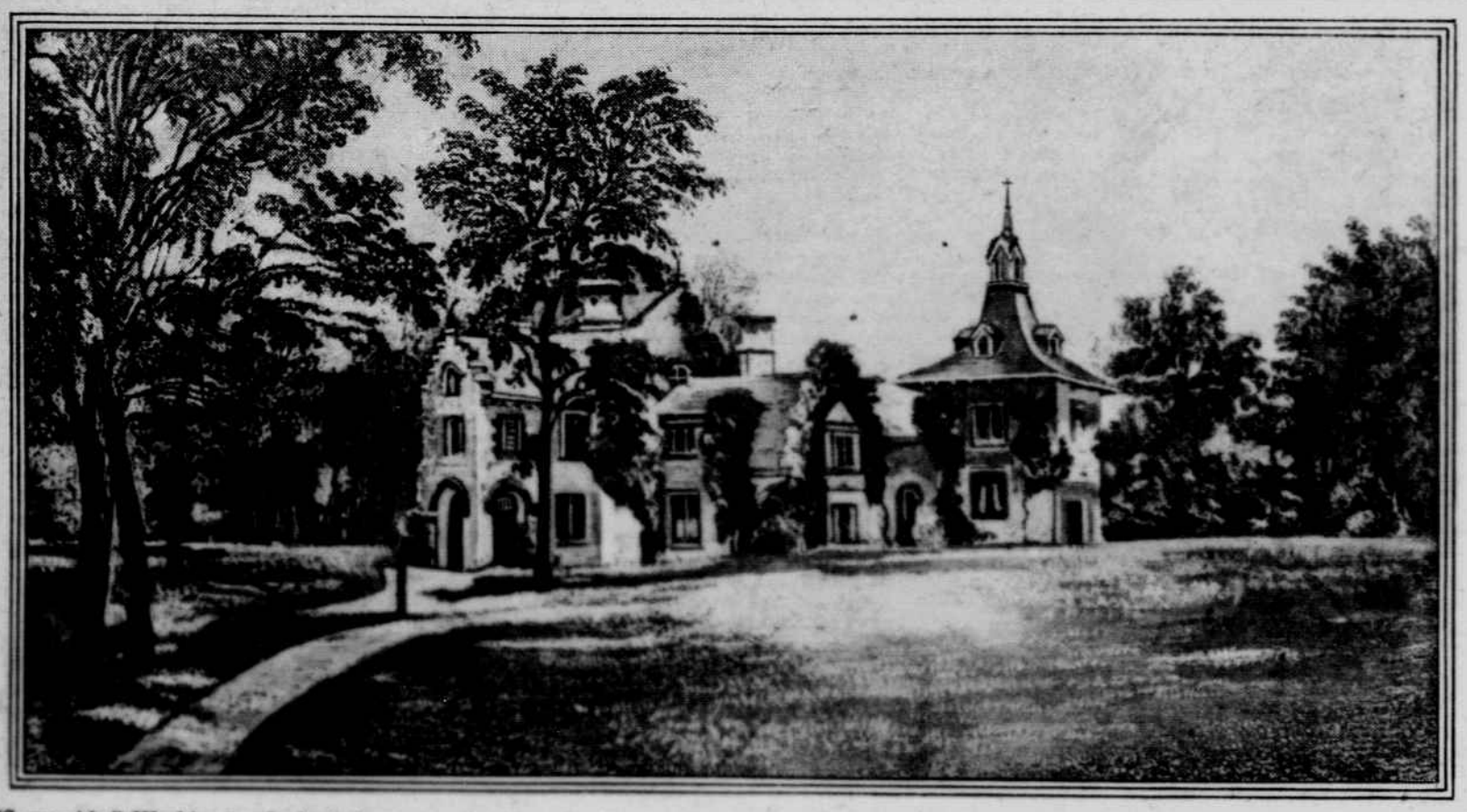

"Sunnyside," Washington Irving's home, overlooking the Hudson River, near Tarrytown, New York. Here Uncle Washington, surrounded by his nieces, lived through the peaceful later years of his life.

