the time; and other people, with their interminable letters and poems and requests and demands, take the rest. I have hardly a moment to think of my own writings, and am cheated of some of life's fairest hours. This is the extreme of folly; and if I knew a man, far off in

some foreign land, doing as I do here, I should say he was mad.

November 17. I said as I dressed myself this morning, "Today at least I will work on Evangeline" But no sooner had I breakfasted than there came a note from - , to be answered forthwith; then - , to talk about a doctor; then Mr. Bates, to put up a fireplace; then this journal, to be written for a week. And now it is past eleven o'clock, and the sun shines so brightly upon my desk and papers that I can write no more.

December 10. Laid up with a cold. Moped and mowed the day through. Made an effort, however, and commenced the second part of Evangeline. I felt all day wretched enough to give it the sombre tone of coloring that belongs to the theme.

December 15. Stayed at home, working a little on Evangeline; planning out the second part, which fascinates me, if I can but give complete tone and expression to it Of materials for this part there is superabundance. The difficulty is to select, and give unity to variety.

December 17. Finished this morning, and copied, the first canto of the second part of Evangeline. The portions of the poem which I write in the morning, I write chiefly standing at my desk here [by the window], so as to need no copying. What I write at other times is scrawled with a pencil on my knee in the dark, and has to be written out afterward. This way of writing with a pencil and portfolio I enjoy much; as I can sit by the fireside and do not use my eyes. I see a diorama of the Mississippi advertised. This comes very a propos. The river comes to me instead of my going to the river; and as it is to flow through the pages of the poem, I look upon this as a special benediction.

December 19. Went to see Banvard's moving diorama of the Mississippi. One seems to be sailing down the great stream, and sees the boats and the sand-banks crested with cottonwood, and the bayous by moonlight. Three miles of canvas, and a great deal of merit.

December 29. I hoped to do much on my poem to-day; and did nothing. My whole morning was taken up with letters and doing up New Year's gifts.

January 7, 1847. Went to the Library and got Watson's Annals of Philadelphia and the Historical Collections of Pennsylvania. Also Darby's Geographical Description of Louisiana. These books must help me through the last part of *Evangeline*, so far as facts and local coloring go. But for the form and the poetry, they must come from my own brain.

January 14. Finished the last canto of *Evangeline*. But the poem is not finished. There are three intermediate cantos to be written.

January 18. Billings came to hear some passages in *Evangeline*, previous to making designs. As I read, I grew discouraged. Alas, how difficult it is to produce anything really good! Now I see nothing but the defects of my work. I hope the critics will not find so many as I do. But onward! The poem, like love, must " advance or die."

January 22. Wrote in *Evangeline*. Then walked a couple of hours. After dinner, a couple more. In the evening, the whist club.

January 23. Morning as yesterday, sitting by the fire in a darkened room, writing with a pencil in my portfolio,

without the use of eyes.

January 26. Finished second canto of Part II. of Evangeline.

February 1. During the day worked busily and pleasantly on Evangeline, canto third of Part II. It is nearly finished.

February 2. Shrouded in a cold, which covers me like a monk's hood. I am confident it is often sheer laziness, when a poet refrains from writing because he is not " in the mood." Until he begins he can hardly know whether he is in the mood or not. It is reluctance to the manual labor of recording one's thoughts; perhaps to the mental labor of setting them in due order.

February 17. Find the ground covered with snow, to my sorrow; for what comes as snow departs as mud. Wrote description of the prairies for Evangeline.

February 23. Evangeline is nearly finished. I shall complete it this week, together with my fortieth year.

February 27. Evangeline is ended. I wrote the last lines this morning.

February 28. The last day of February. Waded to church through snow and water ankle-deep. The remainder of the day, was warmly housed, save a walk on the piazza. When evening came, I really missed the poem and the pencil.

March 6. A lovely spring morning. I began to revise and correct Evangeline for the press. Went carefully over the first canto.

April 3. The first canto of Evangeline in proofs. Some of the lines need pounding; nails are to be driven and clenched.

On the whole I am pretty well satisfied. Fields came out in the afternoon. I told him of the poem, and he wants to publish it.

April 9. Proof-sheets of *Evangeline* all tattooed with Folsom's marks. How severe he is! But so much the better.

Evangeline was published October 30, 1847, and Hawthorne, who had taken a lively interest in the poem, wrote a few days after, to say that he had read it "with more pleasure than it would be decorous to express." Mr. Longfellow, in replying, thanked him for a friendly notice which he had written for a Salem paper, and added: "Still more do I thank you for resigning to me that legend of Acady. This success I owe entirely to you, for being willing to forego the pleasure of writing a prose tale which many people would have taken for poetry, that I might write a poem which many people take for prose."

The notes which we have taken from Mr. Longfellow's diary intimate, in a degree, the method of his preparation for writing the poem. He was not writing a history, nor a book of travels. He drew upon the nearest, most accessible materials, which at that time were to be found in Haliburton's *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*, with its liberal quotations from the Abbé Raynal's emotional account of the French settlers. He may have examined Winslow's narrative of the expedition under his command, in the cabinet of the Massachusetts Historical Society, not then printed, but since that time made easily accessible. He did not visit Grand-Pré nor the Mississippi but trusted to descriptions and Banvard's diorama. At the time of the publication of *Evangeline* the actual history of the deportation of the Acadians had scarcely been investigated. It is not too much to say that this tale was itself the cause of the frequent studies since made, studies

which have resulted in a revision of the accepted rendering of the facts. The publication by the government of Nova Scotia in 1869 of Selections from the Public Documents of the Province of Nova Scotia, edited by Thomas B. Akins, D. C. L., Commissioner of Public Records, threw a great deal of light on the relations of the French and English; A History of Nova Scotia, or Acadie, by Beamish Murdock, published in 1879, and The History of Acadia from the First Discovery to its Surrender to England by the treaty of Paris, by James Hannay, published in 1879, furnish opportunities for an examination of the subject, and recently the work by Dr. Francis Parkman on Montcalm and Wolfe gives special attention to the expulsion of the Acadians. Dr. W. J. Anderson published a paper in the Transactions of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, New Series, part 7, 1870, entitled Evangeline and the Archives of Nova Scotia, in which he examines the poem in the light of Mr. Akins's work, finding, after all, a substantial agreement between the poem and the documents.

Mr. Longfellow gave to a Philadelphia journalist a reminiscence of his first notice of the material which was used in the conclusion of the poem: " I was passing down Spruce Street one day toward my hotel, after a walk, when my attention was attracted to a large building with beautiful trees about it, inside of a high enclosure. I walked along until I came to the great gate, and then stepped inside, and looked carefully over the place. The charming picture of lawn, flower-beds and shade which it presented made an impression which has never left me, and when I came to write Evangeline, I placed the final scene, the meeting between Evangeline and Gabriel, and the death, at the poor-house, and the burial in an old Catholic grave-yard not far away, which I found by chance in another of my walks."