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BALDWIN'S BIOGRAPHICAL BOOKLETS

THE STORY
OF
WASHINGTON IRVING

FOR YOUNG READERS

BY
SHERWIN CODY



WERNER SCHOOL BOOK COMPANY

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. HIS CHILDHOOD	5
II. IRVING'S FIRST VOYAGE UP THE HUDSON RIVER	8
III. A TRIP TO MONTREAL	12
IV. IRVING GOES TO EUROPE	16
V. "SALMAGUNDI"	19
VI. "DIEDRICH KNICKERBOCKER"	22
VII. A COMIC HISTORY OF NEW YORK	26
VIII. FIVE UNEVENTFUL YEARS	31
IX. FRIENDSHIP WITH SIR WALTER SCOTT	35
X. "RIP VAN WINKLE"	38
XI. LITERARY SUCCESS IN ENGLAND	45
XII. IRVING GOES TO SPAIN	48
XIII. "THE ALHAMBRA"	51
XIV. THE LAST YEARS OF IRVING'S LIFE	59

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doing everything he could for the American prisoners whom the British held. His wife, especially, had a happy way of persuading Sir Henry Clinton, and when the British general saw her coming, he prepared himself to grant any request about the prisoners which she might make. Often she sent them food from her own table, and cared for them when they were sick.

When their last son, the eleventh child, was born, on April 3, 1783, the parents showed their loyalty by naming him Washington, after the beloved Father of his Country.

Six years after this, George Washington was elected president, and went to New York to live. The Scotch maid who took care of little Washington Irving made up her mind to introduce the boy to his great namesake. So one day she followed the general into a shop, and, pointing to the lad, said, "Please, your honor, here's a bairn was named after you." Washington turned around, smiled, and placing his hand on the boy's head, gave him his blessing. Little did General Washington suspect that in later years this boy, grown

to manhood and become famous, would write his biography.

In those days New York was only a small town at the south end of Manhattan Island. It extended barely as far north as the place where now stand the City Hall and the Postoffice. Broadway was then a country road. The Irvings lived at 131 William Street, afterward moving across to 128. This is now one of the oldest parts of New York. The streets in that section are narrow, and the buildings, though put up long after Irving's birth, seem very old.

Here the little boy grew up with his brothers and sisters. At four he went to school. His first teacher was a lady ; but he was soon transferred to a school kept by an old Revolutionary soldier who became so fond of the boy that he gave him the pet name of "General." This teacher liked him because, though often in mischief, he never tried to protect himself by telling a falsehood, but always confessed the truth.

Washington was not very fond of study, but he was a great reader. At eleven his favorite stories

were "Robinson Crusoe" and "Sindbad the Sailor." Besides these, he read many books of travel, and soon found himself wishing that he might go to sea. As he grew up he was able to gratify his taste for travel, and some of his finest books and stories relate to his experiences in foreign lands. In the introduction to the "Sketch Book" he says, "How wistfully would I wander about the pier-heads in fine weather, and watch the parting ships bound to distant climes—with what longing eyes would I gaze after their lessening sails, and waft myself in imagination to the ends of the earth!"

CHAPTER II

IRVING'S FIRST VOYAGE UP THE HUDSON RIVER

Irving's first literary composition seems to have been a play written when he was thirteen. It was performed at the house of a friend, in the presence of a famous actress of that day; but in after years Irving had forgotten even the title.

His schooling was finished when he was sixteen.

His elder brothers had attended college, and he never knew exactly why he did not. But he was not fond of hard study or hard work. He lived in a sort of dreamy leisure, which seemed particularly suited to his light, airy genius, so full of humor, sunshine, and loving-kindness.

After leaving school, he began to study law in the office of a certain Henry Masterton. This was in the year 1800. He was admitted to the bar six years later; but he spent a great deal more of the intervening time in traveling and scribbling than in the study of law. His first published writing was a series of letters signed "Jonathan Oldstyle," printed in his brother's daily paper, "The Morning Chronicle," when the writer was nineteen years old.

Irving's first journey was made the very year after he left school. It was a voyage in a sailing boat up the Hudson river to Albany; and a land journey from there to Johnstown, New York, to visit two married sisters. In the early days this was on the border of civilization, where the white traders went to buy furs from the Indians. Steam-

boats and railroads had not been invented, and a journey that can now be made in a few hours, then required several days. Years afterward, Irving described his first voyage up the Hudson.

“My first voyage up the Hudson,” said he, “was made in early boyhood, in the good old times before steamboats and railroads had annihilated time and space, and driven all poetry and romance out of travel. . . . We enjoyed the beauties of the river in those days.*

“I was to make the voyage under the protection of a relative of mature age—one experienced in the river. His first care was to look out for a favorite sloop and captain, in which there was great choice. . . .

“A sloop was at length chosen; but she had yet to complete her freight and secure a sufficient number of passengers. Days were consumed in drumming up a cargo. This was a tormenting delay to me, who was about to make my first voyage, and who, boy-like, had packed my trunk

* Irving was the first to describe the wonderful beauties of the Hudson river.

on the first mention of the expedition. How often that trunk had to be unpacked and repacked before we sailed!

“At length the sloop actually got under way. As she worked slowly out of the dock into the stream, there was a great exchange of last words between friends on board and friends on shore, and much waving of handkerchiefs when the sloop was out of hearing.

“ . . . What a time of intense delight was that first sail through the Highlands! I sat on the deck as we slowly tided along at the foot of those stern mountains, and gazed with wonder and admiration at cliffs impending far above me, crowned with forests, with eagles sailing and screaming around them; or listened to the unseen stream dashing down precipices; or beheld rock, and tree, and cloud, and sky reflected in the glassy stream of the river. . . .

“But of all the scenery of the Hudson, the Kaatskill Mountains had the most witching effect on my boyish imagination. Never shall I forget the effect upon me of the first view of them pre-

dominating over a wide extent of country, part wild, woody, and rugged; part softened away into all the graces of cultivation. As we slowly floated along, I lay on the deck and watched them through a long summer's day, undergoing a thousand mutations under the magical effects of atmosphere; sometimes seeming to approach, at other times to recede; now almost melting into hazy distance, now burnished by the hazy sun, until, in the evening, they printed themselves against the glowing sky in the deep purple of an Italian landscape."