A Child's Story of American Literature

By ALGERNON TASSIN and ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE.

Part IX. Uncle Washington Irving.

IF you had been a boy or a girl in the New York of one hundred and thirty odd years ago you would have known a city very different from the busy, noisy metropolis of to-day. Some twenty-three thousand persons dwelt therein, instead of the many millions of the present. Pleasant and instructive glimpses of the town at the lower end of Manhattan Island in the years immediately following the war of the Revolution are to be had in old maps and prints. In the prints you will see funny frame houses with gabled windows; canals where now are streets; little knobby hills long since gone and forgotten, and the spreading branches of many shade trees. That of course means in the section of the city which is far down town to-day. Beyond what is now the City Hall there were open fields and swamps where traps might be set for muskrats, and streams where a boy might go fishing. To reach the spot where the Public Library now stands, for example, meant a long country journey and a sailing vessel was about the best means of traveling to so far off a spot as Yonkers.

The Town fo President Washington.

Yet, country village as it was, New York was for a time the first seat of Government of the young Republic. At a spot where the arch of the Brooklyn Bridge now spans Cherry street the first President of the nation had his home. It was considered something of a country residence at that, and the carriage was brought out when, of an evening, President Washington felt inclined to go into town for the diversions of the theater in John street. When, in the daytime, he walked about the streets of the old city he was naturally the object of much attention. One day in 1789 he entered a shop to make a purchase. Into the shop followed a Scotch nurse leading by the hand a boy of six. "Please, your Honor," said Lizzie boldly, "here's a bairn was named after you." President Washington gravely placed his hand on the urchin's head and gave him his blessing. Perhaps some of the bystanders laughed at the incident, and perhaps the President himself suppressed a smile. But fate had a hand in the meeting, for the boy's name was Washington Irving, destined, to use the words of the great English novelist Thackeray, to become the first literary ambassador of the New to the Old World, and to win such a place in the hearts of his countrymen as has never been held by another man of letters.

All American literature is the heritage of our boys and girls. But if there is one figure that stands out as the particular possession of youth it is that of Washington Irving. You cannot begin to think of him too soon as Uncle Washington Irving any more than you can begin too soon to study the noble and clear English in which he wrote, or to find pleasant and instructive reading in his "Knickerbocker History of New York," or his "Tales of a Traveler," or his "Rip Van Winkle," or his "Bracebridge Hall," or his "Lives" of Columbus and Washington, and Ferdinand and Isabella. He was literally Uncle Washington Irving. Never marrying and having children of his own, the later years of his life, in his home at Sunnyside on the banks of the Hudson River, were given over to the care of his various nephews and nieces, especially nieces, of which there were aplenty.

A Little Boy in Old New York.

He was born April 3, 1783, in a two story dwelling, No. 131 William street, about half way between Fulton and John. The war for independence had just been brought to a successful conclusion, and his mother said: "Washington's work is ended and the child shall be named for him." So Washington Irving he was baptized, in the chapel of St. George in Beekman street. To his formal schooling there was not so much. In his fourth year he was sent to a school in Ann street, and from there after two years he was transferred to another school at 198 Fulton street, then 37 Partition street. Before he was 16 what was called his education was over. His brothers, Peter and John, were sent to Columbia College, but he was not. Yet his mind was being developed by a self-selected course of profitable reading. When he was 11 books of voyages and travel became his passion.

