

**THE DUTCHMAN'S
FIRESIDE: A TALE, IN
TWO VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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The Dutchman's Fireside: A Tale, in Two Volumes, Vol. I by James Kirke Paulding

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JAMES KIRKE PAULDING

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FIRESIDE: A TALE, IN
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Harper's Stereotype Edition.

THE

DUTCHMAN'S FIRESIDE.

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LETTERS FROM THE SOUTH," "THE BACKWOODSMAN,"
"JOHN BULL IN AMERICA," &c. &c.

"Somewhere about the time of the old French war."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

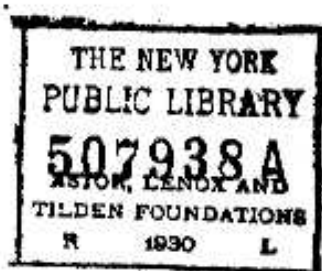
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1831. ✓



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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE idea of the following tale was conceived on reading, many years ago, "The Memoirs of an American Lady," by Mrs. Grant, of Laggan; and the work partly finished about that time. The reader acquainted with the book referred to will, perhaps, wonder at the indiscretion of the author of the Dutchman's Fireside in thus, as it were, provoking a comparison with one of the finest sketches of early American manners ever drawn.

April, 1831.

T.

THE
DUTCHMAN'S FIRESIDE.

CHAPTER I.

Rural Scenes and rural Manners.

“SOMEWHERE about the time of the old French war,” there resided on the rich border that skirts the Hudson, not a hundred miles from the good city of Albany, a family of some distinction, which we shall call Vancour, consisting of three brothers whose names were Egbert, Dennis, and Ariel, or Auriel as it was pronounced by the Dutch of that day. They were the sons of one of the earliest as well as most respectable of the emigrants from Holland, and honourably sustained the dignity of their ancestry, by sturdy integrity, liberal hospitality, and a generous public spirit.

On the death of the old patriarch, who departed this life almost a century old, according to the custom of those early times, the estate was amicably divided among his three sons; the portion of the eldest being alone distinguished from that of the others by comprising the old mansion-house. This was the sole compliment paid to the right of primogeniture, which in almost every other Christian country swallows up the inheritance of the younger offspring, and enables one man to wallow in overgrown luxury, at the expense of all the rest of his blood and name.

This concession was rather a voluntary acknowledgment of the younger, than claimed by the elder brother. Neither at this early period of our infancy was it the general custom for people that had children to make their wills; and however singular it may seem, there were fewer lawsuits concerning the division of property among heirs, than there is now, when such particular care is taken in the devising of estates, that it generally takes three or four courts, six or eight lawyers, and the like number of years to interpret the oracle. And how can it be otherwise, since I once heard a great pleader affirm, that there never were three words put together, in any language, that would not admit of three different interpretations. Here, however, there was no necessity for the interference of strangers; the children knew the wishes of their parents, and for the most part complied without a murmur.

The settlement of Mr. Vancour's affairs was actually made without consulting a lawyer; partly, perhaps, for the reason that there was no person of that description within less than one hundred and sixty miles, at New-York. According to Pliny, Rome subsisted five hundred years without a physician; which fact, however incredible it may appear, is equalled by the miracle of the city of Albany and the surrounding country having flourished for the best part of a century without the aid of a single lawyer. People can no more go to law without lawyers, than to war without arms; deprive them of both, and there would be no more occasion for peace societies. But to return.

Among the many good old fashions that prevailed in the days of ignorance and simplicity among our forefathers, was that of paying their debts themselves,

J. B. V. M.

instead of leaving it to their posterity. They knew little or nothing of the virtues of the *post obit*; nor, I believe, did it ever happen to occur to them, that it was a capital speculation to revel in luxuries and support a splendid establishment during life, leaving the penalty to be paid by their offspring. When old Mr. Vancour died, he paid the only debt he owed—the debt of nature.

In the division of the estate, Egbert, the elder brother, received the third part, which occupied the centre, with the old mansion-house; Dennis, that on the right, and Ariel, that on the left-hand. Each of these occupied the space which lay between a range of hills and the banks of the Hudson, on which they bordered about two miles equally. With a view to this arrangement, Mr. Vancour had erected, at different times, a comfortable mansion on either of the extremities of his estate; so that the two younger brothers were saved the expense of building.

At the period in which our history commences, the old gentleman had been dead many years, and Ariel, the youngest of the three brothers, was fast verging towards that stage of life in which a man runs imminent risk of being set down as an old bachelor by the young ladies. Dennis, the second brother, was a widower without issue; and Egbert was blessed with a most notable wife, the mother of an only daughter verging towards womanhood, and finishing her education at a boarding-school in New-York. The house occupied by Mr. Vancour was built when it was customary for men to anticipate the possibility of their descendants', some one of them at least, inheriting and dwelling in their old nestling places. It was a large four square mansion of two low stories, built of little yellow Dutch bricks, imported from

Holland, as much from veneration for the "Faderland," as from a certain unconsciousness of the capacity to do any thing out of the ordinary way, that long beset and still in some degree besets the occupants of this western world. Right through the centre ran a wide and stately hall, wainscotted with oak; from the farther end of which a broad staircase rose in such a gentle ascent as to be almost as easy as a railway. This staircase was defended on the outerside by a row of chubby mahogany banisters, ranged so as almost to touch each other, and presenting in their plump exuberance fit models for the legs of all the gallant burghers of the country round. We know not whether it was in sympathy with these classical patterns, or from some other more occult influence, but certain it is, there hath not, since the fashion of them changed, been seen so goodly a set of legs, not even in the picture of the Declaration of our Independence, as was exhibited every Sabbath-day in summer-time, in woollen hose, at the little eight-square stone church of the Flats, at the time of which we are treating.

The furniture of the mansion corresponded with its Doric dignity and simplicity. There was nothing too fine for use, or which was not used whenever occasion required; although we are willing to confess, there was one hallowed room, dignified with the name of the spare room, which was difficult of access, and into which no one intruded except on very particular occasions. Here was the sacred deposite of ancestral heirlooms. Chairs with high and haughty backs and worked satin bottoms, from the old country; a Brussels carpet; two vast china jars, on either side of the chimney, nearly five feet high; and the treasure of all treasures, a Dutch cabinet, exactly such