CHAPTER III

A TRIP TO MONTREAL

Soon after returning from this trip, Irving became a clerk in the law office of a Mr. Hoffman. There was a warm friendship between him and Mr. Hoffman's family. Mrs. Hoffman was his lifelong friend and, as he afterwards said, like a sister to him; and he finally fell in love with Matilda, one of Mr. Hoffman's daughters, and was engaged to be married to her. Her sad death at the age of

seventeen was perhaps the greatest unhappiness of his life. He never married, but held her memory sacred as long as he lived.

In 1803 he was invited by Mr. Hoffman to go with him to Montreal and Quebec. Irving kept a journal during this expedition, and it shows what a rough time travelers had in those days.

Part of the way they sailed in a scow on Black River. They were partially sheltered from the rain by sheets stretched over hoops. At night they went ashore and slept in a log cabin.

One morning after a rainy night they awoke to find the sky clear and the sun shining brightly. Setting out again in their boat, they were soon surprised by meeting three canoes in pursuit of a deer.

“The deer made for our shore,” says Irving in his journal. “We pushed ashore immediately, and as it passed, Mr. Ogden fired and wounded it. It had been wounded before. I threw off my coat and prepared to swim after it. As it came near, a man rushed through the bushes, sprang into the water, and made a grasp at the animal.

He missed his aim, and I jumped after, fell on his back, and sunk him under water. At the same time I caught the deer by one ear, and Mr. Ogden seized it by a leg. The submerged gentleman, who had risen above the water, got hold of another. We drew it ashore, when the man immediately dispatched it with a knife. We claimed a haunch for our share, permitting him to keep all the rest."

Irving had one or two experiences with the Indians which were not altogether pleasant at the time, but which afterward appeared very amusing.

On one occasion he went with another young man to a small island in a river, where he hoped to be able to hire a boat to take the party to a place some distance farther down the stream. They found there a wigwam in which were a number of Indians, both men and women; but the Indian they were looking for was away selling furs.

He soon came in, with his squaw, who was rather a pretty woman. Both he and she had been drinking. While the other young man was trying to explain their business, the Indian woman

sat down beside Irving, and in her half drunken way began to pay him great attention.

The husband, a tall, strapping Hercules of an Indian, sat scowling at them with his blanket drawn up to his chin, and his face between his hands, while his elbows rested on his knees.

But soon the Indian could no longer endure the flirtation his wife was carrying on with Irving. He rushed upon him, calling him a "cursed Yankee," and gave him a blow which stretched him on the floor.

While Irving was picking himself up and getting out of the way, his friend went to the Indian and tried to quiet him. By this time the feelings of the drunken redman had quite changed. He fell on the young man's neck, exchanged names with him after the Indian fashion, and declared that they would be sworn friends and brothers as long as they lived.

Irving hastened to get into his boat, and he and his companion made off as quickly as possible, having no wish for any further intercourse with drunken Indians.

CHAPTER IV

IRVING GOES TO EUROPE

Irving's health was by no means good, and his friends were so alarmed that when he was twenty-one they planned a trip to Europe for him. As he stepped on board the boat that was to take him, the captain eyed him from head to foot and remarked to himself, "There's a chap who will go overboard before we get across."

To the surprise of the captain and other passengers, however, he did not die, but got much better.

He disembarked at Bordeaux, in France, and joining a merry company, traveled with them in a kind of stagecoach called a diligence.

Among the company were a jolly little Pennsylvania doctor, and a French officer going home to see his mother. In one of the little French towns where they stopped they had an amusing experience, which Irving has described in his journal.

"In one of our strolls in the town of Tonneins," says he, "we entered a house where a number of girls were quilting. They gave me a needle and

set me to work. My bad French seemed to give them much amusement. They asked me several questions; as I could not understand them I made them any answer that came into my head, which caused a great deal of laughter amongst them.

“At last the little doctor told them that I was an English prisoner, whom the young French officer (who was with us) had in custody. Their merriment immediately gave place to pity.

“‘Ah, the poor fellow!’ said one to another, ‘he is merry, however, in all his trouble.

“‘And what will they do with him?’ said a young woman to the traveler.

“‘Oh, nothing of consequence?’ replied he; ‘perhaps shoot him or cut off his head.’

“The honest souls seemed quite distressed for me, and when I mentioned that I was thirsty, a bottle of wine was immediately placed before me, nor could I prevail on them to take a recompense. In short, I departed, loaded with their good wishes and benedictions, and I suppose I furnished a theme of conversation throughout the village.”

Years afterward, when Mr. Irving was minister

to Spain, he went some miles out of his way to visit this town. Says he:

“As my carriage rattled through the quiet streets of Tonneins, and the postilion smacked his whip with the French love of racket, I looked out for the house where, forty years before, I had seen the quilting party. I believe I recognized the house; and I saw two or three old women, who might once have formed part of the merry group of girls; but I doubt whether they recognized in the stout, elderly gentleman, who thus rattled in his carriage through their streets, the pale young English prisoner of forty years since.”

In this manner he wandered about for nearly two years. He visited Genoa, the birthplace of Columbus, and climbed Mount Vesuvius. He dined with Madame de Staël, the famous author of “Corinne.” At Rome he met Washington Allston, the great American painter, then a young man not much older than he. They became good friends, and Allston afterward illustrated some of Irving’s works. Irving was tempted to remain in

Rome and become a painter like Allston. But he finally decided that he did not have any special talent for art, and went home to finish his study of law.

CHAPTER V

“SALMAGUNDI”

Washington Irving returned to New York, quite restored to health; and there he soon became a social hero. Trips to Europe were so uncommon in those days that to have made one was a distinction in itself. Besides, Irving was now a polished young gentleman, very fond of amusement; and having become a lawyer with little to do, he made up his mind to enjoy himself.

