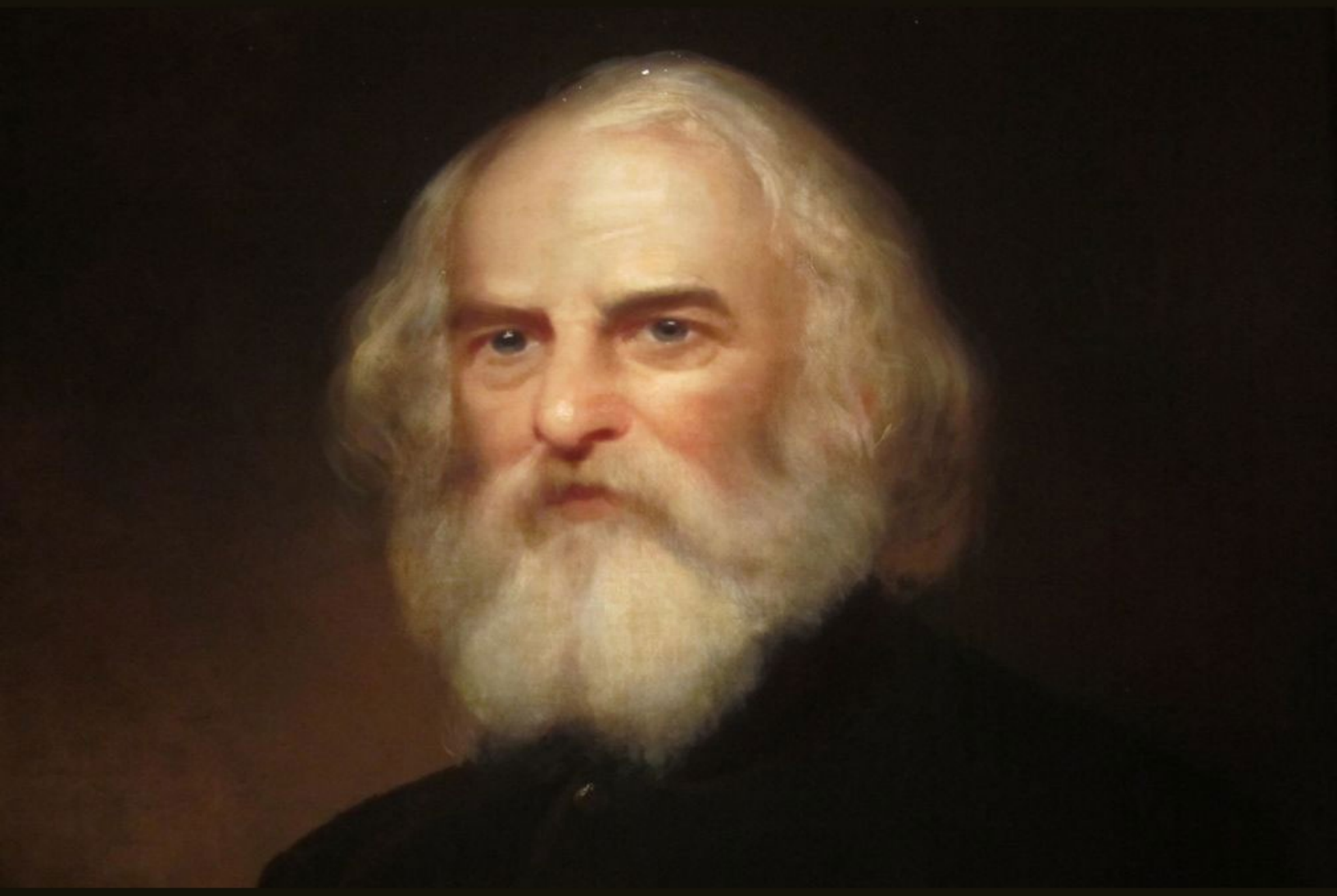
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW
- EXTENDED ANNOTATED EDITION -



