

## The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

by Washington Irving

Found among the papers of the Late Diedrich Knickerbocker.

*A pleasing land of drowsy head it was,  
Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye;  
And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,  
Forever flushing round a summer sky.*  
—Castle of Indolence

In the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson, at that broad expansion of the river denominated by the ancient Dutch navigators the Tappan Zee, and where they always prudently shortened sail and implored the protection of St. Nicholas when they crossed, there lies a small market town or rural port, which by some is called Greensburgh, but which is more generally and properly known by the name of Tarry Town. Not far from this village, perhaps about two miles, there is a little valley that is one of the quietest places in the whole world. A small brook glides through it, with just murmur enough to lull one to relaxation; and the occasional whistle of a quail or tapping of a woodpecker is almost the only sound that ever breaks in upon the uniform tranquility.

I recollect that, when a young boy, my first exploit in squirrel-shooting was in a grove of tall walnut-trees that shades one side of the valley. I had wandered into it at noontime, when all nature is peculiarly quiet, and was startled by the roar of my own gun, as it broke the Sabbath stillness around and was prolonged and reverberated by the angry echoes. If ever I should wish for a retreat from the world and its distractions, and dream away a troubled life, I know of none more promising than this little valley.

This valley has long been known by the name of Sleepy Hollow. A drowsy, dreamy influence seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere. Some say that the place was bewitched by a High German doctor, during the early days of the settlement; others, that an old Indian chief, the prophet or wizard of his tribe, held his powwows

there before the country was discovered by Master Hendrick Hudson. Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual daydream. They are given to all kinds of paranormal beliefs, are subject to trances and visions, and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air. The whole neighborhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions.



The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region, and seems to be commander-in-chief of all the powers of the air, is the apparition of a figure on horseback, without a head. It is said by some to be the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannon-ball, in some nameless battle during the Revolutionary War, and who is ever and anon seen by the country folk hurrying along in the gloom of night, as if on the wings of the wind. His haunts are not confined to the valley, but extend at times to the adjacent roads, and especially to a nearby church. Indeed, the most knowledgeable historians claim that the body of the trooper, which was buried in the churchyard, appears in ghostlike form, riding to the scene of the battle in nightly quest of his severed head. The ghost – this spectre – is known at all the country firesides, by the name of the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

This dreamy phenomenon touches all who happen upon the place. However wide awake they may have been before they entered that sleepy New York region, they are sure, in a little time, to inhale the witching influence of the air, and begin to grow imaginative, to dream dreams, and see apparitions.



A man named Ichabod Crane came to stay in Sleepy Hollow, for the purpose of instructing the children of the area. He was a native of Connecticut, a State which supplies the Union with many schoolmasters. The surname of Crane was appropriate to his person. He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with

huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose. One might have mistaken him for an actual crane, or some scarecrow escaped from a cornfield.

His schoolhouse was a low building of one large room, rudely constructed of logs; the windows partly glazed. The schoolhouse stood in a rather lonely but pleasant situation, just at the foot of a woody hill, with a brook running close by, and a formidable birch-tree growing at one end of it. From hence the low murmur of his pupils' voices, memorizing their lessons, might be heard in a drowsy summer's day, like



the hum of a beehive; interrupted now and then by the authoritative voice of the schoolmaster, in the tone of menace or command, or, possibly, the appalling sound of a stick greeting misbehavior.

I would not have it imagined, however, that he was one of those cruel rulers of the school who joy in the pain of their students; and he never inflicted a punishment without following it by consoling the hurting child with an assurance that "he would remember it and thank him for it the longest day he had to live."

When school hours were over, he was even the companion and playmate of the larger boys; and on holiday afternoons would escort some of the smaller ones home, who happened to have pretty sisters, or good housewives for mothers, who would provide him with a delicious meal. Indeed, it behooved him to keep on good terms with his students.

