

The National Period of American Literature

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emanations from America had been to foreigners devoted to such discussions. The Irving family, though with a proclivity for letters, were not descendants of a long line of cultivated ancestors, as was often the case with New England authors. Young Washington himself was through his school days at 16 and, though a bookish boy, was also a stroller over Manhattan Island with a keen eye for what was going on and a wistful gaze after the sails that filled away for lands remote.

"The History of New York From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty," with its accounts of the unutterable proceedings of Walter the Doubter, the disastrous projects of William the Testy and the chivalric achievements of Peter the Headstrong, came very near being what the author asserted, "the only authentic history of the times that ever hath been or ever will be written." If history is a reproduction of life, as well as a record of events, no better representation of a former age to illustrate and ridicule the ongoings of a later one will likely be made by any successor of Dietrich Knickerbocker. For example:

"Such was the happy reign of Wouter Van Twiller, celebrated in many a long forgotten song as the real golden age, the rest being nothing but counterfeit, copper washed coin. In that delightful period a sweet and holy calm reigned over the whole province. The burgomaster smoked his pipe in peace. The substantial solace of his domestic cares, after her daily toils were done, sat soberly at the door with her arms crossed over her apron of snowy white without being insulted by ribald street walkers or vagabond boys, those un-lucky urchins who do so infest our streets, displaying under the roses of youth the thorns and briars of iniquity. Then it was that the lover with ten breeches and damsel with petticoats half a score indulged in all the endearments of virtuous love without fear and without reproach. Happy would it have been for New Amsterdam could it always have existed in this state of blissful ignorance and lovely simplicity; but, alas, the days of childhood are too sweet to last."

"The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.," is what its title implies, a collection of short, suggestive outlines of narration and incident struck off with the fidelity to nature and certainty of touch which belong to an accomplished artist. A few masterly strokes reveal much more than themselves and intimate possibilities far beyond the limited range which the author allowed himself. For example, everybody knows how Rip Van Winkle has been expanded by the dramatization to which Joseph Jefferson has given a masterly interpretation, and yet it is a dull imagination which has not seen the vagabond Rip, his dog and gun and turtleneck spouse and what was left of these after a 20 years' nap as clearly portrayed in suggestive lines of Irving. "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 incrustated with rust, the lock falling off and the stock worm eaten. He shook his head, shouldered the rusty gun and turned his steps homeward. 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 an old acquaintance, barked at him as he passed. Strange names were over the doors, strange faces at the windows—everything was strange." This is a portrayal to whose realism little can be added by brush or the living picture. It may be superbly represented, but it was all there before the ordinary reader, set in simple words, but always the right ones in the right place. "It was with some difficulty that 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 a wolf was skulking about it. Rip called him by name, but the cur snarled, showed his teeth and passed on. "My very dog," sighed poor Rip, "has forgotten me!" This seems simple and easy to do. The reader thinks that it is the very way he himself should have described the old fellow if he had seen him. To test the matter, let the habit of Franklin be imitated. Read the story once more and rewrite it; then compare revisions. After this the greater achievement remains of inventing or, if it was an adaptation of a German legend, of adapting the character to the drowsy atmosphere of the Catskills.



Irving.

The genius which produced this, "Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and 20 other sketches was instantly recognized in England. Walter Scott's quick appreciation and generous assistance brought the new author into pleasant and profitable relations with the chief publishers of London, and after Scott, Byron and Murray led there was nothing that did not follow. An American had found his place in the fraternity of letters and without bating a jot of his patriotism or sparing the truth in speaking of English prejudices, established himself for five years in the literary metropolis, where he could best do his work and find a market for it.

Irving, however, was coming to be a cosmopolite. England did not keep him too long. By 1820 he is in Paris hobnobbing with Thomas Moore, following up the theaters, catching notes of applause from across the channel, then going back to win an English triumph on English soil in his "Bracebridge Hall."