KAVANAGH

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Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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Introductory Note To Kavanagh

ON the day when Mr. Longfellow wrote the last lines of Evangeline he noted in his diary: " Now for a little prose; a romance which I have in my brain Kavanagh by name." This was February 27, 1847, and the book was published May

12, 1849. At that time he wrote of it: "People think it is not long enough. But why beat out one's ideas into thin leaf? " It must not be supposed, however, that he was at work for two years on this slight romance. He began it, indeed, immediately after finishing Evangeline,, but appears to have worked at it in a very desultory fashion until the autumn of 1848. He records in his diary under date of October 3, 1848: " Still the imprisoning rain; but to-day welcome, thrice welcome. Sat by the fireside in the library and wrote in Kavanagh, to my own great satisfaction and delight." On the 31st of the same month, he wrote: " Kavanagh is nearly completed. I have written it *con amore*, and have had so much satisfaction as this, whatsoever may be its fate hereafter; " on the 9th of November he finished the book. Yet, in spite of the evident pleasure which he took in his work, he was not over-confident of success. Perhaps he was affected a little by the cautious appreciation which the manuscript received from his first audience of three, his wife, his brother, and Sumner; " The general opinion favorable, on the whole, though it did not awaken any very lively enthusiasm." At any rate, he wrote in his diary, February 13, 1849: " With some doubts and misgivings I carried the first sheets of Kavanagh to the printer. I have never hesitated so much about any of my books, except the first hexameters, The Children of the Lord's Supper. Let us see how it will look in print. I want to get this out of the way. Things lying in manuscript encumber and impede me; hold me back from working on to something better." His hesitation continued after he had begun to see the book in print, and on the 8th of March he wrote: " My mind is perplexed about Kavanagh. The title is better than the book, and suggests a different kind of book. One more long, spiritual chapter must be written for it. The thought struck me last night. It must go into the book as the keystone into the arch. An idea so very obvious, and yet coming so late! " The next day, he recorded: " Longed to write the chapter

for Kavanagh, but was obliged to go to college. Ah, me! and yet what a delight to begin every day with Dante! "

The chapter which was thus written to give spiritual significance and unity to the book was the eighteenth, which can be removed without disturbing the flow of the narrative, and yet does perform just the function designed by the author, since it is, as it were, a brief history of the hero's spiritual experience.

As has been said before, the figure of a schoolmaster was a favorite one with Mr. Longfellow, and he seems to have employed it finally in Kavanagh as the centre about which to group his thoughts respecting literature and scholarship, thoughts which before he had given in fragmentary, note-book form. He made use also of his country rambles both in the Berkshire hills and in Maine for pictures of life and scenery. The time when the romance was written easily explains the freedom of reference to domestic life, and the little society of the household. Without regarding the interior of Mr. Churchill's home as in any direct sense a reproduction of the author's, it is fair to suppose that the scenes narrated of childish life have the same general relation to Mr. Longfellow's domestic experience that the scenes portrayed in Hyperion bear to his life before his marriage.

Although Mr. Longfellow kept no note-book in the manner of Hawthorne's, recording suggestions for stories and poems, he was in the habit, as the reader has seen, of setting down occasionally in his diary a half-formed plan, and he also kept for use such newspaper clippings as bore upon his work. He valued the real touch which he conceived that he thus secured, and sometimes incorporated this matter in his manuscript. Thus the announcement of Edward Dimple in the nineteenth chapter

was a veritable advertisement, cut from some newspaper and attached in its place to the manuscript given to the printer.

The name of Kavanagh is that of an old Roman Catholic family of Maine, now extinct, and is perpetuated both by this book and by a school in Portland called the Kavanagh School. The Arthur Kavanagh of the story is, however, an entirely imaginary personage.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – A Primer

By Thomas Davidson

H. W. Longfellow was an American poet, born on the 27th of February 1807, at Portland, Maine. His ancestor, William Longfellow, had immigrated to Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1676, from Yorkshire, England. His father was Stephen Longfellow, a lawyer and United States congressman, and his mother, Zilpha Wadsworth, a descendant of John Alden and of “Priscilla, the Puritan maiden.”