He and his brother Peter, with a number of young men about the same age, called themselves “the nine worthies,” or the “lads of Kilkenny,” and many a gay time they had together,—rather too gay, some people thought. One of their favorite resorts was an old family mansion, which had descended from a deceased uncle to one of the

nine lads. It was on the banks of the Passaic river, about a mile from Newark, New Jersey. It was full of antique furniture, and the walls were adorned with old family portraits. The place was in charge of an old man and his wife and a negro boy, who were the sole occupants, except when the nine would sally forth from New York and enliven its solitudes with their madcap pranks and orgies.

“Who would have thought,” said Irving at the age of sixty-three to another of those nine lads, “that we should ever have lived to be two such respectable old gentlemen!”

About this time Irving and a friend named James K. Paulding proposed to start a paper, to be called “Salmagundi.” It was an imitation of Addison’s *Spectator*, and consisted of light, humorous essays, most of them making fun of the fads and fancies of New York life in those days. The numbers were published from a week to a month apart, and were continued for about a year.

The young men had no idea of making money by the venture, for they were then well-to-do; but

to their surprise it proved a great success, and the publisher is said to have made ten or fifteen thousand dollars out of it. He afterwards paid the editors four hundred dollars each.

Irving now visited Philadelphia, Boston, and other places. He thought of trying for a government office, and was tempted into politics. His description of his experience is amusing enough.

“Before the third day was expired, I was as deep in mud and politics as ever a moderate gentleman would wish to be; and I drank beer with the multitude; and I talked handbill-fashion with the demagogues, and I shook hands with the mob—whom my heart abhorreth. ’Tis true, for the two first days I maintained my coolness and indifference. . . . But the third day—ah! then came the tug of war. My patriotism all at once blazed forth, and I determined to save my country! O, my friend, I have been in such holes and corners; such filthy nooks, sweep offices, and oyster cellars!”

He closes by saying that this saving one’s country is such a sickening business that he wants no more of it.

CHAPTER VI

“DIEDRICH KNICKERBOCKER”

On October 26, 1809, there appeared in the *New York Evening Post* the following paragraph:

“DISTRESSING.

“Left his lodgings, some time since, and has not since been heard of, a small elderly gentleman, dressed in an old black coat and cocked hat, by the name of Knickerbocker. As there are some reasons for believing he is not entirely in his right mind, and as great anxiety is entertained about him, any information concerning him left either at the Columbian Hotel, Mulberry street, or at the office of this paper, will be thankfully received.

“P.S. Printers of newspapers will be aiding the cause of humanity in giving an insertion to the above.”

Two weeks later a letter was printed in the *Evening Post*, signed “A Traveler,” saying that such a gentleman as the one described had been

seen a little above King's Bridge, north of New York, "resting himself by the side of the road."

Ten days after this the following letter was printed:

"To the Editor of the Evening Post:

"Sir,—You have been good enough to publish in your paper a paragraph about Mr. Diedrich Knickerbocker, who was missing so strangely some time since; but a very curious kind of a written book has been found in his room, in his own handwriting. Now I wish to notice* him, if he is still alive, that if he does not return and pay off his bill for boarding and lodging, I shall have to dispose of his book to satisfy me for the same.

"I am, sir, your obedient servant,

"Seth Handaside,

"Landlord of the Independent Columbian Hotel,
Mulberry Street."

On November 28th there appeared in the advertising columns the announcement of "A History of New York," in two volumes, price three dollars.

* Legal term, meaning "to give notice to."

The advertisement says, "This work was found in the chamber of Mr. Diedrich Knickerbocker, the old gentleman whose sudden and mysterious disappearance has been noticed. It is published in order to discharge certain debts he has left behind."

When the book was published the people took it up, expecting to find a grave and learned history of New York. It was dedicated to the New York Historical Society, and began with an account of the supposed author, Mr. Diedrich Knickerbocker. "He was a small, brisk-looking old gentleman, dressed in a rusty black coat, a pair of olive velvet breeches, and a small cocked hat. He had a few gray hairs plaited and clubbed behind. . . . The only piece of finery which he bore about him was a bright pair of square silver shoe-buckles." The landlord of the inn, who writes this description, adds: "My wife at once set him down for some eminent country school-master."

Imagine for yourself the astonishment, and then the amusement—in some cases even the anger—of

those who read, to find a most ludicrous description of the old Dutch settlers of New York, the ancestors of the most aristocratic families of the metropolis of America. The people that laughed got the best of it, however, and the book was considered one of the popular successes of the day.

The real author of this book was, of course, Washington Irving. When forty years later the book was to be included in his collected works he wrote an "Apology," in which he says, "When I find, after a lapse of nearly forty years, this haphazard production of my youth still cherished among them (the New Yorkers); when I find its very name become a 'household word,' and used to give the home stamp to everything recommended for popular acceptance, such as Knickerbocker societies, Knickerbocker insurance companies, Knickerbocker steamboats, Knickerbocker omnibuses, Knickerbocker bread, and Knickerbocker ice,—and when I find New Yorkers of Dutch descent priding themselves upon being 'genuine Knickerbockers,' I please myself with the persuasion that I have struck the right chord."

CHAPTER VII

A COMIC HISTORY OF NEW YORK

“Knickerbocker’s History of New York” was undertaken by Irving and his brother Peter as a parody on a book that had lately appeared, entitled “A Picture of New York.” The two young men, one of whom had already proved himself something of an author, were so full of humor and the spirit of mischief that they must amuse themselves and their friends, and they thought this a good way of doing it. There was to be an introduction giving the history of New York from the foundation of the world, and the main body of the book was to consist of “notices of the customs, manners, and institutions of the city; written in a serio-comic vein, and treating local errors, follies, and abuses with good-humored satire.”

The introduction was not more than fairly begun when Peter Irving started for Europe, leaving the completion of the work to the younger brother. Washington decided to change the plan, and

merely give a humorous history of the Dutch settlement of New York.

Let us take a peep into this amusing history. First, here is the portrait of "that worthy and irrecoverable discoverer (as he has justly been called), Master Henry Hudson," who "set sail from Holland in a stout vessel called the Half-Moon, being employed by the Dutch East India Company to seek a northwest passage to China."

