

THE ORIGINAL OF REBECCA IN IVANHOE.

WE believe it is not generally known that the honor of having been the prototype and inspiration of the character of Rebecca the Jewess, in "Ivanhoe," belongs to an American lady, whose beauty and noble qualities were described to Scott by a friend. The friend was Washington Irving, and the lady Rebecca Gratz, of an honorable Jewish family of Philadelphia.

Michael Gratz, the father of Rebecca, was a native of Styria in Austria. Having received his inheritance in money from his father, he emigrated to America in 1750, when a mere youth, and engaged in the business of supplying Indian traders with merchandise. He became wealthy, and in 1769 married Miriam Symons, of Lancaster, Pa. Retiring from mercantile life at the close of the war for Independence, he devoted his time to his extensive landed interests, which in Kentucky included the Mammoth Cave. He warmly espoused

the cause of the colonists, and his name appears among the signatures to the Non-Importation Resolutions after the passage of the Stamp Act. The Gratz family mansion in Philadelphia was known far and wide as the home of a refined and elegant hospitality. Gifted and distinguished guests—illustrious statesmen, and eminent persons from abroad whom choice or vicissitude brought to the country—found there an appreciative welcome. About 1811 Rebecca's parents died, leaving a family of eleven children. Many of their descendants filled important public positions, or were prominent as merchant princes of their day. Simon, the eldest son, retired from business in 1825, and purchased a portion of the old Willing estate, in what is now the twenty-ninth ward of the city of Philadelphia, and resided at "Willington" until his death in 1839. He was the founder of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine



"SUNNYSIDE," IRVING'S HOME ON THE HUDSON.



REBECCA GRATZ. (FROM THE MINIATURE BY MALBONE, IN POSSESSION OF MRS. REBECCA GRATZ NATHAN.)

Arts, and remarkable for vigor of intellect, benevolence of character, and manly beauty. His brother Hyman, a man of elegant presence, was President of the Pennsylvania Insurance Company. Rebecca was born on the 4th of March, 1781, and in her younger days, and even beyond middle life, she possessed singular beauty. Her eyes were of exquisite shape, large, black, and lustrous; her figure was graceful, and her carriage was marked by quiet dignity—attractions which were heightened by elegant and winning manners. Gentle, benevolent, with instinctive refinement and innate purity, she inspired affection among all who met her; and having received the best instruction that the time and country afforded, she was well fitted for practical and social duties. In company with her brother, she was accustomed to spend her summers at Saratoga Springs, where she became the center of a brilliant circle of men and women of position and culture from all parts of the country. Her visits at the home of her brother in Lexington, Kentucky, whither her fame had preceded her, partook of the nature of ovations. On these occasions she received marked attention from Henry Clay, between whom and her brother a warm friendship existed. Several members of her family intermarried with the Clays, the Schuylers and other Gentile families; and the society of few persons was more courted by Christians than was that of Rebecca Gratz.

It is said that, when a young lady, Rebecca won the regard of a gentleman of character, position, and wealth, whose passion was devotedly returned. The difference in their religious faith, however,—the one a conscientious Christian, the other devoted to the ancient creed of Israel,—proved an insuperable barrier to their union. She was never married. Accustomed to the society of Christians, loving them and beloved by them, the attachment to her ancestral faith is rendered more conspicuous, and her firmness in the strife between inclination and duty may be considered an index of the exalted character of the woman. Self-denial and lofty conscientiousness distinguished her life, which was one long chain of golden deeds. There was scarcely a charitable institution of her day in her native city that did not have her name inscribed upon its records as an active officer, or as an adviser and benefactress. As early as 1811 her name appears as an officer of the Female Association. She founded the Orphan Asylum of that city, and was its secretary and warmest friend for more than forty years. She was one of the founders of the Female Benevolent Society, the Foster Home, the Fuel Society, and the Sewing Society. In 1838 she founded a mission Sunday-school for Hebrew children, where prayers of her own composition were in daily use, and for which she procured the writing and compilation of text-books. This is said to be the

oldest institution of the kind in America. Gentiles, as well as Hebrews, were made the recipients of her zealous kindness. For a half-century she was thus actively engaged in benevolent enterprises, and for many subsequent years was a valued counselor in charitable work. She died on the 27th day of August, 1869, at the age of eighty-eight.

