

WASHINGTON IRVING



KNICKERBOCKER'S HISTORY OF NEW YORK

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INTRODUCTION.

KNICKERBOCKER'S HISTORY OF NEW YORK is the book, published in December, 1809, with which Washington Irving, at the age of twenty-six, first won wide credit and influence. Walter Scott wrote to an American friend, who sent him the second edition——

"I beg you to accept my best thanks for the uncommon degree of entertainment which I have received from the most excellently jocose History of New York. I am sensible that, as a stranger to American parties and politics, I must lose much of the concealed satire of the piece, but I must own that, looking at the simple and obvious meaning only, I have never read anything so closely resembling the style of Dean Swift as the annals of Diedrich Knickerbocker. I have been employed these few evenings in reading them aloud to Mrs. S. and two ladies who are our guests, and our sides have been absolutely sore with laughing. I think, too, there are passages which indicate that the author possesses powers of a different kind, and has some touches which remind me much of Sterne."

Washington Irving was the son of William Irving, a sturdy native of the Orkneys, allied to the Irvines of Drum, among whose kindred was an old historiographer who said to them, "Some of the foolish write themselves Irving." William Irving of Shapinsha, in the Orkney Islands, was a petty officer on board an armed packet ship in His Majesty's service, when he met with his fate at Falmouth in Sarah Sanders, whom he married at Falmouth in May, 1761. Their first child was buried in England before July, 1763, when peace had been concluded, and William Irving emigrated to New York with his wife, soon to be joined by his wife's parents.

At New York William Irving entered into trade, and prospered fairly until the outbreak of the American Revolution. His sympathy, and that of his wife, went with the colonists. On the 19th of October, 1781, Lord Cornwallis, with a force of seven thousand men, surrendered at Yorktown. In October, 1782, Holland acknowledged the independence of the United States in a treaty concluded at The Hague. In January, 1783, an armistice was concluded with Great Britain. In February, 1783, the independence of the United States was acknowledged by Sweden and by Denmark, and in March by Spain. On the 3rd of April in that year an eleventh child was born to William and Sarah Irving, who was named Washington, after the hero under whom the war had been brought to an end. In 1783 the peace was signed, New York was evacuated, and the independence of the United States acknowledged by England.

Of the eleven children eight survived. William Irving, the father, was rigidly pious, a just and honorable man, who made religion burdensome to his children by associating it too much with restrictions and denials. One of their two weekly half-holidays was devoted to the Catechism. The mother's gentler sensibility and womanly impulses gave her the greater influence; but she revered and loved her good husband, and when her youngest puzzled her with his pranks, she would say, "Ah, Washington, if you were only good!"

For his lively spirits and quick fancy could not easily be subdued. He would get out of his bed-room window at night, walk along a coping, and climb over the roof to the top of the next house, only for the high purpose of astonishing a neighbor by dropping a stone down his chimney. As a young school-boy he came upon Hoole's translation of Ariosto, and achieved in his father's back yard knightly adventures. "Robinson Crusoe" and "Sindbad the Sailor" made him yearn to go to sea. But this was

impossible unless he could learn to lie hard and eat salt pork, which he detested. He would get out of bed at night and lie on the floor for an hour or two by way of practice. He also took every opportunity that came in his way of eating the detested food. But the more he tried to like it the nastier it grew, and he gave up as impracticable his hope of going to sea. He fastened upon adventures of real travelers; he yearned for travel, and was entranced in his youth by first sight of the beauties of the Hudson River. He scribbled jests for his school friends, and, of course, he wrote a school-boy play. At sixteen his schooling was at an end, and he was placed in a lawyer's office, from which he was transferred to another, and then, in January, 1802, to another, where he continued his clerkship with a Mr. Hoffman, who had a young wife, and two young daughters by a former marriage. With this family Washington Irving, a careless student, lively, clever, kind, established the happiest relations, of which afterwards there came the deep grief of his life and a sacred memory.

