

WASHINGTON IRVING

1783 – 1859

Washington Irving was the United States' first literary celebrity, and among the first American writers to be widely read and respected—including in Britain, where critics had long scoffed at literature in America. Over the course of his highly varied career, Irving earned fame for his urbane satire and ambitious, pseudohistorical parody; for his small-scale literary portraits of rural New York; and for works of nonfiction that capitalized on the emerging cultural importance of the American “frontier.” As an important advocate for writers' financial rights, and one of the first Americans to attain financial success through his writings alone, Irving played a vital role in giving shape to an American literary market—and stature to a national literature that was struggling for recognition.

Born to English and Scottish parents in Manhattan in 1783, Irving was raised primarily in the growing metropolis, but also experienced the landscapes and cultural heritage of rural Dutch New York, whose influence would be seen in some of his earliest writings. Though he was initially pushed toward a career in the law, Irving had by his early twenties established a local reputation as a satirist and occasional theater critic; he wrote a popular series of letters under the pen name of Jonathan Oldstyle for New York's *Morning Chronicle* in 1802, and from 1807 to 1808 collaborated with his brother William and friend James Kirke Paulding on the periodical *Salmagundi*, which was among the first publications to refer to New York City by the nickname “Gotham.”

By 1809, Irving was piecing together his first major book, a unified work that quickly evolved from an extension of the satirical *Salmagundi* project into a work of much broader literary and cultural scope. Published late that year, *A History of New York, from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* was a lively parody of American historical publications. Written in the persona of the elderly and rather unreliable Dutch historian Diedrich Knickerbocker, the book's account of New York's colonial history was composed of both farce and fact; though parodic in tone, the text was nevertheless based on serious archival research on Irving's part, and worked to feed the growing post-revolutionary hunger of Euro-Americans for an account of their national heritage. In this sense, Irving's *History* responded to the appeals of writers like Charles Brockden Brown, who had in the *American Review* of 1802 called for an American historian who could “vie with those who have so recently shone in Great-Britain.” The *History* became the most lucrative single literary work yet published in the United States. Abroad, its humor won the admiration (and won Irving the friendship) of Scottish Romantic poet Sir Walter Scott, who claimed the volume had given him an “uncommon degree of entertainment,” and who favorably compared Irving's writing to that of the famous satirists Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne. The immensely popular Scott would prove an important influence on Irving's later fiction.

Irving's next publication, written while he was living abroad in England, constituted a considerable change in his literary vision. The stories and sketches that made up *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819–20) were written under yet another pseudonym. Lightly comic in tone, they also exhibited Irving's increasingly romantic sensibility and interest in European myth. Much of the text was inspired by Irving's recent readings of German folktales, to which he had been introduced by Scott; “Rip Van Winkle,” for example, is an Americanized adaptation of the German tale “Peter Klaus.”

The *Sketch Book* was published in the United States between 1819 and 1820 to extraordinary and lasting acclaim; years later, American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would call the collection his



“first book,” “the one book among all others” that first captivated him as a child. The *Sketch Book* was soon re-published in Britain by the prestigious publisher John Murray. In an age of rampant and unchecked book piracy—especially when it came to international publication—Irving established a copyright in England and subsequently became one of the first American authors to make a profit from books printed abroad. The English volumes of the *Sketch Book* contained a number of both major and minor revisions, some likely designed to capitalize on the new literary market; particularly noteworthy were two added sketches depicting and commenting on Native American culture and life. In England, the *Sketch Book* was admired by writers such as Lord Byron and Charles Dickens; Irving’s numerous tales of English Christmas traditions contributed to a tradition that would later influence Dickens’s famous Christmas tales. Overall, indeed, the *Sketch Book*’s focus was almost overwhelmingly English—yet its most popularly enduring stories, “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” have acquired near-mythic status as quintessentially American fables.

Irving’s next two books, *Bracebridge Hall* (1822) and *Tales of a Traveller* (1824), were also written under the Geoffrey Crayon pseudonym and inspired by Irving’s European travels. He then wrote *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828) while on a political assignment in Madrid. Though a rather fanciful account of the explorer’s life, the work long remained a standard educational text in American schools; as such, it contributed to an enduring historical misconception: the notion that Europeans had believed the earth to be flat until Columbus’s voyage had proved them wrong.

After seventeen years abroad Irving finally returned to the United States and was recognized there as a celebrity. He embarked on a tour of the western regions of the country, which provided the raw material for three lucrative volumes of travel writing. These books—*A Tour on the Prairies* (1833), *Astoria: Or, Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (1836), and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (1837)—represent another significant shift in Irving’s literary vision and cultural focus. Irving encourages his readers to take excursions into the west such as he had done. He wrote, in *A Tour*: “We send our youth abroad to grow luxurious and effeminate in Europe; it appears to me that a previous tour on the prairies would be more likely to produce that manliness, simplicity, and self-dependence most in unison with our political institutions.” These books both contributed to and were shaped by the growing culture of western expansion—exemplified in fiction by the works of James Fenimore Cooper—with *A Tour* influentially describing the frontier as a place “between civilized and savage life.” Though Irving shows some sympathy for the struggles of Indigenous Americans, he nevertheless portrays western expansion—reliant on the genocidal Indian Removal Act—in broadly romantic terms.

The travel volumes proved lucrative, and allowed Irving to purchase property in the region that has since 1996 been named Sleepy Hollow in his honor. He spent the last two decades of his life writing several biographical works, including a life of Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith (whose *Citizen of the World* [1760–61] Irving had admired as a child), and the substantial *Life of George Washington* (1855–59). Irving died a few months after the release of the latter work’s final volume, and was buried in the cemetery at Sleepy Hollow. Upon Irving’s death, the English novelist William Makepeace Thackeray described him as “the first ambassador whom the New World of Letters sent to the Old.” In that so-called New World, Irving’s work had bolstered and brought life to American literature as a whole, and the American short story in particular. Though American authors would continue throughout much of the nineteenth century to struggle against a literary market that privileged British writing, Irving helped open the door to the idea that American writers could be worth reading. His depictions of the American landscape, from the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains to Oregon, helped define a whole set of romantic associations with those regions in America’s popular imagination.

NOTE ON THE TEXTS: Unless otherwise noted, the texts of the writings presented here have been prepared based on their first American editions, the 1809 edition of *A History of New York*, and the 1819–20 edition of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized in accordance with the practices of this anthology.



from *A History of New York, from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, by *Diedrich Knickerbocker*

FROM CHAPTER 5¹

... Thus were the European worthies who first discovered America, clearly entitled to the soil; and not only entitled to the soil, but likewise to the eternal thanks of these infidel savages, for having come so far, endured so many perils by sea and land, and taken such unwearied pains, for no other purpose under heaven but to improve their forlorn, uncivilized and heathenish condition—for having made them acquainted with the comforts of life, such as gin, rum, brandy, and the small-pox; for having introduced among them the light of religion, and finally—for having hurried them out of the world, to enjoy its reward!

But as argument is never so well understood by us selfish mortals, as when it comes home to ourselves, and as I am particularly anxious that this question should be put to rest forever, I will suppose a parallel case, by way of arousing the candid attention of my readers.

Let us suppose then, that the inhabitants of the moon, by astonishing advancement in science, and by profound insight into that ineffable lunar philosophy, the mere flickerings of which, have of late years, dazzled the feeble optics, and addled the shallow brains of the good people of our globe—let us suppose, I say, that the inhabitants of the moon, by these means, had arrived at such a command of their *energies*, such an enviable state of *perfectibility*, as to control the elements, and navigate the boundless regions of space. Let us suppose a roving crew of these soaring philosophers, in the course of an aerial voyage of discovery among the stars, should chance to alight upon this outlandish planet.