One of her brother's most intimate friends was Washington Irving, then in the early freshness of his literary fame. When in Philadelphia he was a welcome guest at the mansion, and the "big room" was assigned him to "roost in," as he termed it. The beauty and character of Rebecca, together with the fact that she was a representative of a race whose history is full of romance, deeply impressed him, and the foundation was laid of a cordial friendship and admiration which lasted through life. In the following letter to her, introducing Thomas Sully the artist, Irving expresses his respect and esteem :

"NEW YORK, NOV. 4, 1807.

"I hardly need introduce the bearer, Mr. Sully, to you, as I trust you recollect him perfectly. He purposes passing the winter in your city, and as he will be a mere 'stranger and sojourner in the land,' I would solicit for him your good graces. He is a gentleman for whom I have great regard, not merely on account of his professional abilities, which are highly promising, but for his amiable character and engaging manners. I think I cannot render him a favor for which he ought to be more grateful, than in introducing him to the notice of yourself and your connections. Mr. Hoffman's family are all well, and you are often the subject of their conversation. Remember me affectionately to all the family. Excuse the liberty I have taken, and believe me, with the warmest friendship,

"Ever yours,
"WASHINGTON IRVING."

Miss Gratz passed many of her younger days with the Hoffmans and other old families in New York, with whom she was on intimate terms. Among her friends at this time were the literary wits of Salmagundi. Matilda Hoffman, the object of Irving's first, last, and only love, was her dearest friend. Miss Hoffman, who is described as lovely in person and mind, with engaging manners, delicate sensibilities, and playful humor, faded early and died in April, 1809, at the age of eighteen. Rebecca was her constant companion during her illness, sharing with the family the cares of her sick-bed, and holding her in her arms when she died. Irving was then twenty-six years old, and for the half-century of his later life he cherished faithfully the memory of his early love. He slept with her Bible and Prayer-book under his pillow, and they were ever his inseparable companions. After his death, a package was found containing some private memoranda, a miniature of great

beauty, a braid of fair hair, and a slip of paper containing her name in his own handwriting. In his private note-book he wrote: "She died in the beauty of her youth, and in my memory she will ever be young and beautiful." Portions of his writings convey the impress of the event, as the following passage in "St. Mark's Eve," in "Bracebridge Hall:" "There are departed beings that I have loved as I never shall love again in this world—that have loved me as I never again shall be loved." In "Rural Funerals," in the "Sketch Book," the same tinge of quiet sadness is discernible. The painful experience through which his friend Rebecca had passed, and her grief at Miss Hoffman's death, were well known to Irving, and the delicate sympathy arising from the knowledge each possessed of the other's sorrow was the firmest bond of their friendship.

For many years, during which he studied law and was admitted to the bar, Irving's naturally gay temperament was overshadowed by this grief, and his frequent intervals of depression unfitted him for literary labor. Engaging in business with his brother at Liverpool, he passed much of his time abroad. His mercantile career, however, proved a failure, and he thenceforth devoted himself to literature. It was in the fall of the year 1817 that Scott and Irving met for the first time. With a letter of introduction from the poet Campbell, who was aware of Scott's high estimate of Irving's genius, the latter visited Abbotsford. He was most cordially received and welcomed by Scott himself, who came limping down to the gate, attended by his favorite stag-hound, and grasped his hand in a way that made Irving feel as if they were already old friends. Here Irving passed several of the most delightful days of his life, rambling from morning till night about the hills and streams; listening to old tales told as no one but Scott could tell them; and charmed by the storied and poetical associations of the Tweed. A warm, mutual attachment ensued. Scott was then forty-six, and in the brilliancy of his early fame. Irving was thirty-four, and just rising in literary reputation from the favorable reception of his "Salmagundi," and the "Knickerbocker's History of New York." Scott's opinion of Irving is thus expressed in a letter to John Richardson:

"When you see Tom Campbell, tell him with my love that I have to thank him for making me known to Mr. Washington Irving, who is one of the best and pleasantest acquaintances I have made this many a day."

