1988

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Ann Struthers

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Recommended Citation
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow · Ann Struthers

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Fanny Appleton were separated only once in their marriage when he spent two days in New Hampshire. They slept in the narrow country sleigh-bed of their wedding night, had six children; Frances died of a fever; Charles shot off his thumb with the gun he had begged to buy. The others were healthy.

They gave dinners and dances—he chose the crystal, Bohemian goblets for wine, ruby-red with gold grape vines for Jenny Lind, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackery.

On the 9th of July, 1861, Fanny worked at her desk, fixing packets of the children’s curls, and sealing them with melted wax from a lighted candle. Her gauzy sleeve caught fire; the flames swept her dress in a whirl like no dance she had ever known. Trailing an orange train, she ran to her husband (taffeta had never crackled like this), pressed her face against his chest. He tried to beat out the fire with his hands. She died the next day, and Longfellow thought he’d go mad.