And here I beg my readers will not have the impertinence to smile, as is too frequently the fault of volatile readers, when perusing the grave speculations of philosophers. I am far from indulging in any sportive vein

at present, nor is the supposition I have been making so wild as many may deem it. It has long been a very serious and anxious question with me, and many a time, and oft, in the course of my overwhelming cares and contrivances for the welfare and protection of this my native planet, have I lain awake whole nights, debating in my mind whether it was most probable we should first discover and civilize the moon, or the moon discover and civilize our globe. Neither would the prodigy of sailing in the air or cruising among the stars be a whit more astonishing and incomprehensible to us, than was the European mystery of navigating floating castles through the world of waters, to the simple savages. We have already discovered the art of coasting along the aerial shores of our planet, by means of balloons, as the savages had, of venturing along their sea coasts in canoes; and the disparity between the former, and the aerial vehicles of the philosophers from the moon, might not be greater, than that, between the bark canoes of the savages, and the mighty ships of their discoverers. I might here pursue an endless chain of very curious, profound and unprofitable speculations; but as they would be unimportant to my subject, I abandon them to my reader, particularly if he be a philosopher, as matters well worthy his attentive consideration.

To return then to my supposition—let us suppose that the aerial visitants I have mentioned, possessed of vastly superior knowledge to ourselves; that is to say, possessed of superior knowledge in the art of extermination—riding on Hippogriffs, defended with impenetrable armour—armed with concentrated sun beams, and provided with vast engines, to hurl enormous moon stones: in short, let us suppose them, if our vanity will permit the supposition, as superior to us in knowledge, and consequently in power, as the Europeans were to the Indians, when they first discovered them. All this is very possible, it is only our self-sufficiency, that makes us think otherwise; and I warrant the poor savages, before they had any knowledge of the white men, armed in all the terrors of glittering steel and tremendous gun-powder, were as perfectly convinced that they themselves, were the wisest, the most virtuous, powerful and perfect of created beings, as are, at this present moment, the lordly inhabitants of old England, the volatile populace of

¹ The full text of this chapter appears in the website component of this anthology.

France, or even the self-satisfied citizens of this most enlightened republic.

Let us suppose, moreover, that the aerial voyagers, finding this planet to be nothing but a howling wilderness, inhabited by us, poor savages and wild beasts, shall take formal possession of it, in the name of his most gracious and philosophic excellency, the man in the moon. Finding however, that their numbers are incompetent to hold it in complete subjection, on account of the ferocious barbarity of its inhabitants; they shall take our worthy President, the King of England, the Emperor of Haiti, the mighty little Bonaparte, and the great King of Bantam,¹ and returning to their native planet, shall carry them to court, as were the Indian chiefs led about as spectacles in the courts of Europe.

Then making such obeisance as the etiquette of the court requires, they shall address the puissant man in the moon, in, as near as I can conjecture, the following terms:

“Most serene and mighty Potentate, whose dominions extend as far as eye can reach, who rideth on the Great Bear,² useth the sun as a looking glass and maintaineth unrivalled control over tides, madmen, and sea-crabs. We thy liege subjects have just returned from a voyage of discovery, in the course of which we have landed and taken possession of that obscure little scurvy planet, which thou beholdest rolling at a distance. The five uncouth monsters, which we have brought into this august presence, were once very important chiefs among their fellow savages; for the inhabitants of the newly discovered globe are totally destitute of the common attributes of humanity, inasmuch as they carry their heads upon their shoulders, instead of under their arms—have two eyes instead of one—are utterly destitute of tails, and of a variety of unseemly complexions, particularly of horrible whiteness—whereas all the inhabitants of the moon are pea green!

¹ *Emperor of Haiti* Following the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), the First Empire of Haiti was ruled by Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines until his assassination in 1806. By the time Irving was writing the *History*, however, Haiti was a republic; *Bantam* Sultanate in present-day Indonesia.

² *Great Bear* Constellation also colloquially known as the Big Dipper.

“We have moreover found these miserable savages sunk into a state of the utmost ignorance and depravity, every man shamelessly living with his own wife, and rearing his own children, instead of indulging in that community of wives, enjoined by the law of nature, as expounded by the philosophers of the moon. In a word they have scarcely a gleam of true philosophy among them, but are, in fact, utter heretics, ignoramuses and barbarians. Taking compassion therefore on the sad condition of these sublunary wretches, we have endeavoured, while we remained on their planet, to introduce among them the light of reason—and the comforts of the moon. We have treated them to mouthfuls of moonshine and draughts of nitrous oxide, which they swallowed with incredible voracity, particularly the females; and we have likewise endeavoured to instil into them the precepts of lunar Philosophy. We have insisted upon their renouncing the contemptible shackles of religion and common sense, and adoring the profound, omnipotent, and all perfect energy, and the ecstatic, immutable, immovable perfection. But such was the unparalleled obstinacy of these wretched savages, that they persisted in cleaving to their wives and adhering to their religion, and absolutely set at naught the sublime doctrines of the moon—nay, among other abominable heresies they even went so far as blasphemously to declare, that this ineffable planet was made of nothing more nor less than green cheese!”

At these words, the great man in the moon (being a very profound philosopher) shall fall into a terrible passion, and possessing equal authority over things that do not belong to him, as did whilome³ his holiness the Pope, shall forthwith issue a formidable bull, specifying “That—whereas a certain crew of Lunatics⁴ have lately discovered and taken possession of that little dirty planet, called *the earth*—and that whereas it is inhabited by none but a race of two legged animals, that carry their heads on their shoulders instead of under their arms; cannot talk the Lunatic language; have two eyes instead of one; are destitute of tails, and of a horrible whiteness, instead of pea green—therefore

³ *whilome* Once; formerly.

⁴ *Lunatics* Punning on the Latin word for moon, “Luna.” (In its original use, the word “lunatic” referenced those whose insanity was affected by the lunar cycles.)

and for a variety of other excellent reasons—they are considered incapable of possessing any property in the planet they infest, and the right and title to it are confirmed to its original discoverers. And furthermore, the colonists who are now about to depart to the aforesaid planet, are authorized and commanded to use every means to convert these infidel savages from the darkness of Christianity, and make them thorough and absolute Lunatics.”

In consequence of this benevolent bull, our philosophic benefactors go to work with hearty zeal. They seize upon our fertile territories, scourge us from our rightful possessions, relieve us from our wives, and when we are unreasonable enough to complain, they will turn upon us and say—miserable barbarians! ungrateful wretches! Have we not come thousands of miles to improve your worthless planet—have we not fed you with moon shine—have we not intoxicated you with nitrous oxide—does not our moon give you light every night—and have you the baseness to murmur, when we claim a pitiful return for all these benefits? But finding that we not only persist in absolute contempt to their reasoning and disbelief in their philosophy, but even go so far as daringly to defend our property, their patience shall be exhausted, and they shall resort to their superior powers of argument—hunt us with hippogriffs, transfix us with concentrated sun-beams, demolish our cities with moonstones; until having by main force, converted us to the true faith, they shall graciously permit us to exist in the torrid deserts of Arabia, or the frozen regions of Lapland,¹ there to enjoy the blessings of civilization and the charms of lunar philosophy—in much the same manner as the reformed and enlightened savages of this country, are kindly suffered to inhabit the inhospitable forests of the north, or the impenetrable wilderness of South America.

Thus have I clearly proved, and I hope strikingly illustrated, the right of the early colonists to the possession of this country—and thus is this gigantic question, completely knocked in the head—so having manfully surmounted all obstacles, and subdued all opposition, what remains but that I should forthwith conduct my impatient and wayworn readers, into the renowned city, which we have so long been in a

manner besieging. But hold, before I proceed another step, I must pause to take breath and recover from the excessive fatigue I have undergone, in preparing to begin this most accurate of histories. And in this I do but imitate the example of the celebrated Hans Von Dunderbottom, who took a start of three miles for the purpose of jumping over a hill, but having been himself out of breath by the time he reached the foot, sat himself quietly down for a few moments to blow, and then walked over it at his leisure.

—1809

*The Wife*²

The treasures of the deep are not so precious
As are the concealed comforts of a man
Lock'd up in woman's love. I scent the air
Of blessings, when I come but near the house.
What a delicious breath marriage sends forth—
The violet bed's not sweeter!³

MIDDLETON

I have often had occasion to remark the fortitude with which women sustain the most overwhelming reverses of fortune. Those disasters which break down the spirit of a man, and prostrate him in the dust, seem to call forth all the energies of the softer sex, and give such intrepidity and elevation to their character, that at times it approaches to sublimity. Nothing can be more touching than to behold a soft and tender female, who had been all weakness and dependence, and alive to every trivial roughness while treading the prosperous paths of life, suddenly rising in mental force, to be the comforter and supporter of her husband, under misfortune, and abiding, with unshrinking firmness, the bitterest blasts of adversity.

