

**A MEMORIAL OF
WASHINGTON
IRVING**

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A Memorial of Washington Irving by Various

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VARIOUS

**A MEMORIAL OF
WASHINGTON
IRVING**

A MEMORIAL
OF
WASHINGTON IRVING.

—Tread lightly on his ashes, ye men of genius,—
for he was your kinsman :
Weed his grave clean, ye men of goodness,—for he
was your brother,

TRISTRAM SANDY, CHAP. CLXXXVI.

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1860.

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IRVINGIANA:

A MEMORIAL OF WASHINGTON IRVING.

MEMORANDA OF THE LITERARY CAREER OF WASHINGTON IRVING.*

BY EVERT A. DEYONKOR.

WASHINGTON IRVING was born April 3, 1783, in the city of New York. As there has been some little discussion as to the particular spot of his birth, it may not be amiss, writing for an historical magazine, to produce the following decisive testimony on the subject.

In a letter, the original of which is before us, to Mr. Henry Panton, dated Sunnyside, Feb. 15, 1850, Mr. Irving states precisely the place of his birth. "The house in which I was born was No. 131 William-street, about half-way between John and Fulton streets. Within a very few weeks after my birth the family moved into a house nearly opposite, which my father had recently purchased; it was No. 128, and has recently been pulled down and a large edifice built on its site. It had been occupied by a British commissary during the war; the *broad arrow* was on the street door, and the garden was full of choice fruit-trees, apricots, green-gages, nectarines, &c. It is the first home of which I have any recollection, and there I passed my infancy and boyhood."

Mr. Irving was the youngest son of a merchant of the city, William Irving, a native of Scotland, of an ancient knightly stock, who had married Sarah Sanders, an English lady, and been settled in his new country some twenty years.

A newspaper correspondent a few years since narrated an anecdote of this early period, of a pleasing character, which, unlike many things of the kind, has, we believe, the merit of truth in its favor. The story, as related, is given from the lips of Mr. Irving at a breakfast-table in Washington City. "Mr. Irving said that he remembered General Washington perfectly. There was some celebration, some public affair going on in New York, and the General was there to participate in the ceremony. 'My nurse,' said Mr. Irving, 'a good old Scotchwoman, was very

anxious for me to see him, and held me up in her arms as he rode past. This, however, did not satisfy her; so the next day, when walking with me in Broadway, she espied him in a shop, she seized my hand and darting in, exclaimed in her bland Scotch:—"Please, your Excellency, here's a bairn that's called after ye!" General Washington then turned his benevolent face full upon me, smiled, laid his hand upon my head, and gave me his blessing, which,' added Mr. Irving earnestly, 'I have reason to believe, has attended me through life. I was but five years old, yet I can feel that hand upon my head even now.'"^{*}

The early direction of the mind of the boy upon whose infant head the hand of Washington had thus been laid, was much influenced by the tastes of his brothers who had occupied themselves with literature. Of these, William, who subsequently became united with him in the joint authorship of *Satanstoe*, was seventeen years his elder, while Peter, the editor of a later day, was also considerably his senior. With the guidance of these cultivated minds and sound family influences, the youth had the good fortune to fall in with a stock of the best old English authors of the Elizabethan as well as of the Augustan period, the study of which generously unfolded his happy natural disposition. Chaucer and Spenser were his early favorites; and a better training cannot be imagined for a youth of genius. His school education was the best the times afforded. Though something may be said of the defects of the city academies of those days in comparison with the present, we are forced to remember that however prodigally the opportunities of learning may be increased, the receptive faculties of a boy are limited. There may be more cramming in these times at the feast of the sciences; but we question whether the digestion is very materially improved. Few men, at any rate, have ever shown themselves better trained in the pursuit of literature than Washington Irving. The education which bore such early and mature fruit must have been of the right kind.

* A portion of this paper is made up from a previous sketch, published in "The Cyclopaedia of American Literature."

* This anecdote appeared in the *Buffalo Courier*, in the winter of 1853.

EARLY VISIT TO EUROPE.—INTIMACY WITH ALLSTON.