Longfellow's external life presents little that is of stirring interest. It is the life of a modest, deep-hearted gentleman, whose highest ambition was to be a perfect man, and, through sympathy and love, to help others to be the same. His boyhood was spent mostly in his native town, which he never ceased to love, and whose beautiful surroundings and quiet, pure life he has described in his poem “My Lost Youth.” Here he grew up in the midst of majestic peace, which was but once broken, and that by an event which

made a deep impression on him — the War of 1812. He never forgot

“the sea-fight far away,
How it thundered o'er the tide,
And the dead captains as they lay
In their graves o'erlooking the tranquil bay,
Where they in battle died.”

The “tranquil bay” is Casco Bay, one of the most beautiful in the world, studded with bold, green islands, well fitted to be the Hesperides of a poet's boyish dreams. At the age of fifteen Longfellow entered Bowdoin College at Brunswick, a town situated near the romantic falls of the Androscoggin river, about 25 m. from Portland, and in a region full of Indian scenery and legend. Here he had among his classfellows Nathaniel Hawthorne, George B. Cheever and J. S. C. Abbott. During the latter years of his college life he contributed to the United States Literary Gazette some half-dozen poems, which are interesting for two reasons — (1) as showing the poet's early, book-mediated sympathy with nature and legendary heroisms, and (2) as being almost entirely free from that supernatural view of nature which his subsequent residence in Europe imparted to him. He graduated in 1825, at the age of eighteen, with honours, among others that of writing the “class poem” — taking the fourth place in a class of thirty-eight. He then entered his father's law office, without intending, however, it would appear, to devote himself to the study of the law. For this profession he was, both by capacity and tastes, utterly unfitted, and it was fortunate that, shortly after his graduation, he received an offer of a professorship of modern languages at Bowdoin College. In order the better to qualify himself for this appointment, he went to Europe (May 15th, 1826) and spent three years and a half travelling in France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Holland and

England, learning languages, for which he had unusual talent, and drinking in the spirit of the history and life of these countries. The effect of Longfellow's visit was twofold. On the one hand, it widened his sympathies, gave him confidence in himself and supplied him with many poetical themes; on the other, it traditionalized his mind, coloured for him the pure light of nature and rendered him in some measure unfit to feel or express the spirit of American nature and life. His sojourn in Europe fell exactly in the time when, in England, the reaction against the sentimental atheism of Shelley, the pagan sensitivity of Keats, and the sublime, Satanic outcastness of Byron was at its height; when, in the Catholic countries, the negative exaggerations of the French Revolution were inducing a counter current of positive faith, which threw men into the arms of a half-sentimental, half-aesthetic medievalism; and when, in Germany, the aristocratic paganism of Goethe was being swept aside by that tide of dutiful, romantic patriotism which flooded the country, as soon as it began to feel that it still existed after being run over by Napoleon's war-chariot. He returned to America in 1829, and remained six years at Bowdoin College (1829-1835), during which he published various text-books for the study of modern languages. In his twenty-fourth year (1831) he married Miss Mary Story Potter, one of his “early loves.” In 1833 he made a series of translations from the Spanish, with an essay on the moral and devotional poetry of Spain, and these were incorporated in 1835 in Outre-mer: a Pilgrimage beyond the Sea.

In 1835 Longfellow was chosen to succeed George Ticknor as professor of modern languages and belles-lettres in Harvard. On receiving this appointment, he paid a second visit of some fifteen months to Europe, this time devoting special attention to the Scandinavian countries and

Switzerland. During this visit he lost his wife, who died at Rotterdam, on the 29th of November 1835.

