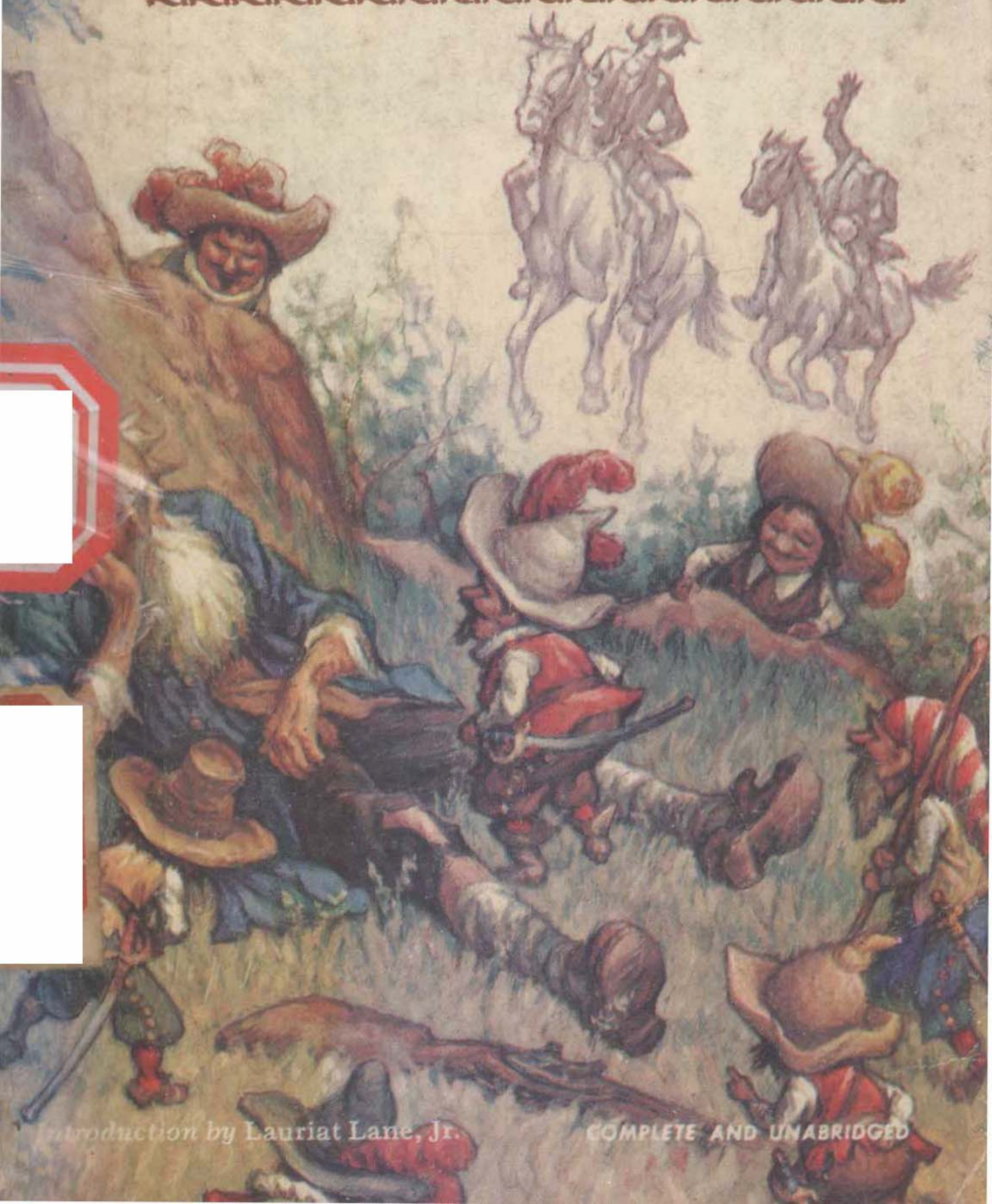




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CLASSICS SERIES CL50

Washington Irving
the legend of
Sleepy Hollow
and Other Stories



Introduction by Lauriat Lane, Jr.