As the vine which has long twined its graceful foliage around the oak, and been lifted by it into sunshine, will, when the hardy plant is rifted by the thunderbolt, cling round it with its caressing tendrils, and bind

² Irving placed this tale immediately before “Rip Van Winkle” in the first American edition of *The Sketch Book* (1819).

³ *The treasures ... not sweeter!* See Thomas Middleton's Jacobean play *Women Beware Women* 3.1 (1657).

¹ *Lapland* Northernmost region of Finland.

up its shattered boughs; so is it beautifully ordered by Providence, that woman, who is the mere dependant and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity, winding herself into the rugged recesses of his nature, tenderly supporting the drooping head, and binding up the broken heart.

I was once congratulating a friend, who had around him a blooming family, knit together in the strongest affection. "I can wish you no better lot," said he, with enthusiasm, "than to have a wife and children—if you are prosperous, there they are to share your prosperity; if otherwise, there they are to comfort you." And, indeed, I have observed that married men falling into misfortune, are more apt to retrieve their situation in the world than single men; partly because they are more stimulated to exertion by the necessities of the helpless and beloved beings who depend upon them for subsistence; but chiefly because their spirits are soothed and relieved by domestic endearments, and their self-respect kept alive by finding, that though all abroad is darkness and humiliation, yet there is still a little world of love, of which they are monarchs. Whereas a single man is apt to run to waste and self neglect; to fancy himself lonely and abandoned, and his heart to fall to ruin like some deserted mansion, for want of an inhabitant.

These observations call to mind a little domestic story, of which I was once a witness. My intimate friend, Leslie, had married a beautiful and accomplished girl, who had been brought up in the midst of fashionable life. She had, it is true, no fortune, but that of my friend was ample; and he delighted in the anticipation of indulging her in every elegant pursuit, and administering to those delicate tastes and fancies, that spread a kind of witchery about the sex. "Her life," said he, "shall be like a fairy tale."

The very difference in their characters produced an harmonious combination: he was of a romantic, and somewhat serious, cast; she was all life and gladness. I have often noticed the mute rapture with which he would gaze upon her in company, of which her sprightly powers made her the delight; and how, in the midst of applause, her eye would still turn to him, as if there alone she sought favour and acceptance. When leaning on his arm, her slender form contrasted finely

with his tall, manly person. The fond confiding air with which she looked up to him, seemed to call forth a flush of triumphant pride and cherishing tenderness, as if he doted on his lovely burden for its very helplessness. Never did a couple set forward on the flowery path of early and well-suited marriage with a fairer prospect of felicity.

It was the mishap of my friend, however, to have embarked his fortune in large speculations; and he had not been married many months, when, by a succession of sudden disasters, it was swept from him, and he found himself reduced almost to penury. For a time he kept his situation to himself, and went about with a haggard countenance, and a breaking heart. His life was but a protracted agony; and what rendered it more insupportable, was the necessity of keeping up a smile in the presence of his wife; for he could not bring himself to overwhelm her with the news. She saw, however, with the quick eyes of affection, that all was not well with him. She marked his altered looks and stifled sighs, and was not to be deceived by his sickly and vapid attempts at cheerfulness. She tasked all her sprightly powers and tender blandishments to win him back to happiness; but she only drove the arrow deeper into his soul. The more he saw cause to love her, the more torturing was the thought that he was soon to make her wretched. A little while, thought he, and the smile will vanish from that cheek—the song will die away from those lips—the lustre of those eyes will be quenched with sorrow; and the happy heart which now beats lightly in that bosom, will be weighed down, like mine, by the cares and miseries of the world.

At length he came to me one day, and related his whole situation in a tone of the deepest despair. When I had heard him through, I inquired, "does your wife know all this?" At the question he burst into an agony of tears. "For God's sake!" cried he, "if you have any pity on me, don't mention my wife; it is the thought of her that drives me almost to madness!"

"And why not?" said I. "She must know it sooner or later: you cannot keep it long from her, and the intelligence may break upon her in a more startling manner, than if imparted by yourself; for the accents of those we love soften the harshest tidings. Besides, you are depriving yourself of the comforts of her sympathy; and not merely that, but also endangering the only

bond that can keep hearts together—an unreserved community of thought and feeling. She will soon perceive that something is secretly preying upon your mind; and true love will not brook reserve, but feels undervalued and outraged, when even the sorrows of those it loves are concealed from it.”

“Oh, but, my friend! to think what a blow I am to give to all her future prospects—how I am to strike her very soul to the earth, by telling her that her husband is a beggar! that she is to forego all the elegancies of life—all the pleasures of society—to shrink with me into indigence and obscurity! To tell her that I have dragged her down from the sphere in which she might have continued to move in constant brightness—the light of every eye—the admiration of every heart! How can she bear poverty? she has been brought up in all the refinements of opulence. How can she bear neglect? she has been the idol of society. Oh, it will break her heart, it will break her heart!”

I saw his grief was eloquent, and I let it have its flow; for sorrow relieves itself by words. When his paroxysm had subsided, and he had relapsed into moody silence, I resumed the subject gently, and urged him to break his situation at once to his wife. He shook his head mournfully, but positively.

“But how are you to keep it from her? It is necessary she should know it, that you may take the steps proper to the alteration of your circumstances. You must change your style of living—nay,” observing a pang to pass across his countenance, “don’t let that afflict you. I am sure you have never placed your happiness in outward show—you have yet friends, warm friends, who will not think the worse of you for being less splendidly lodged: and surely it does not require a palace to be happy with Mary—”

“I could be happy with her,” cried he convulsively, “in a hovel! I could go down with her into poverty and the dust! I could—I could—God bless her! God bless her!” cried he, bursting into a transport of grief and tenderness.

“And believe me, my friend,” said I, stepping up, and grasping him warmly by the hand, “believe me, she can be the same with you. Aye, more: it will be a source of pride and triumph to her—it will call forth all the latent energies and fervent sympathies of her nature; for she will rejoice to prove that she loves you for

yourself. There is in every true woman’s heart a spark of heavenly fire, which lies dormant in the broad daylight of prosperity; but which kindles up, and beams and blazes in the dark hour of adversity. No man knows what the wife of his bosom is—no man knows what a ministering angel she is—until he has gone with her through the fiery trials of this world.”

There was something in the earnestness of my manner, and the figurative style of my language, that caught the excited imagination of Leslie. I knew the auditor I had to deal with; and following up the impression I had made, I finished by persuading him to go home and unburden his sad heart to his wife.

I must confess, notwithstanding all I had said, I felt some little solicitude for the result. Who can calculate on the fortitude of one whose whole life has been a round of pleasures? Her gay spirits might revolt at the dark, downward path of low humility, suddenly pointed out before her, and might cling to the sunny regions in which they had hitherto revelled. Besides, ruin in fashionable life is accompanied by so many galling mortifications, to which, in other ranks, it is a stranger. In short, I could not meet Leslie, the next morning, without trepidation. He had made the disclosure.

“And how did she bear it?”

“Like an angel! It seemed rather to be a relief to her mind, for she threw her arms around my neck, and asked if this was all that had lately made me unhappy—but, poor girl,” added he, “she cannot realize the change we must undergo. She has no idea of poverty but in the abstract: she has only read of it in poetry, where it is allied to love. She feels as yet no privation: she experiences no want of accustomed conveniences or elegancies. When we come practically to experience its sordid cares, its paltry wants, its petty humiliations—then will be the real trial.”

“But,” said I, “now that you have got over the severest task, that of breaking it to her, the sooner you let the world into the secret the better. The disclosure may be mortifying; but then it is a single misery, and soon over; whereas you otherwise suffer it, in anticipation, every hour in the day. It is not poverty, so much as pretence, that harasses a ruined man—the struggle between a proud mind and an empty purse—the keeping up a hollow show that must soon come to an end.

Have the courage to appear poor, and you disarm poverty of its sharpest sting." On this point I found Leslie perfectly prepared. He had no false pride himself, and as to his wife, she was only anxious to conform to their altered fortunes.