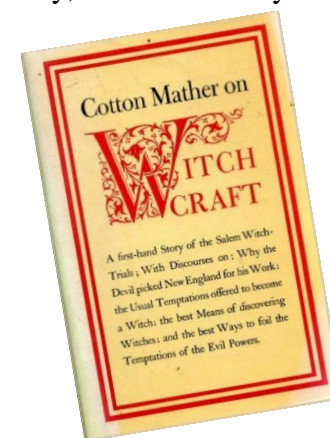
The profit arising from his school was small, and would have been scarcely sufficient for daily meals, for he was a huge eater, and, though lank, could devour like an anaconda; but, luckily, to manage his eating habits, he visited for a week at a time with one neighbor and the next, as was country custom in those parts. And, of course, he was always as kind as could be to his pupils and their families in these moments.

In addition to his other vocations, he was the singing-master of the neighborhood, and picked up extra profits by instructing the young folks. And on Sundays, he would take his station in front of the church, with a band of chosen singers; though, certain it is, his voice resounded far above all the rest of the congregation.

The schoolmaster is generally a man of some importance in the female circle of a rural neighborhood; being considered a kind of idle, gentlemanlike celebrity, of vastly superior taste and accomplishments to the rough countrymen. This superiority, paired with his clever way of doting on the country damsels, gathering grapes for them and walking along the millpond with them, brought about envy from the other men.

From his half-itinerant life, also, he was a kind of travelling periodical, carrying the local gossip from house to house, so that his appearance was always greeted with satisfaction. He was, moreover, esteemed by the women as a man of great knowledge, for he had read several books quite through, and was a perfect master of Cotton Mather's History of New England Witchcraft, in which, by the way, he most firmly and potently believed.

He was, in fact, an odd mixture of small shrewdness and simple gullibility. His appetite for the supernatural, and his powers of digesting it were equally extraordinary; and both had been increased by his residence in this spell-bound region. No tale was too gross or too monstrous for him. It was often his delight, after his school was dismissed in the afternoon, to read these tales of the supernatural. Then,



as he made his way home by swamp and stream, every sound of nature would startle him. His only resource during such frightening moments was to drive away evil spirits by singing psalm tunes, which could be heard by the good people of Sleepy Hollow.

Another of his sources of fearful pleasure was to pass long winter evenings with the old Dutch wives, as they sat spinning by the fire, with a row of apples roasting on the hearth, and listen to their marvelous tales of ghosts and goblins, and haunted fields, and haunted brooks, and haunted bridges, and haunted houses, and particularly of the headless horseman, or Galloping Hessian of the Hollow, as they sometimes called him. He would delight them equally by his anecdotes of witchcraft, and of the direful omens and sinister sights and sounds in the air.

But if there was a pleasure in all these ghost stories, it was dearly paid for by the terrors of his subsequent walk homewards. What fearful shapes and shadows crossed his path, amidst the dim and ghastly glare of a snowy night! With what wistful look did he eye every trembling ray of light streaming from some distant window! How often was he appalled by some shrub covered with snow, which, like a sheeted ghost, came upon his very path! How often did he shrink with curdling awe at the sound of his own steps on the frosty crust beneath his feet; and dread to look over his shoulder, lest he should behold some creature tramping close behind him! And how often was he thrown into complete dismay by some blasting sound, howling among the trees, in the idea that it was the Galloping Hessian on one of his nightly rides!

All these, however, were mere terrors of the night, phantoms of the mind that walk in darkness; yet daylight put an end to all these evils; and he would have led a pleasant life, in despite of the Devil and all his works, if his path had not been crossed by a creature that causes more confusion to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was—a woman.



Among the aspiring singers he tutored, was Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter and only child of a wealthy Dutch farmer. She was a blooming lass of fresh eighteen; plump as a partridge; ripe and rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches, and universally famed, not merely for her beauty, but even her dress. She wore the ornaments of pure yellow gold, and a provokingly short petticoat, to display the prettiest foot and ankle in the country round.

Ichabod Crane had a soft and foolish heart towards women; and, not surprisingly so, he had come to admire her charm, even more so after he had visited her in her father's mansion. Old Baltus Van Tassel was a successful farmer, and Ichabod's mouth watered at the sight of such a rich and delicious feast waiting for him. As the enraptured Ichabod desired all this, his heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit it all - the blooming Katrina.

He knew he must gain the affections of the daughter of Van Tassel. In this endeavor, however, he had real difficulties: he had to win his way to the heart of a country flirt; and he had to encounter the many men who also admired her.

