wild pigeons. He would never refuse to assist a neighbor, even in the slaughter of it, and was a foremost man in all country frolics for hooking his dun mare, or hauling stone thereto. The women of the village, too, used to employ him to run their errands, and to do such little odd jobs as their busy obliging husbands would not do for them. In a word, he was ready to attend to anybody's business but his own; but as to doing family duty, and keeping his house in order, he was hated it impossible.

It fell to the lot of Brom, at was of no use to work on his farm; it was the most pestilent little piece of ground in the whole country. Every thing about it went wrong and would go wrong in spite of him. His cattle were ever spontaneously falling to pieces; his cow would clamber up a rock, or get among the cabbages; weeds were sure to grow quicker in his fields than any where else; the rain always made a point of seeing in just as he had some out-door work to do; so that though his patrimonial estate had dwindled away under his management, acre by acre, until there was little more left than a mere patch of Indian corn and potatoes, yet it was the worst conditioned farm in the neighborhood.

His children, too, were as ragged and wild as if they belonged to nobody. His son Rip, an urchin begot ten in his own likeness, promised to inherit the habits, with the old clothes, of his father. He was generally seen trooping like a colt at his mother's heels, equipped in a pair of his father's cast off galligaskins, which he had much ado to hold up with one hand, as a fine lady does her train in bad weather.

Rip Van Winkle, however, was one of those happy mortals of foolish, well-oiled temperament, who take the world easy, eat white bread or brown, whichever can be got with the least trouble, and would rather starve on a penny than work for a penny. If left to himself, he would have whistled life away in perfect contentment; but his wife kept him continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his carelessness, and the ruin he was bringing on his family. Morning noon and night her tongue was incessantly going, and every thing he said or did was sure to produce a torrent of abuse. He could not even plead in excuse the example of his father, who had but one way of replying to all lectures of the kind, and that by frequent use, had grown into a habit. He shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, cast up his eyes, but said nothing. This however, always provoked a fresh volley from his wife; so that he was fain to draw off his forces, and take to the outside of the house—the only side which, in truth, belongs to a henpecked husband.

Rip's sole domestic adherent was his dog Schneider, a cur of an equivocal character, who had been brought up in idleness and even looked upon Schneider with an evil eye, as the cause of his master's present state of misery. True it is, in all points of spirit befitting an honorable dog, he was as courageous an animal as ever scoured the woods; but what courage can withstand the rage of a belligerent termagent of a woman's tongue? The moment Dame Van Winkle appeared in sight, every thing wore a sneaking air; Schneider with his tail between his legs, and slinking off to the door with a dejected look and humble deprecating whine, as much as to say, "Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle! save me or I shall be murdered!" In short, Rip's whole family rendered him a complete nullity in his own house. He was obliged to fetch and carry, like a true slave; and even to accept a rating as a favor, for he was sure to get one whether he deserved it or not. In a word, as he phrased it, he "could not do right to please his wife."

It is a thing of course that he should seek comfort abroad for what he met with at home. The only place where a man can do this with impunity is a village inn, designed by its shrewd landlord as a kind of safety valve to let off the superfluous steam of domestic discontent. Rip therefore made frequent visits to the village inn; at least whenever he could get his wife to send him on any errand, for he seldom returned in less than a couple of hours; sometimes he came back with a basket on his arm, containing a few articles of household gear, but oftener without any thing but a long face and doleful tale. Dame Van Winkle was not to be put off in this way; so when her husband disappeared, she would shut the door against him, and thus oblige him to stay abroad as long as he pleased.

Rip's visits were generally to the village inn—the only place where he could obtain a little quiet and social converse. Here he would sometimes lounge away half the day on a bench before the door, indulging in the sweets of tranquil existence, and listening with open mouth to stupendous stories about nothing. But the heavy hours lagged wofully when unenlivened by anecdote or conversation. Then he would stroll over the village, or walk down the road that led to the neighboring city, and watch the travellers that passed by, to see if he could not pick up some kind of news; or would carry his dog and gun into the woods, but seldom returned with more game than his master. Whenever he went out with his gun, Schneider would carry it for him with great exultation, but would keep sneaking behind him when he had it to load himself. Indeed, he instinctively knew the futility of his master's sporting operations.

There was one spot in the neighborhood which Rip Van Winkle could never pass without a sigh. It was a steep, lonely glen, scooped out of the bosom of a mountain. A small brook tumbled down it, over a bed of rocks, and formed a foaming cascade in the midst. Here and there a few trees grew out of the crevices of the cliffs, and threw their branches across the chasm; so that you could only see the sky and a bit of the rocky bottom. The place was a retreat for winged things of prey, and the crags echoed with their wild notes. Rip had often visited this lonely glen in the course of his shooting excursions, and had never failed to meet with game in it; but now he saw nothing but tokens of desolation. The brook no longer murmured across its bed, but stagnated in pools, overgrown with water-plants. The dark pines and hemlocks, which clothed the sides of the mountain, seemed to sigh to each other in the breeze that passed through their tops; and a cold wind whistled down the glen, that obliged Rip to pull his jacket closer about him.

