

IRVING'S
TALES
OF A
TRAVELLER



THE
LONDON
EDITION

MACMILLAN'S POCKET CLASSICS

SELECTED TALES

FROM

TALES OF A TRAVELLER

BY

WASHINGTON IRVING

EDITED BY

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TEACHER OF ENGLISH IN THE WILLIAM MCKINLEY
HIGH SCHOOL, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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PREFACE

THE purpose of the "Pocket Classics" is so well known that it seems scarcely necessary to say more of this one than that this purpose has been held in mind as steadfastly as was possible to the writer. Elucidation of the text, presentation of the influences which moulded the author's character, as well as the principles which guided his work, in connection with the details of his biography, and some few suggestions as to feasible methods of using the *Tales* as a basis for the technical study of good expression, were the main considerations.

Hearty thanks are due from the readers as well as from the writer for the cordial permission of the Houghton Mifflin Company to use Charles Dudley Warner's *Irving*. It has been the basis of all biographical detail, and many critical estimates, to such an extent that apologies may be necessary for resemblances in expression where the thought has taken on its coloring, though the quotation marks were impossible.

J. F. C.

“ Life, behind its accidents, stands strong and self-sustaining,
The human fact transcending all the losing and the gaining.”

— WHITTIER.

INTRODUCTION

IRVING'S LIFE AND WORKS

MANY interests combine to make the charm of reading, but no other one compares in intensity with the keen desire of a normal human being to know the experiences of others. With an instinctive effort to know ourselves better, we love to follow the struggles and successes, the emotions and peculiar characteristics, of interesting people with whom we can come into touch only through the sympathy and comprehension of the mind, as well as of those whom we can grasp by the hand. It is life that holds us all — life of the slums, of the bush, of the palace; life overseas or at our own hearthstones. And the author who makes his appeal to humanity vivid is sure of a hearing, though the character of his audience will be determined by the skill with which he makes his appeal as well as by its nature.

Irving lives in literature to-day primarily because he felt a keen interest in the lives with which he came into contact. The intensity of this feeling, together with his early interest in reading and the social nature which inclined him to share everything, led him to embody his impressions freely, adding, liberally, to the original facts, exuberant fancies which enriched and diversified them, transforming with the magic touch of his humor whatever incongruous elements appeared, and making all wholesome with the deft scalpel of his irony.

Quite close to this prime interest in people is the

understanding of natural surroundings. It was pre-eminent in Irving. The lad who wandered about the farms of Manhattan heard the croaking of the frogs, the tap of the woodpeckers, and the scoffing laugh of the crows, as well as the tales of the goodwives. As he stood at the pier heads on the Battery, or watched the swirling waters of Hell Gate, his dreams were not idle, for he was unconsciously storing up those treasures which always accrue from genuine and active interest. The youth who was the first to depict the loveliness of the Hudson found original expression, also, for the attractions of places "old in story," when he looked upon them with untired eyes trained to beauty and rejoicing in its manifestations. In this genuine, warm-hearted love of life of all kinds lay Irving's genius.

In America there had been no voice to tell in ringing tones of the new life there till Irving spoke. There had been religious works and magnificently clear, forceful writing in defence of colonial rights and on other political themes. We had even produced a novelist. Charles Brockden Brown had written stories — too much like his European patterns of the eighteenth century, it is true, and not genuinely American in tone. Charles Dudley Warner says, "The figures who are moved in them seem to be transported from the pages of foreign fiction to the New World, not as it was, but as it existed in the minds of European sentimentalists." He was, however, the first American who "made literature a profession and attempted to live on its fruits."

There had been no original use of all the varied material of life under American conditions, with the atmosphere of the New World about it. Irving saw things which aroused his admiration, his curiosity, his sense of

the ludicrous. The inspiration seems to have come from the contrast between his own people and family life, and the conditions he found in the Dutch homes where he visited; for though the lives of the English and Dutch settlers seem to have been quite distinct in social matters, Irving's family were on good terms with the best of both, and his personal charm no doubt gained him ready admission everywhere then — as it did throughout his life. It would be most inappreciative of Irving's nature to think him capable of inhospitably using his friends as "material" for literature. It was not so. The contrasts apparent in different ways of living opened the way, in his observant mind, for sketches of people, places, and situations which later in his life set all the reading world to laughing or touched them with the tenderness of his own manly sympathy.