Among these, the most formidable opponent was a brawny, burly man, by the name of Brom Van Brunt, the hero of the country round, which rang with his feats of strength and hardihood. He was broad-shouldered and double-jointed, with short curly black hair, and was both fun and arrogant. From his Herculean frame and great powers of limb he had received the nickname of Brom Bones, by which he was universally known. He was famed for great knowledge and skill in horsemanship, and was always ready for either a fight or a frolic, but had more mischief than ill-will in his composition. And his good humor was always well-received by his crew of men, who could be heard dashing and whooping along past the farmhouses at midnight; and the old dames, startled out of their sleep, would listen for a moment till the hurry-scurry had clattered by, and then exclaim, "Ay, there goes Brom Bones and his gang!" The neighbors looked upon him with a mixture of awe, admiration, and good-will; and, when any madcap prank or rustic brawl occurred in the vicinity, always shook their heads, and determined Brom Bones was at the bottom of it.

Such was the intimidating rival with whom Ichabod Crane had to contend if he were to pursue Katrina Van Tassel, and, considering all things, a stouter man than he would have shrunk from the competition, and a wiser man would have lost hope - but not Ichabod.

To have taken the field openly against his rival would have been madness. Ichabod, therefore, made his advances in a quiet manner. Under cover of his character of singing-master, he made frequent visits at the farmhouse and would carry on his suit of Katrina while sitting under the elm tree or while sauntering along in the twilight. And soon, a deadly feud gradually arose between him and the mighty Brom Bones.

Brom would have preferred to settle the matter by single combat, but Ichabod knew better than to allow that; he had overheard a boast of Bones, that he would “double the schoolmaster up, and lay him on a shelf of his own schoolhouse;” and he was too careful to give him an opportunity. This avoidance left Brom no alternative but to play crude practical jokes upon his rival: They smoked out his singing school by stopping up the chimney and broke into the schoolhouse at night and turned everything topsy-turvy, so that the poor schoolmaster began to think all the witches in the country held their meetings there at night. But what was still more annoying, Brom took all opportunities of turning him into ridicule in presence of Katrina.



In this way matters went on for some time, without the situation changing much, until one quiet fine autumnal afternoon when the school day was interrupted by a messenger bearing an invitation for an evening at the Van Tassel's. Immediately, the schoolmaster dismissed his pupils and spent at least an extra half hour readying himself. That he might make his appearance before Katrina in the true style of a cavalier, he borrowed a horse from the farmer with whom he was staying, an old Dutchman by the name of Hans Van Ripper, and, thus gallantly mounted and rode forth like a knight-errant in quest of

adventures. But I must take a moment to describe our hero and his trusty steed. The animal he rode was an old, broken-down plow-horse, with a ewe neck, and a head like a hammer; his rusty mane and tail were tangled and knotted; one eye had lost its pupil, and was glaring and ghostly, but the other had the gleam of a genuine devil in it. Van Ripper appropriately named the horse Gunpowder. He was a furious rider, and had infused, very probably, some of his own spirit into the animal; for, old and broken-down as he looked, there was more of the lurking devil in him than in any young horse in the country.

Ichabod was a suitable figure for such a steed. He rode with short stirrups, which brought his knees nearly up to the top of the saddle; his sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers' and as his horse jogged on, the motion of his arms was not unlike the flapping of a pair of wings.

As Ichabod jogged slowly on his way, his hungry eyes ranged with delight over the treasures of jolly autumn. On all sides he beheld vast store of apples; some hanging in oppressive opulence on the trees; some gathered into baskets and barrels for the market; others heaped up in rich piles for the cider-press. Farther on he beheld great fields of Indian corn, with its golden ears peeping from their leafy coverts, and holding out the promise of cakes and hasty-pudding; and the yellow pumpkins lying beneath them, turning up their fair round bellies to the sun, and giving ample prospects of the most luxurious of pies; and anon he passed the fragrant buckwheat fields breathing the odor of the beehive, and as he beheld them, he thought of pancakes, well buttered, and garnished with honey or syrup, by the delicate little hand of Katrina Van Tassel.

