



Educating A Democracy:

Author, Jurist, and Jack of All Trades, Hugh Henry Brackenridge Tries His Hand at the Same.

“There is a natural alliance between liberty and letters. Men of letters are seldom men of wealth, and these naturally ally themselves with the democratic interest in a commonwealth. These form a balance with the bulk of the people, against power, springing from family interest, and large estates. It is not good policy in republicans to declare war against letters; or even to frown upon them, for in literary men is their best support. They are as necessary to them as light to the steps. They are a safe auxiliary; for all they want is, to have the praise of giving information...The knowledge of our rights, and capacity to prosecute, and defend them, does not spring from the ground; but from education and study.” ~ *Modern Chivalry*, vol. II, Book 2, ch. 15, 1815 edition

Singularly talented, versatile, and energetic though he was, Scottish born¹ Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1748-1816) was not without his like in his generation of Americans. Joel Barlow, for one, readily comes to mind as someone remarkably akin to him. Both were (what we *now* refer to as) Ivy League graduates. Both were chaplains in Washington army. Both were journalists and publishers. As well as patriotic poets, both found time to be humorists. Both were pro-U.S. Constitution and yet also Jacobins, of a sort, who supported Revolutionary France. Both lauded Washington, a Federalist, to the skies, but ended up, largely, serving democrat Jefferson. Like Barlow also, Brackenridge was probably a little surprised and secretly disappointed he was not more popular than he was and ended up being, and with good reason. For both exhibited better than average perspicuity and writing ability, and despite nay-saying and misgivings of later critics, they left enough worthwhile printed works behind them to deserve much better reputations than those bestowed on them. But it was perhaps because -- and this is true also of such as Timothy Dwight and Philip Freneau, who incurred similar literary fates -- they were so involved politically, and in the process made themselves unavoidably controversial and indeed by some were disliked, that they, in their own lifetimes and subsequently, were disdained honors they more rightly merited. When the beginnings of the literature of this country have been spoken and written of, it is usually the likes of Irving, Cooper, Bryant, (and, later in the history of criticism, Brockden Brown) who are referred to -- rarely or not so much Brackenridge, Barlow, Humphreys, Dwight, or Freneau. But then Irving, Cooper, and Bryant, etc. were careful to stay out of national politics; so that this may, in some significant measure, account for the difference. Besides, at a time of war and nation founding, people understandably felt there was little room for including authors when great statesmen and military men were taking and being given the obvious spotlight. Only when the war was over and the founding of the nation more or less settled could we more freely grant importance and prestige to *mere* writers and artists.

On the surface Brackenridge appears or may appear as a chameleon; who would change his colors to suit those who he chose to please, and certainly there were political opponents in his day who would have characterized him as fickle and not be relied on for long. And it is true as well, that in surveying his writings there are probably few persons or topics that he enthusiastically praises which on yet other occasions he does not criticize, if not laugh at and deride. Yet despite the unflattering repute and seeming contradictions in stance, these reflected a dynamic personality, who like a proper judge (and among his

¹ His family migrated to York, Pennsylvania when he was five years old.

many occupations Brackenridge was judge; in his case a Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court), he was usually (if not always in every instance) trying to get the fair two sides of the question in order to better understand what was going on so as to arrive at a just decision. He was against the Constitution (for lacking a Bill of Rights), then for it. He cheered, foolishly, at the execution of Louis XVI, and first acted as advocate of the insurrectionist in the Whiskey Rebellion² in western Pennsylvania (1791-1794); only to be later accused of selling out to eastern moneyed interests. He was an ardent admirer and champion of classical literature, frequently expressing himself in Latin, yet no American author of his time gave himself more freely in permitting his characters to act and speak in the manners and language of every day people. He could call for enfranchisement of the Negro, yet would claim the dispossession of the Indians was excusable if the Natives did not make optimal use of the land by cultivating and tilling it. Whether in a given instance, his final judgment was correct may be open to question, he can be granted credit for at least seeking, and sincerely, to find a golden mean for whatever controversy he found himself addressing.

So if Brackenridge tried to be all things to all people, he did so with honest and disinterested motives. For him democracy, of which he was the staunchest of proponents, was, at last, the best means of attempting to serve the justice and best interests of everyone. He had, notwithstanding, no delusions about the ability of common people to govern themselves; in fact, he went to considerable lengths to lampoon the idea. Yet the people must have their say; otherwise the rich and wealthy would control and manipulate all to suit their own selfish ends. Brackenridge's solution to this quandary was urge education for all, and for his own part spend much of his career (formally he ended up as a lawyer and then judge) as an author acting as a teacher and instructor. Like Philip Freneau, his fellow as a student at Princeton and with whom he co-authored the rollicking *Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca* (1770),³ he was originally trained to be a clergymen; and during the Revolutionary War, like Joel Barlow, did his stint in Washington's army as a chaplain. But also like Freneau, he took turned to literature, in place of religion, as a preferred means of reaching out to, raising the awareness of, and informing people. In the process, there was hardly a spoken or written medium and genre he did not resort to for purposes of serving these ends and imparting his message: such as sermons, the essay, drama, poetry, oratory, fiction, news reporting, and satire. His very earliest patriotic compositions include the plays "The Battle of Bunker Hill. A Dramatic Piece of Five Acts in Heroic Measure" (1776) and "The Death of Montgomery at the Siege of Quebec. A Tragedy." (1777).⁴

In this sampler, I've collected four extracts as an introduction to Brackenridge's work. Given his markedly variegated and voluminous output, we hardly touch the surface of what he did and what he was capable of. But this small and particular selection does have the advantage of displaying him, I think you will find, at some of his most winsome, moving, and enjoyable.

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

"The Cave of Vanhest" was an uncompleted series that literary historian Emory Elliott describes as "perhaps America's first genuine short story."<sup>5</sup> It first was printed in installments in 1779 in Frances Bailey's short-lived, Philadelphia based *United States Magazine*; the last remarkable for its being a wartime publishing endeavor. In certain parts of central Pennsylvania are to be found some marvelous caverns and networks of caves in which the narrative takes place. It is further worth noting that Charles Brocken Brown makes dramatic use of the same in his, at times, spine-chilling *Edgar Huntly, or Memoirs of the Sleepwalker* (1799).

---

<sup>2</sup> He tried to act as peace negotiator between the rebels and the Federal government, and instead and in the process received the ire of both. At one point, Brackenridge found himself having to contend and deal with Henry Lee when the latter, as Major General (and governor of Virginia), led the federalized Virginia militia called in by President Washington to quell the insurrection. Lee, however and as Brackenridge informs us, treated his former Princeton tutor ("in composition and eloquence") kindly and courteously.

<sup>3</sup> A ribald, comic novella, and one of America's literary firsts.

<sup>4</sup> This latter play in its published form was accompanied by "An Ode in Honour of the Pennsylvania Militia, and the Small Band of Regular Continental Troops, who Sustained the Campaign, in the Depth of Winter, January, 1777, and Repulsed British Forces from the Banks of the Delaware."

<sup>5</sup> *Revolutionary writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1720-1810* (1986), p. 177.

## THE CAVE OF VANHEST

[January 1779]

In my younger years I had read much of that romantic kind of writing which fills every mountain with a hermitage so that you can scarcely miss your way in any part of the country, but you stumble in upon a residence of this kind and discover some old man who, when the usual civilities are over, tells you a long story of his conflicts with the evils and accidents of life, until sick of the world, he has retired from it to this cell in which alone he has found happiness. I have often it might, one day, be my special fortune to fall in with some such individual of the hill and to hear from his own mouth the tale of his disappointed love or ambition, and how it was he could be happy in that solitude. Not unfrequently [sic] in my excursions in the country, I have missed my way through the bad information of the peasants directing me to go straight forward while the road, perhaps in the space of half a mile, was to bend into several angles and to send out paths to the thirty-two points of the compass. In this situation I have consoled myself that while I was wandering among the rocks I might have the good fortune to stumble in upon the cell of a hermit and be invited by him to partake of a mess of roots gathered from the soil or the milk which the wild goats of the mountain has afforded him. I have been a thousand times disappointed in my expectation and never had the pleasure to descry any mortal of this stamp, until lately in a tour through the Jerseys in company with a young gentleman of Philadelphia.