Washington Irving was born on the 3d of April, 1783, in the city of New York. His father, William, was of an old and respected Scotch family, whose fortunes, however, had declined. He had left his home in the Orkney Islands when a boy, and was a subordinate officer on a ship plying between Falmouth and New York when he met Sarah Sanders, the granddaughter of an English curate. They married in 1761, and two years later went to New York, where he entered into trade instead of following the sea.

Washington, the youngest of eleven children and the eighth son, was born in what is now one of New York's busiest districts, in William Street between Fulton and John. In a quaint Dutch house across the street from there, he grew up in the midst of a happy family life where the father's rule in the spirit of the old Scotch Covenanters, though stern and evincing little sympathy

with youthful recreations and gayety, was righteous and not lacking in essential tenderness; and where the gentleness and fine intellect of the more demonstrative mother won her children's lifelong devotion. Washington was full of vivacity, drollery, and innocent mischief. His sportiveness and disinclination to religious seriousness caused his mother some anxiety. She is quoted as saying, "Oh, Washington, if you were only good!" He was fond of music and the theatre, and did not always respect his father's stern injunctions against the latter.

Irving's routine studies were carried on in a desultory fashion throughout his youth because, perhaps, of his delicate health; but the exceptional nature and abilities of the tender-hearted, truthful, susceptible boy enabled him to accomplish without them much that was usually attained with difficulty. All vacations were spent in roaming about the neighboring country: a summer holiday passed in Westchester County when he was fifteen furnished the basis for the charming description of Sleepy Hollow with its dreamy, spectre-haunted atmosphere. At seventeen he visited a married sister in the Mohawk Valley, and on his way there in a sailing vessel "discovered for literature the beauty of the Hudson."

In 1802 he became a clerk in the law office of Josiah Ogden Hoffman, where he was, according to the usual method of those days, to prepare himself for practising law. Mr. Hoffman's family was of a refined character especially congenial to Irving, and the intimacy with them lasted throughout Irving's life. With them he took a rough and romantic journey into the wilderness of northern New York, where Mr. Hoffman was interested in lands.

In the next few years Irving spent much time in visits

and excursions to various places from which he sent numerous interesting letters, the writing of which no doubt served well in the development of his style. He seems to have had no definite literary ambition at this time, his tendency being toward the idle life of a man of society.

His first literary work published was a series of letters, signed "Jonathan Oldstyle," to the *Morning Chronicle*, his brother Peter's new paper. They were daring satires, based mainly on the theatre, its audiences, and actors; and though in direct imitation of the *Spectator*, they show the author's own quiet humor, his sensibility, and that chivalrous devotion to woman which always characterized him, — a chivalry which led him — the boy of nineteen — to protest against the careless and unmanly habit prevailing at the time of jesting about "old maids," and to recognize their possible right to admiration, tenderness, and protection.

At twenty-one Irving's health remained so delicate that his brothers sent him to Europe. The sea voyage revived him greatly, and the literary world is richer for the failure of the captain's well-known prophecy, — "There's a chap who will go overboard before we get across!" Five weeks of sailing brought him to the mouth of the Garonne, and after six weeks at Bordeaux, where he learned the language, and a leisurely trip through France, he reached Genoa five months after he left New York. This was in 1804. France showed the effects of the Revolution, and travel was impeded by the suspicion of his being an English spy. At Avignon, Irving was sadly disappointed at finding that the tomb of Laura, one of the literary shrines at which he had hoped to pay the tribute of his poetic imagination, had been destroyed; but on the whole he lived in the spirit of his

own words, "When I cannot get a dinner to suit my taste, I endeavor to get a taste to suit my dinner." Friends were made everywhere amongst the best and most distinguished people. They received him in their homes at Genoa with cordiality, and gave him letters to eminent people in Florence, Rome, and Naples.

From Genoa he went to Sicily, and had an experience on the journey which no doubt colored some of his later writings. The boat fell into the hands of pirates of the most approved style, with cutlasses in their hands, and stiletos and pistols stuck in their waistbands — pirates with a sense of humor, too, for on leaving they gave the captain a receipt for what they had taken and an order on the British consul at Messina to pay for the same! Two months in Sicily were full of interesting explorations and agreeable idling at the ports, where the officers of American ships were most appreciative of his "boundless capacity for good fellowship."