It was toward evening that Ichabod arrived at the castle of Van Tassel, whose guests were adorned in magnificent clothing. Brom Bones, however, was the hero of the scene, having come to the gathering on his favorite steed Daredevil, a creature, like himself, full of mettle and mischief, and which no one but himself could manage. He was, in fact, noted for preferring vicious animals, given to all kinds of tricks which kept the rider in constant risk of his neck.



But what was most magnificent in the eyes of Ichabod was the scrumptious display found on the tea-table inside the Van Tassel mansion: every crisp and crumbling delight imaginable; sweet cakes and short cakes, ginger cakes and honey cakes, and the whole family of cakes. And then there were apple pies, and peach pies, and pumpkin pies. Happily, Ichabod Crane did ample justice to every treat.

He was a kind and thankful creature, whose spirits rose with eating, as some men's do with drink. He could not help, too, rolling his large eyes round him as he ate, and chuckling with the possibility that he might one day be lord of all this scene of almost unimaginable luxury and splendor.

Old Van Tassel moved about among his guests with a face dilated with content and good humor, round and jolly as the harvest moon. His hospitable attentions were brief, but expressive, being confined to a shake of the hand, a slap on the shoulder, a loud laugh, and a pressing invitation to "fall to, and help themselves."

And now the sound of the music from the hall summoned Ichabod to the dance. Ichabod prided himself upon his dancing as much as upon his vocal powers. His dancing was the admiration of all. And his dancing was as animated and joyous as it could be with Katrina, the lady of his heart, as his partner in the dance. She smiled graciously, while Brom Bones, sorely smitten with love and jealousy, sat brooding by himself in one corner.



When the dance was at an end, Ichabod was attracted to a group of older folks, who, with Old Van Tassel, sat smoking at one end of the room, gossiping over former times, and drawing out long stories about the war.

But all these war stories were nothing to the tales of ghosts and apparitions that came next. The neighborhood is rich in legendary tales and superstitions, thanks to its proximity to Sleepy Hollow.

There was a contagion in the very air that blew from that haunted region; it breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies infecting all the land. Several of the Sleepy Hollow people were present at Van Tassel's, and, as usual, were sharing their wild and wonderful legends. Many dismal tales were told about funeral trains, and mourning cries and wailings heard and seen about the great tree where the unfortunate Major André was killed, and which stood in the neighborhood. Some mention was made also of the woman in white that haunted the dark glen at Raven Rock, and was often heard to shriek on winter nights before a storm, having perished there in the snow. The chief part of the stories, however, turned upon the favorite ghost of Sleepy Hollow, the Headless Horseman, who had been heard several times of late, patrolling the country; and, it was said, tied his horse nightly among the graves in the churchyard.

On one side of the church extends a wide woody area, along which ran a large stream. Over a deep black part of the stream, not far from the church, was a makeshift wooden bridge. Both the bridge and the road that led to it were thickly shaded by overhanging trees, which cast a gloom about it, even in the daytime; but produced a fearful darkness at night. Such was one of the favorite haunts of the Headless Horseman, and the place where he was most frequently encountered. The tale was told of old Brouwer, a disbeliever in ghosts, who met the Horseman; how they galloped over bush and brake, over hill and swamp, until they reached the bridge; when the Horseman suddenly turned into a skeleton, threw old Brouwer into the brook, and sprang away over the tree-tops with a clap of thunder.

This story was immediately matched by the equally marvelous adventure of Brom Bones, who poked fun at the Galloping Hessian. He affirmed that on returning one night from the neighboring village of Sing Sing, he had met this Headless Horseman; that he had offered to race with him for a bowl of punch, and should have won it too, for his horse, Daredevil, beat the goblin horse, but just as they came to the church bridge, the Hessian bolted, and vanished in a flash of fire.

All these tales sank deep in the mind of Ichabod. He repaid them with stories of witchcraft and added many supernatural events that had taken place in his native State of Connecticut, and fearful sights which he had seen in his nightly walks about Sleepy Hollow.

The party now gradually broke up. The old farmers gathered together their families in their wagons, and were heard for some time rattling along the hollow roads, and over the distant hills,—and the late scene of noise and frolic was all silent and deserted. Ichabod only lingered behind, according to the custom of country lovers, to speak privately with Katrina. What took place during this conversation I do not know, but something must have gone wrong, for Ichabod turned away, sad and rejected. Without looking up, he went straight to the stable to get his horse for departure.