"Henry (or as the Dutch historians call him, Hendrick) Hudson was a seafaring man of renown, who had learned to smoke tobacco under Sir Walter Raleigh, and is said to have been the first to introduce it into Holland, which gained him much popularity in that country, and caused him to find great favor in the eyes of their High Mightinesses, the Lords States General, and also of the honorable East India Company. He was a short, square, brawny old gentleman, with a double chin, a mastiff mouth, and a broad copper nose, which was supposed in those days to have acquired its fiery hue from the constant neighborhood of his tobacco pipe.

“He wore a commodore’s cocked hat on one side of his head. He was remarkable for always jerking up his breeches when he gave out his orders, and his voice sounded not unlike the brattling of a tin trumpet—owing to the number of hard northwesterners which he had swallowed in the course of his seafaring.

“Such was Hendrick Hudson, of whom we have heard so much and know so little.”

You must read in the history itself the amusing account of Ten Breeches and Tough Breeches. One of the Dutch colonists bought of the Indians for sixty guilders as much land as could be covered by a man’s breeches. When the time for measuring came Mr. Ten Breeches was produced, and peeling off one pair of breeches after another, soon produced enough material to surround the entire island of Manhattan, which was thus bought for sixty guilders, or Dutch dollars.

In due time came the first Dutch governor, Wouter Van Twiller.

Governor Van Twiller was five feet six inches in height, and six feet five inches in circumference,

his figure "the very model of majesty and lordly grandeur." On the very morning after he had entered upon his office, he gave an example of his great legal knowledge and wise judgment.

As the governor sat at breakfast an important old burgher came in to complain that Barent Bleecker refused to settle accounts, which was very annoying, as there was a heavy balance in the complainant's favor. "Governor Van Twiller, as I have already observed, was a man of few words; he was likewise a mortal enemy to multiplying writings—or being disturbed at his breakfast. Having listened attentively to the statement of Wandle Schoonhoven, giving an occasional grunt, as he shoveled a spoonful of Indian pudding into his mouth,—either as a sign that he relished the dish or comprehended the story,—he called unto him his constable, and pulling out of his breeches pocket a huge jack-knife, dispatched it after the defendant as a summons, accompanied by his tobacco-box as a warrant."

When the account books were before him, "the sage Wouter took them one after the other, and

having poised them in his hands, and attentively counted over the number of leaves, fell straightway into a great doubt, and smoked for half an hour without saying a word; at length, laying his finger beside his nose, and shutting his eyes for a moment, with the air of a man who had just caught a subtle idea by the tail, he slowly took his pipe from his mouth, puffed forth a column of tobacco smoke, and with marvelous gravity and solemnity pronounced, that, having carefully counted over the leaves and weighed the books, it was found that one was just as thick and heavy as the other; therefore, it was the final opinion of the court that the accounts were equally balanced; therefore, Wandle should give Barent a receipt, and Barent should give Wandle a receipt, and the constable should pay the costs."

It is not wonderful that this was the first and last lawsuit during his administration, and that no one was found who cared to hold the office of constable.

This is only one of scores of droll stories to be found in this most interesting "history."

CHAPTER VIII

FIVE UNEVENTFUL YEARS

It seems strange that the success of the "History of New York" did not make Irving a professional man of letters at once. The profits on the first edition were three thousand dollars, and several other editions were to follow steadily. But though he wished to be a literary man, and now knew that he might make a fair living by his writings, there was still lacking the force to compel him to work. He had always lived in easy circumstances, doing as he liked, enjoying society, and amusing himself, and it was hard for him to devote his attention strictly to any set task.

He applied for a clerkship at Albany, but failed to get it. Then his brothers, with whom he must have been a great favorite, as he was the youngest of the family, arranged a mercantile business in which he was to be a partner. Peter was to buy goods in England and ship them to New York, while Ebenezer was to sell them. Washington was to be a silent partner, and enjoy one fifth of

the profits. At first he objected to taking no active part in the business; but his brothers persuaded him that this was his chance to become independent and have his entire time for literary work.

But five years passed away and little was accomplished. This covered the period of the War of 1812. At first Irving was opposed to the war; but when he heard the news of the burning of Washington his patriotism blazed forth. "He was descending the Hudson in the steamboat when the tidings first reached him," says his nephew in the biography which he wrote. "It was night and the passengers had betaken themselves to their settees to rest, when a person came on board at Poughkeepsie with the news of the inglorious triumph, and proceeded in the darkness of the cabin to relate the particulars: the destruction of the president's house, the treasury, war, and navy offices, the capitol, the depository of the national library and the public records. There was a momentary pause after the speaker had ceased, when some paltry spirit lifted his head

from his settee, and in a tone of complacent derision, 'wondered what *Jimmy* Madison would say now.' 'Sir,' said Mr. Irving, glad of an escape to his swelling indignation, 'do you seize on such a disaster only for a sneer? Let me tell you, sir, it is not now a question about *Jimmy* Madison or *Jimmy* Armstrong.* The pride and honor of the nation are wounded; the country is insulted and disgraced by this barbarous success, and every loyal citizen should feel the ignominy and be earnest to avenge it.' 'I could not see the fellow,' said Mr. Irving when he related the anecdote, 'but I let fly at him in the dark.'"

As soon as he reached New York, Irving went to the governor and offered his services. He was immediately appointed military secretary and aide with the rank of colonel. His duties were neither difficult nor dangerous, and he enjoyed his position; but he was glad when the war came to an end the following year.

When the War of 1812 was over, his friend

* The Secretary of War.

Commodore Decatur invited him to accompany him on an expedition to the Mediterranean, the United States having declared war against the pirates of Algiers. Irving's trunks were put on board the *Guerriere*, but as the expedition was delayed on account of the escape of Napoleon from Elba, he had them again brought ashore, and finally gave up his plan of going with Decatur. His mind was set on visiting Europe, however, and he immediately took passage for Liverpool in another vessel. Little did he think that he was not to return for seventeen years.

One of Irving's married sisters was living in Birmingham, and his brother Peter was in Liverpool managing the business in which he was a partner. Soon after Washington's arrival, however, Peter fell ill, and the younger brother was obliged to take charge of affairs. He found a great many bills to pay, and very little money with which to pay them. He was now beginning to face some of the stern realities of life. He worked hard; but the black cloud of ruin came nearer and nearer. Other difficulties were added to those they already

had to face, and finally, in 1818, the brothers were obliged to go into bankruptcy.