On his return to America in December 1836, Longfellow took up his residence in Cambridge, and began to lecture at Harvard and to write. In his new home he found himself amid surroundings entirely congenial to him. Its spaciousness and free rural aspect, its old graveyards and towering elms, its great university, its cultivated society and its vicinity to humane, substantial, busy Boston, were all attractions for such a man. In 1837-1838 several essays of Longfellow's appeared in the North American Review, and in 1839 he published Hyperion: a Romance, and his first volume of original poetry, entitled Voices of the Night. Hyperion, a poetical account of his travels, had, at the time of its publication, an immense popularity, due mainly to its sentimental romanticism. At present few persons beyond their teens would care to read it through, so unnatural and stilted is its language, so thin its material and so consciously mediated its sentiment. Nevertheless it has a certain historical importance, for two reasons — (1) because it marks that period in Longfellow's career when, though he had left nature, he had not yet found art, and (2) because it opened the sluices through which the flood of German sentimental poetry flowed into the United States. The Voices of the Night contains some of his best minor poems, e.g. “The Psalm of Life” and “Footsteps of Angels.” In 1842 Longfellow published a small volume of Ballads and other Poems, containing some of his most popular pieces, e.g. “The Skeleton in Armour,” “The Wreck of the Hesperus,” “The Village Blacksmith,” “To a Child,” “The Bridge,” “Excelsior.” In the same year he paid a third brief visit to Europe, spending the summer on the Rhine. During his return-passage across the Atlantic he wrote his Poems on Slavery (1842), with a dedication to Channing. These poems went far to wake in the youth of New England a

sense of the great national wrong, and to prepare them for that bitter struggle in which it was wiped out at the expense of the lives of so many of them. In 1843 he married again, his wife being Miss Frances Elizabeth Appleton of Boston, a daughter of Hon. Nathan Appleton, one of the founders of Lowell, and a sister of Thomas G. Appleton, himself no mean poet.

About the same time he bought, and fixed his residence in, the Craigie House, where he had formerly only been a lodger, an old “revolutionary house,” built about the beginning of the 18th century, and occupied by General Washington in 1776. This quaint old wooden house, in the midst of a large garden full of splendid elms, continued to be his chief residence till the day of his death. Of the lectures on Dante which he delivered about this time, James Russell Lowell says: “These lectures, illustrated by admirable translations, are remembered with grateful pleasure by many who were thus led to learn the full significance of the great Christian poet.” Indeed, as a professor, Longfellow was eminently successful. Shortly after the Poems on Slavery, there appeared in 1843 a more ambitious work, The Spanish Student, a Play in Three Acts, a kind of sentimental “Morality,” without any special merit but good intention. If published nowadays it would hardly attract notice; but in those gushing, emotion-craving times it had considerable popularity, and helped to increase the poet's now rapidly widening fame. A huge collection of translations of foreign poetry edited by him, and entitled The Poets and Poetry of Europe, appeared in 1845, and, in 1846, a few minor poems — songs and sonnets — under the title The Belfry of Bruges. In 1847 he published at Boston the greatest of all his works, Evangeline, a Tale of Acadie. It was, in some degree, an imitation of Goethe's Hermann and Dorothea, and its plot, which was derived from Hawthorne's American Note-Books, is even simpler than

that of the German poem, not to say much more touching. At the violent removal by the British government of a colony of French settlers from Acadie (Nova Scotia) in 1755, a young couple, on the very day of their wedding, were separated and carried in different directions, so that they lost all trace of each other. The poem describes the wanderings of the bride in search of her lover, and her final discovery of him as an old man on his death-bed, in a public hospital which she had entered as a nurse. Slight as the story is, it is worked out into one of the most affecting poems in the language, and gives to literature one of its most perfect types of womanhood and of “affection that hopes and endures and is patient.” Though written in a metre deemed foreign to English ears, the poem immediately attained a wide popularity, which it has never lost, and secured to the dactylic hexameter a recognized place among English metres.