Stirred by these to the desire for travel he found a way to gratify the desire even if in the early years there was little opportunity to stray far afield. But close at hand were the Battery and the East and North rivers, where at the wharves were ships that stirred the boy to dreams of remote lands. Then there was a delightful voyage up the Hudson, which was perhaps responsible for two of his most famous stories of later years: "A Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle." At this point it may be mentioned that when in England he wrote the latter story with its picture of the ghostly men of Henryk Hudson at their game of bowls. Washington Irving had never been in the Catskill Mountains. Of that Hudson River trip he wrote in late life: "My first voyage up the Hudson was made in early boyhood, in the good old times before steamboats and railroads had annihilated time and space and driven all poetry and romance out of travel. A voyage to Albany then was equal to a voyage to Europe at present, and took almost as much time."

The dreamer at school continued to be a dreamer in the law office, where he was entered at 16. When he should have been poring over briefs he was reading delightful books, and in the evening when he was supposed to be in bed he was very often witnessing the play in the John Street Theater in company with his friend Paulding. He was still only a youth, and a very delicate youth at that. At 19 he went into the office of Judge Josiah Ogden Hoffman, and that connection led to his intimacy with the Hoffman home and the romance which is one of the prettiest in all the story of American literary men and women.

In the meantime those who loved him did not urge him to work too hard, realizing the dangerous state of his health. In 1804, when he became of age, his brothers determined to send him to Europe. So weak was he that he had to be helped up the side of the sailing vessel which was to carry him to Bordeaux, and the captain of the ship said to himself, "There's a chap who will go overboard before we get across." But that sea voyage was the turning point in his physical life. For two years he wandered through France, Italy, the Netherlands and England, and then, fully restored to health, he returned home in February, 1806.

First Literary Ventures.

The New York which he found after that first journey to Europe had grown from the little Dutch village of 20,000 inhabitants in which he was born to a gay little city of 80,000 souls. Joyously he entered into its life. Admitted to the bar, his shingle was for a time displayed at No. 3 Wall street, his brother John's house, but that was as far as he ever went with the law, finding much more fun in the company of certain young men of his own age who talked literature and gave merry suppers in an old country house on the banks of the Passaic River, the Cockloft Hall of the "Salmagundi" papers. "Salmagundi" was a semi-monthly periodical which ran through twenty numbers, something like the famous *Spectator* of Joseph Addison, and the young men who wrote for it were doing their best to write in Addison's style.

In 1809 appeared the work which made Washington Irving at once a literary man in importance second to none other in the land—the "Knickerbocker History of New York." It was begun as a kind of joke, to make fun of a serious history of the city which had just been published. Washington Irving and his brother Peter started the ball of its success rolling by sending to a New York newspaper, six weeks before the publication of the "Knickerbocker History," letters about an old Deidrich Knickerbocker who had strayed from New York without paying for his lodgings, about his having been seen on the way to Albany, and the landlord's final decision to print a manuscript which the old man had left behind, and to apply the proceeds to the unpaid bill. The book thus advertised gave delight to every one who read it except those persons whose family name happened to be Knickerbocker.

Fame had come to Washington Irving. But almost at the same time came the great sorrow that sent him on lonely through the years. He loved and was loved by Matilda Hoffman, the daughter of the Judge Hoffman in whose office he had played at studying law. On the 26th of April, 1809, she died, in the eighteenth year of her age. He never mentioned the name of Matilda even to his most intimate friends, but, after his own death, fifty years later, a package was found marked "Private," and in this package was found a miniature of great beauty, inclosed in a case, and in it a braid of fair hair, and a slip of paper on which was written in his own handwriting: "Matilda Hoffman."

Long Years in Europe.

When, in 1812, we went to war with England for the second time, Washington Irving wanted to fight, and for four months he was Col. Irving, because of an appointment on the military staff of Gov. Tompkins of New York. But, happily perhaps, he never got anywhere near a battle front, and when the war was over he went to England, to visit his brother Peter and try to help him in business affairs, and then to settle down there to make his living by his pen. Seventeen years were to pass before he saw America again.

His first book after the "Knickerbocker History" was "The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon," which was published in 1819. In this book, written three thousand miles away from home, he turned back to his native land for the two stories that have made it forever world famous. These were

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