After a visit in Naples, he went to Rome, where for the first time he could enjoy freely masterpieces of music and of art. A friendship with Washington Allston, the American artist, made him dream for a time of remaining in Italy to study art. At Rome a certain banker was most assiduous in his attentions to Irving, and only when Irving was leaving, was it discovered that he had supposed him to be a relative of George Washington. This suggests another one of many anecdotes concerning his name. It was years later, when he had some literary fame, that an English lady rebuked the ignorance of her daughter who had asked information about the original of a bust marked "George Washington," by saying, "Why, my dear, don't you know? He wrote *The Sketch Book!*"

At the end of a year Irving was in Paris, where for four months he enjoyed the fascinating life of the French capital, and then went by way of the Netherlands to London. Here, as everywhere, he met famous people and made valuable friends. He rejoiced in attendance at the theatre and opera, loitered about historic scenes, and played an agreeable part in brilliant salons and at dinners where his hosts could appreciate the charm of his manner and his ingenuous nature.

The eighteen months spent in this desultory fashion were an important factor in Irving's literary equipment, not alone in the material they furnished, but in the languages he learned and the cultivation resulting from wide experience amongst refined people of various nationalities. But so far in his life there was little actual performance upon which to base any prediction of literary success.

Irving returned to New York in 1806, resumed his study of law, and was admitted to the bar, though neither he nor his examiners probably had a very high opinion of the amount of his legal knowledge. He entered again upon the active enjoyment of social life in Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, and Albany, as well as in New York, everywhere welcomed for his sunny, lively disposition, his agreeable manners and vivacious conversation — perhaps also for his comely appearance. A drawing which was made in Paris in 1805 shows a most distinguished and attractive-looking face.

Salmagundi was published at this period of Irving's life, in conjunction with his eldest brother, William, and his lifelong friend, James K. Paulding. It was a small periodical which appeared twice a month for about ten months. Though the idea was, again, as in "Jonathan

Oldstyle's" letters, borrowed from Addison's *Spectator*, its wit and humor were largely original, and "its amusing audacity and complacent superiority, the mystery hanging about its writers, its affectation of indifference to praise or profit, its fearless criticism, lively wit, and irresponsible humor, piqued, puzzled, and delighted the town." It was read widely in other places, and was immensely successful. Here we have the real beginning of his literary career.

Irving did not follow up his literary success immediately, and after a half-hearted attempt to enter upon a political career, he gave that up, "disgusted by the servility and duplicity and rascality witnessed among the swarm of scrub politicians."

A History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker, his first important work, resulted from a plan formed some time later with his brother Peter to satirize a publication about New York which had just appeared. It was to be a burlesque upon pedantry and erudition. Peter having been called abroad by business, Irving finished it alone in a way altogether different from the original intention, after condensing what they had written together into five chapters. Some critics seem to think it would have been better to condense those five into one, and then throw it away!

During the progress of this work Irving suffered a great sorrow in the illness and death of Matilda Hoffman, whom he had expected to marry. The loss affected his entire life, for though he seems to have admired women of his acquaintance very much, and though some of his letters indicate that he was contemplating at least the probability of his marrying, he never did so. He recovered his serenity and much of his gay humor,

but there seemed always present a tender and sacred memory.

The History of New York was most cleverly advertised by notices in the newspapers, first of the disappearance of "a small, elderly gentleman dressed in an old black coat and cocked hat, by the name of Knickerbocker," and afterwards by paragraphs stating that an old gentleman answering to the description had been seen traveling north on an Albany stage; and that Knickerbocker went away owing his landlord and leaving behind a "curious kind of written book," which would be sold to pay his bills if he did not return. Finally the announcement of the publication was made, and ever after the magic words "by Diedrich Knickerbocker" were sufficient to secure attention from the reading public. "This was the germ of the whole Knickerbocker legend," says Warner, "a fantastic creation which in a manner took the place of history and stamped upon the commercial metropolis of the New World the Knickerbocker name and character." The hidden humor of its advertisement and dedication to the New York Historical Society was not always discerned, and for a time Irving was under a cloud of social condemnation in certain circles for holding the old Dutch inhabitants up to ridicule; but "even the Dutch critics were disarmed before long by the absence of all malice in the gigantic humor of the composition." The work came to be considered a masterpiece of humorous writing. Sir Walter Scott, among the first to recognize its power, compared its style to Swift's; and though it may not be always pleasing to modern taste, it has an assured place in literature.

