



A SON OF THE FOREST (1829)

One of the *very first* and most significant civil rights and racial equality activists in United States history; one of the *very first*, as well as most prolific, of published Native American authors -- William Apess (1798–1839; pronounced, or so I have heard, A-pess, with “A” as in “hay”) was both of these. And yet perhaps what arguably makes Apess as much, or more, a figure of interest than these honorable titles is that he could have passed for a gifted writer and engaging personality regardless of his color or nationality. He therefore proved his own thesis; namely, that when it comes to talent or greatness, race and ethnic heritage are no proper measures, and what most and truly matters is worth founded on strength of character combined with ability. And these Apess had. True, his was not an unqualified artistic success; if at times Apess in his writings appears or sounds a bit ridiculous, it no doubt was because sometimes he indeed was and acted ridiculously. And yet even conceding this to have been an occasional fault, his better traits of indefatigable perseverance, political shrewdness, impassioned elegance, and touching eloquence are more than enough to prevent us from losing sight of his merit and where it lies.

By his own account, Apess was a descendant of King Philip of Pokanoket, or Metacomet, (c 1639-1676), the heroic and tragic Wampanoag chief, son of Massasoit; who waged a war of resistance (1675-1678) against the first new England settlers and their Indian allies; perhaps made most familiar to later generations by a piece written about him by Washington Irving in the latter’s *Sketch Book*. Even if Apess was not actually of King Philip’s progeny (we don’t really know for sure), he even so saw himself as someone ready to take up the cause and put on the mantle of Philip, and based on his subsequent achievement was deserving, certainly in spirit, of doing so.

As he relates in close detail in his 1829 autobiography, *A Son of the Forest*, Apess (originally spelled “Apes”; with “apes” in Latin, incidentally, meaning “bees”) suffered an extremely trying and abusive youth growing up as a semi-half breed -- his paternal grandfather had been white -- in northwestern Massachusetts, and after a series of fairly astonishing adventures and run-ins with odd characters -- rivaling in wildness and pathos, and sometimes in humor, the wanderings and scrapes of Roderick Random and David Copperfield. He began his life very early as an indentured servant; subsequently ran away and became a soldier serving in the War of 1812, and ended up a traveling Methodist minister, working the preaching circuits. He later headed up the first open, non-violent, and largely successful civil rights protest in the United States on behalf of people of color in the Mashpee (or Marshpee) Revolt of 1835 in Cape Cod.

As with Samson Occom and Jupiter Hammon, we see it was religion that first opened doors to people discriminated for race and color, and it was only in certain churches -- or in the military, army and navy -- that desegregation was or ever could be tolerated. Outside the church, outside of the military, there was no effective way for native Americans, blacks, or people of color to have *any hope* of significant

participation, advancement, or respect. No wonder then, as Apess himself recalls, many people went to church simply to scoff; that is because it was in some churches people were becoming free, and no doubt among some of those scoffers were such who disapproved of emancipation, real or potential.

Apess viewed America as the joint inheritance of white and Indian, and argued his point with some brilliance, both in his sermons and autobiography. He is both fair and impartial, and doesn't hesitate or flinch at pointing out the faults and admirable characteristics of both. He strives for justice and truth, and his candor, and capacity to wisely express it, is as startling and surprising now as it must have been to early 19th century readers and audiences.

The format and manner of his autobiography harkens back to religious conversion witnessing found in innumerable 18th century tracts and pamphlets, and Apess cleverly uses the genre to get in his own sermons on race and race relations. He may also have been inspired by slave narratives like that of Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) or Venture Smith (1729?-1805). But what is extraordinary is that his autobiography, as we alluded to, reads much like Smollett or Dickens, and even if you don't care about race history in the United States, it holds up quite well as an amusing and rattlingly good, if every now and then disturbing and sobering, read. The extracts here come from the 1831 second edition.

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WILLIAM APES [as earlier noted, later modified into the spelling "Apess"], the author of the following narrative, was born in the town Colereign [modern Colrain], [in northwestern] Massachusetts, on the thirty-first of January, in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and ninety-eight. My grandfather was a white man, and married a female attached to the royal family of Philip, king of the Pequod [also "Pequot"] tribe of Indians, so well known in that part of American history, which relates to the wars between the whites and the natives. My grandmother was, if I am not misinformed, the king's granddaughter, and a fair and beautiful woman. This statement is given not with a view of appearing great, in the estimation of others -- what I would ask, is *royal* blood -- the blood of a king is no better than that of the subject -- we are in fact but one family; we are all the descendants of one great progenitor -- Adam. I would not boast of my extraction, as I consider myself nothing more than a worm of the earth.

I have given the above account of my origin with the simple view of narrating the truth as I have received it; and under the settled conviction that I must render an account at the last day, to the sovereign Judge of all men, for every word contained in this little book.