Washington Irving's eldest brothers were beginning to thrive in business. A brother Peter shared his frolics with the pen. His artist pleasure in the theater was indulged without his father's knowledge. He would go to the play, come home for nine o'clock prayers, go up to bed, and climb out of his bed-room window, and run back and see the after-piece. So come evasions of undue restraint. But with all this impulsive liveliness, young Washington Irving's life appeared, as he grew up, to be in grave danger. When he was nineteen, and taken by a brother-in-law to Ballston springs, it was determined by those who heard his incessant night cough that he was "not long for this world." When he had come of age, in April, 1804, his brothers, chiefly his eldest brother, who was prospering, provided money to send him to Europe that he might recover health by restful travel in France, Italy and England. When he was helped up the side of the vessel that was to take him from

New York to Bordeaux, the captain looked at him with pity and said, "There's a chap who will go overboard before we get across." But Washington Irving returned to New York at the beginning of the year 1806 with health restored.

What followed will be told in the Introduction to the other volume of this History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker. H.M.

THE AUTHOR'S APOLOGY.

The following work, in which, at the outset, nothing more was contemplated than a temporary *jeu-d'esprit*, was commenced in company with my brother, the late Peter Irving, Esq. Our idea was to parody a small hand-book which had recently appeared, entitled, "A Picture of New York." Like that, our work was to begin an historical sketch; to be followed by notices of the customs, manners and institutions of the city; written in a serio-comic vein, and treating local errors, follies and abuses with good-humored satire.

To burlesque the pedantic lore displayed in certain American works, our historical sketch was to commence with the creation of the world; and we laid all kinds of works under contribution for trite citations, relevant or irrelevant, to give it the proper air of learned research. Before this crude mass of mock erudition could be digested into form, my brother departed for Europe, and I was left to prosecute the enterprise alone.

I now altered the plan of the work. Discarding all idea of a parody on the "Picture of New York," I determined that what had been originally intended as an introductory sketch should comprise the whole work, and form a comic history of the city. I accordingly moulded the mass of citations and disquisitions into introductory chapters, forming the first book; but it soon became evident to me

that, like Robinson Crusoe with his boat, I had begun on too large a scale, and that, to launch my history successfully, I must reduce its proportions. I accordingly resolved to confine it to the period of the Dutch domination, which, in its rise, progress and decline, presented that unity of subject required by classic rule. It was a period, also, at that time almost a *terra incognita* in history. In fact, I was surprised to find how few of my fellow-citizens were aware that New York had ever been called New Amsterdam, or had heard of the names of its early Dutch governors, or cared a straw about their ancient Dutch progenitors.

This, then, broke upon me as the poetic age of our city; poetic from its very obscurity, and open, like the early and obscure days of ancient Rome, to all the embellishments of heroic fiction. I hailed my native city as fortunate above all other American cities in having an antiquity thus extending back into the regions of doubt and fable; neither did I conceive I was committing any grievous historical sin in helping out the few facts I could collect in this remote and forgotten region with figments of my own brain, or in giving characteristic attributes to the few names connected with it which I might dig up from oblivion.

In this, doubtless, I reasoned like a young and inexperienced writer, besotted with his own fancies; and my presumptuous trespasses into this sacred, though neglected, region of history have met with deserved rebuke from men of soberer minds. It is too late, however, to recall the shaft thus rashly launched. To any one whose sense of fitness it may wound, I can only say with Hamlet——

"Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil Free me so far
in your most generous thoughts That I have shot my arrow
o'er the house, And hurt my brother."

I will say this in further apology for my work: that if it has taken an unwarrantable liberty with our early provincial history, it has at least turned attention to that history, and

provoked research. It is only since this work appeared that the forgotten archives of the province have been rummaged, and the facts and personages of the olden time rescued from the dust of oblivion, and elevated into whatever importance they may actually possess.

The main object of my work, in fact, had a bearing wide from the sober aim of history, but one which, I trust, will meet with some indulgence from poetic minds. It was to embody the traditions of our city in an amusing form; to illustrate its local humors, customs and peculiarities; to clothe home scenes and places and familiar names with those imaginative and whimsical associations so seldom met with in our new country, but which live like charms and spells about the cities of the old world, binding the heart of the native inhabitant to his home.

In this I have reason to believe I have in some measure succeeded. Before the appearance of my work the popular traditions of our city were unrecorded; the peculiar and racy customs and usages derived from our Dutch progenitors were unnoticed, or regarded with indifference, or adverted to with a sneer. Now they form a convivial currency, and are brought forward on all occasions; they link our whole community together in good-humor and good-fellowship; they are the rallying points of home feeling; the seasoning of our civic festivities; the staple of local tales and local pleasantries; and are so harped upon by our writers of popular fiction that I find myself almost crowded off the legendary ground which I was the first to explore by the host who have followed in my footsteps.