Irving's opinion of Scott is given in a letter to Paulding:

"I cannot express my delight at his character and manners. He is a sterling, golden-hearted old worthy, full of the joyousness of youth, with a charming simplicity of manner that puts you at ease in a moment."

To this friendship we owe the character of Rebecca in "Ivanhoe." During one of their many conversations, when personal and family affairs were the topics, Irving spoke of his own, and Miss Hoffman's cherished friend, Rebecca Gratz, of Philadelphia, described her wonderful beauty, related the story of her firm adherence to her religious faith under the most trying circumstances, and particularly illustrated her loveliness of character, and zealous philanthropy. Scott was deeply interested and impressed, and conceived the plan of embodying the pure, moral sentiment, that like a thread of silver ran through the story. Although "Rob Roy" was then unfinished, he was already revolving in his mind the plot and characters of "Ivanhoe." He immediately determined to introduce a Jewish female character, and, on the strength of Irving's vivid description, he named his heroine Rebecca.

More than in the *Cœur de Lion* himself, or in the Knight of Ivanhoe, or in any of the haughty templars and barons so prominent in this romance, its strength and charm lie in the sad, devoted and unrequited tenderness of the Jewish damsel. In almost every one of Scott's works there is a poetical, may we not say impossible, character—some one too good and enchanting to be believed in—yet so identified with our nature as to pass for a reality. Rebecca is the angelic being in "Ivanhoe," and at the last engrosses all the interest. It is by far the finest and the most romantic creation of female character that the author ever conceived, and ranks with any in the annals of poetry or romance. It is, moreover, an exhibition of Scott's wonderful power of will, in view of its composition during moments of intense physical pain. He was obliged to dictate a large portion of the work to his faithful amanuenses, William Laidlaw and John Ballantyne as he lay on a sofa, frequently turning on his pillow with a groan of torment. Yet, when the dialogue became animated, he rose from his couch and walked up and down the room, and vividly personated the different characters. Ballantyne entered with keen zest into the interest of the story as it flowed from the author's lips, and could not repress exclamations of surprise and delight. "Gude keep us a'!" "The like o' that!" "Eh, sirs! eh, sirs!" Laidlaw, too, related the following: "I remember being

so much interested in a part of 'Ivanhoe' relating to Rebecca the Jewess, that I exclaimed, 'That is fine, Mr. Scott! get on—get on!' Mr. Scott, himself highly pleased with the character, laughed and replied, 'Ay, Willie, but recollect I have to make the story—I shall make something of my Rebecca.'"

Scott finished the book in December, 1819, and immediately sent the first copy to Irving. In the letter accompanying it, he asked: "How do you like your Rebecca? Does the Rebecca I have pictured compare well with the pattern given?"

This source of the character was known to Miss Gratz, upon whom Irving had made his first call when he returned to Philadelphia to superintend the publication of his works. Shrinking as she did from any publicity, she would seldom acknowledge the fact, and when pressed upon the subject would deftly evade it by a change of topic. The resemblance is closely marked in many points, which the reader of "Ivanhoe" may be left to find for himself.

In addition to the miniature of Miss Gratz by Malbone, who was famous for the faithfulness and beauty of his art, there is in existence a portrait by Sully, which is said to be one of his most successful works, though he himself was dissatisfied with it.

As an illustration of the regard in which Miss Gratz was held, we may relate the following incident. An aunt of hers was married to Dr. Nicholas Schuyler, of Albany, a surgeon in the Revolutionary war, a friend of Washington, and a near relative of General Schuyler. The Doctor was a Christian, and the differences of religious faith made the marriage very objectionable to the bride's father, who had, however, the highest regard for his son-in-law. A long estrangement ensued, and a reconciliation seemed impossible. During his last illness, the grandfather was attended by Miss Gratz, whose gentleness and skill seem always to have made her in demand in the sick-room. Calling her to him one day, he said: "My dear child, what can I do for you?" Turning upon him her beautiful eyes filled with tears, she replied, in a tone of earnest entreaty: "Grandfather, forgive Aunt Shinah." The old gentleman sought her hand, pressed it, and after a silence said in a broken voice, "Send for her." In due course the lady came, received her father's forgiveness and blessing, and when, a few days later, he breathed his last, the arms of his long-estranged child were about him, while Rebecca Gratz sat silently at his side.