Some days afterwards he called upon me in the evening. He had disposed of his dwelling house, and taken a small cottage in the country, a few miles from town. He had been busied all day in sending out furniture. The new establishment required few articles, and those of the simplest kind. All the splendid furniture of his late residence had been sold, excepting his wife's harp. That, he said, was too closely associated with the idea of herself; it belonged to the little story of their loves; for some of the sweetest moments of their courtship were those when he had leaned over that instrument, and listened to the melting tones of her voice. I could not but smile at this instance of romantic gallantry in a doting husband.

He was now going out to the cottage, where his wife had been all day, superintending its arrangement. My feelings had become strongly interested in the progress of this family story, and as it was a fine evening, I offered to accompany him.

He was wearied with the fatigues of the day, and as we walked out, fell into a fit of gloomy musing.

"Poor Mary!" at length broke, with a heavy sigh, from his lips.

"And what of her," asked I, "has any thing happened to her?"

"What," said he, darting an impatient glance, "is it nothing to be reduced to this paltry situation—to be caged in a miserable cottage—to be obliged to toil almost in the menial concerns of her wretched habitation?"

"Has she then repined at the change?"

"Repined! she has been nothing but sweetness and good humour. Indeed, she seems in better spirits than I have ever known her; she has been to me all love, and tenderness, and comfort!"

"Admirable girl!" exclaimed I. "You call yourself poor, my friend; you never were so rich—you never knew the boundless treasures of excellence you possessed in that woman."

"Oh, but my friend, if this first meeting at the cottage were over, I think I could then be comfortable.

But this is her first day of real experience. She has been introduced into a humble dwelling—she has been employed all day in arranging its miserable equipments—she has for the first time known the fatigues of domestic employment—she has for the first time looked around her on a home destitute of everything elegant, and almost convenient;¹ and may now be sitting down, exhausted and spiritless, brooding over a prospect of future poverty."

There was a degree of probability in this picture that I could not gainsay, so we walked on in silence.

After turning from the main road, up a narrow lane, so thickly shaded by forest trees, as to give it a complete air of seclusion, we came in sight of the cottage. It was humble enough in its appearance for the most pastoral poet; and yet it had a pleasing rural look. A wild vine had overrun one end with a profusion of foliage; a few trees threw their branches gracefully over it; and I observed several pots of flowers tastefully disposed about the door, and on the grass plot in front. A small wicket gate opened upon a footpath that wound through some shrubbery to the door. Just as we approached, we heard the sound of music—Leslie grasped my arm; we paused and listened. It was Mary's voice, in a style of the most touching simplicity, singing a little air² of which her husband was peculiarly fond.

I felt Leslie's hand tremble on my arm. He stepped forward, to hear more distinctly. His step made a noise on the gravel walk. A bright beautiful face glanced out at the window, and vanished—a light footstep was heard—and Mary came tripping forth to meet us. She was in a pretty rural dress of white; a few wild flowers were twisted in her fine hair; a fresh bloom was on her cheek; her whole countenance beamed with smiles—I had never seen her look so lovely.

"My dear George," cried she, "I am so glad you are come; I've been watching and watching for you; and running down the lane, and looking out for you. I've set out a table under a beautiful tree behind the cottage; and I've been gathering some of the most delicious strawberries, for I know you are fond of them—and we have such excellent cream—and every thing is so

¹ *destitute of ... convenient* Lacking not only in things of elegance, but also in everyday conveniences.

² *air* Style of song, often played on the piano at polite gatherings.

sweet and still here—Oh!” said she, putting her arm within his, and looking up brightly in his face, “Oh, we shall be so snug!”

Poor Leslie was overcome.—He caught her to his bosom—he folded his arms around her—he kissed her again and again—he could not speak, but the tears gushed into his eyes. And he has often assured me, that though the world has since gone prosperously with him, and his life has been a happy one, yet never has he experienced a moment of such unutterable felicity.—1819

Rip Van Winkle

[The following Tale was found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker, an old gentleman of New York, who was very curious in the Dutch history of the province,¹ and the manners of the descendants from its primitive settlers. His historical researches, however, did not lay so much among books, as among men; for the former are lamentably scanty on his favourite topics; whereas he found the old burghers,² and still more, their wives, rich in that legendary lore, so invaluable to true history. Whenever, therefore, he happened upon a genuine Dutch family, snugly shut up in its low-roofed farm house, under a spreading sycamore, he looked upon it as a little clasped volume of black-letter,³ and studied it with the zeal of a bookworm.

The result of all these researches was a history of the province, during the reign of the Dutch governors, which he published some years since. There have been various opinions as to the literary character of his work, and, to tell the truth, it is not a whit better than it should be. Its chief merit is its scrupulous accuracy, which, indeed, was a little questioned, on its first

¹ *Diedrich Knickerbocker* Allusion to the fictional author of Irving's parody *History of New York* (1809); *curious* interested; *Dutch history ... province* In the early to mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic colonized land on the east coast of North America, calling this territory New Netherland. The territory was ceded to Britain in 1664 and renamed the Province of New York, with the town of New Amsterdam also being named New York.

² *burghers* Citizens.

³ *black-letter* Gothic-style typeface used in early printed material; black-letter books were regarded as valuable and important, and therefore often fitted with clasps and locks.

appearance, but has since been completely established; and it is now admitted into all historical collections, as a book of unquestionable authority.

The old gentleman died shortly after the publication of his work, and now, that he is dead and gone, it cannot do much harm to his memory, to say, that his time might have been much better employed in weightier labours. He, however, was apt to ride his hobby his own way; and though it did now and then kick up the dust a little in the eyes of his neighbours, and grieve the spirit of some friends, for whom he felt the truest deference and affection; yet his errors and follies are remembered “more in sorrow than in anger,”⁴ and it begins to be suspected, that he never intended to injure or offend. But however his memory may be appreciated by critics, it is still held dear among many folk, whose good opinion is well worth having; particularly certain biscuit bakers, who have gone so far as to imprint his likeness on their new year cakes, and have thus given him a chance for immortality, almost equal to being stamped on a Waterloo medal, or a Queen Anne's farthing.⁵

Rip Van Winkle

A Posthumous Writing of Diedrich Knickerbocker

By Woden, God of Saxons,
From whence comes Wensday, that is Wodensday,
Truth is a thing that ever I will keep
Unto thylke day in which I creep into
My sepulchre—

CARTWRIGHT⁶

⁴ [Irving's note] Vide the excellent discourse of G.C. Verplanck, Esq. before the New-York Historical Society. [Gulian C. Verplanck was a politician, writer, and founder of the New York Historical Society, who had disparaged Irving's parodic *History of New York*; also see Horatio's description of the King's ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* 1.2.232: “A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.”]

⁵ *Waterloo medal ... Anne's farthing* Waterloo medals were widely distributed to those who fought in the battles leading up to the defeat of Napoleon in 1815; Queen Anne's farthings, small coins worth a quarter of a penny, were only accidentally circulated after the Queen's death in 1714, and then incorrectly believed to be highly valuable.

⁶ *By Woden ... CARTWRIGHT* Excerpt from William Cartwright's 1635 play *The Ordinary* (3.1.1050–54), lines spoken by a pedantic antiquarian named Moth; *Woden* Foremost god in Norse mythology.

Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson¹ must remember the Kaatskill mountains. They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains, and they are regarded by all the good wives, far and near, as perfect barometers. When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapours about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory.

At the foot of these fairy mountains, the voyager may have descried² the light smoke curling up from a village, whose shingle roofs gleam among the trees, just where the blue tints of the upland melt away into the fresh green of the nearer landscape. It is a little village of great antiquity, having been founded by some of the Dutch colonists, in the early times of the province, just about the beginning of the government of the good Peter Stuyvesant³ (may he rest in peace!), and there were some of the houses of the original settlers standing within a few years, with lattice windows, gable fronts surmounted with weathercocks, and built of small yellow bricks brought from Holland.