I dwell on this head because, at the first appearance of my work, its aim and drift were misapprehended by some of the descendants of the Dutch worthies, and because I understand that now and then one may still be found to regard it with a captious eye. The far greater part, however, I have reason to flatter myself, receive my good-humored picturings in the same temper with which they

were executed; and when I find, after a lapse of nearly forty years, this haphazard production of my youth still cherished among them; when I find its very name become a "household word," and used to give the home stamp to everything recommended for popular acceptance, such as Knickerbocker societies, Knickerbocker insurance companies, Knickerbocker steamboats, Knickerbocker omnibuses, Knickerbocker bread, and Knickerbocker ice; and when I find New Yorkers of Dutch descent priding themselves upon being "genuine Knickerbockers," I please myself with the persuasion that I have struck the right chord; that my dealings with the good old Dutch times, and the customs and usages derived from them, are in harmony with the feelings and humors of my townsmen; that I have opened a vein of pleasant associations and quaint characteristics peculiar to my native place, and which its inhabitants will not willingly suffer to pass away; and that, though other histories of New York may appear of higher claims to learned acceptance, and may take their dignified and appropriate rank in the family library, Knickerbocker's history will still be received with good-humored indulgence, and be thumbed and chuckled over by the family fireside.

Sunnyside, 1848.

W.I.

Notices.

WHICH APPEARED IN THE NEWSPAPERS PREVIOUS TO THE PUBLICATION OF THIS WORK.

From the "Evening Post" of October 26, 1809.

DISTRESSING.

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

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

From the same, November 6, 1809.

To the Editor of the "Evening Post."

SIR,—Having read, in your paper of the 26th of October last, a paragraph respecting an old gentleman by the name of *Knickerbocker*, who was missing from his lodgings; if it would be any relief to his friends, or furnish them with any clue to discover where he is, you may inform them that a person answering the description given was seen by the passengers of the Albany stage, early in the morning, about four or five weeks since, resting himself by the side of the road, a little above King's Bridge. He had in his hand a small bundle tied in a red bandana handkerchief: he appeared to be traveling northward, and was very much fatigued and exhausted.

A TRAVELER.

From the same, November 16, 1809.

To the Editor of the "Evening Post."

SIR,—You have been good enough to publish in your paper a paragraph about *Mr. Diedrich Knickerbocker*, who was missing so strangely some time since. Nothing satisfactory has been heard of the old gentleman since; but a *very curious kind of a written book* has been found in his room, in his own handwriting. Now, I wish you to notice him, if he is still alive, that if he does not return and pay off his bill for boarding and lodging, I shall have to dispose of his book to satisfy me for the same.

I am, Sir, your humble servant,

SETH HANDASIDE,

Landlord of the Independent Columbian Hotel,
Mulberry Street.

From the same, November 28, 1809.

LITERARY NOTICE.

INSKEEP and BRADFORD have in the press, and will shortly publish,

A History of New York,

In two volumes, duodecimo. Price three dollars.

Containing an account of its discovery and settlement, with its internal policies, manners, customs, wars, &c. &c., under the Dutch government, furnishing many curious and interesting particulars never before published, and which are gathered from various manuscript and other authenticated sources, the whole being interspersed with philosophical speculations and moral precepts.

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

From the "American Citizen" December 6, 1809.

Is this day published,

By INSKEEP and BRADFORD, No. 128, Broadway,

A History of New York,

&c. &c.
(Containing same as above.)

ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR

It was some time, if I recollect right, in the early part of the fall of 1808, that a stranger applied for lodgings at the Independent Columbian Hotel in Mulberry Street, of which I am landlord. He was a small, brisk-looking old gentleman, dressed in a rusty black coat, a pair of olive velvet breeches, and a small cocked hat. He had a few gray hairs plaited and clubbed behind, and his beard seemed to be of some eight-and-forty hours' growth. The only piece of finery which he bore about him was a bright pair of square silver shoe-buckles; and all his baggage was contained in a pair of saddle-bags, which he carried under his arm. His whole appearance was something out of the common run; and my wife, who is a very shrewd little body, at once set him down for some eminent country schoolmaster.