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

The
LEGEND
of
SLEEPY HOLLOW

WASHINGTON IRVING

AIRMONT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
22 EAST 60TH STREET • NEW YORK 10022

An Airmont Classic
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The *LEGEND* *of* *SLEEPY* *HOLLOW*

and other stories

WASHINGTON IRVING

(1783 - 1859)



Introduction

Washington Irving is one of the most read and the most unread of authors. In his own day, of course, he was very widely read both in America and England. His writings caught the current fancy for romanticism, for local color, for sentiment, for nostalgia, for humor. In spite of this past popularity, it is doubtful how much of Irving's writing is still read today. Dust-covered sets of Irving's complete works probably appear in the second-hand bookstores as often as do those of Longfellow or Lowell, or any of the other traditional classics of American literature whose reputations have been revised downwards in recent years. Yet a few of Irving's writings, above all "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," are still very widely read. It is a rare general anthology of the short story that does not contain one or both of these stories, but it is an even rarer one that has anything more by Irving. A collection such as the following, which ranges more generously over Irving's whole work, may not only teach us why Irving was once so popular but may suggest that Irving has more to

offer a modern reader than just his two most famous stories.

Irving is of course one of the earlier American authors, but curiously, he seems even earlier than he actually was, and this illusion may help to define his essential quality. His most characteristic writings are all set in an earlier time than his own: the early days of the Dutch settlement of New York, the Revolutionary War era, or some earlier, more legendary period in Europe's past. This choice of subject gives a clue to where his sympathies lay and also to the general tone and effect of his writing. "Irving always lived a little in the past tense," it has been said. As a writer, Irving took on roles as historian of the past, as student of legend, and as recreator of legend in literature, that exploited this leaning toward the past, both real and fabulous, in all its dimensions. Almost always in Irving's writings we feel strongly the sense of the story's being retold and filtered through the memory of one or more narrators. This gives all his writing a special quality close to Wordsworth's aim of some powerful emotion recollected in tranquillity and then contemplated until the emotion is renewed.

Irving has been given three ambitious titles: the First American Man of Letters, the Ambassador of the New World to the Old, and the Father of American Literature. How well has he earned them?

The First American Man of Letters: this title really embodies two facts about Irving. First, he was able to make his living as a writer. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he wrote more as a professional than as a gentleman amateur. In this he set a kind of example. In his later years, moreover, he became a national hero, a local boy who had made good in the larger world of European literature. In this, too, he set a kind of example. His later writings, his books of travel and biography and history, reflect one of the problems of the professional man of letters—the need to write whether he has an immediate inspiration or not. This need may cause a writer to fall back on compilation, rather than creation, to maintain his position, and to some extent Irving did this.

The Ambassador of the New World to the Old: this title also embodies two facts about Irving. Literally he held various diplomatic posts in Spain and England. But these posts were a tribute to his more important role as a literary ambassador. The great success of Irving's writings in England proved that the New World had a writer that could be ranked with those of the Old World. On the other hand, Irving gained this rank chiefly by meeting the Old World writers on their own ground. Except for a few stories, little that Irving wrote was characteristically American in the way Mark Twain's writings, fifty years later, were characteristically American. Even compared to Cooper, his contemporary, Irving could not be said to have presented any extensive image of America to his European readers—certainly not an image that differed in any serious way from the half-romantic image these readers already had of the New World.

The Father of American Literature: finally, how much right has Irving to this title? In many ways, as already suggested, Irving was indirectly an example and inspiration for later writers. But his direct literary influence is harder to judge. If he did suggest to the authors who came later new subjects, new attitudes, and new techniques, it must be in his short stories that he did so. These stories may have influenced Hawthorne, Poe, and the later writers of the local color school. But it is almost impossible to distinguish the influence of Irving himself from the influence of various kinds of English and German writing through Irving. Moreover, no one would ever claim that Irving's stories equal those of Poe or Hawthorne. If we see some of Irving's rich use of local material in Hawthorne, we see little of Hawthorne's moral complexity in Irving. If we see some of Irving's skillful creation of a single mood in Poe's stories, we see little of Poe's psychological or symbolic complexity in Irving's, or of anything like Poe's wide variety of technique and subject.