We had rode out to see the field of Monmouth, and having made every observations to which our curiosity invited us, we proposed to return by way of *Coryel[]'s Ferry* [west of Trenton] so much spoken of while the two armies of the British and the American lay upon the Delaware. In this route we had traced the windings of the Raritan until we found ourselves upon the southwest branch of that river and amongst the mountains whence it takes its rise. We had missed the direct road and were endeavoring to regain it by a cross course through the country, shaded by the woods and sometimes by the projection of the precipice above us. The indistinctness of the path made it impossible to trace it, so that at last we wandered from it altogether and were at a loss which way to steer, when the glimmering of a taper through the disjointings [sic] of the rocky mountain gave us the hope of finding some hospitable dwelling where we might detain a few hours until the moon should be up to assist us in our journey. Approaching to the light we found a kind of gothic building in the bosom of the mountain. Knocking at the door through the crevices of which the light seemed to issue, a voice from within called to us, "Who is there?" We answered, "Friends." And immediately the door was opened to us by a man in a long white linen robe who desired us to walk in and be happy, if we could be happy in the cave of Vanhest.

We informed him in what manner we had lost our way, and added that we thought ourselves fortunate in falling in with the dwelling of a gentleman of his civility whom we hoped would be kind enough to give us some directions, [and] that as soon as the moon was up we might pursue our course to *Coryel's Ferry* on the Delaware. "My sons," said he, "you will detain with me tonight and tomorrow, if I cannot be able to prevail upon you to detain longer? You will better with the light of day enter on your journey. You will find a bed in that apartment and you will oblige me by endeavoring to repose yourselves upon it until the morning shall arise to bless the mountains." We accepted very gracefully his hospitality and were lighted by him to a chamber where we found a very rich bed with the beautiful covering of a counterpane in which there were wrought many figures of the summer season of the year. Wishing us a good repose, he retired to his hall, which was but half divided from the apartment in which we lay, and gave us an opportunity to see him as he reclined on his sofa, a lamp burning by him, and a number of books strewed around him, in one of which he read in the intervals of his meditation.

We composed ourselves to sleep, not a little at a loss to account for the unusual appearance, language and behavior of this person who had so courteously received us to what I now began to call his hermitage. His reply "Is it possible?" when we answered "Friends" was remarkable. It would seem, that disgusted with the world, he thought it a phenomenon to find a friend in it. (*to be continued*)

----

[February 1779]

The light began to dawn through a small window of the apartment in which we lay, when we proposed to arise and set out upon our journey. "My son," said the master of the cave, who in the meantime was awaked on the sofa and overheard our conversation, "this morning is unfavorable to the traveler. We shall have rain upon the earth; and as you are now sheltered by a friendly roof, be contented and wait a day of fair weather." "Sir," said I, "the sky appears somewhat cloudy, but we apprehend there will be but little rain." "Not so, my sons," said the master of the dwelling. "I perceive by the haziness that settles on the distant top of the mountain that we shall have a rain of some days continuance. Repose yourselves, my sons, and think not of leaving this retreat until fair weather with her dry breezes shall again come to visit us." Agreeable to his advice we composed ourselves to sleep, and the heavy air of the morning sealed up our eyes in a pleasing reverie of soft dreams and slumbers.

The day was considerably advanced when we were awaked by a soft voice penetrating to the room in which we lay in the following words, "All ye mortals who love food, come and taste of this repast. Here is water from the limpid rill wherewith to wash and prepare for breakfast." Having dressed ourselves with as much dispatch as possible, we advanced to the head of the staircase which communicated with our room; and beginning to descend, we were addressed from the lower floor at the bottom of the steps by the master of the dwelling, who had received us the evening before and now desired us to walk down to the lower apartment of the cave and partake of the repast prepared for us. We descended and were introduced by him to the mistress of the cave, a very amiable lady, who with two lovely daughters, just arriving to the years of women, bade us welcome, very welcome to the cave of Vanhest.

We cast our eyes around the subterranean apartment and were struck with the richness of the furniture. There stood a bed at one angle of the cave with a set of hangings of the finest chintz, variegated with a thousand flowers of the springing year. At another angle was placed a buffet replenished with china cups and bowls and with silver plates and vases of every shape and dimension. The floor was covered with a very rich carpet whose variety of figures resembled that which Themistocles alluded to in his conversation with the king of Persia. "Thought expressed in a foreign language and translated," said that great hero and philosopher, "is like a carpet rolled up; you see the bulk, but not the figures of it. But though expressed in a native tongue is to those who hear it like the carpet of a king's hall unfolded, and discovering to the eye every spring, flower and fancy that the imagination of the artist has been able to inweave in its tapestried borders." Such was the carpet upon which we steeped in this subterranean residence. The neat but small mahogany table that stood upon it was that around which we sat down to breakfast and which supported a set of china cups depicted with the tops of the jonquil, also a silver tea urn of the most original construction. The lady handed each of us a dish of tea or coffee according to our choice, and this with a smile of complacency that gave us to see she thought herself happy in having it in her power to serve us. She was indeed a very amiable woman, above middle stature, but finished in her person to the last degree of the most happy ease and elegance. Nevertheless my whole attention was soon diverted from her to a careful survey of her two lovely daughters. The eldest was of that class of beauties that are said to be more agreeable than handsome, that is with features not so regular but with an air and accomplishment of manner that engages the heart without giving warning that it is about to engage it. The younger of the two was all that the poets mean when they talk of Venus and the Graces. The plain of her forehead was beautifully rising; her eye-brow exquisitely painted; her eye itself vermilioned with blushes, and a small mole upon it was that one which the power of love seemed to erect his standard. The fine ringlets of her auburn hair flowed upon her shoulders and her bosom largely uncovered, as is the mode of the times, showed a skin that without touching it appeared as the down on the soft flower of the white rose.

We were waited on at breakfast by the dwarf of the cave who was called Bernardus and in whose visage fortitude was painted like the shading of the twilight or the fog of a hazy eve. This we did not wonder at when we were informed that he had been born in the cave and had scarcely ever had the curiosity to go above ground. He had belonged to the man who built the cave, and who having died some years ago, left it to be inhabited by the present family on whom the boy continued to attend as on his former master.

A variety of conversation passed during breakfast. The gentleman himself did not speak a great deal, but what he did say discovered him a man of pious thought and attention to the ways of providence.

“You observe,” said he, “the Raritan is almost dried up, which bespeaks what we have experienced, a very dry summer; and yet, what must appear strange, we have never had more plenteous crops upon the fields than have been this season. We may readily explain the phenomenon by bringing into view that though in the course of this summer there have been no heavy rains to sink into the earth and fill the basins of the mountains, yet there have been a sufficiency of gentle showers to satisfy the soil and give vegetation to the fruits upon it. Hence it is that the crops are everywhere joyful, and in the meantime the channels of the rivers dry.”

The day continued to be cloudy and to promise rain, which gave this pleasing family good ground of argument against our setting out upon our journey. We were indeed by this time so perfectly resigned to their pleasure that we sat down in a sweet romantic disposition, ready to forget the world and all the hopes of eminence that we formed in it. (*to be continued*)

---

[*March 1779*]

“Sir,” said I, addressing myself to the master of the cave, “this young gentleman who accompanies me and whom I have the pleasure to introduce you to is the son of a worthy citizen of Pennsylvania, who on a short excursion to the field of Monmouth famous for the battle lately fought between the American and British armies had done me the honor to put him under my care; and as his education has been considerably interrupted by the progress of the war in that state, I have endeavored in the meantime to be of some service to him by directing his attention to the study of the Latin language, in which he has made some proficiency before the frown of Mars had driven the Muses from our country. In the course of our small tour it has been useful for him at an early hour to recite to me a morning exercise in this language, and at noon, when we have withdrawn from the heat of the solar ray and have lain ourselves down by the margin of the brook, he has made it his amusement to translate a few passages from a classic author, which at our first setting out he had been careful to make the companion of his journey. I mention this circumstance as an apology for the request I am about to make that you will permit me to suspend the happiness which I promise to myself from your agreeable conversation and to hear for a short time the young gentleman recite to me a page or two from this author.”

“My son,” said the master of the cave, “I am much pleased with your mode of traveling and instructing the youth at the same time, and it will be agreeable to me to hear him repeat to you his exercise in the Latin language which is of all others except Greek the noblest and most harmonious.”