In that same village, and in one of these very houses (which, to tell the precise truth, was sadly time-worn and weather-beaten), there lived many years since, while the country was yet a province of Great Britain, a simple, good-natured fellow, of the name of Rip Van Winkle. He was a descendant of the Van Winkles who figured so gallantly in the chivalrous days of Peter Stuyvesant, and accompanied him to the siege of Fort

Christina.⁴ He inherited, however, but little of the martial character of his ancestors. I have observed that he was a simple, good-natured man; he was moreover a kind neighbour, and an obedient, henpecked husband. Indeed, to the latter circumstance might be owing that meekness of spirit which gained him such universal popularity; for those men are most apt to be obsequious and conciliating abroad, who are under the discipline of shrews⁵ at home. Their tempers, doubtless, are rendered pliant and malleable in the fiery furnace of domestic tribulation, and a curtain lecture⁶ is worth all the sermons in the world for teaching the virtues of patience and long suffering. A termagant⁷ wife may, therefore, in some respects, be considered a tolerable blessing; and if so, Rip Van Winkle was thrice blessed.

Certain it is, that he was a great favourite among all the good wives of the village, who, as usual with the amiable sex, took his part in all 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 neighbourhood.

The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labour.⁸ It could not be for the want of assiduity or perseverance; for he would sit on a wet rock, with a rod as long and heavy as a Tartar's lance, and fish all day without a murmur, even though he should not be encouraged by a single

¹ *Hudson* Hudson River, which runs through what is now New York State; the river was named after English explorer Henry Hudson, who sailed for the Dutch East India Company in the early seventeenth century.

² *descried* Discerned; caught sight of.

³ *Peter Stuyvesant* Last director-general of the colony of New Netherland, from 1647 until 1664, when he ceded the territory to the English.

⁴ *Fort Christina* Swedish colony in what is now the state of Delaware, where Swedish troops were defeated by Stuyvesant in 1655, effectively ending Swedish colonialism in North America.

⁵ *shrews* Derogatory term for controlling or nagging women.

⁶ *curtain lecture* Archaic term describing the scolding by a wife of her husband, with the further implication that she denies his sexual advances, while behind the curtains of their bed.

⁷ *termagant* Bad-tempered; shrewish.

⁸ *The great error ... profitable labour* I.e., Rip's greatest character flaw was his constant distaste for doing useful work.

nibble. He would carry a fowling piece¹ on his shoulder for hours together, trudging through woods and swamps, and up hill and down dale, to shoot a few squirrels or wild pigeons. He would never even refuse to assist a neighbour in the roughest toil, and was a foremost man at all country frolics for husking Indian corn, or building stone fences; the women of the village, too, used to employ him to run their errands, and to do such little odd jobs as their less obliging husbands would not do for them—in a word, Rip was ready to attend to anybody's business but his own; but as to doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, it was impossible.

In fact, he declared it was no use to work on his farm; it was the most pestilent little piece of ground in the whole country; everything about it went wrong, and would go wrong, in spite of him. His fences were continually falling to pieces; his cow would either go astray, or get among the cabbages; weeds were sure to grow quicker in his fields than anywhere else; the rain always made a point of setting in just as he had some outdoor work to do. So that though his patrimonial estate had dwindled away under his management, acre by acre, until there was little more left than a mere patch of Indian corn and potatoes, yet it was the worst conditioned farm in the neighbourhood.

His children, too, were as ragged and wild as if they belonged to nobody. His son Rip, an urchin begotten in his own likeness, promised to inherit the habits, with the old clothes of his father. He was generally seen trooping like a colt at his mother's heels, equipped in a pair of his father's cast-off galligaskins,² which he had much ado to hold up with one hand, as a fine lady does her train in bad weather.

Rip Van Winkle, however, 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. Morning, noon, and night, her tongue was incessantly going, and

everything he said or did was sure to produce a torrent of household eloquence. Rip had but one way of replying to all lectures of the kind, and that, by frequent use, had grown into a habit. He shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, cast up his eyes, but said nothing. This, however, always provoked a fresh volley from his wife, so that he was fain to draw off his forces,³ and take to the outside of the house—the only side which, in truth, belongs to a henpecked husband.

Rip's sole domestic adherent was his dog Wolf, who was as much henpecked as his master; for Dame Van Winkle regarded them as companions in idleness, and even looked upon Wolf with an evil eye, as the cause of his master's so often going astray. True it is, in all points of spirit befitting an honourable dog, he was as courageous an animal as ever scoured the woods—but what courage can withstand the ever-during and all-besetting terrors of a woman's tongue? The moment Wolf entered the house, his crest fell, his tail drooped to the ground, or curled between his legs, he sneaked about with a gallows air,⁴ casting many a sidelong glance at Dame Van Winkle, and at the least flourish of a broomstick or ladle, would fly to the door with yelping precipitation.

Times grew worse and worse with Rip Van Winkle as years of matrimony rolled on; a tart temper never mellows with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edge tool that grows keener⁵ by constant use. For a long while he used to console himself, when driven from home, by frequenting a kind of perpetual club of the sages, philosophers, and other idle personages of the village, that held its sessions on a bench before a small inn, designated by a rubicund portrait of his majesty George the Third.⁶ Here they used to sit in the shade, of a long lazy summer's day, talk listlessly over village gossip, or tell endless sleepy stories about nothing. But it would have been worth any statesman's money to have heard the profound discussions that sometimes took place,

³ *fain to ... his forces* I.e., inclined to withdraw from the interaction.

⁴ *gallows air* Appearance of one ready for the gallows, to be hanged.

⁵ *keener* Sharper.

⁶ *George the Third* King of Great Britain from 1760 to 1820, and the last British monarch to rule over the Thirteen Colonies preceding the American Revolutionary War.

¹ *fowling piece* Small gun for hunting wild birds.

² *galligaskins* Loose-fitting style of breeches or trousers.

when by chance an old newspaper fell into their hands, from some passing traveller. How solemnly they would listen to the contents, as drawled out by Derrick Van Bummel, the schoolmaster, a dapper, learned little man, who was not to be daunted by the most gigantic word in the dictionary; and how sagely they would deliberate upon public events some months after they had taken place.

The opinions of this *junto*¹ were completely controlled by Nicholas Vedder, a patriarch of the village, and landlord of the inn, at the door of which he took his seat from morning till night, just moving sufficiently to avoid the sun, and keep in the shade of a large tree; so that the neighbours could tell the hour by his movements as accurately as by a sun dial. It is true, he was rarely heard to speak, but smoked his pipe incessantly. His adherents, however (for every great man has his adherents), perfectly understood him, and knew how to gather his opinions. When anything that was read or related displeased him, he was observed to smoke his pipe vehemently, and send forth short, frequent, and angry puffs; but when pleased, he would inhale the smoke slowly and tranquilly, and emit it in light and placid clouds, and sometimes taking the pipe from his mouth, and letting the fragrant vapour curl about his nose, would gravely nod his head in token of perfect approbation.

From even this stronghold the unlucky Rip was at length routed by his termagant wife, who would suddenly break in upon the tranquility of the assemblage, [and]² call the members all to nought; nor was that august personage, Nicholas Vedder himself, sacred from the daring tongue of this terrible *virago*,³ who charged him outright with encouraging her husband in habits of idleness.

Poor Rip was at last reduced almost to despair; and his only alternative to escape from the labour of the farm and the clamour of his wife, was to take gun in hand, and stroll away into the woods. Here he would sometimes seat himself at the foot of a tree, and share the contents of his *wallet*⁴ with Wolf, with whom he sympathised 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, while I live thou shalt never want a friend to stand by thee!" Wolf would wag his tail, look wistfully in his master's face, and if dogs can feel pity, I verily believe he reciprocated the sentiment with all his heart.

In a long ramble of the kind on a fine autumnal day, Rip had unconsciously scrambled to one of the highest parts of the Kaatskill mountains. He was after his favourite sport of squirrel shooting, and the still solitudes had echoed and re-echoed with the reports of his gun. Panting and fatigued, he threw himself, late in the afternoon, on a green knoll, covered with mountain herbage, that crowned the brow of a precipice. From an opening between the trees, he could overlook all the lower country for many a mile of rich woodland. He saw at a distance the lordly Hudson, far, far below him, moving on its silent but majestic course, the reflection of a purple cloud, or the sail of a lagging bark,⁵ here and there sleeping on its glassy bosom, and at last losing itself in the blue highlands.