It was now absolutely necessary that Irving should earn his living in some way. His brothers procured him an appointment at Washington; but to their astonishment he declined it and said he had made up his mind to live by his pen.

He immediately went to London and set to work on the "Sketch Book," and during the next dozen years wrote the greater number of his more famous works.

CHAPTER IX

FRIENDSHIP WITH SIR WALTER SCOTT

While he was worrying over the failure of his business, Irving was fortunate enough to make some distinguished literary friendships. He had already helped to introduce Thomas Campbell's works in the United States, and had written a biography of Campbell; one of the first things he did, therefore, after reaching Liverpool, was to go to see the English poet.

It was not until a little later that he became acquainted with Sir Walter Scott, who was the literary giant of those times. In 1813 Henry Brevoort, one of Irving's most intimate boyhood friends, had presented to Scott a copy of the "History of New York," and Scott had written a letter of thanks in which he said, "I have been employed these few evenings in reading the annals of Diedrich Knickerbocker aloud to Mrs. S. and two ladies who are our guests, and our sides have been absolutely sore with laughing. I think, too, there are passages which indicate that the author possesses powers of a different kind."

Irving, too, had been a great admirer of Scott's "Lady of the Lake." Campbell gave him a letter of introduction to the bard, and in a letter to his brother, Irving gives a delightful description of his visit to Abbotsford, Scott's home.

"On Saturday morning early," says he, "I took a chaise for Melrose; and on the way stopped at the gate of Abbotsford, and sent in my letter of introduction, with a request to know whether it would be agreeable for Mr. Scott to receive a visit

from me in the course of the day. The glorious old minstrel himself came limping to the gate, and took me by the hand in a way that made me feel as if we were old friends; in a moment I was seated at his hospitable board among his charming little family, and here I have been ever since. . . . I cannot tell you how truly I have enjoyed the hours I have passed here. They fly by too quickly, yet each is loaded with story, incident, or song; and when I consider the world of ideas, images, and impressions that have been crowded upon my mind since I have been here, it seems incredible that I should only have been two days at Abbotsford."

And here is Scott's impression of Irving: "When you see Tom Campbell," he writes to a friend, "tell him, with my best love, that I have to thank him for making me known to Mr. Washington Irving, who is one of the best and pleasantest acquaintances I have made this many a day."

When the "Sketch Book" was coming out in the United States, and Irving was thinking of publishing it in England, he received some advice

and assistance from Scott; and finally Scott persuaded the great English publisher Murray to take it up, even after that publisher had once declined it. On this occasion Irving wrote to a friend as follows:

“He (Scott) is a man that, if you knew, you would love; a right honest-hearted, generous-spirited being; without vanity, affectation, or assumption of any kind. He enters into every passing scene or passing pleasure with the interest and simple enjoyment of a child.”

CHAPTER X

“RIP VAN WINKLE”

Irving's most famous work is undoubtedly the “Sketch Book”; and of the thirty-two stories and essays in this volume, all Americans love best “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

After the failure of his business, when Irving saw that he must write something at once to meet his ordinary living expenses, he went up to Lon-

don and prepared several sketches, which he sent to his friend, Henry Brevoort, in New York. Among them was the story of Rip Van Winkle. This, with the other sketches, was printed in handsome form as the first number of a periodical, which was offered for sale at seventy-five cents. Though "The Sketch Book," as the periodical was called, professed to be edited by "Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.," every one knew that Washington Irving was the real author. In fact, the best story in the first number, "Rip Van Winkle," was represented to be a posthumous writing of Diedrich Knickerbocker, the author of the "History of New York."

There are few Americans who do not know the story of "Rip Van Winkle" by heart; for those who have not read the story, have at least seen the play in which Joseph Jefferson, the great actor, has made himself so famous.

Attached to the story is a note supposed to have been written by Diedrich Knickerbocker, which a careless reader might overlook, but which is an excellent introduction to the story. Says he:

"The story of Rip Van Winkle may seem incred-

ible to many, but nevertheless I give it my full belief, for I know the vicinity of our old Dutch settlements to have been very subject to marvelous events and appearances. Indeed, I have heard many stranger stories than this in the villages along the Hudson; all of which were too well authenticated to admit of a doubt. I have even talked with Rip Van Winkle myself, who, when I last saw him, was a very venerable old man, and so perfectly rational and consistent on every point, that I think no conscientious person could refuse to take this into the bargain; nay, I have seen a certificate on the subject, taken before a country justice, and signed with a cross, in the justice's own handwriting. The story, therefore, is beyond the possibility of doubt."

Rip was truly an original character. He had a shrewish wife who was always scolding him; and he seems to have deserved all the cross things she said to him, for he had "an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor—in other words, he was as lazy a fellow as you could find in all the country side."

Nevertheless, every one liked him, he was so good-natured. "He was a great favorite among all the good wives of the village, who took his part in all the family squabbles; and never failed whenever they talked those matters over in their evening gossipings, to lay all the blame on Dame Van Winkle. The children of the village, too, would shout with joy whenever he approached. He assisted at their sports, made their playthings, taught them to fly kites and shoot marbles, and told them long stories of ghosts, witches, and Indians. Whenever he went dodging about the village, he was surrounded by a troop of them, hanging on his skirts, clambering on his back, and playing a thousand tricks on him with impunity; and not a dog would bark at him throughout the neighborhood."

You can't find much fault with a man who is so well liked that even the dogs will not bark at him. You are reminded of Irving himself, who for so many years was so idle; and yet who, out of his very idleness, produced such charming stories.

"Rip Van Winkle," continues the narrative,

“was one of those happy mortals, of foolish, well-oiled dispositions, who take the world easy, eat white bread or brown, whichever can be got with least thought or trouble, and would rather starve on a penny than work for a pound. If left to himself, he would have whistled life away in perfect contentment; but his wife kept continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his carelessness, and the ruin he was bringing on his family.”