“Then,” said I, “it only remains to apologize to the ladies and to enquire if it may be pardonable to obtrude on their ears, even for half an hour, the hard sounds of a foreign language which it is not supposed the sex are taught to understand.”

“Sir,” said the eldest of the two ladies, “we have heard Papa read Latin, and though we do not understand the sounds, yet we think them not hard but musical; and were it not so, yet the politeness of your apology secures our complaisance, and whatsoever you are pleased to make the object of your attention will become our entertainment.” A page was recited, and the young ladies thought it was very odd language. The master of the cave commended very highly the docility and progress of the youth and made some observations on Sal[*l*]ust, the author which was read, as an historian, who in one happy expression had oftentimes given us a character more clearly and fully than many others in a long delineation of the various passions, views, and interest of the person. From his observations on this author, he was led to speak of Thucydides whose conciseness he had copied, and of Livy and Tacitus, who had perhaps excelled him in judicious reflection upon men and things which became the subject of their story. From these he was drawn insensibly to speak of the orators and poets of antiquity, and in this excursion it was evident, from the great critical propriety with which he spoke of the character of every writer, that in his early years he had cropped the poppies of Arcadia and drank of the streams of Helicon, that he had visited the bower of Museus and conversed with Homer at the feast of Alcinous,<sup>6</sup> that in short he was acquainted with all the divine learning and genius of the ancients.

---

<sup>6</sup> [Brackenridge's footnote] *The Odyssey*, vii.

But recollecting himself, and returning from this classic ramble, "My son," said he, "you have made mention of the field of Monmouth which you have had the curiosity to visit, and were it not to give you the trouble of a tedious relation, I should be happy to hear from you some account of the action of that day, and what remarks you may have, made upon the field where it was contended."

"Sir," said I, "it would be tedious to you to hear the whole account of the affairs of that day and impossible for me to relate them, as no regular account by those who were present had been yet published to the world; but I shall think myself happy in giving you any account of the smaller circumstances which I have collected from the inhabitants in the neighborhood of Monmouth, or any observation which I may have made of the traces of the battle on the plain where it was lately fought between the two armies."

"We arrived, Sir, in the evening at the church which stands at the northeast point of the plain of Monmouth. Here we were struck with the sight of six new graves, in which were interred a like number of American officers who had fallen in the battle. At the head of one of these graves was a board with a cross-bar on which was written, if I remember right, the name of Lieutenant Haymond of the Third Maryland Regiment. At this church it was that Captain Fant le Roy fell by a cannon ball which from the artillery of the enemy, at the distance of one and one-half mile, had made its way through an orchard of high trees, and as he was mounting his horse, passed level through his body. The orchard of which I speak had obscured the view of the enemy and from this circumstance, and the distance at which he was, this young gentleman, who I believe was only a spectator of the battle, had not apprehended that he was in any danger."

"From the church we proceeded to a farmer's house about one-half mile farther on the plain and just in the rear of that ground on which our army had been drawn up in three lines on the day of the engagement. Here we were received very hospitably, and the farmer, who was an intelligent and good-natured man, gave us a very particular account of what had happened in the neighborhood previous and subsequent to the battle. Amongst other things he related to us on the approach of the two armies the inhabitants had carried out their household furniture, their beds, trunks, and other articles, to the woods, swamps, and hidden places of the country. Some they had buried under ground, or covered with the bramble bushes or the woodland leaves that lay upon the soil. Thus, whether found by the enemy or by our own army equally rapacious, were the greater part carried off. The enemy in many places had taken up the floors of the house, and for the purpose of searching places where they might suspect things to be buried, they had long pikes which they thrust under ground. From this circumstance a very odd incident had happened in the town of Monmouth. A gentleman had hastily buried on the approach of the enemy, his plate, papers, and a large sum of money in an earthen pot in his garden. In the hurry of his spirits he had left his spade on the very spot where he had deposited his wealth. The enemy, on advancing to the town, were led by this circumstance directly to explore it with their pikes and to dig up the soil to a considerable depth. The gentleman returning home when the enemy left the village the day succeeding that of the engagement, saw the earth removed in his garden and gave his treasure up for lost. He sat himself down resigned to the loss which was to be attributed more to the will of providence than to any want of care or industry on his part. His wife, however, could not so easily console herself but continued greatly distressed on seeing themselves reduced almost to poverty. In this agitation of her mind, she had a dream the succeeding night that the pot was still in that spot of the garden where it had been deposited. Her husband labored to drive it from her thoughts and reasoned with her on the great improbability that the enemy would dig up the soil and find the pot, as they must have found it, and yet not take it with them. Nevertheless no reasoning would satisfy her, but he must dig up the ground in the morning and try whether it might not be there still. Agreeably to her request the ground was dug up, and at a considerable less depth than the enemy had penetrated, the pot was found, split asunder by a pike which had struck it and passed transversely through its side."

"With these and the like circumstances our host entertained us for the evening, and this with much cheerfulness, as he himself had escaped the ravage of the enemy; for I find it in human nature than even when we commiserate the evils and distresses of others, we draw some consolation from it that we ourselves are not in the same situation."

“My son,” said the master of the cave, “you draw an unfavorable picture of human nature; nevertheless I believe there is too much truth in it; but please go on, for the small circumstances of your story are to me very interesting.”

“Sir,” continued I, “early on the next morning our host became our guide, and we rode to take a view of the field of Battle. To the east of the plain and on the left of our line of battle, Lord Sterling had been posted near a graveyard, on a bold and commanding eminence, with a morass for several miles running at right angles to the line of his array and securing his left flank from any attempt of the enemy to turn it. From this eminence his artillery annoyed the enemy in a line diagonally drawn to a height occupied on their part at the distance of about a mile, and from whence he was answered for the space of two hours without intermission.

“On the right of his Lordship, and in front of the main line of battle, was our principal park of artillery, which played incessantly upon the enemy at nearly the same distance of one mile, and here we could perceive the shattered frames of the carriages of dismounted pieces, the deep beds wrought in the earth by the recoiling of the cannon, the furrows ploughed upon the hill, and the trenches cut by the balls which striking it had made their way for some distance, or again rebounded from the soil and sought a course through the lines or above the heads of the soldiery.

“On the northeast of the intermediate ground before the enemy was an old orchard to which they had penetrated, crossing a morass passable to light-armed troops only. In this orchard they were met by the artillery under Lord Stirling [William Alexander], whose right flank they had in view to gain and who on this occasion made a very great slaughter with his grape shot and obliged them to retire, leaving seventy-five dead upon the soil.

“In the front of our main battle [line?], and just at the foot of the eminence possessed by the enemy, was a morass undetermined in length and about one hundred yards in breadth, passable but not easily to foot and horse but impassable to the artillery, save at one place slightly bridged by split pieces of timber, six or eight feet in length, laid across it. The bridge for a considerable time had been raked by one of our pieces under cover of a point of woods, which piece was afterwards dismounted, and we saw the broken splinters of the carriage scattered everywhere around the spot where it had been planted.

“In this spot, by what had been told me, fell Lieutenant James M’Nair of the artillery, having his head taken off by a cannon ball. I was truly sorry for his death, having known the mild disposition and the merit of the man. From his less elevated rank as an officer, he will never be taken notice of by the historian, and yet he is no less deserving of renown than those in the band of brothers who have fallen at the head of a brigade or battalion.

“The bridge in front had been so raked that the enemy were cut down as they came upon it, but a body in the meantime had passed the morass to the right of the bridge and advanced in the front of our lines over some low ground a considerable distance, but beginning to ascend the hill they suffered much and were driven back by the artillery to which they were exposed. Here we saw a grave in which it would seem that just on their retreat they had buried hastily one of their number, and that so slightly in the earth that one foot of the poor fellow was still uncovered; and though he had been once our enemy, yet touched with humanity, we did him the small office of throwing the loose soil over him to a greater depth.” (*to be continued*)

----  
[May 1779]

...I had finished my narration, and the hermit of the cave was silent; but from the kindling luster of his eyes, at every circumstance which in the course of the narration reflected honor on the arms of America, it was evident that he was in sentiment a Whig.