As the story of King Philip is perhaps generally known, and consequently the history of the Pequod tribe, over whom he reigned; it will suffice to say, that he was overcome by treachery, and the goodly heritage occupied by this once happy, powerful, yet peaceful people, was possessed in the process of time, by their avowed enemies the whites, who had been welcomed to their land in that spirit of kindness, so peculiar to the red-men of the woods. But the violation of their inherent rights, by those to whom they had extended the hand of friendship, was not the only act of injustice which this oppressed and afflicted nation, was called to suffer at the hands of their white neighbours -- alas! they were subject to a more intense and heart-corroding affliction, that of having their daughters claimed by the conquerors, and however much subsequent efforts were made to sooth their sorrows, in this particular, they considered the glory of their nation as having departed.

From what I have already stated, it will appear that my father was of mixed blood; his father being a white man, and his mother a native, or in other words, a red woman. -- On attaining a sufficient age to act for himself, he joined the Pequod tribe, to which he was maternally connected. He was well received, and in a short time afterwards, married a female of the tribe, in whose veins a single drop of the white man's blood never flowed. Not long after his marriage, he removed to what was then called the back settlements, directing his course first to the west, and afterwards to the north-east, where he pitched his tent in the woods of a town called Colreign, near the Connecticut river, in the state of Massachusetts. In this, the place of my birth, he continued some time, and afterwards removed to Colchester, New-London county, Connecticut. At the latter place, our little family lived for nearly three years in comparative comfort. Circumstances however changed with us, as with many other people, in consequence of which, I was taken

together with my two brothers and sisters into my grandfather's family -- One of my uncles dwelt in the same hut. Now my grand parents, were not the best people in the world -- like all others, who are wedded to the beastly vice of intemperance, they would drink to excess whenever they Could procure rum, and as usual in such cases, when under the influence of liquor, they would not only quarrel and fight with each other, but would at times, turn upon their un offending grand children, and beat them in a most cruel manner. It makes me shudder even at this time, to think how frequent, and how great have been our sufferings in consequence of the introduction of this "cursed stuff" into our family -- and I could wish, in the sincerity of my soul, that it were banished from our land.

Our fare was of the poorest kind, and even of this we had not enough -- our clothing also was of the worst description: literally Speaking, we were clothed with rags, so far only as rags would suffice to cover our nakedness. We were always contented and happy to get a cold potatoe [sic] for our dinner -- of this at times we were denied, and many at night have we gone supperless to rest, if stretching our limbs on a bundle of straw, without any covering against the weather, may be called rest. Truly we were in a most deplorable condition. Too young to obtain subsistence for ourselves, by the labour of our hands, and our wants almost totally disregarded by those who should have made every exertion to supply them. Some of our white neighbours however took pity on us, and measurably administered to our wants, by bringing us frozen milk, with which we were glad to satisfy the calls of hunger. We lived in this way for some time, suffering both from cold and hunger. Once in particular, I remember that when it rained very hard, my grandmother put us all down cellar, and when we complained of cold and hunger, she unfeelingly bid us dance and thereby warm ourselves -- but we had no food of any kind; and one of my sisters, almost died of hunger. -- Poor dear girl she was quite overcome. -- Young as I was, my very heart bled for her. I merely relate this circumstance, without any embellishment or exaggeration, to show the reader how we were treated. The intensity of our sufferings I cannot tell. Happily we did not continue in this very deplorable condition for a great length of time. Providence smiled on us, but in a particular manner.

Our parents quarrelled, parted and went off to a great distance, leaving their helpless children to the care of their grand parents. We lived at this time in an old house, divided into two apartments -- one of which was occupied by my uncle. Shortly after my father left us, my grandmother, who had been out among the whites, returned in a state of intoxication, and without any provocation whatever on my part, began to belabour me most unmercifully with a club; she asked me if I hated her, and I very innocently answered in the affirmative as I did not then know what the word meant, and thought all the while that I was answering alight; and she continued asking me the same question, and I as often answered her in the same way, whereupon she continued beating me, by which means one of my arms Was broken in three different places. I was then only four years of age, and consequently could not take care of, or defend myself -- and I was equally unable to seek safety in flight. But my uncle who lived in the other part of the house, being alarmed for my safety, came down to take me away, when my grandfather made towards him with a fire-brand, but very fortunately he succeeded in rescuing me, and thus saved my life, for had he not come at the time he did, I would most certainly have been killed. My grand parents who acted in this unfeeling and cruel manner, were by my mother's side -- those by my father's side, were christians, lived and died happy in the love of God; and if I continue faithful in improving that measure of grace, with which God hath blessed me, I expect to meet them in a world of unmingled and ceaseless joys...