Rip Van Winkle ✓ This description is as perfect and as delightful as any in the English language. Any one who cannot enjoy this has no perception of human nature, and no love of humor in his composition. In time Rip discovered that his only escape from his termagant wife was to take his gun, and stroll off into the woods with his dog. “Here he would sometimes seat himself at the foot of a tree, and share the contents of his wallet with Wolf, with whom he sympathized as a fellow sufferer in persecution. ‘Poor Wolf,’ he would say, ‘thy mistress leads thee a dog’s life of it; but never mind, my lad, whilst I live thou shalt never want a friend to stand by thee!’ Wolf would wag his tail, look

wistfully into his master's face, and if dogs can feel pity, I verily believe he reciprocated with all his heart."

Rip is just the sort of fellow to have some sort of adventure, and we are not at all astonished when we find him helping the dwarf carry his keg of liquor up the mountain. The description of "the odd-looking personages playing at nine-pins" whom he finds on entering the amphitheater, is a perfect picture in words; for the truly great writer is a painter of pictures quite as much as the great artist.

"They were dressed in a quaint outlandish fashion; some wore short doublets, others jerkins, with long knives in their belts. Their visages, too, were peculiar: one had a large head, broad face, and small piggish eyes; the face of another seemed to consist entirely of nose, and was surmounted by a white sugar-loaf hat, set off with a little red cock's tail. They all had beards of various shapes and colors. There was one who seemed to be the commander. He was a stout old gentleman, with a weather-beaten countenance; he

wore a laced doublet, broad belt and hanger, high-crowned hat and feather, red stockings, and high-heeled shoes, with roses in them. . . . What seemed particularly odd to Rip was, that though these folks were evidently amusing themselves, yet they maintained the gravest faces, the most mysterious silence, and were, withal, the most melancholy party of pleasure he had ever witnessed. Nothing interrupted the stillness of the scene but the noise of the balls, which, whenever they were rolled, echoed along the mountains like rumbling peals of thunder."

But now comes a surprise. Rip indulges too freely in the contents of the keg and falls asleep. When he wakes he finds a rusty old gun beside him, and he whistles in vain for his dog. He goes back to the village; but everything and everybody is strange and changed. Putting his hand to his chin he finds that his beard has grown a foot. He has been sleeping twenty years.

But you must read the story for yourselves. It will bear reading many times, and each time you will find in it something to smile at and enjoy.

CHAPTER XI

LITERARY SUCCESS IN ENGLAND

“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” also purports to be written by Diedrich Knickerbocker, and it is only less famous than “Rip Van Winkle.” When he was a boy, Irving had gone hunting in Sleepy Hollow, which is not far from New York city; and in the latter part of his life he bought a low stone house there of Mr. Van Tassel and fitted it up for his bachelor home.

“The outline of this story,” says his nephew Pierre Irving, “had been sketched more than a year before* at Birmingham, after a conversation with his brother-in-law, Van Wart, who had been dwelling on some recollections of his early years at Tarrytown, and had touched upon a waggish fiction of one Brom Bones, a wild blade, who professed to fear nothing, and boasted of his having once met the devil on a return from a nocturnal frolic, and run a race with him for a bowl of milk punch. The imagination of the author suddenly

* That is, before it was finally written and published.

kindled over the recital, and in a few hours he had scribbled off the framework of his renowned story, and was reading it to his sister and her husband. He then threw it by until he went up to London, where it was expanded into the present legend."

No sooner had the first number of the "Sketch Book," as published in New York, come to England, than a periodical began reprinting it, and Irving heard that a publisher intended to bring it out in book form. That made him decide to publish it in England himself, and he did so at his own expense. The publisher soon failed, and by Scott's help, as already explained, Irving got his book into the hands of Murray. Murray finally gave him a thousand dollars for the copyright. But when it was published, it proved so very popular that Murray paid him five hundred more. From that time forward he received large sums for his writings, both in the United States and in England.

The "Sketch Book" was followed by "Bracebridge Hall," consisting of stories and sketches of

the same character; and later by the "Tales of a Traveller."

In the "Tales of a Traveller" we are most interested in "Buckthorne and his Friends," a series of English stories, with descriptions of literary life in London. Most famous of all is the account of a publishers' dinner, with a description of the carving partner sitting gravely at one end, with never a smile on his face, while at the other end of the table sits the laughing partner; and the poor authors are arranged at the table and are treated by the partners according to the number of editions their books have sold.

Irving's father was a Scotchman, and his mother was an Englishwoman; and one of his sisters and one of his brothers, as we have already learned, lived in England for many years. It is not strange, then, that England became to him a second home, and that many of his best stories and descriptions in the "Sketch Book," "Bracebridge Hall," and the "Tales of a Traveller" relate to English characters and scenes.

CHAPTER XII

IRVING GOES TO SPAIN

When Irving went to Liverpool in 1815, it was his intention to travel on the continent of Europe. As we have seen, business reasons made that impossible. But after the publication and success of the "Sketch Book" he was free. He was now certain of an income, and his reputation was so great that he attracted notice wherever he went.

In 1820, after having spent five years in England, he at last set out on his European journey. We cannot follow him in all his wanderings; but one country that he visited furnished him the materials for the most serious, and in one way the most important part of his literary work. This was Spain. Here he spent a great deal of time, returning again and again; and finally he was appointed United States minister to that country.

He first went to Spain to collect materials for the "Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus." This was a much more serious work than anything he had before undertaken. It was, unlike

the history of New York, a genuine investigation of facts derived from the musty old volumes of the libraries of Spanish monasteries and other ancient collections. It was a record of the life of the discoverer of America that was destined to remain the highest authority on that subject. Murray, the London publisher, paid him over fifteen thousand dollars for the English copyright alone.

In his study among the ruins of Spain, Irving found many other things which greatly interested him—legends, and tales of the Moors who had once ruled there, and of the ruined beauties of the Moorish palace of the Alhambra. His imagination was set on fire, he was delighted with the images of by-gone days of glittering pageantry which his fancy called up. Before his history of Columbus was finished, he began the writing of a book so precisely to his taste that he could not restrain himself until it was finished. This was the “Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada”—a true history, but one which reads more like a romance of the Middle Ages than a simple record of facts.