Irving himself had no great pretensions about his aims and achievements. In "The Author's Account of Himself"

from *The Sketch Book*, reprinted in the following collection, Irving gives a very clear statement of what he is setting out to do in his writings. He reminds the reader of his childhood interest in what we would call local color, and he praises American scenery as a source of "the sublime and beautiful"—an interesting echo of Edmund Burke's famous eighteenth-century treatise on esthetics. At the same time, he praises Europe's "storied and poetical associations" and speaks of his wish to escape "from the commonplace realities of the present." His final comment is the most revealing. He frankly rejects the role of the philosopher for that of the lover of the picturesque, and by implication he offers the reader of the sketches: "the delineations of beauty . . . the distortions of caricature, and . . . the loveliness of landscape."

The pen names Irving adopted at various times also suggest something of his qualities as a writer. First he called himself "Jonathan Oldstyle," uniting the Revolutionary War term applied to the rebelling colonists with an implied allegiance to the style and manner of the eighteenth century, an allegiance not, however, without overtones of irony and parody. At other times, he posed as "Diedrich Knickerbocker," a humorous and pedantic amateur historian of New York's own past. And *The Sketch Book* is presented as by "Geoffrey Crayon," with its suggestion of the particular medium and limitations of the artist responsible for these "sketches," and also, perhaps, with overtones of an earlier and greater Geoffrey—Chaucer, who delighted equally in the humorous portrayal of character.

What can we learn about Irving's writing from his most famous story, "Rip Van Winkle"? First, the framework, content, and meaning of the story all involve us in various dimensions of the past. By way of the framework we move past the author-narrator Geoffrey Crayon, past the supposed manuscript source in the papers of Diedrich Knickerbocker, into an even earlier world where the story of Rip had already happened and become legendary. At the end of the

story the framework takes us even further back into the time of Indian legend. Within the story, we have not only the double past of Rip's youth before the Revolutionary War and his old age in the time of the Republic, but the further past of Hendrick Hudson and his crew. And at least part of the meaning of the story is surely how to live through an unpleasant personal and social past as if it had never happened.

The style of the story is characteristic of Irving. The sentences are long, but easy and balanced. The tone is familiar and sympathetic toward the reader and the tale. The opening paragraph shows Irving's ability to paint with detail, with color, and even with the very shape and sound of his sentences an atmospheric picture. The last sentences of the third paragraph show Irving's gentle wit. The dialogue is similarly easy and fluent and unobtrusively suited to the character speaking.

Not only has the story of Rip Van Winkle become a tradition, but many of the elements in the story are themselves traditional and familiar. Rip is a rich example of the hen-pecked husband and likable good-for-nothing, and Dame Van Winkle an example of the termagant wife. The mountains are the traditional home of magic, and the magical sleep is found throughout folk and fairy tale. In spite of the conventionality of these elements in the story, Irving has, by the skillful use of the specific setting of the Hudson River valley and by such details as the rusted gun Rip finds when he wakes and the changes Rip meets when he returns to the village, made the story as real to us as if it were an everyday occurrence.

In spite of its informality, the story of Rip Van Winkle can have great effect and meaning. Not only is Rip himself appealing to one side of our natures, but his story, too, has its attractions, for the impulse to sleep out our troubles, to fade away from the world, lies not too far below the surface of our minds. We may also, if we wish, ask how much Rip has lost by his long holiday from reality: has the price been

too high? Above all, Rip's mixed attitude toward the changes in his village reflects not only Irving's mixed attitude toward the rejection of the past involved in any great political and social revolution, but also the more universal yearning that all men feel at sometime toward "the good old days," especially when those days are seen through the kindly eye of memory.