His first literary productions known to the public, bear date at the early age of nineteen. They were a series of essays on the theatrical performances and manners of the town, and kindred topics, with the signature, "Jonathan Oldstyle," and were written for a newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*, just then commenced, in 1802, by his brother, Dr. Peter Irving. A surreptitious edition of these papers was published twenty years later, when the *Sketch-Book* had made the author famous; but they have not been included in his collected works. We have read them with pleasure. They present a quaint picture of the life of New York half a century ago, and are noticeable for the early formation of the writer's happy style.

A year or two after this time, in 1804, Mr. Irving, induced by some symptoms of ill-health, apparently of a pulmonary nature, visited the South of Europe. Embarking at New York for Bordeaux in May, he travelled, on his arrival in France, by Nice to Genoa, where he passed two months; thence to Messina, in Sicily, making a tour of that island, and crossing from Palermo to Naples. He continued his journey through Italy and Switzerland to France; resided several months in Paris, and finally reached England through Flanders and Holland, having accumulated, by the way, an abiding stock of impressions, which lingered in his mind, and furnished ever fresh material for his subsequent writings. It was while at Rome, on this journey, that he became acquainted with Washington Allston, and so far participated in his studies as to meditate for a time the profession of a painter, a pursuit for which he had naturally a taste, and in which he had been somewhat instructed. His own reminiscence of this period, in his happy tribute to the memory of Allston,* is a delightful picture, softly touched in an Italian atmosphere.

"We had delightful rambles together," he writes, "about Rome and its environs, one of which came near changing my whole course of life. We had been visiting a stately villa, with its gallery of paintings, its marble halls, its terraced gardens set out with statues and fountains, and were returning to Rome about sunset. The blandness of the air, the serenity of the sky, the transparent purity of the atmosphere, and that nameless charm which hangs about an Italian landscape, had derived additional effect from being enjoyed in company with Allston, and pointed out by him with the enthusiasm of an artist. As I listened to him, and gazed upon the landscape, I drew in my mind a contrast between our different pursuits and prospects. He was to

reside among these delightful scenes, surrounded by masterpieces of art, by classic and historic monuments, by men of congenial minds and tastes, engaged like him in the constant study of the sublime and beautiful. I was to return home to the dry study of the law, for which I had no relish, and, as I feared, but little talent.

"Suddenly the thought presented itself, 'Why might I not remain here, and turn painter?' I had taken lessons in drawing before leaving America, and had been thought to have some aptness, as I certainly had a strong inclination for it. I mentioned the idea to Allston, and he caught at it with eagerness. Nothing could be more feasible. We would take an apartment together. He would give me all the instruction and assistance in his power, and was sure I would succeed.

"For two or three days the idea took full possession of my mind; but I believe it owed its main force to the lovely evening ramble in which I first conceived it, and to the romantic friendship I had formed with Allston. Whenever it recurred to mind, it was always connected with beautiful Italian scenery, palaces, and statues, and fountains, and terraced gardens, and Allston as the companion of my studio. I promised myself a world of enjoyment in his society, and in the society of several artists with whom he had made me acquainted, and pictured forth a scheme of life, all tinted with the rainbow hues of youthful promise.

"My lot in life, however, was differently cast. Doubts and fears gradually clouded over my prospects; the rainbow tints faded away; I began to apprehend a sterile reality, so I gave up the transient but delightful prospect of remaining in Rome with Allston, and turning painter."

After an absence of two years, Mr. Irving returned to New York, in March, 1806. He resumed the study of the law, which he had abandoned for his journey, and was admitted at the close of the year attorney-at-law. He, however, never practised the profession.

Salmagundi; or, the Whim-Whams and Opinions of Lavineot Langstaff, Esq., and others—an undertaking much more to his taste—was at that time projected, and the publication was commenced in a series of small eighteenmo numbers, appearing about once a fortnight from the Shakspeare Gallery of Longworth. The first is dated January 24, 1807. It was continued for a year through twenty numbers. Paulding wrote a good portion of this work, William Irving the poetry, and Washington Irving the remainder. The humors of the day are hit off, in this genial collection of essays, in so agreeable a style, that the work is still read with interest—what was piquant gossip then being amusing

* Kindly contributed to "The Cyclopaedia of American Literature."