This was followed by four other books based on Spanish history and legend. It seemed as if Irving could never quite abandon this entrancing subject, for during the entire remainder of his life he went back to it constantly.

When his great history of the life of Columbus was published and proved its merit, Irving was honored in a way he had little expected in his more idle days. The Royal Society of Literature bestowed upon him one of two fifty-guinea* gold medals awarded annually, and the University of Oxford conferred the degree of LL.D.

The "Life of Columbus" was followed in 1831 by the "Voyages of the Companions of Columbus." In the following year Irving returned to the United States after an absence of seventeen years.

He was no longer an idle young man unable to fix his mind on any serious work; he had become the most famous of American men of letters. When he reached New York his countrymen hastened to heap honors upon him, and almost overwhelmed him with public attentions.

* Two hundred and fifty dollars.

CHAPTER XIII

"THE ALHAMBRA"

Just before Irving's return to the United States in 1832, he prepared for publication some sketches which he had made three or four years before while living for a few months in the ruins of the Alhambra, the ancient palace of the Moorish kings when they ruled the kingdom of Granada. Next to the stories of "Rip Van Winkle" and the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow," nothing that Irving has written has proved more popular than this volume of "The Alhambra;" and it has made the ancient ruin a place of pilgrimage for tourists in Europe ever since.

In this volume Irving not only describes in his own peculiarly charming manner his experiences in the halls of the Alhambra itself, but he gives many of the stories and legends of the place, most of which were told to him by Mateo Ximenes, a "son of the Alhambra," who acted as his guide. This is the way he came to secure Mateo's services: "At the gate were two or three ragged, super-

annuated soldiers, dozing on a stone bench, the successors of the Zegrís and the Abencerrages; while a tall, meagre valet, whose rusty-brown cloak was evidently intended to conceal the ragged state of his nether garments, was lounging in the sunshine and gossiping with the ancient sentinel on duty. He joined us as we entered the gate, and offered his services to show us the fortress.

“I have a traveler’s dislike to officious ciceroni, and did not altogether like the garb of the applicant.

“‘You are well acquainted with the place, I presume?’

“‘Nobody better; in fact, sir, I am a son of the Alhambra.’

“The common Spaniards have certainly a most poetical way of expressing themselves. ‘A son of the Alhambra!’ the appellation caught me at once; the very tattered garb of my new acquaintance assumed a dignity in my eyes. It was emblematic of the fortunes of the place, and befitted the progeny of a ruin.”

Accompanied by Mateo, the travelers pass on to

“the great vestibule, or porch of the gate,” which “is formed by an immense Arabian arch, of the horseshoe form, which springs to half the height of the tower. On the keystone of this arch, is engraven a gigantic hand. Within the vestibule, on the keystone of the portal, is sculptured, in like manner, a gigantic key,” emblems, say the learned, of Moorish superstition and religious belief.

“A different explanation of these emblems, however, was given by the legitimate son of Alhambra, and one more in unison with the notions of the common people, who attach something of mystery and magic to everything Moorish, and have all kinds of superstitions connected with this old Moslem fortress. According to Mateo, it was a tradition handed down from the oldest inhabitants, and which he had from his father and grandfather, that the hand and key were magical devices on which the fate of the Alhambra depended. The Moorish king who built it was a great magician, or, as some believed, had sold himself to the devil, and had laid the whole fortress under a magic spell. By this means it had

remained standing for several years, in defiance of storms and earthquakes, while almost all other buildings of the Moors had fallen to ruin and disappeared. This spell, the tradition went on to say, would last until the hand on the outer arch should reach down and grasp the key, when the whole pile would tumble to pieces, and all the treasures buried beneath it by the Moors would be revealed."

The travelers at once made application to the governor for permission to take up their residence in the palace of the Alhambra, and to their astonishment and delight he placed his own suite of apartments at their disposal, as he himself preferred to live in the city of Granada.

Irving's companion soon left him, and he remained sole lord of the palace. For a time he occupied the governor's rooms, which were very scantily furnished; but one day he came upon an eerie suite of rooms which he liked better. They were the rooms that had been fitted up for the beautiful Elizabetta of Farnese, the second wife of Philip V.

“The windows, dismantled and open to the wind and weather, looked into a charming little secluded garden, where an alabaster fountain sparkled among roses and myrtles, and was surrounded by orange and citron trees, some of which flung their branches into the chambers.” This was the garden of Lindaraxa.

“Four centuries had elapsed since the fair Lindaraxa passed away, yet how much of the fragile beauty of the scenes she inhabited remained! The garden still bloomed in which she delighted; the fountain still presented the crystal mirror in which her charms may once have been reflected; the alabaster, it is true, had lost its whiteness; the basin beneath, overrun with weeds, had become the lurking-place of the lizard, but there was something in the very decay that enhanced the interest of the scene, speaking as it did of the mutability, the irrevocable lot of man and all his works.”

In spite of warnings of the dangers of the place, Irving had his bed set up in the chamber beside this little garden. The first night was full of

frightful terrors. The garden was dark and sinister. "There was a slight rustling noise overhead; a bat suddenly emerged from a broken panel of the ceiling, flitting about the room and athwart my solitary lamp; and as the fateful bird almost flouted my face with his noiseless wing, the grotesque faces carved in high relief in the cedar ceiling, whence he had emerged, seemed to mope and mow at me.

"Rousing myself, and half smiling at this temporary weakness, I resolved to brave it out in the true spirit of the hero of the enchanted house," says the narrator. So taking his lamp in his hand he started out to make a midnight tour of the palace.

"My own shadow, cast upon the wall, began to disturb me," he continues. "The echoes of my own footsteps along the corridors made me pause and look around. I was traversing scenes fraught with dismal recollections. One dark passage led down to the mosque where Yusef, the Moorish monarch, the finisher of the Alhambra, had been basely murdered. In another place I trod the gal-

lery where another monarch had been struck down by the poniard of a relative whom he had thwarted in his love."

In a few nights, however, all this was changed; for the moon, which had been invisible, began to "roll in full splendor above the towers, pouring a flood of tempered light into every court and hall."