Nevertheless I was still greatly at a loss to know what could be the cause of his retirement to his present solitude. On my first acquaintance with him, I had thought it possible he might be disaffected with

the present cause of America, and had withdrawn to this mountain that he might not be under the necessity of taking any part in the contest. But the visible benevolence and good sense of the man, and at the same time the pleasure discoverable in his countenance on every circumstance of advantage in our favor, place it beyond a doubt he was a friend to America. However, I had a desire to know his history, and for this reason, after some preface of smooth words, hinted to him that curiosity which had naturally been excited in my mind, and requested him, though in a manner distant, and with some degree of that delicacy which the circumstance required that it would give me great pleasure to hear the life and travels of a man of his years and experience.

“My son,” said he, “I will with great pleasure gratify your very natural and pardonable curiosity. But the story of my life is saddened with adversity and will accord better with the shadows of the evening. Until that time give me leave to defer the narrative. The day you see is become bright with the rays of the cloud-dispelling sun. It is time that we go upon the soil to collect fruits and vegetables for the short repast of the dinner hour. After which it will remain for the slow hours of the day that we try the river with the hook and return home to light up the cave with the twilight lamp, and while Bernardus dresses what we may have taken, it will [be] our amusement to recall former times, and repeat with a melancholy pleasure, the laborious toils of experience in the ways of men.” (*to be continued.*)

----  
[June 1779]

Issuing from the cave in the bosom of the mountain, we walked upon the margin of the Raritan and found and the found ourselves by a large plumb tree which, having shaken, we filled a basket with the fruit, which was luscious and refrigerating to the taste. We were led insensibly to speak of the nature of plumb trees.

“There is,” said the hermit, “your great damask plumb. This is a pretty large plumb, inclining to an oval shape; the outside is of a dark blue covered with a violet bloom; the juice is richly sugared; the flesh is yellow and parts from the stone.

“There is your red imperial plumb. This is a large oval-shaped fruit of a deep red color, covered with a fine bloom. It is excellent for sweet meats.

“There is your myrobalan plumb. This is a middle-sized fruit of a round shape. It is ripe in August. But indeed there are a variety of plumbs; and amongst them all there is none of which I am fonder than a cherry plumb. It is round and is of a red color. The stalk is long like that of a cherry, which this fruit so much resembles as not to be distinguished at some distance. The blossoms of this tree come out very early in the spring, and being very tender, are oftentimes destroyed by cold; but it affords a very agreeable prospect in the spring, for these trees are generally covered with flowers which open about the same time with the almonds so that when they are intermixed therewith they make a beautiful appearance before many other sorts put out; but by their blossoming so early, there are few years that they have much fruit.

“Besides these,” continued he, “there is the white pear plumb, which is a very good fruit. There is also the musele plumb and the Julian plumb and the Mogul plumb.”

“There are,” said I, “a great variety of plumbs in the different soils of America.”

“Yes,” replied the hermit, “and some of them very fine; equal, if not superior to any to be found in Europe or the more eastern countries. This plumb, which is of the red cherry kind, is excellent to be eaten from the tree and suits very well for sweet meats. I have been told there are fine plumbs on the creeks to the westward.”

“I have seen some very good,” said I, “on the creeks of Elk and Octorara; but in the state of Maryland, on Deer Creek, there are much better; though I am told that to the westward they are still in greater quantities and of better quality.”



By this time we had filled our basket, and remeasuring back the margin of the Raritan, we found ourselves at the entrance of the cave, and were saluted by the younger of the two young ladies in a stream of tears. The cause was that Bernardus, having conceived a great affection for the young gentleman who had walked with us to the plumb tree, had been willing to follow and be one of the company; but poor fellow, he had been so long accustomed to the cave that as soon as he had reached the head of the steps that led from it, in the rays of the sun he began to hallucinate, and turning to get in again he fell from the steps, and had hurt his ankle in the fall. The young lady was of the opinion that poor Nardy's foot was broke, and that it might be past all remedy.

I easily conceived that a very small hurt might give rise to Nardy's complaint and to the young lady's apprehensions, and therefore [I] was perfectly composed. Nevertheless, with as much condescension and appearance of humanity as possible, [I] told her, that having read many books in my early years and having spent some time in the army, where hurts were very frequent, I had acquired a considerable skill in the treatment of them, and made no doubt but that with the help of bandages and vinegar, I could restore him to his feet again in a very short time. The hermit smiled; for knowing well, I suppose, how great an alarm a small affair will give to a tender breast, he was easy with regard to the circumstance of Nardy's fall, and was disposed to be diverted with the serious and grave manner in which I addressed myself to the young lady, entering into all her sympathies and mixing my assuatives [sic] kindly with her griefs.

"Nardy," said I, "where is your ankle hurt?" "Here, Sir," said he, pointing to it. "Yes, yes," said I, "I perceive the whole affair at one single glance. It is not a dislocation or fracture, nor indeed anything but a small disprain that will be speedily relieved by a few simple applications."

I saw the rays of returning pleasure begin to dart through the crystal tear that now hesitated to descend from the young lady's eye.

"Miss," said I, "I shall be greatly honored by having presented to me by your hand a small bit of linen for bandage and at the same time a little vinegar made warm to bathe the ankle, which remedy of bathing, in a case of this nature, I have always found to be without fail efficacious."

The bit of linen was presented to me, and at the same time the vinegar, with which having washed the lad's ankle and having bound it up, he himself, whose hurt was more in imagination than in feeling, began to recover spirits; and the young lady who had shared particularly in sympathy with his misfortune and was attentive to him in assisting me to bandage and to bathe his ankle, was cheered like a vernal day after April flowers.

Bernardus was composed away in an angle of the cave, upon a bed of green leaves, and we sat down to dinner. (*to be continued*)

----

[July 1779]

Plumbs shaken from a tree, peaches gathered from an orchard on brow of hill above, apples at the same time, vegetables from the garden, dried fish, milk, cheese, butter were upon the board; and intermingling a variety of conversation on the nature of the several fruits, and on other matters, we had now dined. "Sir," said the lady of the cave, "I have heard your request to the gentleman, whom with some propriety you will call a hermit, that he would be pleased to relate a sample of his life and travels. This, as according better with descending shades, he has deferred to evening. But in meantime, may it not be possible to prevail with you, Sir, to give some sketch of what you may have seen in life? It is true, not more than one-third of yours can be yet past; but as part even of the story of an old man is fortune of early years, why may it not be proper in a young man to relate the history of that part life which he had just passed over?"

"Madam," said I, "I am ready to obey you in this so very reasonable command, but you are not to expect in my story any great example of uncommon fortitude struggling with adversity, for the history of

youth is rather that of follies than misfortunes. Nevertheless my life has had some varieties, and these have arisen chiefly, as is usual with the young men, from the indulgence of one single passion.

“My father was a worthy good man, who wishing to see me step along the quiet vale of life, as he had done, had entertained the thought of matching me with a farmer’s daughter of the neighborhood in which he lived. But I had heard of the Miss Muses, who were great beauties.” “The Miss Maises, did you say, Sir?” said the lady. “No, Madam, the Miss Muses, of whom I have heard much and had long desired to see. At length having cultivated an acquaintance with a worthy clergyman in their neighborhood, I was introduced to them; for as the young ladies had no father living, and they were by themselves, nine sisters of them, they did not choose to be visited by every one. Miss Urany Muse, you must know, was my flame: The same lady that Milton talks of when he says,

*Descend from heaven, Urania, by that name,  
If rightly thou are called.*<sup>7</sup>

“The old bard, kindling into rapture at the name of so great a beauty, could not help calling that ground heaven where this young lady with her sisters dwelt. And indeed from the pleasant situation of the hill on the bending river of Castalia, and from the laurel with which it was everywhere planted out, and from the poems of divine thought which these young ladies sung to harpsichords and violins, it was little short of heaven. I was in love, that is the truth of it, and every thing said was to me the speech of paradise.

“I shall not stop to tell you the many pleasant evening walks that I had on this hill, and the tender things that Miss Urany deigned to say to me, for I cannot yet be persuaded but that I possessed some share of her affection. Nevertheless, it has so come to pass that the hope I had entertained of making her one day my own has long since vanished. The circumstances of this small affair must remain a secret to the world. Perhaps when I die some hint of it may be found amongst my papers, and some friend may inscribe it on my tomb.