On the other side he looked down into a deep mountain glen, wild, lonely, and shagged, the bottom filled with fragments from the impending cliffs, and scarcely lighted by the reflected rays of the setting sun. For some time Rip lay musing on this scene, evening was gradually advancing, the mountains began to throw their long blue shadows over the valleys, he saw that it would be dark long before he could reach the village, and he heaved a heavy sigh when he thought of encountering the terrors of Dame Van Winkle.

As he was about to descend, he heard a voice from a distance, hallooing, "Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!" He looked around, but could see nothing but a crow winging its solitary flight across the mountain. He thought his fancy must have deceived him, and turned again to descend, when he heard the same cry ring through the still evening air; "Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!"—at the same time Wolf bristled up his back, and giving a low growl, skulked to his master's side, looking fearfully down into the glen. Rip now felt a vague apprehension stealing over him; he looked anxiously in the same direction, and perceived a strange figure slowly toiling up the rocks, and bending under the weight of something he carried on his back.

¹ *junto* Self-organized political committee or club.

² [*and*] Irving added this word in later editions.

³ *virago* Fierce woman.

⁴ *wallet* Knapsack.

⁵ *bark* Small type of sailing boat.

He was surprised to see any human being in this lonely and unfrequented place, but supposing it to be someone of the neighbourhood in need of his assistance, he hastened down to yield it.

On nearer approach, he was still more surprised at the singularity of the stranger's appearance. He was a short, square-built old fellow, with thick bushy hair, and a grizzled beard. His dress was of the antique Dutch fashion—a cloth jerkin¹ strapped round the waist—several pairs of breeches, the outer one of ample volume, decorated with rows of buttons down the sides, and bunches at the knees. He bore on his shoulder a stout keg, that seemed full of liquor, and made signs for Rip to approach and assist him with the load. Though rather shy and distrustful of this new acquaintance, Rip complied with his usual alacrity, and mutually relieving each other, they clambered up a narrow gully, apparently the dry bed of a mountain torrent. As they ascended, Rip every now and then heard long rolling peals, like distant thunder, that seemed to issue out of a deep ravine, or rather cleft between lofty rocks, toward which their rugged path conducted. He paused for an instant, but supposing it to be the muttering of one of those transient thunder showers which often take place in mountain heights, he proceeded. Passing through the ravine, they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheatre, surrounded by perpendicular precipices, over the brinks of which impending trees shot their branches, so that you only caught glimpses of the azure sky, and the bright evening cloud. During the whole time, Rip and his companion had laboured on in silence; for though the former marvelled greatly what could be the object² of carrying a keg of liquor up this wild mountain, yet there was something strange and incomprehensible about the unknown, that inspired awe, and checked familiarity.³

On entering the amphitheatre, new objects of wonder presented themselves. On a level spot in the centre was a company of odd-looking personages playing at nine-pins.⁴ They were dressed in a quaint,

outlandish fashion: some wore short doublets,⁵ others jerkins, with long knives in their belts, and most had enormous breeches, of similar style with that of the guide's. 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 sugarloaf hat,⁶ set off with a little red cockstail. They all had beards, of various shapes and colours. 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,⁷ high crowned hat and feather, red stockings, and high-heeled shoes, with roses in them. The whole group reminded Rip of the figures in an old Flemish painting, in the parlour of Dominie⁸ Van Schaick, the village parson, and which had been brought over from Holland at the time of the settlement.

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.

As Rip and his companion approached them, they suddenly desisted from their play, and stared at him with such fixed statue-like gaze, and such strange, uncouth, lacklustre countenances, that his heart turned within him, and his knees smote together. His companion now emptied the contents of the keg into large flagons, and made signs to him to wait upon the company. He obeyed with fear and trembling;⁹

⁵ *doublets* Another form of male upper-body garment.

⁶ *sugarloaf hat* Tall, conical sort of hat, often associated with English Puritans and Pilgrims who settled the eastern Americas in the early 1600s.

⁷ *hanger* Short sword worn at the belt.

⁸ *old Flemish painting* Flemish art, hailing from Belgium and the Netherlands, developed its distinctive style during the late Renaissance; *Dominie* Title for a minister or parson, commonly used in the former Dutch colonies.

⁹ *fear and trembling* Cf. Philippians 2.12: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

¹ *jerkin* Style of jacket fashionable during the seventeenth century, but no longer worn by the time of this story.

² *object* Purpose.

³ *checked familiarity* I.e., discouraged overt friendliness.

⁴ *nine-pins* Lawn game similar to modern-day bowling.

they quaffed the liquor in profound silence, and then returned to their game.

By degrees, Rip's awe and apprehension subsided. He even ventured, when no eye was fixed upon him, to taste the beverage, which he found had much of the flavour of excellent Hollands.¹ He was naturally a thirsty soul, and was soon tempted to repeat the draught. One taste provoked another, and he reiterated his visits to the flagon so often, that at length his senses were overpowered, his eyes swam in his head, his head gradually declined, and he fell into a deep sleep.

On awakening, he found himself on the green knoll from whence he had first seen the old man of the glen. He rubbed his eyes—it was a bright sunny morning. The birds were hopping and twittering among the bushes, and the eagle was wheeling aloft, and breasting the pure mountain breeze. “Surely,” thought Rip, “I have not slept here all night.” He recalled the occurrences before he fell asleep. The strange man with the keg of liquor—the mountain ravine—the wild retreat among the rocks—the woebegone party at nine-pins—the flagon—“Oh! that flagon! that wicked flagon!” thought Rip—“what excuse shall I make to Dame Van Winkle?”

He looked round for his gun, but in place of the clean, well-oiled fowling piece, he found an old firelock lying by him, the barrel encrusted with rust, the lock falling off, and the stock worm-eaten. He now suspected that the grave roysters² of the mountain had put a trick upon him, and having dosed him with liquor, had robbed him of his gun. Wolf, too, had disappeared, but he might have strayed away after a squirrel or partridge. He whistled after him, shouted his name, but all in vain; the echoes repeated his whistle and shout, but no dog was to be seen.

He determined to revisit the scene of the last evening's gambol,³ and if he met with any of the party, to demand his dog and gun. As he arose to walk he found himself stiff in the joints, and wanting in his usual activity.⁴ “These mountain beds do not agree with me,” thought Rip, “and if this frolic should lay me up with a fit of the rheumatism, I shall have a blessed time with

Dame Van Winkle.” With some difficulty he got down into the glen: he found the gully up which he and his companion had ascended the preceding evening, but to his astonishment a mountain stream was now foaming down it, leaping from rock to rock, and filling the glen with babbling murmurs. He, however, made shift to scramble up its sides, working his toilsome way through thickets of birch, sassafras, and witch hazel, and sometimes tripped up or entangled by the wild grape vines that twisted their coils and tendrils from tree to tree, and spread a kind of network in his path.

At length he reached to where the ravine had opened through the cliffs, to the amphitheatre; but no traces of such opening remained. The rocks presented a high impenetrable wall, over which the torrent came tumbling in a sheet of feathery foam, and fell into a broad deep basin, black from the shadows of the surrounding forest. Here, then, poor Rip was brought to a stand. He again called and whistled after his dog; he was only answered by the cawing of a flock of idle crows, sporting high in air about a dry tree that overhung a sunny precipice; and who, secure in their elevation, seemed to look down and scoff at the poor man's perplexities. What was to be done? the morning was passing away, and Rip felt famished for his breakfast. He grieved to give up his dog and gun; he dreaded to meet his wife; but it would not do to starve among the mountains. He shook his head, shouldered the rusty firelock, and, with a heart full of trouble and anxiety, turned his steps homeward.

As he approached the village, he met a number of people, but none that he knew, which somewhat surprised him, for he had thought himself acquainted with everyone in the country round. Their dress, too, was of a different fashion from that to which he was accustomed. They all stared at him with equal marks of surprise, and whenever they cast eyes upon him, invariably stroked their chins. The constant recurrence of this gesture induced Rip, involuntarily, to do the same, when, to his astonishment, he found his beard had grown a foot long!