As the Independent Columbian Hotel is a very small house, I was a little puzzled at first where to put him; but my wife, who seemed taken with his looks, would needs put him in her best chamber, which is genteelly set off with the profiles of the whole family, done in black, by those two great painters, Jarvis and Wood: and commands a very pleasant view of the new grounds on the Collect, together with the rear of the Poor House and Bridewell, and the full front of the Hospital; so that it is the cheerfulest room in the whole house.

During the whole time that he stayed with us, we found him a very worthy, good sort of an old gentleman, though a little queer in his ways. He would keep in his room for days together, and if any of the children cried, or made a noise about his door, he would bounce out in a great passion, with his hands full of papers, and say something about

"deranging his ideas;" which made my wife believe sometimes that he was not altogether *compos*. Indeed, there was more than one reason to make her think so, for his room was always covered with scraps of paper and old mouldy books, lying about at sixes and sevens, which he would never let anybody touch; for he said he had laid them all away in their proper places, so that he might know where to find them; though, for that matter, he was half his time worrying about the house in search of some book or writing which he had carefully put out of the way. I shall never forget what a pother he once made, because my wife cleaned out his room when his back was turned, and put everything to rights; for he swore he would never be able to get his papers in order again in a twelve-month. Upon this my wife ventured to ask him, what he did with so many books and papers? and he told her, that he was "seeking for immortality"; which made her think, more than ever, that the poor old gentleman's head was a little cracked.

He was a very inquisitive body, and when not in his room was continually poking about town, hearing all the news, and prying into everything that was going on; this was particularly the case about election time, when he did nothing but bustle about him from poll to poll, attending all ward meetings and committee-rooms; though I could never find that he took part with either side of the question. On the contrary, he would come home and rail at both parties with great wrath—and plainly proved one day to the satisfaction of my wife, and three old ladies who were drinking tea with her, that the two parties were like two rogues, each tugging at the skirt of the nation; and that in the end they would tear the very coat off its back, and expose its nakedness. Indeed, he was an oracle among the neighbors, who would collect around him to hear him talk of an afternoon, as he smoked his pipe on the bench before the door; and I really believe he would have brought over

the whole neighborhood to his own side of the question, if they could ever have found out what it was.

He was very much given to argue, or, as he called it, philosophize, about the most trifling matter, and to do him justice, I never knew anybody that was a match for him, except it was a grave-looking old gentleman who called now and then to see him, and often posed him in an argument. But this is nothing surprising, as I have since found out this stranger is the city librarian; and, of course, must be a man of great learning; and I have my doubts if he had not some hand in the following history.

As our lodger had been a long time with us, and we had never received any pay, my wife began to be somewhat uneasy, and curious to find out who and what he was. She accordingly made bold to put the question to his friend the librarian, who replied, in his dry way, that he was one of the *Literati*; which she supposed to mean some new party in politics. I scorn to push a lodger for his pay, so I let day after day pass on without dunning the old gentleman for a farthing; but my wife, who always takes these matters on herself, and is, as I said, a shrewd kind of a woman, at last got out of patience, and hinted, that she thought it high time "some people should have a sight of some people's money." To which the old gentleman replied in a mighty touchy manner, that she need not make herself uneasy, for that he had a treasure there (pointing to his saddle-bags) worth her whole house put together. This was the only answer we could ever get from him; and as my wife, by some of those odd ways in which women find out everything, learnt that he was of very great connections, being related to the Knickerbockers of Scaghtikoke, and cousin german to the Congressman of that name, she did not like to treat him uncivilly. What is more, she even offered, merely by way of making things easy, to let him live scot-free, if he would teach the children their letters; and to try her best and get her neighbors to send their children

also; but the old gentleman took it in such dudgeon, and seemed so affronted at being taken for a schoolmaster, that she never dared to speak on the subject again.

About two months ago, he went out of a morning, with a bundle in his hand—and has never been heard of since. All kinds of inquiries were made after him, but in vain. I wrote to his relations at Scaghtikoke, but they sent for answer, that he had not been there since the year before last, when he had a great dispute with the Congressman about politics, and left the place in a huff, and they had neither heard nor seen anything of him from that time to this. I must own I felt very much worried about the poor old gentleman; for I thought something bad must have happened to him, that he should be missing so long, and never return to pay his bill. I therefore advertised him in the newspapers, and though my melancholy advertisement was published by several humane printers, yet I have never been able to learn anything satisfactory about him.