He was about to turn back in disgust, when he recollected a basket of provisions which he had left under a bush in the morning, and which he now found devoured by wolves or vermin. He shook his head at sight of the direful waste, and proceeded to whistle for his dog; but Schneider was not to be seen. He next shouted his name repeatedly, and was answered by the echoes, which seemed to mock his voice and call on Schneider in turn. At length, on climbing a steep rock, he saw the cur at the bottom of the precipice. Instead of profiting by the opportunity to break his neck, he had merely given himself a harmless roll, which had placed him sprawling on his back. There he lay, looking wistfully up the precipice, and howling piteously for assistance.

Rip was inclined to laugh at the plight in which he found his companion, but he was too much concerned for his safety. He descended, therefore, to the assistance of the cur, who, instead of showing any sense of gratitude for his timely succor, scrambled growling by him, and made off for the village. Rip followed him with his eyes, and saw him limping into the village inn, from which he had originally issued.

Rip now began to feel the want of his breakfast. He gazed in gaze at the sun, and found by the height that it was almost noon. His heart yearned after his family repast, and he began to consider the propriety of returning home; but the approach of his wife was an obstacle that he dreaded more than famine. He thought of the terrors of her tongue, and of the uproar that awaited his return. Hunger, however, prevailed at last; and he set out slowly and reluctantly for the village.

As he approached the village he met a number of people, but none whom he knew, which somewhat surprised him, for he had been familiar with almost every one in the country round. Their dress, too, was of a different fashion from that to which he was accustomed. They all stared at him with equal marks of surprise, and whenever they met their eyes upon him, invariably stroked their chins. The constant recurrence of this gesture induced Rip, involuntarily, to do the same, when, to his great surprise, he found his beard had grown a foot long!

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. The very village was altered; it was larger and more populous. There were many faces to him which he had never seen before, and those which had been his familiar acquaintance had disappeared. Strange names were over the doors—strange faces at the windows—everything was strange. His mind now began to misgive him; he began to doubt whether he and the world around him were not bewitched. Surely this was his native village, which he had left but the day before. There stood the Kaatskill mountains—there ran the silver Hudson at a distance—there was every hill and dale precisely as it had always been. Rip was sorely perplexed. "That flagon last night," thought he, "has addled my poor head sadly!"

It was with some difficulty that he found the way to his own house, which he approached with cautious steps, casting every moment to see the stout figure 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 Schneider, was skulking about it. Rip called him by his name, but the cur snarled, showed his teeth, and passed on. This was an unkind cut indeed. "My very dog," sighed poor Rip, "has forgotten me!"

He entered the house, which was the picture of desolation. He even ventured to penetrate the room where he had left his family. All was silent. His children had all grown up, married, settled off, and dispersed. A rude time-worn tombstone had supplied the place of the hearth-stone, where he found the dame of the family knitting in the midst of her children and grandchildren.

Who can paint the astonishment of Dame Van Winkle when she beheld her husband enter the room? Her tongue had wagged in incessant clack for many hours that day, but it now remained motionless in her mouth. Rip's sons and daughters mimicked his gestures, and stared in his face; and a general shout burst from the whole family, that seemed to have been waiting for a chance to join in it.

The neighbors soon hurried in on hearing of the return of Rip Van Winkle, whom they had given up for lost. All thronged round the door, eager to welcome him home, and delighted to have a new story about old times. He was recognized by some of the inhabitants as the very man who used to tell long stories about nothing. But no one seemed disposed to verify his anecdotes of the old times before the Revolution. His cronies had all departed, one after another, excepting a few aged men, who had grown so much like children that they could not be trusted. New faces thronged the village—new manners prevailed. The very character of the people seemed changed. There was a busy bustling disputatious tone about it, instead of the accustomed phlegm and drowsy tranquility. He looked in vain for the sage counsellors of former times, who used to sit smoking on the bench before the inn door. The very inn itself had disappeared, and a large white house with many windows occupied the place. The only resemblance it bore to the former edifice was a rickety sign-post, before the door, on which hung something that was still called a flag, but had changed both color and device. Instead of the gallant militia general, it now displayed the effigy of a gentleman in a sky-blue coat and red breeches, with a cocked hat under his arm, and a sword by his side, and underneath was painted in large characters, General Washington.

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