

**KAVANAGH:
A ROMANCE**

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Kavanagh: a romance by Henry W. Longfellow

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HENRY W. LONGFELLOW

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Henry W. Longfellow
1848



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KAVANAGH

A ROMANCE

PHILADELPHIA
HENRY ALTEMUS

KAVANAGH.

CHAPTER I.

GREAT men stand like solitary towers in the city of God, and secret passages running deep beneath external nature give their thoughts intercourse with higher intelligences, which strengthens and consoles them, and of which the laborers on the surface do not even dream!

Some such thought as this was floating vaguely through the brain of Mr. Churchill, as he closed his school-house door behind him; and if in any degree he applied it to himself, it may perhaps be pardoned in a dreamy, poetic man like him; for we judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done. And moreover his wife considered him equal to great things. To the people in the village, he was the school-master, and nothing more. They beheld in his form and countenance no outward sign of the divinity within. They saw him daily moiling and

delving in the common path, like a beetle, and little thought that underneath that hard and cold exterior, lay folded delicate golden wings, wherewith, when the heat of the day was over, he soared and revelled in the pleasant evening air.

To-day he was soaring and revelling before the sun had set; for it was Saturday. With a feeling of infinite relief he left behind him the empty school-house, into which the hot sun of a September afternoon was pouring. All the bright young faces were gone; all the impatient little hearts were gone; all the fresh voices, shrill, but musical with the melody of childhood, were gone; and the lately busy realm was given up to silence, and the dusty sunshine, and the gray old flies, that buzzed and bumped their heads against the window-panes. The sound of the outer door, creaking on its hebdomadal hinges, was like a sentinel's challenge, to which the key growled responsive in the lock; and the master, casting a furtive glance at the last caricature of himself in red chalk on the wooden fence close by, entered with a light step the solemn avenue of pines that led to the margin of the river.

At first his step was quick and nervous; and he swung his cane as if aiming blows at some invisible and retreating enemy. Though a meek man, there were moments when he remembered with bitterness the unjust reproaches of fathers and their insulting words; and then he fought imaginary battles with people out of sight, and struck them to the ground, and trampled upon them; for Mr. Churchill was not exempt from the weakness of human nature, nor the customary vexations of a schoolmaster's life. Unruly sons and unreasonable fathers did sometimes embitter his else sweet days and nights. But as he walked, his step grew slower, and his heart calmer. The coolness and shadows of the great trees comforted and satisfied him, and he heard the voice of the wind as if it were the voice of spirits calling around him in the air. So that when he emerged from the black woodlands into the meadows by the river's side, all his cares were forgotten.

He lay down for a moment under a sycamore, and thought of the Roman consul Licinius, passing a night with eighteen of his followers in the hollow trunk of the great Lycian plane tree. From the branches overhead the falling seeds

were wafted away through the soft air on plummy tufts of down. The continuous murmur of the leaves and of the swift-running stream seemed rather to deepen than disturb the pleasing solitude and silence of the place; and for a moment he imagined himself far away in the broad prairies of the West, and lying beneath the luxuriant trees that overhang the banks of the Wabash and the Kaskaskia. He saw the sturgeon leap from the river, and flash for a moment in the sunshine. Then a flock of wild-fowl flew across the sky toward the seamist that was rising slowly in the east; and his soul seemed to float away on the river's current, till he had glided far out into the measureless sea, and the sound of the wind among the leaves was no longer the sound of the wind, but of the sea.

Nature had made Mr. Churchill a poet, but destiny made him a schoolmaster. This produced a discord between his outward and his inward existence. Life presented itself to him like the Sphinx, with its perpetual riddle of the real and the ideal. To the solution of this dark problem he devoted his days and his nights. He was forced to teach grammar when he would

fain have written poems; and from day to day, and from year to year, the trivial things of life postponed the great designs, which he felt capable of accomplishing, but never had the resolute courage to begin. Thus he dallied with his thoughts and with all things, and wasted his strength on trifles; like the lazy sea, that plays with the pebbles on its beach, but under the inspiration of the wind might lift great navies on its outstretched palms, and toss them into the air as playthings.

The evening came. The setting sun stretched his celestial rods of light across the level landscape, and, like the Hebrew in Egypt, smote the rivers and the brooks and the ponds, and they became as blood.

Mr. Churchill turned his steps homeward. He climbed the hill with the old windmill on its summit, and below him saw the lights of the village; and around him the great landscape sinking deeper and deeper into the sea of darkness. He passed an orchard. The air was filled with the odor of the fallen fruit, which seemed to him as sweet as the fragrance of the blossoms in June. A few steps farther brought him to an old and neglected churchyard; and