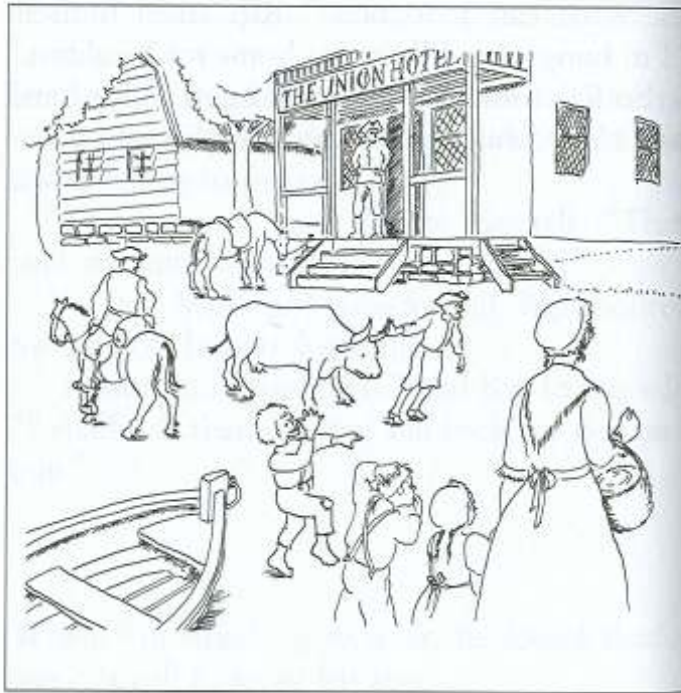


Chapter 4

As Rip came closer to the village, he met a number of people. But he did not know any of them. He found this surprising. Surely he knew everyone in the village and in the country
5 round about? These people were dressed in very strange clothes. Rip had never seen anyone dressed in clothes like that.

The people all looked hard at Rip. Every time



they looked at him, Rip noticed, they put their hands up to their faces. So Rip put his hand up to his face as well. And what did he find? He was wearing a long grey beard!

Rip was now coming into the village. A 5



beard



number of strange children were running around him, laughing and pointing at his long grey beard. The dogs, too, were all dogs that he did not know, and they barked at him as he passed.

The village itself was different now. It was larger. There were streets of houses which he had never seen before. Strange names were over the doors - strange faces were at the windows - everything was strange. Most of the old houses, which he had always known, were gone.

"What can have happened here?" Rip asked himself. "Have I lost my mind? Have ghosts and witches changed everything? Surely this is my village? My village which I left yesterday?"

There stood the Catskill Mountains - there ran the silver Hudson River - there lay every field exactly as it had always been. Rip put his hands to his head.

"The drink from that barrel last night," he said to himself, "has done something terrible to my poor head!"

* * *

It was difficult to find the way to his own house. At last he found the house and stood in front of it. Every moment he expected to hear the loud voice of his wife, but all was quiet. The windows

of the little house were broken, and the front door stood half open. A thin, hungry dog, rather like Wolf, came out from behind the house. Rip called him by name, but the dog showed his teeth and ran away. Rip was very sorry to see that. "Even my own dog," he said to himself, "has forgotten me!"

Rip entered his house. His wife had always kept it in good order. But now the house was empty - no one lived there now. Rip called out loudly for his wife and children, but all he heard in the empty rooms was the sound of his own voice. Then all was quiet again.

* * *

"I know!" said Rip to himself. "I'll go to the inn and talk to my friends."

But when he got there, the little old inn, too, was gone. A large hotel now stood there in its place. Over the door stood the name: THE UNION HOTEL. The great tree, that in the old days used to keep the hot sun off the quiet little Dutch inn, was gone too. In its place, there was now a tall pole, and on this pole a new, strange flag was flying.

| pole, flag: see picture, page 28