THE RECEPTION OF KNICKERBOCKER.

history now. It was the intention of Mr. Irving to have extended these papers by carrying out the invention, and marrying Will Wizard to the eldest Miss Cockloft—with, of course, a grand wedding at Cockloft Hall, the original of which mansion was a veritable edifice owned by Gouverneur Kemble, on the Passaic, a favorite resort of Geoffrey Crayon in his youthful days. Among other originals of these sketches we have heard it mentioned that some of the peculiarities of Dennis, the author, were hit off in the character of Launcelot Langstaff. The well-defined picture of "My Uncle John" is understood to have been from the pen of Paulding; his, too, was the original sketch of the paper entitled "Autumnal Reflections," though extended and wrought up by Mr. Irving.

Knickickerbocker's History of New York was published in December, 1809. It was commenced by Washington Irving, in company with his brother, Peter Irving, with the notion of parodying a handbook, which had just appeared, entitled "A Picture of New York." In emulation of an historical account in that production, it was to burlesque the local records, and describe in an amusing way the habits and statistics of the town. Dr. Irving departing for Europe, left the work solely with his brother, who confined it to the historical part, which had grown in his hands into a long comic history. The humorous capabilities of the subject were turned to account in the happiest way, the fun being broad enough to steer clear of the realities; though a venerable clergyman, who was on the lookout for a history with that theme from a clerical brother, is said to have begun the work in good faith, and to have been only gradually warned to a consciousness of the joke. The highest honor ever paid to the authentic history of Knickerbocker was the quotation from it—in good Latin phrase—by Goeller, German annotator of Thucydides, in illustration of a passage of the Greek author: "Adde locum Washingtonis Irvingii *Hist. Novi Eboracæ*," lib. vii., cap. 5.* To humor the pleasure, preliminary advertisements had been inserted before the publication in the *Evening Post*, calling for information of "a small elderly gentleman, dressed in an old black coat and cocked hat, by the name of *Knickickerbocker*," etc., who had left his lodgings at the Columbian Hotel in Mulberry street; then a statement that the old gentleman had left "a very curious kind of a written book in his room," followed by the announcement of the actual book, "in two volumes duodecimo, price three dollars," from the publishers, Inskeep & Bradford—to pay the bill of his landlord.

To the last revised edition of this work, in 1850, which contains some very pleasant additions, the author prefixed an "Apology," which, however, offered little satisfaction to the irate families who had considered their honor aggrieved by the publication of this extravagant burlesque—seeing that the incorrigible author insisted upon it that he had brought the old Dutch manners and times into notice, instancing the innumerable Knickerbocker hotels, steamboats, ice-carts, and other appropriations of the name; and had added not only to the general hilarity but to the harmony of the city, by the popular traditions which he had set in vogue "forming a convivial currency; linking our whole community together in good humor and good fellowship; the rallying points of home feeling; the seasoning of civic festivities; the staple of local sales and local pleasantries."† We should attach little importance to the subject had it not been made a matter of comment in the New York Historical Society, in an address before which body it was gravely held up to reprehension. The truth of the matter is that the historians should have occupied the ground earlier, if possible, and not have given the first advantage to the humorist. We do not find, however, that the burlesque has at all damaged the subject in the hands of Mr. Brodhead, who has at length brought to bear a system of original investigation and historical inquiry upon the worthy Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam; or deteriorated a whit the learned labors of O'Callaghan, who has illustrated the early Dutch annals with faithful diligence. The style of *Knickickerbocker* is of great felicity. There is just enough flavor of English classical reading to give the riant, original material, the highest gusto. The descriptions of nature and manners are occasionally very happy in a serious way, and the satire is, much of it, of that universal character which will bear transplantation to wider scenes and interests. The laughter-compelling humor is irresistible, and we may readily believe the story of that arch wag himself, Judge Brackenridge, exploding over a copy of the work, which he had snuggled with him to the bench.

Has the reader ever noticed the beautiful, pathetic close of this humorous book? "Already," writes Diedrich Knickerbocker, "has withering age showered his sterile snows upon my brow; in a little while, and this genial warmth, which still lingers around my heart, and throbs—worthy reader—throbs kindly towards myself, will be chilled forever. Haply this frail compound of dust, which while alive may have given

* Classical Museum, Oct., 1849.

† The author's "Apology," preface to edition of *Knickickerbocker*, 1848.