Ichabod began the trek homewards, taking a road he had traversed so cheerily just that afternoon. The hour was as miserable as himself. In the dead hush of midnight, he could even hear the barking of the watchdog from the opposite shore of the Hudson; but it was so vague and faint. No signs of life occurred near him, but occasionally the melancholy chirp of a cricket, or perhaps the guttural twang of a bullfrog from a neighboring marsh, as if sleeping uncomfortably and turning suddenly in his bed.

All the stories of ghosts and goblins that he had heard in the afternoon now came crowding upon his recollection. The night grew darker and darker; the stars seemed to sink deeper in the sky, and driving clouds occasionally hid them from his sight. He had never felt so lonely and dismal. He was, moreover, approaching the very place where many of the scenes of the ghost stories had been laid.

As Ichabod approached the fearful tree where Major André was killed, he began to whistle to comfort himself; he thought his whistle was answered; but it was just a breeze sweeping sharply through the dry branches. As he approached a little nearer, he thought he saw something white, hanging in the midst of the tree: he paused and ceased whistling but, on looking more narrowly, perceived that it was a place where the tree had been scathed by lightning, and the white wood laid bare. Suddenly he heard a groan—his teeth chattered, and his knees

knocked against the saddle: it was but the rubbing of one huge limb upon another, as they were swayed about by the breeze. He passed the tree in safety, but new dangers lay before him.

About two hundred yards from the tree, a small brook crossed the road, and ran into a marshy and thickly-wooded glen, known by the name of Wiley's Swamp. A few rough logs, laid side by side, served for a bridge over this stream. On that side of the road where the brook entered the wood, a group of oaks and chestnuts, matted thick with wild grape-vines, threw a dark shadow over it. To pass this bridge was the harshest trial. It was at this identical spot that the unfortunate André was captured, and under the cover of those chestnuts and vines was the spot of his murder. This has ever since been considered a haunted stream, and fearful are the feelings of the schoolboy who has to pass it alone after dark.

As he approached the stream, his heart began to thump; he summoned up, however, all his courage, gave his horse half a score of kicks in the ribs, and attempted to dash briskly across the bridge; but instead of starting forward, the stubborn old animal ran sideways against the fence. Ichabod, whose fears increased with the delay, jerked the reins on the other side and kicked: it was all in vain; his steed started, it is true, but it was only to plunge to the opposite side of the road into a thicket of brambles and alder bushes. The schoolmaster now bestowed both whip and heel upon the ribs of old Gunpowder, who dashed forward, snuffing and snorting, but came to an abrupt stop right before the bridge and nearly sent his rider sprawling over his head. Just at this moment a tramp by the side of the bridge caught the sensitive ear of Ichabod. In the dark shadow of the grove, he beheld something huge, misshapen and towering. It remained still, but looked like some gigantic monster ready to spring upon the traveller.

Ichabod's hair rose upon his head with terror. What was to be done? To turn and fly was now too late; and besides, what chance was there of escaping ghost or goblin, if such it was, which could catch him in no time? Summoning up, therefore, a show of courage, he demanded, "Who are you?" He received no reply. He repeated his demand in a still more agitated voice. Still there was no answer. Once more he kicked the inflexible Gunpowder, and, shutting his eyes, began singing a

psalm tune. Just then the shadowy figure moved to the middle of the road. Though the night was dark and dismal, Ichabod could better see the form. He appeared to be a horseman of large dimensions, and mounted on a black horse of powerful frame. He remained at the side of the road, moving alongside Gunpowder who finally began to move forward.