“The next fair lady for whom I conceived and affection was Miss Theology, a young lady of indeed great merit, and who had been sometimes mentioned to me by friends. But whether it is because we are apt to dislike those who are too much pressed upon us, or whether it is that the will of heaven gave a new current to the affections of the heart, I cannot tell; but I had until this hour set light by her, and could see nothing handsome in her person or captivating in her air and manner. My affection for miss Theology was a stream of love springing from a cold aversion.

“I have loved Miss Theology, and for five years I paid her a constant attention. But so it is that though with much condescension and many marks of tenderness she received my addresses, yet we both saw the necessity of ceasing to indulge any fond thought of union. This has cost me many slights; and it is my only consolation that we are hastening to a state where circumstances of a various nature will not intervene to divert us from the company of those persons whom we value highest and whose conversation will be no small ingredient in the happiness of that clime where the spirits of the just are made perfect.

“The present object of my soft attention is a Miss Law, a grave and comely young lady, a little pitted with the small pox.

“Her steward, an old fellow of the name of Coke, is a dry queer genius, and with him I have almost every day a quarrel. However, upon the whole I am pleased with the old fellow, and tossing him about with a string of young fellows of a more cheerful vein, and who are likewise attached to the family of Miss Law, I make myself merry with him. This young lady is of a prudent industrious turn, yet what she has in expectancy is considerable. I have paid my addresses to her now about a year. But I begin to apprehend that the beauty of some persons not so far distant as the head of the gulf of California is in confederacy to draw me away from her, and whereas I first set out with a warmth of affection for the young ladies of the hill<sup>8</sup> I shall this day fall a victim to the young ladies of the cave.

---

<sup>7</sup> [Brackenridge’s footnote] *Paradise Lost*, VII, 1.

<sup>8</sup> [Brackenridge’s footnote] Parnassus

The young ladies smiled. But it was now time to try the river with the hook, and we advanced on the margin of the Raritan accordingly. (*to be continued*)

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

Poetry was rarely among Brackenridge's strong point, and his contribution to *The Rising Glory of America*, that he wrote along with Freneau for the Princeton 1771 commencement, is far inferior to Freneau's input. Daniel Marder, in his *A Hugh Henry Brackenridge Reader, 1770-1815*, pointedly omits in his anthology the following Masque, in the manner of Ben Jonson, written in honor of General Washington as a rather disappointing piece. To this verdict, I cannot altogether concur; for what it wants in execution it partly makes up for in creative imagination and in visionary intent; hence its inclusion here.

A MASQUE WRITTEN AT THE WARM-SPRINGS, IN VIRGINIA, IN THE YEAR 1784⁹

THE GENIUS OF THE WOOD,

I AM the Genius of the shady wood;
Whose care it is to crown the swelling rivers,
And bid the mountains hide them from the herd
Of the solstitial ray; the Delaware
I crown with poplar and with boughs of oak;
The Susquehannah with the cherry tree;
Potomack wasted by the summer's sun,
And Rappahannock and the river James,
I crown with branches of the lofty pine:
The great Ohio, with her thousand sons
To Mississippi roiling on, I crown
With leaves of ash-wood and the sugar-tree.
This is the day and this the well known place
Your presence is expected.

POTOMACK.

These springs we annually revisit;
But where the Genius of the tepid streams?
Whose task it is to warm them for the bath,
And touch them, with the sacred ore, which gives
Salubrious quality; this is his task,
In chose recesses and deep caverns fram'd
By Neptune, where the mountain base o'erspreads.
His naiads there attend him and each brings
Her urn and pours it where th' embosom'd rock
Gives current to the tide.

GENIUS OF THE SPRINGS.

Great sire of fountains, on this annual day
I greet your presence.

DELAWARE.

You know, my son, this is the happy season,

⁹ *Gazette Publications* (1806), pp. 35-40.

When from our banks the gayest citizens,
To taste the water of the springs repair.
Is every drop ting'd with the mountain ore
And made medicinal? Is every drop
Through sand filtrated, that the chrystal glass
Of those who drink may be transparent with it?

GENIUS OF THE SPRINGS.

The wave is nine times purified by fire;
The hundred naiads of th' embowering rocks
With pitchers from the subterranean flood
Have drawn the tide; the' alembic has distill'd
The tide to vapour; the mountain cistern
Has receiv'd the liquid current. Beds of ore
Have ting'd and sand has filtrated the stream.
That every drop with power of health impregnate
Dispels all pain, all shape of malady,
That racks the system or the mind subdues.

OHIO.

Then bid the naiads of the vocal powers,
Haste hither with the nimble dance and song,
The virtue of the springs to celebrate;
And bid the deities of these rude hills
With Triton whom the goddess Thetis sent
Attune their chords in symphony with these.

POTOMACK.

Go tell the naiads and the jocund deities,
To cull their choicest flowers; a noble name,^{*10}
Has come this day to do them honour.
That chief whose fame has oft been heard by them,
In contest with Britannia's arms; that chief
Whom I myself have seen quitting the farm,
By no ambition, but by virtue led,
Arising at his country's call, and swift
The challenge of the vet'ran foe receiving.
My brother streams have told me his achievements,
The oak-crown'd Hudson told me that he saw him,
Walk like a God upon his well fought banks.
The Raritan in Jersey told me of him;
But most the Delaware, whose noble tide
Roll'd his indignant waves upon the bank
And triumph'd on the heroic days
Of Brandy wine, of Germantown and Monmouth;
The Rappahannock told me of the chief
When great Cornwallis yielded. With him I shed
A tear of lucent joy. The Chesapeake,
Oh! bay divine, thou heardst the victory,
And through thy hundred islands far and wide,
Rejoicing, there was gladness.

¹⁰ [Brackenridge's footnote] Washington.

But when the rage of horrid war had ceas'd,
My son return'd; I mark'd his character...
No scorn appeared upon his furrow'd brow,
His air was dignity and graceful ease
The same as when he left us, save that now
His visage worn with care shew'd more of age
I hail'd my son and bade him come with me
To taste the water of the healthful springs.

THE NAIADS IN A DANCE.

Purest streams that gently flow
From the rock that covers you,
No decrease of tide you know,
Summer suns do not subdue.
Nor do storms fierce winter's brood
Rain or snow that comes with them,
Swell your current to a flood;
You are still, pure streams, the same.

Emblem this of that great chief,
WASHINGTON who made us free,
Shewing 'midst our joy and grief
Equal equanimity.

The dance continues with a second song.

The gentle streams flowing,
The trees around growing
And shadows now showing
Themselves o'er the spring.

No danger of wasting
Your water by tasting
Though many are hasting
To drink of the spring.

Third song with a dance.

Clear bursting fountains by you shall appear,
The gayest assemblies through each circling year;
To lead up the dance in these chearful abodes,
And live at their leisure the life of the Gods.

We taste of the streams and forget all our care:
Your virtues like Lethe, not fabulous are.
Your virtues expel all diseases and pain,
To those that are weak, they give vigour again.
The lame that come hither their crutches forego:
They leap and exult like the wild mountain roe,
Here youth is confirm'd in his vigour and bloom,
To age is given years and days yet to come.

They disappear.

GENIUS OF THE WOODS.

Such is the virtue of these healthful springs;
Yet not in these alone salubrious quality.
Far west, and near thy source, Ohio, rising
There is a spring*¹¹ with copious oil embrown'd,
All chronic pain dispelling, at the touch,
And washing all scorbutic taint away,
As erst in Jordan was the Syrian king.
Th' inflexible joint, the fibre of old age
Relaxing, it gives youth and nimble motion.
The natives of the wood, my oldest sons,
Nor less than Hamadryades, my care;
All bathe in the smooth current, and receive
Returning health and vigour. Soon assembling
There, the modern race of men unnumbered
In place of the discoloured native
Shall frequent its margin. The gods and naiads
There, as usual shall repair
While annually with festive song and dance,
They celebrate the virtue of the springs.