My wife now said it was high time to take care of ourselves, and see if he had left anything behind in his room, that would pay us for his board and lodging. We found nothing, however, but some old books and musty writings, and his pair of saddle-bags; which, being opened in the presence of the librarian, contained only a few articles of worn-out clothes and a large bundle of blotted paper. On looking over this, the librarian told us, he had no doubt it was the treasure which the old gentleman had spoke about; as it proved to be a most excellent and faithful History of New York, which he advised us by all means to publish; assuring us that it would be so eagerly bought up by a discerning public, that he had no doubt it would be enough to pay our arrears ten times over. Upon this we got a very learned schoolmaster, who teaches our children, to prepare it for the press, which he accordingly has done; and has, moreover, added to it a number of notes of his

own; and an engraving of the city, as it was at the time Mr. Knickerbocker writes about.

This, therefore, is a true statement of my reasons for having this work printed, without waiting for the consent of the author; and I here declare, that if he ever returns (though I much fear some unhappy accident has befallen him), I stand ready to account with him like a true and honest man. Which is all at present——

From the public's humble servant,
SETH HANDASIDE.

INDEPENDENT COLUMBIAN HOTEL, NEW YORK.

The foregoing account of the author was prefixed to the first edition of this work. Shortly after its publication, a letter was received from him, by Mr. Handaside, dated at a small Dutch village on the banks of the Hudson, whither he had traveled for the purpose of inspecting certain ancient records. As this was one of those few and happy villages, into which newspapers never find their way, it is not a matter of surprise, that Mr. Knickerbocker should never have seen the numerous advertisements that were made concerning him; and that he should learn of the publication of his history by mere accident.

He expressed much concern at its premature appearance, as thereby he was prevented from making several important corrections and alterations: as well as from profiting by many curious hints which he had collected during his travels along the shores of the Tappan Sea, and his sojourn at Haverstraw and Esopus.

Finding that there was no longer any immediate necessity for his return to New York, he extended his journey up to the residence of his relations at Scaghtikoke. On his way thither he stopped for some days at Albany, for which city he is known to have entertained a great partiality. He found it, however, considerably altered, and was much concerned at the inroads and improvements which the Yankees were making, and the consequent decline of the good old Dutch

manners. Indeed, he was informed that these intruders were making sad innovations in all parts of the State; where they had given great trouble and vexation to the regular Dutch settlers, by the introduction of turnpike-gates and country school-houses. It is said, also, that Mr. Knickerbocker shook his head sorrowfully at noticing the gradual decay of the great Vander Heyden palace; but was highly indignant at finding that the ancient Dutch church, which stood in the middle of the street, had been pulled down since his last visit.

The fame of Mr. Knickerbocker's History having reached even to Albany, he received much flattering attention from its worthy burghers; some of whom, however, pointed out two or three very great errors he had fallen into, particularly that of suspending a lump of sugar over the Albany tea-tables, which they assured him had been discontinued for some years past. Several families, moreover, were somewhat piqued that their ancestors had not been mentioned in his work, and showed great jealousy of their neighbors who had thus been distinguished; while the latter, it must be confessed, plumed themselves vastly thereupon; considering these recordings in the lights of letters patent of nobility, establishing their claims to ancestry, which, in this republican country, is a matter of no little solicitude and vain-glory.

It is also said, that he enjoyed high favor and countenance from the governor, who once asked him to dinner, and was seen two or three times to shake hands with him when they met in the street; which certainly was going great lengths, considering that they differed in politics. Indeed, certain of the governor's confidential friends, to whom he could venture to speak his mind freely on such matters, have assured us that he privately entertained a considerable good-will for our author—nay, he even once went so far as to declare, and that openly too, and at his own table, just after dinner, that "Knickerbocker

was a very well-meaning sort of an old gentleman, and no fool." From all which may have been led to suppose, that, had our author been of different politics, and written for the newspapers instead of wasting his talents on histories, he might have risen to some post of honor and profit: peradventure to be a notary public, or even a justice in the ten-pound court.

Besides the honors and civilities already mentioned, he was much caressed by the *literati* of Albany; particularly by Mr. John Cook, who entertained him very hospitably at his circulating library and reading-room, where they used to drink Spa water, and talk about the ancients. He found Mr. Cook a man after his own heart—of great literary research, and a curious collector of books. At parting, the latter, in testimony of friendship, made him a present of the two oldest works in his collection; which were, the earliest edition of the Heidelberg Catechism, and Adrian Vander Donck's famous account of the New Netherlands; by the last of which Mr. Knickerbocker profited greatly in this his second edition.