Ichabod, who did not want this strange midnight companion, and thinking back to Brom Bones's successful encounter with the Galloping Hessian, he quickened his steed in hopes of leaving him behind. The stranger, however, quickened his horse to an equal pace. Ichabod pulled up, and slowed to a walk, thinking to lag behind,—the other did the same. His heart began to sink within him; he endeavored to resume his song, but his parched tongue would not allow it. Ichabod could feel something in the midnight silence that was mysterious and appalling. It was soon fearfully accounted for. As they moved forward, the night sky outlined the figure of the schoolmaster's unwanted companion — a creature gigantic in height, and muffled in a cloak, Ichabod was horror-struck on perceiving that he was headless!—but his horror was still more increased on observing that the head, which should have rested on his shoulders, was carried before him on the front of his saddle! His terror rose to desperation; he rained a shower of kicks and blows upon Gunpowder, hoping by a sudden movement to slip past the headless figure; but the phantom moved quickly with him. Away, then, they dashed through thick and thin; stones flying and sparks flashing at every bound. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air, as he stretched his long lank body away over his horse's head, in the eagerness of his flight.

They had now reached the road which turns off to Sleepy Hollow; but Gunpowder, who seemed possessed with a demon, instead of running straight ahead, made an opposite turn, and plunged downhill to the left onto the road that would lead to the church. If the panicked steed and rider weren't enough, Ichabod's saddle began to give way and slipped out from under him. He clasped old Gunpowder round the neck and could hear the goblin right behind him.

An opening in the trees now cheered him with the hopes that the church bridge was at hand. He saw the walls of the church and remembered

this is where the Headless Horseman of Brom Bones's story had disappeared. "If I can but reach that bridge," thought Ichabod, "I am safe." Just then he heard the black steed panting and blowing close behind him; he even thought he felt his hot breath. Another convulsive kick in the ribs, and old Gunpowder sprang upon the bridge; he thundered over the planks; he made it to the opposite side; and now Ichabod cast a look behind to see if his pursuer should vanish, as he did in Brom Bones's story. Just then he saw the goblin rising in his stirrups, and in a flash, he hurled his severed head at Ichabod. Ichabod attempted to dodge the horrible missile, but too late. It smashed into his own head with a tremendous crash,—with such force, he was thrown into the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider, rode past like a whirlwind.

The next morning the old horse was found without his saddle, waiting at his master's gate, but Ichabod was nowhere to be found. Hans Van Ripper now began to feel some uneasiness about the fate of poor Ichabod, and after an investigation was conducted they came upon his traces. In one part of the road leading to the church was found the saddle trampled in the dirt; the tracks of horses' hoofs deeply dented in the road, and evidently at furious speed, were traced to the bridge. Beyond these tracks was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod, and close beside it a shattered pumpkin.

The brook was searched, but the body of the schoolmaster was not to be discovered. Hans Van Ripper examined the bundle of possessions that Ichabod had left in his home. It did not contain much more than a few pieces of clothing, a rusty razor, a book of psalm tunes, and a broken pitch-pipe.

The mysterious event caused much speculation at the church on the following Sunday. Many gathered and gossiped in the churchyard, at the bridge, and at the spot where the hat and pumpkin had been found. The stories of Brouwer, of Bones, and a whole budget of others were called to mind; and when they had diligently considered them all, and compared them with the symptoms of the present case, they shook their heads, and came to the conclusion that Ichabod had been carried off by the Headless Horseman. As he was a bachelor, and in nobody's debt, nobody troubled his head any more about him; the school was removed

to a different part of the hollow, and another schoolmaster reigned in his stead.

It is true, an old farmer, who had been down to New York on a visit several years after, shared the knowledge that Ichabod Crane was still alive; that he had left the neighborhood partly through fear of the goblin, and partly in mortification at having been suddenly rejected by Katrina Van Tassel. Brom Bones, too, who, shortly after his rival's disappearance triumphantly married the blooming Katrina, was observed to look exceedingly knowing whenever the story of Ichabod was related, and always burst into a hearty laugh at the mention of the pumpkin; which led some to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell.

The old country wives, however, who are the best judges of these matters, maintain to this day that Ichabod was carried away by supernatural means; and it is a favorite story often told about the neighborhood round the winter evening fire. The bridge became more than ever an object of superstitious awe. The schoolhouse being deserted soon fell to decay, and was reported to be haunted by the ghost of the unfortunate Ichabod and the plowboy, walking homeward on a still summer evening, has often heard his voice at a distance, chanting a melancholy psalm tune among the tranquil solitudes of Sleepy Hollow.

THE END.