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

*Although the greater part of Brackenridge's work are legal writings in defense of the politically empowered judiciary; which latter many, including Thomas Jefferson, saw as a threat to American liberties, his most famous work, indeed timeless, in spirit, magnum opus, is of course his Modern Chivalry, penned and published in volume installments over the span of 1792 to 1815. By "modern chivalry," Brackenridge means, in effect and perhaps in response to Edmund Burke,<sup>12</sup> that he who stands up for the rights and true interests of the people is no less than a knight in shining armor; of present and future times. So that Brackenridge himself, in wryly or risibly depicting the faults and foibles of Democracy in America, saw himself as a errant chevalier of that new, noble order. Claude W. Newlin, in his superlative, informative, and insightful introduction to the American Book Company edition (1937) of the same, sums it up this way:*

*"...[T]he heart of the book is political, and its chief themes concern (1) the ambition of unqualified persons to rise to high position, (2) the lack of intelligent discrimination on the part of voters, and (3) the excesses of democracy."<sup>13</sup>*

*While the ensuing excerpt passages have little to do with politics, certainly they show Brackenridge at some of his most humorous.*

*From Volume 3, Chapter VII (1793).*

Taking advantage of the humiliated state of mind in which the bog-trotter now was, from the late cowskinning he had received, the captain thought he could be drawn off from an extreme attention to the ladies, and engaged to apply to the qualifying himself for state affairs. Accordingly, continuing his address to him, he observed, -- that though gallantry and waiting upon ladies was very agreeable, yet prudence ought to be observed, not to create enemies by seeming to engross their attention, so as to put a man in danger of duels, and cowskinings: at the same time it behooved a man not to suffer his gallantry to interfere with business; and more especially in the early stages when he was about qualifying himself for

<sup>11</sup> [Brackenridge's footnote] The Oil-Spring on French creek.

<sup>12</sup> "...Oh! what a revolution [i.e., the French]! and what heart must I have to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards, to avenge even a look that threatened her [Marie Antoinette] with insult -- but the age of chivalry is gone!" Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790).

<sup>13</sup> p. XXVIII.

any occupation or appointment; that as he (Teague O'Regan) was a candidate for state affairs, he ought to check his career and withdraw himself for some time from the gay circles, in order to acquire some small things which were necessary to the creditable and convenient discharge of a public function ; such as learning to write his name if possible. As to learning to read or write generally, that would be a work of years, if at all acquirable at his period of life; but he might be taught to imitate the few characters that composed his name, in such a manner as to pass for it; so that when he had to sign despatches or commissions, or the like, he need not be under the necessity of making his mark, like an Indian at a treaty; he might do something that would pass for the letters of the alphabet. So providing him with a room, and placing a table before him with an inkstand, and strewing some papers, and furnishing him with spectacles, as if he was already making out dispatches, he began to instruct him in making the letters, T, E, A, G, U, E, etc.

But he had scarcely begun, when the waiter coming in delivered a parcel of cards and billets for Major O'Regan. The captain instantly reflecting that this correspondence with the gay world would undo all that he was doing, and draw off the bog-trotter from his lessons, as soon as the smart of the cowskinning had worn off, saw it was necessary to read the billets as from different persons, and containing language different from what was in them. The cards being chiefly from men in public employment, he read as they really were. Opening one of the largest of the billets, "aye," said he, "there is more of it. Do you know this Johnston, that seems so much enraged about Miss Muslin to whom you have paid some attention?" By the by, it was a billet from Miss Muslin, to whose acquaintance it would seem he had been introduced; but the captain read Johnston.

"By de holy fathers," said Teague, "I know no Johnston."

"He sends you a challenge," said the captain, " to meet him on the commons this evening at six o'clock, with a brace of pistols and a second to determine whether you or he has the best right to pay attention to this lady." We shall give the billet as written by the lady, and as read by the captain.

AS WRITTEN BY THE LADY.

Would wish to have the pleasure of Major O'Regan's company this evening at tea. Lawyer: Crabtree and Doctor Drug will be here; and you know we shall split our sides laughing at the ninnies. You're so full of your jokes that I want you here. Dear Major, don't be engaged, but come.

Yours sincerely, Wednesday morning.  
PATTY MUSLIN.

As read [to him] by the Captain:

Sir--

You will instantly do one of two things, either relinquish your attention to Miss Muslin, and be no more in her company; or meet me this evening precisely at six o'clock, on the commons back of the Potter's-field, with a brace of pistols, and a second, to take a shot. I shall have a coffin ready, and a grave dug, for whichever of us shall have occasion to make use of it.

Your humble servant,  
BENJAMIN JOHNSTON.

In the same manner he read the other billets, converting them from love letters into challenges to fight with mortal weapons, or into declarations of cudgelling, and cowskinning, if he interfered any farther in his attentions to such and such ladies.

The bog-trotter began to think the devil was broke loose upon him, and very readily gave the captain leave to write answers, declining all combats, and declaring his compliance with all that was requested of him.

The waiter was the only person, who, by receiving the billets, and handing them in the absence of the captain, and reading them to Teague, might inflame his mind with the thoughts of the fine ladies, and gay circles from which he seemed to be just recovered: taking him aside, therefore, and accosting him, "Matthew," said he, for that was the name of the waiter, "I do not know, that I ought to find any fault with your giving your service for some time past to my Teague, in reading the billets directed to him, and in writing his answers; but I desire that there may be nothing more of this. As he is about to be closely engaged for some time to come, in acquiring some scholarship, and preparing to enter on some state appointment, I do not choose that his mind should be taken off by affairs of compliment or love. All billets therefore directed to him, you will for the future hand to me." The waiter promised compliance, and said it was all the same thing to him, as all he had done, was to oblige the major; and if it was disagreeable to him, (the captain,) he should do no more of it.

However, Teague continuing still to have some hankering after the company of the ladies, so as not to have his mind so much upon learning to write the characters of his name as the captain could have wished, he found it necessary to engage the bar-keeper to assist him in personating now and then, some one who had come to demand satisfaction for the interference of the bog-trotter in affairs of love, that by keeping up the alarm on his mind, he might the better confine him to his studies. -According to the plan agreed upon, the bar-keeper, knocking at the door, and the captain opening it a little, and demanding his business; "is there not a Major O'Regan here," he would say, (with a counterfeited voice,) "who has pretensions to Miss- Nubbin? (one of those who had sent billets,) I wish to see the gentleman, and try if I can put this sword in his body." "God love your soul," would O'Regan say, "dear captain don't let him in. I shall die with fear upon the spot here; for I never fought a man who could blood in my life."-- Here the bar-keeper as recognizing the voice of O'Regan -- "yes," would he say, "I find he is here, let me in, that I may put this through him; I had paid my addresses to Miss Nubbin, and was just about to espouse her, when unlike a gentleman, he has interfered and turned her head with his attentions. By the New Jerusalem, I shall be through his windpipe in a second." Teague hearing this and raising the Irish howl, would redouble his entreaties to the captain not to let him in. The captain would say, "Sir, if you mean to make a pass at him, you must make it through me; for I shall not stand to see a friend of mine run through the body. You may therefore desist, or I shall have you taken into custody as a breaker of the peace." With this he would shut the door, and the bar-keeper would go off cursing and swearing that he would have revenge for the insult that had been offered him, by the Irishman.