Having passed some time very agreeably at Albany, our author proceeded to Scaghtikoke; where, it is but justice to say, he was received with open arms, and treated with wonderful loving-kindness. He was much looked up to by the family, being the first historian of the name; and was considered almost as great a man as his cousin the Congressman—with whom, by-the-by, he became perfectly reconciled, and contracted a strong friendship.

In spite, however, of the kindness of his relations, and their great attention to his comforts, the old gentleman soon became restless and discontented. His history being published, he had no longer any business to occupy his thoughts, or any scheme to excite his hopes and anticipations. This, to a busy mind like his, was a truly deplorable situation; and had he not been a man of inflexible morals and regular habits, there would have been

great danger of his taking to politics or drinking—both which pernicious vices we daily see men driven to by mere spleen and idleness.

It is true he sometimes employed himself in preparing a second edition of his history, wherein he endeavored to correct and improve many passages with which he was dissatisfied, and to rectify some mistakes that had crept into it; for he was particularly anxious that his work should be noted for its authenticity; which, indeed, is the very life and soul of history. But the glow of composition had departed—he had to leave many places untouched which he would fain have altered; and even where he did make alterations, he seemed always in doubt whether they were for the better or the worse.

After a residence of some time at Scaghtikoke, he began to feel a strong desire to return to New York, which he ever regarded with the warmest affection; not merely because it was his native city, but because he really considered it the very best city in the whole world. On his return he entered into the full enjoyment of the advantages of a literary reputation. He was continually importuned to write advertisements, petitions, handbills, and productions of similar import; and, although he never meddled with the public papers, yet had he the credit of writing innumerable essays, and smart things, that appeared on all subjects, and all sides of the question, in all which he was clearly detected "by his style."

He contracted, moreover, a considerable debt at the postoffice, in consequence of the numerous letter he received from authors and printers soliciting his subscription—and he was applied to by every charitable society for yearly donations, which he gave very cheerfully, considering these applications as so many compliments. He was once invited to a great corporation dinner; and was even twice summoned to attend as a juryman at the court of quarter sessions. Indeed, so renowned did he become,

that he could no longer pry about, as formerly, in all holes and corners of the city, according to the bent of his humor, unnoticed and uninterrupted; but several times when he has been sauntering the streets, on his usual rambles of observation, equipped with his cane and cocked hat, the little boys at play have been known to cry, "There goes Diedrich!" at which the old gentleman seemed not a little pleased, looking upon these salutations in the light of the praise of posterity.

In a word, if we take into consideration all these various honors and distinctions, together with an exuberant eulogium, passed on his in the Portfolio (with which, we are told, the old gentleman was so much overpowered, that he was sick for two or three days) it must be confessed that few authors have ever lived to receive such illustrious rewards, or have so completely enjoyed in advance their own immortality.

After his return from Scaghtikoke, Mr. Knickerbocker took up his residence at a little rural retreat, which the Stuyvesants had granted him on the family domain, in gratitude for his honorable mention of their ancestor. It was pleasantly situated on the borders of one of the salt marshes beyond Corlear's Hook; subject, indeed, to be occasionally over-flowed, and much infested, in the summer-time, with mosquitoes; but otherwise very agreeable, producing abundant crops of salt grass and bulrushes.

Here, we are sorry to say, the good old gentleman fell dangerously ill of a fever, occasioned by the neighboring marshes. When he found his end approaching, he disposed of his worldly affairs, leaving the bulk of his fortune to the New York Historical Society; his Heidelberg Catechism and Vander Donck's work to the City Library; and his saddlebags to Mr. Handaside. He forgave all his enemies—that is to say, all that bore any enmity towards him; for as to himself, he declared he died in good-will to all the world.

And, after dictating several kind messages, to his relations at Scaghtikoke, as well as to certain of our most substantial Dutch citizens, he expired in the arms of his friend the librarian.

His remains were interred, according to his own request, in St. Mark's Churchyard, close by the bones of his favorite hero, Peter Stuyvesant; and it is rumored that the Historical Society have it in mind to erect a wooden monument to his memory in the Bowling Green.

TO THE PUBLIC.