The collection of Washington Irving's writings that follows should give a good idea of what Irving achieved as a writer. This achievement is well summed up in a letter Irving wrote to a friend: "It is the play of thought and sentiment and language; the weaving in of characters, lightly yet expressively delineated; the familiar and faithful exhibition of scenes in common life; and the half-concealed vein of humour that is often playing through the whole—these are among what I aim at, and upon which I felicitate myself in proportion as I think I succeed."

LAURIAT LANE, JR.

University of New Brunswick

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The Author's Account of Himself

"I am of this mind with Homer, that as the snaile that crept out of her shel was turned eftsoons into a toad, and thereby was forced to make a stoole to sit on; so the traveller that straggleth from his owne country is in a short time transformed into so monstrous a shape, that he is faine to alter his mansion with his manners, and to live where he can, not where he would."—

LYLY'S *Euphues*

I was always fond of visiting new scenes, and observing strange characters and manners. Even when a mere child I began my travels, and made many tours of discovery into foreign parts and unknown regions of my native city, to the frequent alarm of my parents, and the emolument of the town-crier. As I grew into boyhood, I extended the range of my observations. My holiday afternoons were spent in rambles about the sutrounding country. I made myself familiar with all its places famous in history or fable. I knew every spot where a murder or robbery had been committed, or a ghost seen. I visited the neighboring villages, and added greatly to my stock of knowledge by noting their habits and customs, and conversing with their sages and great men. I even journeyed one long summer's day to the summit of the most distant hill, whence I stretched my eye over many a mile of *terra incognita*, and was astonished to find how vast a globe I inhabited.

This rambling propensity strengthened with my years. Books of voyages and travels became my passion, and in devouring their contents, I neglected the regular exercises of the school. How wistfully would I wander about the pierheads 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!

Further reading and thinking, though they brought this vague inclination into more reasonable bounds, only served to make it more decided. I visited various parts of my own country; and had I been merely a lover of fine scenery, I should have felt little desire to seek elsewhere its gratification, for on no country

have the charms of nature been more prodigally lavished. Her mighty lakes, like oceans of liquid silver; her mountains, with their bright aerial tints; her valleys, teeming with wild fertility; her tremendous cataracts, thundering in their solitudes; her boundless plains, waving with spontaneous verdure; her broad deep rivers, rolling in solemn silence to the ocean; her trackless forests, where vegetation puts forth all its magnificence; her skies, kindling with the magic of summer clouds and glorious sunshine;—no, never need an American look beyond his own country for the sublime and beautiful of natural scenery.

But Europe held forth the charms of storied and poetical association. There were to be seen the masterpieces of art, the refinements of highly cultivated society, the quaint peculiarities of ancient and local custom. My native country was full of youthful promise: Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle. I longed to wander over the scenes of renowned achievement—to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity—to loiter about the ruined castle—to meditate on the falling tower—to escape, in short, from the commonplace realities of the present, and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past.

I had, beside all this, an earnest desire to see the great men of the earth. We have, it is true, our great men in America: not a city but has an ample share of them. I have mingled among them in my time, and been almost withered by the shade into which they cast me; for there is nothing so baleful to a small man as the shade of a great one, particularly the great man of a city. But I was anxious to see the great men of Europe; for I had read in the works of various philosophers, that all animals degenerated in America, and man among the number. A great man of Europe, thought I, must therefore be as superior to a great man of America, as a peak of the Alps to a highland of the Hudson; and in this idea I was confirmed, by observing the comparative importance and swelling magnitude of many English travellers among us, who, I was assured, were very little people in their own country. I will visit this land of wonder, thought I, and see the gigantic race from which I am degenerated.

It has been either my good or evil lot to have my roving passion gratified. I have wandered through different countries, and witnessed many of the shifting scenes of life. I cannot say that I have studied them with the eye of a philosopher, but rather with the sauntering gaze with which humble lovers of the picturesque stroll from the window of one print-shop to another, caught sometimes by the delineations of beauty, sometimes by