He had now entered the skirts of the village. A troop of strange children ran at his heels, hooting after him, and pointing at his gray beard. The dogs, too, not one of which he recognized for his old acquaintances, barked at him as he passed. The very village seemed

¹ *Hollands* Dutch gin.

² *roysters* Revelers.

³ *gambol* Festivity; frolic.

⁴ *wanting in his usual activity* I.e., lacking his usual energy.

altered: it was larger and more populous. There were rows of houses which he had never seen before, and those which had been his familiar haunts had disappeared. Strange names were over the doors—strange faces at the windows—everything was strange. His mind now began to misgive him, that both he and the world around him were bewitched. Surely this was his native village, which he had left but the day before. There stood the Kaatskill mountains—there ran the silver Hudson at a distance—there was every hill and dale precisely as it had always been—Rip was sorely perplexed. “That flagon last night,” thought he, “has addled my poor head sadly!”

It was with some difficulty he found the way to his own house, which he approached with silent awe, expecting every moment to hear the shrill voice of Dame Van Winkle. He found the house gone to decay—the roof fallen in, the windows shattered, and the doors off the hinges. A half-starved dog, that looked like Wolf, was skulking about it. Rip called him by name, but the cur snarled, showed his teeth, and passed on. This was an unkind cut indeed. “My very dog,” sighed poor Rip, “has forgotten me!”

He entered the house, which, to tell the truth, Dame Van Winkle had always kept in neat order. It was empty, forlorn, and apparently abandoned. This desolateness overcame all his connubial fears—he called loudly for his wife and children—the lonely chambers rung for a moment with his voice, and then all again was silence.

He now hurried forth, and hastened to his old resort, the little village inn—but it too was gone. A large rickety wooden building stood in its place, with great gaping windows, some of them broken, and mended with old hats and petticoats, and over the door was painted, “The Union Hotel, by Jonathan Doolittle.” Instead of the great tree that used to shelter the quiet little Dutch inn of yore, there now was reared a tall naked pole, with something on top that looked like a red night cap,¹ and from it was fluttering a flag, on which was a singular assemblage of stars and stripes—all this was strange and incomprehensible.

¹ *tall naked pole . . . red night cap* The pole and the red cap were both widespread symbols of liberty, especially after their use in the French Revolution; similar loose-fitting caps had been worn in ancient Rome by people emancipated from slavery.

He recognized on the sign, however, the ruby face of King George, under which he had smoked so many a peaceful pipe, but even this was singularly metamorphosed. The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff,² a sword was stuck in the hand instead of a sceptre, the head was decorated with a cocked hat,³ and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON.

There was, as usual, a crowd of folk about the door, but none that Rip recollected. The very character of the people seemed changed. There was a busy, bustling, disputatious tone about it, instead of the accustomed phlegm and drowsy tranquillity. He looked in vain for the sage Nicholas Vedder, with his broad face, double chin, and fair long pipe, uttering clouds of tobacco smoke instead of idle speeches; or Van Bummel, the schoolmaster, doling forth the contents of an ancient newspaper. In place of these, a lean, bilious-looking fellow, with his pockets full of handbills, was haranguing vehemently about rights of citizens—election—members of congress—liberty—Bunker’s hill—heroes of seventy-six⁴—and other words, that were a perfect Babylonish jargon⁵ to the bewildered Van Winkle.

The appearance of Rip, with his long, grizzled beard, his rusty fowling piece, his uncouth dress, and the army of women and children that had gathered at his heels, soon attracted the attention of the tavern politicians. They crowded around him, eyeing him from head to foot, with great curiosity. The orator bustled up to him, and drawing him partly aside, inquired “which side he voted?” Rip stared in vacant stupidity. Another short but busy little fellow pulled him by the arm, and raising on tiptoe, inquired in his ear, “whether he

² *blue and buff* Colors worn by American Revolutionary soldiers.

³ *cocked hat* Style of hat worn in the late eighteenth century (especially as part of military uniforms), worn with one side of the brim folded up or “cocked.”

⁴ *Bunker’s hill* First major battle of the Revolutionary war; *heroes of seventy-six* The Declaration of Independence was drafted in 1776.

⁵ *Babylonish jargon* Incomprehensible gibberish, referring to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11.1–9), which relates how it came to be that humans speak different languages and cannot understand one another; technically, the more correct term would be “Babelish.”

was Federal or Democrat.”¹ Rip was equally at a loss to comprehend the question, when a knowing, self-important old gentleman, in a sharp cocked hat, made his way through the crowd, putting them to the right and left with his elbows as he passed, and planting himself before Van Winkle, with one arm akimbo, the other resting on his cane, his keen eyes and sharp hat penetrating, as it were, into his very soul, demanded, in an austere tone, “what brought him to the election with a gun on his shoulder, and a mob at his heels, and whether he meant to breed a riot in the village?” “Alas! gentlemen,” cried Rip, somewhat dismayed, “I am a poor quiet man, a native of the place, and a loyal subject of the King, God bless him!”

Here a general shout burst from the bystanders—“A tory!² a tory! a spy! a refugee! hustle him! away with him!” It was with great difficulty that the self-important man in the cocked hat restored order; and having assumed a tenfold austerity of brow, demanded again of the unknown culprit, what he came there for, and whom he was seeking. The poor man humbly assured them that he meant no harm, but merely came there in search of some of his neighbours, who used to keep about the tavern.

“Well—who are they?—name them.”

Rip bethought himself a moment, and inquired, “where’s Nicholas Vedder?”

There was a silence for a little while, when an old man replied, in a thin piping voice, “Nicholas Vedder? why he is dead and gone these eighteen years! There was a wooden tombstone in the churchyard that used to tell all about him, but that’s rotted and gone too.”

“Where’s Brom Dutcher?”

“Oh he went off to the army in the beginning of the war; some say he was killed at the battle of Stony Point—others say he was drowned in a squall, at the

foot of Antony’s Nose.³ I don’t know—he never came back again.”

“Where’s Van Bummel, the schoolmaster?”

“He went off to the wars too, was a great militia general, and is now in Congress.”

Rip’s heart died away, at hearing of these sad changes in his home and friends, and finding himself thus alone in the world. Every answer puzzled him, too, by treating of such enormous lapses of time, and of matters which he could not understand: war—congress—Stony Point—he had no courage to ask after any more friends, but cried out in despair, “does nobody here know Rip Van Winkle?”

“Oh, Rip Van Winkle!” exclaimed two or three, “Oh, to be sure! that’s Rip Van Winkle yonder, leaning against the tree.”

Rip looked, and beheld a precise counterpart of himself as he went up the mountain: apparently as lazy, and certainly as ragged. The poor fellow was now completely confounded. He doubted his own identity, and whether he was himself or another man. In the midst of his bewilderment, the man in the cocked hat demanded who he was, and what was his name?

“God knows,” exclaimed he, at his wit’s end; “I’m not myself—I’m somebody else—that’s me yonder—no—that’s somebody else, got into my shoes—I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they’ve changed my gun, and everything’s changed, and I’m changed, and I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!”

The bystanders began now to look at each other, nod, wink significantly, and tap their fingers against their foreheads. There was a whisper, also, about securing the gun, and keeping the old fellow from doing mischief; at the very suggestion of which, the self-important man in the cocked hat retired with some precipitation. At this critical moment a fresh likely⁴ woman pressed through the throng to get a peep at the graybearded man. She had a chubby child in her arms, which, frightened at his looks, began to cry. “Hush, Rip,” cried she, “hush, you little fool, the old man

¹ *Federal or Democrat* Opposing political parties that arose in the 1790s, led respectively by Alexander Hamilton (1755–1804) and Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826); the policies of the Federalists emphasized a strong central government and favored stronger ties to Britain in foreign affairs, while Jefferson’s Democratic-Republicans placed more emphasis on states’ rights, defended the values of an agrarian society in opposition to the perceived elitism of the Federalists, and believed in the capability of common people to participate fully in democracy.

² *tory* Royalist.

³ *Stony Point* British fortress which was captured by the Continental Army in 1779; *Antony’s Nose* Small mountain along the Hudson River, which is also mentioned in Irving’s *History of New York*.