"To rescue from oblivion the memory of former incidents, and to render a just tribute of renown to the many great and wonderful transactions of our Dutch progenitors, Diedrich Knickerbocker, native of the city of New York, produces this historical essay."^[1] Like the great Father of History, whose words I have just quoted, I treat of times long past, over which the twilight of uncertainty had already thrown its shadows, and the night of forgetfulness was about to descend for ever. With great solicitude had I long beheld the early history of this venerable and ancient city gradually slipping from our grasp, trembling on the lips of narrative old age, and day by day dropping piecemeal into the tomb. In a little while, thought I, and those revered Dutch burghers, who serve as the tottering monuments of good old times, will be gathered to their fathers; their children, engrossed by the empty pleasures or insignificant transactions of the present age, will neglect to treasure up the recollections of the past, and posterity will search in vain for memorials of the days of the Patriarchs. The origin of our city will be buried in eternal oblivion, and even the names and achievements of Wouter Van Twiller, William Kieft, and Peter Stuyvesant be enveloped in doubt and fiction, like those of Romulus and Remus, of Charlemagne, King Arthur, Rinaldo, and Godfrey of Boulogne.

Determined, therefore, to avert if possible this threatened misfortune, I industriously set myself to work to gather together all the fragments of our ancient history which still existed; and, like my revered prototype, Herodotus, where no written records could be found, I have endeavored to

continue the chain of history by well-authenticated traditions.

In this arduous undertaking, which has been the whole business of a long and solitary life, it is incredible the number of learned authors I have consulted, and all to but little purpose. Strange as it may seem, though such multitudes of excellent works have been written about this country, there are none extant which give any full and satisfactory account of the early history of New York, or of its three first Dutch Governors. I have, however, gained much valuable and curious matter from an elaborate manuscript, written in exceeding pure and classic low Dutch, excepting a few errors in orthography, which was found in the archives of the Stuyvesant family. Many legends, letters, and other documents have I likewise gleaned in my researches among the family chests and lumber garrets of our respectable Dutch citizens; and I have gathered a host of well-authenticated traditions from divers excellent old ladies of my acquaintance, who requested that their names might not be mentioned. Nor must I neglect to acknowledge how greatly I have been assisted by that admirable and praiseworthy institution, the New York Historical Society, to which I here publicly return my sincere acknowledgments.

In the conduct, of this inestimable work I have adopted no individual model, but, on the contrary, have simply contented myself with combining and concentrating the excellences of the most approved ancient historians. Like Xenophon, I have maintained the utmost impartiality, and the strictest adherence to truth throughout my history. I have enriched it, after the manner of Sallust, with various characters of ancient worthies, drawn at full length and faithfully colored. I have seasoned it with profound political speculations like Thucydides, sweetened it with the graces of sentiment like Tacitus, and infused into the whole the dignity, the grandeur and magnificence of Livy.

I am aware that I shall incur the censure of numerous very learned and judicious critics for indulging too frequently in the bold excursive manner of my favorite Herodotus. And, to be candid, I have found it impossible always to resist the allurements of those pleasing episodes, which, like flowery banks and fragrant bowers, beset the dusty road of the historian, and entice him to turn aside, and refresh himself from his wayfaring. But I trust it will be found that I have always resumed my staff, and addressed myself to my weary journey with renovated spirits, so that both my readers and myself have been benefited by the relaxation.

Indeed, though it has been my constant wish and uniform endeavor to rival Polybius himself, in observing the requisite unity of History, yet the loose and unconnected manner in which many of the facts herein recorded have come to hand rendered such an attempt extremely difficult. This difficulty was likewise increased by one of the grand objects contemplated in my work, which was to trace the rise of sundry customs and institutions in these best of cities, and to compare them, when in the germ of infancy, with what they are in the present old age of knowledge and improvement.

But the chief merit on which I value myself, and found my hopes for future regard, is that faithful veracity with which I have compiled this invaluable little work; carefully winnowing away the chaff of hypothesis, and discarding the tares of fable, which are too apt to spring up and choke the seeds of truth and wholesome knowledge. Had I been anxious to captivate the superficial throng, who skim like swallows over the surface of literature; or had I been anxious to commend my writings to the pampered palates of literary epicures, I might have availed myself of the obscurity that overshadows the infant years of our city, to introduce a thousand pleasing fictions. But I have scrupulously discarded many a pithy tale and marvelous