No native could have pictured the life of a country squire more to the satisfaction of all England. There was much in it with which the author himself had sympathy, as well as with the people he describes. As if in half apology to Americans he says, "I can never forget that this is my fatherland, and yet the circumstances under which I have viewed it have been by no means such as were calculated to produce favorable impressions." He then remarks that close observation will often change opinions, hastily formed, of a national character which shows its rough side first. Special mention is made of the reception accorded to the essay in "The Sketch-Book" on literary feuds between England and America and the "generous sympathy in every English bosom toward a solitary individual lifting up his voice in a strange land to vindicate the character of his nation."

This indeed is the eminence which Irving occupies, higher than that of being our first man of letters in the order of time. He was a peacemaker in an age of misunderstanding, jealousy and hostility. The ill feeling consequent upon two wars had not wholly subsided. In letters there was independent aspiration on one side, complacent superciliousness and sharp censoriousness on the other. In this very year Sydney Smith contemptuously asked, "Who ever reads an American book?" The one man who was able to reply to the taunt could do it in his "English Writers on America." A few sentences will show the large and generous spirit in which this was done. After observing that impressions of this country had been gained from the worst kind of travelers he remarks that the prosperity founded upon political liberty and the general diffusion of knowledge cannot be overlooked; that it is of more consequence to England than to us that justice be done and resentment allayed; that, "possessing the fountain head whence the literature of the language flows, it is in her power to make it the medium of amiable and magnanimous feeling, a stream where the two nations might meet together and drink in peace and kindness." And to Americans he said: "Let it be the pride of our writers, discarding all feelings of irritation, and disdaining to retaliate the illiberality of British authors, to speak of the English nation without prejudice and with determined candor. While they rebuke the indiscriminating bigotry with which some of our countrymen admire and imitate everything English because it is English, let them frankly point out what is really worthy of approbation." The entire essay shows Irving in the character of a broad minded, fearless daysman between the two countries in a sphere more important than diplomacy. "The mere contests of the sword," he says, "are temporary, but the slanders of the pen pierce to the heart. They rankle longest in the noblest spirit; they dwell ever present in the mind. Trace hostilities to their cause and they will be found to originate in the mischievous effusions of mercenary writers who concoct and circulate the venom that is to inflame the generous and the brave."

Of Irving's later and more pretentious labors a corresponding amount might be said. They were the result of a wish, that came with advancing years, to do more monumental work. After the "Tales of a Traveller" had been thrown off as in his opinion the climax of his lighter diversions, for writing was no task when the mood seized him, he then entered upon the most prolific period of his career at the age of 46. The year 1826 found him at Madrid to begin his "Life of Columbus." This occupied two pleasant years and was succeeded by the "Companions" and this by the "Conquest of Granada" and "The Alhambra" before 1832, when he returned to America after a 17 years' residence in Europe. These larger achievements brought him academic honors from Oxford and the medal of the Royal Society of Literature, with no end of applause abroad and at home. Then, after ten years of light writing about this and that, tours, recollections, legends and biographies, came the "crowning honor of his life" in the mission to Spain, to be signaled by his crowning work, the "Life of Washington." With the last volume of this he may be said to have ended his days at the Sunnyside retreat on the banks of the river he loved and whose borders he had peopled with legendary beings recalled from the shadowy and dreamy years of the old Dutch dynasty.

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V.—Washington Irving, Humorist and Historian.

IN the year which saw the United States admitted into the commonwealth of nations a child was born in New York city who should eventually be considered worthy to sit among the makers of literature in England. This honor had not been accorded to any of his predecessors, however interesting theological, political or scientific emanations from America had been to foreigners devoted to such discussions. The Irving family, though with a proclivity for letters, were not descendants of a long line of cultivated ancestors, as was often the case with New England authors. Young Washington himself was through his school days at 16 and, though a bookish boy, was also a stroller over Manhattan Island with a keen eye for what was going on and a wistful gaze after the sails that filled away for lands remote.

TO CELEBRATE AT ROANOKE.

Governor Aycock's Eloquent Address in Seconding the Move.

The Anniversary of Sir Walter Raleigh's Attempted Settlement to be Observed by the State Historical Association.