In 1849 Longfellow published a novel of no great merit, Kavanagh, and also a volume of poems entitled The Seaside and the Fireside, a title which has reference to his two homes, the seaside one on the charming peninsula of Nahant, the fireside one in Cambridge. One of the poems in this collection, “Resignation,” has taken a permanent place in literature; another, “Hymn for my Brother's Ordination,” shows plainly the nature of the poet's Christianity. His brother, the Rev. Samuel Longfellow, was a minister of the Unitarian Church.

Longfellow's genius, in its choice of subjects, always oscillated between America and Europe, between the colonial period of American history and the Middle and Romantic Ages of European feeling. When tired of the broad daylight of American activity, he sought refuge and rest in the dim twilight of medieval legend and German sentiment. In 1851 appeared The Golden Legend, a long

lyric drama based upon Hartmann von Aue's beautiful story of self-sacrifice, Der arme Heinrich. Next to Evangeline, this is at once the best and the most popular of the poet's longer works, and contains many passages of great beauty. Bringing his imagination back to America, he next applied himself to the elaboration of an Indian legend. In 1854 he resigned his professorship. In the following year he gave to the world the Indian Edda, The Song of Hiawatha, a conscious imitation, both in subject and metre, of the Finnish epic, the Kalevala, with which he had become acquainted during his second visit to Europe. The metre is monotonous and easily ridiculed, but it suits the subject, and the poem is very popular. In 1858 appeared The Courtship of Miles Standish, based on a charming incident in the early history of the Plymouth colony, and, along with it, a number of minor poems, included under the modest title, Birds of Passage. One of these is “My Lost Youth.”

Two events now occurred which served to cast a gloom over the poet's life and to interrupt his activity, — the outbreak of the Civil War, and the tragic fate of his wife, who, having accidentally allowed her dress to catch fire, was burnt to death in her own house in 1861. It was long before he recovered from the shock caused by this terrible event, and in his subsequent published poems he never ventured even to allude to it. When he did in some measure find himself again, he gave to the world his charming Tales of a Wayside Inn (1863), and in 1865 his Household Poems. Among the latter is a poem entitled “The Children's Hour,” which affords a glance into the home life of the widowed poet, who had been left with five children two sons, Ernest and Charles, and three daughters,

“Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
And Edith with golden hair.”

A small volume entitled Flower de Luce (1867) contains, among other fine things, the beautiful “threnos” on the burial of Hawthorne, and “The Bells of Lynn.” Once more the poet sought refuge in medieval life by completing his translation of the Divina Commedia, parts of which he had rendered into English as much as thirty years before. This work appeared in 1867, and gave a great impulse to the study of Dante in America. It is a masterpiece of literal translation. Next came the New England Tragedies (1868) and The Divine Tragedy (1871), which found no large public. In 1868-1869 the poet visited Europe, and was everywhere received with the greatest honour. In 1872 appeared Three Books of Song, containing translated as well as original pieces, in 1873 Aftermath and in 1875 The Mask of Pandora, and other Poems. Among these “other poems” were “The Hanging of the Crane,” “Morituri Salutamus” and “A Book of Sonnets.” The Mask of Pandora is a proof of that growing appreciation of pagan naturalism which marked the poet's later years. Though not a great poem, it is full of beautiful passages, many of which point to the riddle of life as yet unsolved, a conviction which grew ever more and more upon the poet, as the ebulliency of romanticism gave way to the calm of classic feeling. In the “Book of Sonnets” are some of the finest things he ever wrote, especially the five sonnets entitled “Three Friends of Mine.” These “three friends” were Cornelius Felton, Louis Agassiz and Charles Sumner, whom he calls

“The noble three,
Who half my life were more than friends to me.”

The loss of Agassiz was a blow from which he never entirely recovered; and, when Sumner also left him, he wrote: —

“Thou hast but taken thy lamp and gone to bed;