⁴ *likely* Pretty (later revised editions have “comely” here).

won't hurt you." The name of the child, the air of the mother, the tone of her voice, all awakened a train of recollections in his mind.

"What is your name, my good woman?" asked he.

"Judith Gardenier."

"And your father's name?"

"Ah, poor man, his name was Rip Van Winkle; it's twenty years since he went away from home with his gun, and never has been heard of since—his dog came home without him; but whether he shot himself, or was carried away by the Indians, nobody can tell. I was then but a little girl."

Rip had but one question more to ask; but he put it with a faltering voice:

"Where's your mother?"

Oh, she too had died but a short time since; she broke a blood vessel in a fit of passion at a New England pedlar.

There was a drop of comfort, at least, in this intelligence. The honest man could contain himself no longer. He caught his daughter and her child in his arms. "I am your father!" cried he—"Young Rip Van Winkle once—old Rip Van Winkle now! Does nobody know poor Rip Van Winkle?"

All stood amazed, until an old woman, tottering out from among the crowd, put her hand to her brow, and peering under it in his face for a moment, exclaimed, "Sure enough! it is Rip Van Winkle—it is himself. Welcome home again, old neighbour—why, where have you been these twenty long years?"

Rip's story was soon told, for the whole twenty years had been to him but as one night. The neighbours stared when they heard it; some were seen to wink at each other, and put their tongues in their cheeks; and the self-important man in the cocked hat, who, when the alarm was over, had returned to the field, screwed down the corners of his mouth, and shook his head—upon which there was a general shaking of the head throughout the assemblage.

It was determined, however, to take the opinion of old Peter Vanderdonk, who was seen slowly advancing up the road. He was a descendant of the historian of that name,¹ who wrote one of the earliest accounts of the province. Peter was the most ancient inhabitant

of the village, and well versed in all the wonderful events and traditions of the neighbourhood. He recollected Rip at once, and corroborated his story in the most satisfactory manner. He assured the company that it was a fact, handed down from his ancestor the historian, that the Kaatskill mountains had always been haunted by strange beings. That it was affirmed that the great Hendrick Hudson, the first discoverer of the river and country, kept a kind of vigil there every twenty years, with his crew of the *Half-moon*,² being permitted in this way to revisit the scenes of his enterprise, and keep a guardian eye upon the river, and the great city called by his name. That his father had once seen them in their old Dutch dresses playing at nine pins in a hollow of the mountain; and that he himself had heard, one summer afternoon, the sound of their balls, like long peals of thunder.

To make a long story short, the company broke up, and returned to the more important concerns of the election. Rip's daughter took him home to live with her; she had a snug, well-furnished house, and a stout cheery farmer for a husband, whom Rip recollected for one of the urchins that used to climb upon his back. As to Rip's son and heir, who was the ditto of himself, seen leaning against the tree, he was employed to work on the farm; but evinced an hereditary disposition to attend to anything else but his business.

Rip now resumed his old walks and habits; he soon found many of his former cronies, though all rather the worse for the wear and tear of time; and preferred making friends among the rising generation, with whom he soon grew into great favour.

Having nothing to do at home, and being arrived at that happy age when a man can do nothing with impunity, he took his place once more on the bench, at the inn door, and was revered as one of the patriarchs of the village, and a chronicle of the old times "before the war." It was some time before he could get into the regular track of gossip, or could be made to comprehend the strange events that had taken place during his torpor. How that there had been a revolutionary war—that the country had thrown off the yoke of old

¹ *historian of that name* Adriaen van der Donk, who wrote *Description of New Netherland* (1655).

² *crew of the Half-moon* Referring to Hudson's ship, the *Halve Maen*; following a mutiny in 1611, Hudson and seven other crew members disappeared into the Hudson Bay, their fates remaining unknown.

England—and that, instead of being a subject of his Majesty George the Third, he was now a free citizen of the United States. Rip, in fact, was no politician; the change of states and empires made but little impression on him. But there was one species of despotism under which he had long groaned, and that was—petticoat government. Happily, that was at an end; he had got his neck out of the yoke of matrimony, and could go in and out whenever he pleased, without dreading the tyranny of Dame Van Winkle. Whenever her name was mentioned, however, he shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and cast up his eyes; which might pass either for an expression of resignation to his fate, or joy at his deliverance.

He used to tell his story to every stranger that arrived at Mr. Doolittle's hotel. He was observed, at first, to vary on some points every time he told it, which was doubtless owing to his having so recently awakened. It at last settled down precisely to the tale I have related, and not a man, woman, or child in the neighbourhood, but knew it by heart. Some always pretended to doubt the reality of it, and insisted that Rip had been out of his head, and that this was one point on which he always remained flighty. The old Dutch inhabitants, however, almost universally gave it full credit. Even to this day they never hear a thunderstorm of a summer afternoon about the Kaatskill, but they say Hendrick Hudson and his crew are at their game of nine pins; and it is a common wish of all henpecked husbands in the neighbourhood, when life hangs heavy on their hands, that they might have a quieting draught out of Rip Van Winkle's flagon.

NOTE

The foregoing tale, one would suspect, had been suggested to Mr. Knickerbocker by a little German superstition about Charles V.¹ and the Kypphauser

¹ *Charles V.* Holy Roman Emperor from 1519 to 1556. In later editions, Irving changed this to "the Emperor Frederick der Rothbart," another Holy Roman Emperor who reigned from 1152 to 1190. According to legend, der Rothbart, also known as Frederick Barbarossa ("redbeard"), did not die but rather fell asleep in the Kyffhäuser mountains in Germany, and will one day reawaken and return Germany to its past greatness. In reality, Irving's source for "Rip Van Winkle" is likely the German folktale "Peter Klaus," which was written down by Johann Karl Christoph Nachtigal in 1800.

mountain; the subjoined note, however, which he had appended to the tale, shows that it is an absolute fact, narrated with his usual fidelity:

"The story of Rip Van Winkle may seem incredible 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 marvellous 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 last I saw him, was a very venerable old man, and so perfectly rational and consistent on every other 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 hand writing. The story, therefore, is beyond the possibility of doubt.
D.K."

—1819

IN CONTEXT

Images of Rip Van Winkle



John Quidor, *Rip Van Winkle and His Companions at the Inn Door of Nicholas Vedder*, 1839.



John Quidor, *The Return of Rip Van Winkle*, 1849 (see also the color insert).

The first illustrated edition of Irving's *Sketch Book* appeared in 1848, with 17 illustrations by Felix O.C. Darley. (Irving contributed a new preface for the edition, but made no comment in it on the addition of illustrations to the texts.) Darley's one illustration for "Rip Van Winkle," which appeared without a caption, is reproduced here.



F.O.C. Darley, *Rip Van Winkle Awaking*, 1848.

Joseph Jefferson (1829–1905) became famous in the latter half of the nineteenth century very largely for his portrayals of Rip Van Winkle in the dramatic adaptation by Irish playwright Dion Boucicault (*Rip Van Winkle, or The Sleep of Twenty Years* [1865]); the play was a hit for many years in London as well as throughout America. The 30 September 1865 issue of *The Illustrated London News* featured the following short piece on the new play. The same issue included an illustration of Jefferson starring in the production. Both that image and a photograph of Jefferson starring in the same role almost thirty years later are reproduced on the following pages.

The new play of "Rip Van Winkle," a dramatised version, by Mr. Dion Boucicault, of Washington Irving's most genial and humorous story—in which the hero, one of the early Dutch settlers in New York, falls in with the goblins who haunt the Katskill mountains, and drinks their magic liquor, causing him a sleep of twenty years—is likely to have a long run at the Adelphi Theatre. The new American actor, Mr. Jefferson, who appears as Rip Van Winkle, seems as though he had created the character himself, so perfectly does he enter into the author's conception of the loose-lived, lazy, lounging fellow, who lets his wife turn him out of doors and then becomes the victim of the mischievous imps, with the ghost of the old pirate, Hendrik Hudson, at their head. Our Illustration shows the scene in which poor Rip Van Winkle is compelled to quaff the fatal potion.



Scene from "Rip Van Winkle," at the Adelphi Theatre, 1865.



Benjamin Joseph Falk, *Joseph Jefferson as Rip Van Winkle*, c. 1894.