At the meeting of the State Literary and Historical Association held in Raleigh, October 22, Maj. Graham Daves, of New Bern, proposed that the Association observe the landing of Sir Walter Raleigh's colony at Roanoke Island by holding a meeting there next year. Governor Aycock, our Educational Governor, seconded the move in the following able address:

"I rise for the purpose of seconding the motion of my friend, Major Graham Daves. The motion is not made too soon; indeed we have neglected this important duty until it becomes almost a source of humiliation to us to make it. The event which we propose to celebrate is one of importance. The colonizing of the province of North Carolina was one of great significance, and although the first attempts to settle this State proved unsuccessful they laid the foundations for the later settlement which meant so much to the world. Wherever the Anglo-Saxon sets his foot he becomes a permanency. He loves acre and will not for any consideration yield them to another. Where he has once become established he is a fixture and he carries with him the infinite love of home and out of that grows a respect for government and the power of self-restraint which makes government a possibility and a success.

"He has conquered the earth by his love of home and has found success in curbing his own desires and passions. The leader of the great movement for the colonization of the new land may well be declared to be Sir Walter Raleigh. A soldier, a scholar, a statesman, a navigator, a discoverer, and admiral, he was, taken all in all, a most remarkable man and his death endears him to us as one who suffered much for the great things which he had done. We can say of him with Fitz Green Halleck, of Marco Bozzaris,

"We tell of thy doom without a sigh,
For thou art Freedom's now, and Fame's;
One of the few, the immortal names,
That were not born to die."

"Still if his fame had been dependent upon North Carolina people he would only have been remembered by the naming of our capital city for him.

"In studying his illustrious career with a view to seconding this action I had occasion to seek information and I naturally sought it in our State Library, but I could not find a history of the man who had settled our State. I am a trustee of the State Library and I confess a sense of shame to be compelled to admit that we have in it no life of this good, great and illustrious man. I promise you that the study of his career shall be rendered easier in the future by the purchase of many books relating to his life. It is high time that we learned something of him who first colonized our State and the celebration of that colonization on the island where his colony first landed will in itself teach us something of the great man for whom we have named our city.

"In the morning of the twentieth century, in the dawn of an educational revival, we can do nothing better than to turn back to our beginnings and study carefully the heroic self-sacrifices of those who planted in order that we might reap. Among the pioneers there was none so great, there was none so good, as Sir Walter Raleigh, and if we could learn from his life and his death the lessons which they teach us we would have the greatest State in the world. On the night before he was to have been executed he wrote a letter to his wife from which it is not inappropriate that I should quote. 'I can no more,' he said, 'time and death call me away. The everlasting, powerful, infinite and omnipotent God, who is goodness itself, the true life and true light, keep thee and thine, have mercy on me, and teach me to forgive my persecutors and accusers and send us to meet in his glorious kingdom.' In this spirit he lived, in this spirit he wrought, in this spirit he died and I can but think while we have forgotten the man we have remembered his teachings, and that the uprightness and virtue of our people, their confidence and hope

in God have found a strength and support in the life of this admirable man. Let us, therefore, with united purpose celebrate the settling of this colony. Let us publish to the world our admiration for the man who did so much for us. Let us declare to the earth that we appreciate his work and that we glory in his noble life and in his unjust death. In doing this thing we are but publishing ourselves in line with the new educational zeal of the State. Those of us who have passed out of the schools and can never more attend them will show to the children of the State that the history of great men is to us still an inspiration and is a subject worthy of their study and appropriation. I earnestly, as the Governor of the State, speaking with the authority of the people of North Carolina, second the motion for the celebration on Roanoke Island of the landing of the first colony of the province of North Carolina. The event ought to be made one of great significance, of far reaching results. It ought to show to the world that a pure, unmixed Anglo-Saxon people are not only capable of self-government, but have long memories and a gratitude which extends through centuries, for no people who are ungrateful can ever be truly great. I promise you, ladies and gentlemen, that no power of the State which can properly be exercised shall be wanting to make the event which you propose to celebrate a noble and imposing one, and I am proud of the opportunity of thus identifying myself and my administration with the movement which you have inaugurated. In conjunction with your establishing of rural libraries this event gives you the right to the gratitude of all North Carolinians and particularly of the State which can properly be exercised shall be wanting to make the event which you propose to celebrate a noble and imposing one, and I am proud of the opportunity of thus identifying myself and my administration with the movement which you have inaugurated. 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