By these artifices, certainly innocent as the object was good, for it can be no injury to deceive a man to his own advantage, or to prevent mischief; by these artifices the captain succeeded in preventing a correspondence with the gay world, and detaching the mind of his pupil from the gallantries of love. But when any member of Congress or officer of state called upon him he was admitted. Traddle<sup>14</sup> called frequently, and declared that he had no resentment on account of Teague's proposing to be his competitor, at the election in the country; but wished him success in obtaining some appointment where his talents might be useful.

~~~~\*\*\*~~~~

"The Trial of Mamachtaga" appears in Archibald Loudon's *Selections of Some of the Most Interesting Narratives of Outrages Committed by Indians in Their Wars with the White People* (1808), vol. 1, pp. 38-50.

THE TRIAL OF MAMACHTAGA,
an Indian, at a Court of Oyer and Terminer¹⁵
for the County of Westmoreland, in the year 1784-5.

¹⁴ Brackenridge's fictional persona for William Findley, ex-weaver and one of the leaders of the Whiskey insurgents; who Brackenridge ridiculed for his want of education and qualification as a statesman. Findley, for his part, viewed Brackenridge as a sell-out to the self-serving eastern establishment.

¹⁵ A court of general criminal jurisdiction in newly settled districts.

I know the particulars of the following story well because one of the men (Smith) was shingling a house for me in the town of Pittsburgh the evening before he was murdered by Mamachtaga, and for which murder and of some others this Indian was tried. Smith had borrowed a blanket of me, saying that he was about to cross the river (Allegheny) to the Indian camp on the west side. Here a party of Indians, mostly Delawares, had come in, it being just after the war and the greater part of these Indians having professed themselves friendly during the war, and their chief Killbuck¹⁶ with his family and that of several others having remained at the garrison on an island in the Ohio River called Killbuck's Island and under the reach of the guns of the fort. Mamachtaga had been at war against the settlements with others of the Delawares who were now at this encampment.

I went myself over to the encampment the next morning and found the Indians there. Two men had been murdered, Smith and another of the name of Evans, and two wounded, one of them a dwarf of the name of Freeman. According to the relation which I got from the wounded, there were four white men together in a cabin when Mamachtaga, without the least notice, rushed in and stabbed Smith mortally and had stabbed Evans who had seized the Indian who was entangled with the dwarf among his feet, attempting to escape, and who [the dwarf] had received wounds also in the scuffle; and the other white man also had received a stab. It would appear that the Indian had been in liquor according to the account of the other Indians and of the white men who escaped. Killbuck appeared greatly cast down and sat upon a log, silent. Mamachtaga made no attempt to escape. He was now sober and gave himself up to the guard that came over, affecting not to know what had happened. The seat of justice of Westmoreland county being thirty miles distant and the jail there not being secure, he was taken to the guardhouse of the garrison to be confined until a court of Oyer and Terminer should be held in the county.

Living in the place and being of the profession of the law, said I to the interpreter Joseph Nicholas, one day, "Has that Indian any fur or peltry, or has he any interest with his nation that he could collect some and pay a lawyer to take up his defense for this homicide?" The interpreter said that he had some in the hands of a trader in town, and that he could raise from his nation any quantity of rac[c]oon or beaver provided it would answer any purpose. I was struck with the pleasantry of having an Indian for a client and getting a fee in this way, and told the interpreter to go to the Indian and explain the matter to him. He did so, and brought me an account that Mamachtaga had forty weight of beaver, which he was ready to make over, being with a trader in town, and that he had a brother who would set off immediately to the Indian towns and procure a hundred weight or more if that would do any good, but the interpreter stipulated that he should have half of all that should be got for his trouble in bringing about the contract. Accordingly, he was dispatched to the Indian from whom he brought in a short time an order for the beaver in the hand of the trader, [signed by] Mamachtaga (his mark). The mark was something like a turkey's foot, as these people have no idea of a hieroglyphic merely abstract as a strait line or a curve, but it must bear some resemblance to a thing in nature. After this as it behooved, I went to consult with my client and arrange his defense, if it were possible to make one on which a probable face could be put. Accompanied by the interpreter I was admitted to the Indian so that I could converse with him. He was in what is called the black hole, something resembling that kind of hole which is depressed in the floor and which the southern people have in their cabins in which to keep their esculent roots from the frost during the winter season. Not going down into the hole as may be supposed, though it was large enough to contain two or three and was depressed about eight feet, being the place in which delinquent or refractory soldiery had been confined occasionally for punishment, but standing on the floor above, I desired the interpreter to put his questions. This was done, explaining to him the object of the inquiry, that it was to serve him and, by knowing the truth, [to] be prepared for his defense. He affected to know nothing about it, nor was he disposed to rely upon any defense that could be made. His idea was that he was giving the beaver as a commutation for his life. Under this impression it did not appear to me proper that I should take the beaver, knowing that I could do nothing for him; besides seeing the manner in which the dark and squalid creature was accommodated with but a shirt and breech-clout on, humanity dictated that the beaver should be applied to procure him a blanket and food additional to the bread and water which he was allowed. Accordingly I returned the order to the interpreter, and desired him to procure and furnish these things. He seemed reluctant and thought we ought to keep the prerequisite we had got. On this I thought it most

¹⁶ [From Marder's text] "In 1779 the Delaware Indians warred [against the United States. Only a few of them under Chief Killbuck refused to join the war. They moved to Smoky Island at the mouth of the Allegheny to be under the protection of Fort Pitt."

advisable to retain the order and give it to a trader in town with directions to furnish these articles occasionally to the officer of the guard, which I did, taking the responsibility upon myself to the interpreter for his part of the beaver.

An Indian woman known by the name of the Grenadier Squaw was sitting, doing some work, by the trap door of the cell or hole in which he was confined, for the trap door was kept open and a sentry at the outer door of the guard-house. The Indian woman was led by sympathy to sit by him. I had a curiosity to know the force of abstract sentiment in preferring greater evils to what with us would seem to be less, or rather the force of opinion over pain. For knowing the idea of the Indians with regard to the disgrace of hanging, I proposed to the Indian woman, who spoke English as well as Indian and was a Delaware herself (Mamachtaga was of that nation), to ask him which he would choose, to be hanged or burned? Whether it was that the woman was struck with the inhumanity of introducing the idea of death, she not only declined to put the question, but her countenance expressed resentment. I then recollected, and have since attended to the circumstance, that among themselves when they mean to put anyone to death they conceal the determination and the time until it is about to be put in execution, unless the blackening the prisoner which is a mark upon such as about to be burned may be called an intimation; but it is only by those who are accustomed to their manners that it can be understood. However, I got the question put by the interpreter, at which he seemed to hesitate for some time but said he would rather be shot or be tomahawked. In a few days it made a great noise through the country that I was to appear for the Indian, and having acquired some reputation in the defense of criminals, it was thought possible by some that he might be acquit[t]ed by *the crooks of the law* as the people expressed it; and it was talked of publicly to raise a party and come to town and take the interpreter and me both and hang the interpreter and exact an oath from me not to appear on behalf of the Indian. It was, however, finally concluded to come in to the garrison and demand the Indian and hang him themselves. Accordingly a party came in a few days, and about break of day summoned the garrison and demanded the surrender of the Indian. The commanding officer remonstrated and prevailed with them to leave the Indian to the civil authority. Upon which they retired, firing their guns as they came through the town. The interpreter, hearing the alarm, sprang up in his shirt and made for a hill above the town called Grant's Hill. On seeing him run, he was taken for the Indian that had been suffered to escape, and was pursued until the people were assured that it was not the Indian. In the meantime he had run some miles, and swimming the river, lay in the Indian country until he thought it might be safe to return.

It was not without good reason that the interpreter was alarmed, for having been some years among the Indians in early life a prisoner, and since a good deal employed in the Indian trade, and on all occasions of treaty employed as an interpreter, he was associated in the public mind with an Indian, and on this occasion considered as the abetter [sic] of the Indian from the circumstance of employing council to defend him. And before this time a party had come from the Chartiers, a settlement south of the Monongahela in the neighborhood of this town, and had attacked some friendly Indians on the island in the Ohio (Killbuck's Island) under the protection of the garrison, and had killed several and among them some that had been of essential service to the whites in the expeditions against the Indian towns and on scouting parties in case of attacks upon the settlements.¹⁷ One to whom the whites had given the name of Wilson, (Captain Wilson) was much regretted by the garrison. A certain Cisna had commanded the party that committed this outrage.

A day or two after his return, the interpreter came to me and relinquished all interest in the beaver that was lodged with the trader or expected from the [Indian] towns, that he might, to use his own language, "wipe his hands of the affair, and be clear of the charge of supporting the Indian." The fact was that as to beaver from the towns I expected none, having been informed in the meantime by the friendly Indians that Mamachtaga was a bad man and was thought so by his nation, that he had been a great warrior but was mischievous in liquor, having killed two of his own people, that it would not be much regretted in the nation to hear of his death, and that except [for] his brother, no one would give anything to get him off.

¹⁷ [Marder] "In March, 1783, militia from Chartiers Creek attacked Killbuck's friendly Delawares encamped on Smoky Island and killed all but a few."