SIR WALTER SCOTT'S LETTER.—LIFE OF CAMPBELL.

birth to naught but unprofitable weeds, may form a humble sod of the valley, whence may spring many a sweet wild flower, to adorn my beloved island of *Manna-hatta!*"

Some time after the publication of *Knickerbocker*, a copy was sent by the late Mr. Henry Brevoort, an intimate friend of the author, to Sir Walter Scott. It drew forth the following cordial reply, dated Abbotsford, April 23, 1813: "My dear Sir, I beg you to accept my best thanks for the uncommon degree of entertainment which I have received from the most excellently jocosely 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 any thing 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. I beg you will have the kindness to let me know when Mr. Irving takes pen in hand again, for assuredly I shall expect a very great treat, which I may chance never to hear of but through your kindness. Believe me, dear sir, your obliged and humble servant, Walter Scott."*

Praise like this was likely to create a flutter in a youthful breast. Irving had afterwards the satisfaction to learn how sincere it was, in personal intercourse with Scott. Lockhart, in the biography of Sir Walter, tells us that the latter had not forgotten the *Knickerbocker*, when, in the summer of 1817, Mr. Irving presented himself at the gate of Abbotsford with a letter of introduction from the poet Campbell. The welcome was prompt and earnest; and the proposed morning call was changed into that delighted residence so fondly revived in the "Visit to Abbotsford" in *The Crayon Miscellany*, and largely adopted by Lockhart in the Biography. We have heard Mr. Irving speak of this visit within the last year of his life with boyish delight. "This," said he, "was to be happy. I felt happiness then." So true and generous was his allegiance to the noble nature of Sir Walter, who was himself warmly drawn to his visitor. Scott thanked Campbell for sending him such a guest, "one of the best and pleasantest acquaintances I have made this many a day."† In the

later years of Irving at Sunnyside, there was much to remind the privileged visitor of the pilgrimages to Abbotsford, when the radiance of the author of *Waverley* shed delight on all around.

In 1810 Mr. Irving wrote a biographical sketch of the poet Campbell, which was prefixed to an edition of the poet's works published in Philadelphia, and subsequently was printed, "revised, corrected, and materially altered by the author," in the *Analectic Magazine*. The circumstance which led to this undertaking at that time, was Mr. Irving's acquaintance with Archibald Campbell, a brother of the author, residing in New York, and desirous of finding a purchaser for an American edition of *O'Connor's Child*, which he had just received from London. To facilitate this object, Mr. Irving wrote the preliminary sketch from facts furnished by the poet's brother. It afterwards led to a personal acquaintance between the two authors when Mr. Irving visited England. In 1850, after Campbell's death, when his *Life and Letters*, edited by Dr. Beattie, were about to be republished by the Harpers in New York, Mr. Irving was applied to for a few preliminary words of introduction. He wrote a letter, prefixed to the volumes, in which he speaks gracefully and nobly of his acquaintances with Campbell, many of the virtues of whose private life were first disclosed to the public in Dr. Beattie's publication.

One sentence strikes us as peculiarly characteristic of the feelings of Mr. Irving. It is in recognition of this revelation of the poet's better nature that he writes, in words of charity, as he looked back upon the asperities which beset Campbell's career:—"I shall feel satisfaction in putting on record my own recantation of the erroneous opinion I once entertained, and may have occasionally expressed, of the private character of an illustrious poet, whose moral worth is now shown to have been fully equal to his exalted genius."

Though Mr. Irving in this later essay speaks slightly of the earlier composition as written when he was "not in the vein," we have found it, on perusal, a most engaging piece of writing. A paragraph descriptive of the youthful Campbell might be taken for a portrait of himself. Indeed, it often happens that a writer, while drawing the character of another, is simply projecting his sympathies, and unconsciously portraying himself. "He is generally represented to us," says Mr. Irving, in this description of Campbell, "as being extremely studious, but at the same time social in his disposition, gentle and endearing in his manners, and extremely prepossessing in his appearance and address. With a delicate and even nervous sensibility, and

* This copy is made from a lithographed fac-simile of the original. One or two defects in spelling, it will be seen, are preserved.

† Lockhart's *Scott*, ch. xxxix.