Says Irving, "I now felt the merit of the Arabic inscription on the walls—'How beauteous is this garden; where the flowers of the earth vie with the stars of heaven. What can compare with the vase of yon alabaster fountain filled with crystal water? Nothing but the moon in her fullness, shining in the midst of an unclouded sky!'

"On such heavenly nights," he goes on, "I would sit for hours at my window inhaling the sweetness of the garden, and musing on the checkered fortunes of those whose history was dimly shadowed out in the elegant memorials around. Sometimes, when all was quiet, and the clock from the distant cathedral of Granada struck the midnight hour, I have sallied out on another tour and

wandered over the whole building; but how different from my first tour! No longer dark and mysterious; no longer peopled with shadowy foes; no longer recalling scenes of violence and murder; all was open, spacious, beautiful; everything called up pleasing and romantic fancies; Lindaraxa once more walked in her garden; the gay chivalry of Moslem Granada once more glittered about the Court of Lions!

“Who can do justice to a moonlight night in such a climate and in such a place? The temperature of a summer night in Andalusia is perfectly ethereal. We seem lifted up into an ethereal atmosphere; we feel a serenity of soul, a buoyancy of spirits, an elasticity of frame, which render mere existence happiness. But when moonlight is added to all this, the effect is like enchantment. Under its plastic sway the Alhambra seems to regain its pristine glories. Every rent and chasm of time; every moldering tint and weather-stain is gone; the marble resumes its original whiteness; the long colonnades brighten in the moonbeams; the halls are illuminated with a soft-

ened radiance—we tread the enchanted palace of an Arabian tale!”

When one may journey with such a companion, through a whole volume of enchantment and legend and moonlight, it is not strange that “The Alhambra” has been one of the most widely read books ever produced by an American writer.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST YEARS OF IRVING'S LIFE

Some people have thought that Irving's long residence abroad indicated that he did not care so much as he should for his native land. But the truth is, the years after his return to the United States were among the happiest of his life; and more and more he felt that here was his home.

In 1835 he purchased, as I have already said, a small piece of land on the Hudson, on which stood the Van Tassel house mentioned in the “Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” It was an old Dutch cottage which had stood for so many years that it needed

to be almost entirely rebuilt; and Irving spent a considerable sum of money to fit it up as his bachelor quarters. First he shared it with one of his bachelor brothers; but soon he invited his brother Ebenezer to come with his family of girls to occupy it with him.

As the years went on, Irving took a delight in this cottage that can hardly be expressed. At first he called it "Wolfert's Roost"; afterward the name was changed to "Sunnyside," the name by which it is still known. Little by little he bought more land, he planted trees, and cultivated flowers and vegetables. At one time he boasts that he has become so proficient in gardening that he can raise his own fruits and vegetables at a cost to him of little more than twice the market price.

During this period several books were published, among them a description of a tour on the prairies which he took soon after his return from abroad; a collection of "Legends of the Conquest of Spain" which had been lying in his trunk since his residence in the Alhambra seven or eight years before; and "Astoria," a book of Western life and

adventure, describing John Jacob Astor's settlement on the Columbia river.

It was his wish to write a history of the conquest of Mexico, for which he had collected materials in Spain; but hearing that Prescott, the well-known American historian, was at work on the same subject, he gave it up to him.

The chief work of his later years was his "Life of George Washington." This was a great undertaking, of which he had often thought. He was actually at work on it for many years, and it was finally published only a short time before his death in 1859.

Irving's friends in the United States had long wished to give him some honor or distinction. He had been offered several public offices, among them the secretaryship of the navy; but he had declined them all. But in 1842, when Daniel Webster was secretary of state, Irving was nominated minister to Spain. It was Webster's idea, and he took great delight in carrying out his plan. After the notification of his nomination had been sent to Irving, and Webster thought time enough

had elapsed for him to receive it, he remarked to a friend: "Washington Irving is now the most astonished man in the city of New York."

When Irving heard the news he seemed to think less of the distinction conferred upon him than of the unhappiness of being once more banished from his home. "It is hard—very hard," he murmured, half to himself; "yet," he added, whimsically enough (says his nephew), being struck with the seeming absurdity of such a view, "I must try to bear it. *God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.*" Later, however, Irving speaks of this as the "crowning honor of his life."

He remained abroad four years, when he sent in his resignation, and hurried home to spend his last years at Sunnyside.

His first thought was to build an addition to his cottage, in order to have room for all his nieces and nephews. His enjoyment in every detail of the work was almost that of a boy. Though now an old man, he seemed as sunny and as gay as ever. Every one who knew him loved him; and all the people who now read his books must

have the same affectionate fondness for this most delightful of companions.

In the United States he met both Dickens and Thackeray. His friendship with Dickens was begun by a letter which Irving wrote to the great novelist, enthusiastically praising his work. At once Dickens replied in a long letter, fairly bubbling over with delight and friendship. Here is a part of it:

“There is no man in the world who could have given me the heartfelt pleasure you have. There is no living writer, and there are very few among the dead, whose approbation I should feel so proud to earn. And with everything you have written upon my shelves, and in my thoughts, and in my heart of hearts, I may honestly and truly say so.

“I have been so accustomed to associate you with my pleasantest and happiest thoughts, and with my leisure hours, that I rush at once into full confidence with you, and fall, as it were, naturally, and by the very laws of gravity, into your open arms. . . . My dear Washington Irving, I cannot thank you enough for your cordial and



or tell you what deep and lasting gratification it has given me. I hope to have many letters from you, and to exchange a frequent correspondence. I send this to say so. . . .

“Always your faithful friend,

“CHARLES DICKENS.”

The warmth of feeling which Dickens displays on receiving his first letter from Irving, we must all feel when we have become as well acquainted with Irving's works as Dickens was.

Washington Irving died on the 28th of November, 1859, at his dear Sunnyside, and now lies buried in a cemetery upon a hill near by, in a beautiful spot overlooking the Hudson river and Sleepy Hollow.

NOTE.—The thanks of the publishers are due to G. P. Putnam's Sons for kind permission to use extracts from the Works of Washington Irving.