He had the appearance of great ferocity, was of tall stature [and] fierce aspect. He was called Mamachtaga, which signifies trees blown across, as is usual in a hurricane or tempest, by the wind; and this name had been given him from the ungovernable nature of his passion. Having therefore no expectation of peltry or fur in the case, it was no great generosity in me to press upon the interpreter the taking half the beaver as his right in procuring the contract; but finding me obstinate in insisting upon it, he got a friend to speak to me, and at length I suffered myself to be prevailed upon to let him off and take all the beaver that could be got to myself.

It did not appear to me advisable to relinquish the defense of the Indian, fee or no fee, unless it should be supposed that I yielded to the popular impression, the fury of which, when it had a little spent itself, began to subside. And there were some who thought the Indian might be cleared, if it could be proved that the white men killed had made the Indian drunk, which was alleged to be the case but which the wounded and surviving persons denied, particularly the dwarf (William Freeman); but his testimony it was thought would not be much regarded as he could not be said to be [a] *man grown*, and had been convicted at the Quarter Sessions [court] of stealing a keg of whiskey some time before.

At a court of Oyer and Terminer held for the county of Westmoreland before Chief Justices [Thomas] M’Kean [signer of Declaration of Independence and Gov. of Penn. in 1799] and Bryan, Mamachtaga was brought to trial. The usual forms were pursued. An interpreter, not Nicholas but a certain Handlyn, stood by him and interpreted in the Delaware language the indictment and the meaning of it and the privilege he had to deny the charge, that is the plea of *not guilty*. But he could not easily comprehend that it was [a] matter of form, and that he must say *not guilty*, for he was unwilling to deny, as unbecoming a warrior to deny the truth. For though he did not confess, yet he did not like to say that he had not killed the men; but said he was drunk, and did not know what he had done but *supposed he should know when he was under the ground*. The court directed the plea to be entered for him, and he was put upon his trial.

He was called upon to make his challenges, which the interpreter explained to him and which he was left to make himself and which he did, as he liked the countenances of the jury and challenged according to the sourness or cheerfulness of the countenance and what he thought indications of a mild temper. The jurors, as they were called to the book, being told in the usual form, “Prisoner, look upon the juror. Juror, look upon the prisoner at the bar. Are you related to the prisoner?” One of them, a German of a swarthy complexion and being the first called, took the question amiss, as thinking it a reflection and said with some anger that he thought “that an uncivil way to treat Dutch peoples as if he could be the brothers, or cousings of an Indian.” But the matter being explained to him by another German of the jury, he was satisfied and was sworn.

The meaning of the jury being on oath was explained to the Indian to give him some idea of the solemnity and fairness of the trial. The testimony was positive and put the homicide beyond a doubt; so that nothing remained for me in opening his defense but the offering to prove that he was in liquor, and that this had been given to him by the white people, the traders in town. This testimony was overruled, and it was explained to the Indian that [his] being drunk could not by our law excuse the murder. The Indian said he hoped the good man above would excuse it.

The jury gave their verdict, guilty, without leaving the bar. And the prisoner was remanded to jail. In the meantime there was tried at the same court another person (John Bradly) on a charge of homicide but who was found guilty of *manslaughter* only. Towards the ending of the court these were both brought up to receive sentence. The Indian was asked what he had to say, why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon him. This was interpreted to him and he said that he would rather *run awhile*. This was under the idea of the custom among the Indians of giving time to the murderer, according to the circumstances of the case, to run, during which time if he can satisfy the relations of the deceased, buy a commutation for his life [with] a gun, a horse, fur and the like, it is in their power to dispense with the punishment; but if this cannot be done, having not enough to give, or the relations not consenting to take a commutation, he must come at the end of the time appointed to the spot assigned, and there, by a warrior of the nation, or some relative, son, brother, etc. of the deceased, be put to death, in which case the tomahawk is the usual instrument. No instance will occur in which the condemned man will not be punctual to his engagement. And I think it very probable, or rather can have no doubt, but that if this Indian had been

suffered to run at this time, that is, go to his nation on the condition to return at a certain period to receive the sentence of what he would call the council, he would have come with as much fidelity as a man challenged would on a point of honor come to the place assigned, and at the time when, to risk himself to his adversary. Such is the force of opinion, from education, on the human mind.

Sentence [had] been pronounced upon the convicted [white man] of manslaughter. (In this case the first part of the sentence, as the law directs, was that of hanging, which is done until the *benefit of clergy is prayed by the prisoner*, but not understanding this, nothing could exceed the contortion of his muscles when a sentence contrary to what he had expected was pronounced.) Being a simple man he made a hideous outcry and gave a most woeful look to the court and country and begged for mercy; and it was not for some time after, that having the matter explained to him and the benefit of clergy being allowed, he could be composed. Sentence of *burning in the hand* being now pronounced, at this moment the sheriff came in with a rope to bind up his hand to a beam of the low, wooden courthouse in which we were in order that the hot iron might be put upon it.

Sentence of hanging had been previously pronounced upon the Indian, [upon] which he had said that he would prefer to be shot; but it being explained to him that this could not be done, he had the idea of hanging in his mind. Accordingly, by a side glance, seeing the sheriff coming in with a rope which was a bed-cord he had procured (having nothing else in our then low state of trade and manufacturing), Mamachtaga conceived that the sentence was about to be executed presently upon him and that the rope was for this purpose, which coming unaware upon him, he lost the command of himself for a moment. His visage grew black, his features were screwed up, and he writhed himself with horror and aversion; the surprise not having given time to the mind to collect itself, and on the acquired principle of honor to conceal its dismay, or on those of reason to bear with and compose itself to its fate. Even when undeceived and made acquainted that he was not to die then, he remained under a visible horror, the idea of immediate death and especially of hanging giving a tremor, like the refrigeration of cold upon the human frame.

Before he was taken from the bar he wished to say something, which was to acknowledge that his trial had been fair and to express a wish that his nation would not revenge his death or come to war on his account. [He was] asked, as he was taken off by some of those accompanying the sheriff in conducting him to jail, whom he thought the judges to be before whom he had been tried and who were on the bench in scarlet robes, which was the official custom of that time. Being of the Delaware nation, among whom Moravian missionaries had been a good deal and, as it would seem, mixing some recollections which he had derived from this source, he answered that the one, meaning the Chief Justice, was God, and the other Jesus Christ.

At the same court of Oyer and Terminer was convicted a man for the crime against nature, and at a court of Quarter Sessions a short time after, another, a young man of the name of Jack had been convicted of larceny and was now confined in the same jail, and in fact in the same room, for there was but one, with the Indian and the white man before-mentioned. And though, upon account of his youth and family connections, the jury in finding a verdict had recommended to pardon, for which the supreme executive council of the state had been petitioned some time before, nevertheless he could not restrain the wickedness of his mind and had prevailed upon the white man, guilty of the crime against nature, as he had to die at any rate, to save the disgrace of being hanged, to consent to be murdered by the Indian. The creature [the one condemned to death] was extremely simple and had actually consented, and Jack had prepared a knife for the purpose. But the Indian refused, though solicited and offered liquor, saying he had killed white men enough already.

A child of the jailor had been taken sick and had a fever. The Indian said he could cure it if he had roots from the woods which he knew. The jailor, taking off his irons which he had on his feet, took his word that he would not make his escape while he let him go to the woods to collect roots, telling him that if he did make his escape the great council, the judges, would hang him (the jailor) in his place. But for the greater security the jailor thought proper to accompany him to the woods where roots were collected, and which on their return were made use of in the cure of the child.

The warrant for the execution of the Indian and of the white man came to hand, and the morning of the execution the Indian expressed a wish to be painted that he might die like a warrior. The jailor as before unironed him and took him to the woods to collect his usual paints. Having done [it], he returned and prepared himself for the occasion, painting highly with the rouge which they use on great occasions.

A great body of people assembled at the place of execution. The white man was hung first, and afterwards the Indian ascended a ladder placed to the cross timber of the gibbet; and the rope [was] fastened. When he was swung off, [the rope] broke and the Indian fell, and having swooned a little, he rose with a smile and went up again. A stronger rope in the meantime having been provided, or rather two put about his neck together so that his weight was supported, and he underwent the sentence of the law and was hanged till he was dead.

This was during the Indian war and this place on the verge of the settlement, so that if the Indian had taken a false step and gone off from the jailor while he was looking for roots for the cure or for painting, it would have been easy for him to have made his escape. But such is the force of opinion as we have before said, resulting from the way of thinking among the Indians, that he did not seem to think that he had the physical power to go. It was nevertheless considered an imprudent thing in the jailor to run this risk. For if the Indian had made his escape it is morally certain that in the then state of the public mind, the jailor himself would have fallen a sacrifice to the resentment of the people.

Pittsburgh, 1785

William Thomas Sherman
1604 NW 70th St.
Seattle, Washington 98117
206-784-1132

wts@gunjones.com

<http://www.gunjones.com> and http://www.scribd.com/wsherman_1

For Lee's Legion on Face Book:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/LeesLegion/>