Again success failed to spur Irving on to new literary efforts. In social life and some connection with his

brothers' hardware business the years passed. He became interested in the war with England, and was made aide and military secretary to the governor of New York. He was on his way to Washington to apply for a commission in the regular army when the war was ended.

In May, 1815, Irving went to England for a short visit to a brother living there. The illness of this brother, the bad condition of their mercantile affairs — which ended in failure — and then Irving's literary work, kept him seventeen years abroad. Before the failure, there were trips in Wales and England, which contributed to the store of interesting material which grew into later works. Afterwards, in 1818, Irving went to London determined to devote himself to literature. He was successful, and thereafter repaid in the most loving and delicate manner the care and devotion which had been lavished upon him as the genius of the family. Warner says, "I know of nothing more admirable than the life-long relations of this talented and sincere family."

The Sketch Book was sent to America for publication in May, 1819. It was immensely successful, "The Wife" and "Rip Van Winkle" being the best of the sketches. Reprints were made in England without authority, so it was thought best to publish there also; and soon Irving was received in the highest literary circles with enthusiasm. The "Literary Dinner" in this volume of *The Tales of a Traveller* had a personal foundation in experiences of these times, "whimsical and conventional" though it seems. "Irving's satire of both authors and publishers has always the old-time Grub Street flavor, or at least the *reminiscent tone*, which is, by the way, quite characteristic of nearly everything that he wrote about England." I insert these words of Warner's as

keenly appreciative of Irving's literary attitude. It seemed generally, without losing originality or individual charm, to be that of an observer, and an observer who has read.

Irving went to Paris in the summer of 1820. His works increased in popularity — a fact which is more significant of their worth when we remember that both Scott and Byron were at that time the "idols of the English-reading world."

The next year *Bracebridge Hall* was published, a sort of sketch book of English life in which was "Dolph Heyliger," one of his best Dutch characterizations. Irving had returned to England, and had been staying with a sister in Birmingham. He had become something of an invalid on account of an eruptive disease which affected his ankles and troubled him more or less all the rest of his life. Trips were taken to different "cures," on one of which he met the Foster family, who became intimate friends and added much to the interest of this part of his life. After this he made a long visit in Paris again, where he was closely associated with Thomas Moore and his wife.

The Tales of a Traveller appeared in 1824. They were tales of English, French, and Italian life, based on his own experiences and stories told by the way. In his own opinion, and in that of his best critics, it contained some of his best writing and had a charming spontaneity of expression. Nevertheless it was not so popular as former writings, and perhaps this was one reason why Irving turned his attention to more serious themes. He thought of writing his *Life of Washington* at that time; but in 1826 he settled in Madrid, his sole object at first being to make translations of some historical documents then appearing. But the fascination of the old chronicles

and legends kindled the fires of his genius and resulted in *The Life of Columbus*, *The Alhambra*, *The Conquest of Granada*, *Legends of the Conquest of Spain*, and *The Companions of Columbus*. The books of "mingled fables, sentiment, fact, and humor are after all the most enduring fruits of his residence in Spain," says Warner.

The Life of Columbus appeared in 1828, and was immediately successful. "It is open to the charge of too much rhetorical color here and there, and it is at times too diffuse; but its substantial accuracy is not questioned, and the glow of the narrative springs legitimately from the romance of the theme." The sympathy and poetic imagination with which he entered into the character of Columbus shows that he appreciated what Carlyle has so emphasized, the importance of vivid portraiture in historical narrative.

In 1829 Irving was appointed Secretary of Legation to the Court of Saint James, and though he was much interested in his literary projects at the time, he was persuaded by the urgency of his friends to accept, and evinced in the duties of the position that genuine patriotism which always distinguished him, — though ignorant doubts and questionings concerning it have sometimes arisen because of his long stay abroad and his interest in other places.

Though he played an active part in the best social and literary life of England, Irving was anxious to return home. In May of 1832 he came back to America.

The reception accorded the "Dutch Herodotus, Diedrich Knickerbocker," as he was called in an after-dinner speech, proved the love and admiration of his countrymen, not only in New York, but wherever civilization had extended its influence in America.