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It may not be improper to remark in this place, that a vast proportion of the misconduct of young people in church, is chargeable to their parents and guardians. It is to be feared that there are too many professing christians who feel satisfied if their children or those under their care enter on a sabbath day within the walls of the sanctuary, without reference to their conduct while there. I would have such persons seriously ask themselves whether they think they discharge the duties obligatory on them by the relation in which they stand to their Maker, as well as those committed to their care, by so much negligence on their part. The christian feels it a duty imposed on him to conduct his children to the house of God. But he rests not here. He must have an eye over them, and if they act well, approve and encourage them; if otherwise,

¹ *A Son of the Forest* (1831 edition), ch. I, pp. 7-12.

point out to them their error, and persuade them to observe a discreet and exemplary course of conduct while in church.

After a while I became very fond of attending on the word of God -- then again I would meet the enemy of my soul, who would strive to lead me away, and in many instances he was but too successful, and to this day I remember that nothing scarcely grieved me so much, when my mind had been thus petted, than to be called by a nick name. If I was spoken to in the spirit of kindness, I would be instantly disarmed of my stubbornness, and ready to perform any thing required of me. I know of nothing so trying to a child as to be repeatedly called by an improper name. I thought it disgraceful to be called an Indian; it was considered as a slur upon an oppressed and scattered nation, and I have often been led to inquire where the Whites received this word, which they so often threw as an opprobrious epithet at the sons of the forest. I could not find it in the bible, and therefore concluded, that it was a word imported for the special purpose of degrading us. At other times I thought it was derived from the term in-gen-uity. But the proper term which ought to be applied to our nation, to distinguish it from the rest of the human family, is that of "*Natives*" -- and I humbly conceive that the natives of this country are the only people under heaven who have a just title to the name, inasmuch as we are the only people who retain the original complexion of our father Adam. Notwithstanding my thoughts on this matter, so completely was I weaned from the interests and affections of my brethren, that a mere threat of being sent away among the Indians into the dreary woods, had a much better effect in making me obedient to the commands of my superiors, than any corporeal punishment that they ever inflicted. I had received a lesson in the unnatural treatment of my own relations, which could not be effaced; and I thought that if those who should have loved and protected me, treated me with such unkindness, surely I had no reason to expect mercy or favour at the hands of those who knew me in no other relation than that of a cast-off member of the tribe. A threat, of the kind alluded to, invariably produced obedience on my part, so far as I understood the nature of the command.

I cannot perhaps give a better idea of the dread which pervaded my mind on seeing any of my brethren of the forest, than by relating the following occurrence [sic]. One day several of the family went into the woods to gather berries, taking me with them. We had not been out long before we fell in with a company of white females, on the same errand -- their complexion was, to say the least, as *dark* as that of the natives. This circumstance filled my mind with terror, and I broke from the party with my utmost speed, and I could not muster courage enough to look behind until I had reached home. By this time my imagination had pictured out a tale of blood, and as soon as I regained breath sufficient to answer the questions which my master asked, I informed him that we had met a body of the natives in the woods, but what had become of the party I could not tell. Notwithstanding the manifest incredibility of my tale of terror, Mr. Furman Was agitated; my very appearance was sufficient to convince him that I had been terrified by something, and summoning the remainder of the family, he sallied out in quest of the absent party, whom he found searching for me among the bushes. The whole mystery was soon unravelled. It may be proper for me here to remark, that the great fear I entertained of my brethren, Was occasioned by the many stories I had heard of their cruelty towards the whites -- how they were in the habit of killing and scalping men, women and children. But the whites did not tell me that they were in a great majority of instances the aggressors -- that they had imbrued their hands in the life blood of my brethren, driven them from their once peaceful and happy homes -- that they introduced among them the fatal and exterminating diseases of civilized life. If the whites had told me how cruel they had been to the "poor Indian," I should have apprehended as much harm from them.²

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...In these days of young desires and youthful aspirations, I found Mrs. Furman ever ready to give me good advice. My mind was intent upon learning the lesson of righteousness, in order that I might walk in the good way, and cease to do evil. My mind for one so young was greatly drawn out to seek the Lord. This spirit was manifested in my daily walk; and the friends of Christ noticed my afflictions; they knew that I was sincere because my spirits were depressed. When I was in church I could not at times avoid giving vent to my feelings, and often have I wept sorely before the Lord and his people. They of course,

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. II, pp. 20-23.

observed this change in my conduct -- they knew I had been a rude child, and that efforts were made to bring me up in a proper manner, but the change in my deportment they did not ascribe to the influence of divine grace, inasmuch as they all considered me *too young* to be impressed with a sense of divine things. They were filled with unbelief. I need not describe the peculiar feelings of my soul.

I became very fond of attending meetings; so much so that Mr. Furman forbid me. He I supposed that I only went for the purpose of seeing the boys and playing with them. This thing caused me a great deal of grief; I went for many days with my head and heart bowed down. No one had any idea of the mental agony I suffered, and perhaps the mind of no untutored child of my age was ever more seriously exercised. Sometimes I was tried and tempted -- then I would be overcome by the fear of death. By day and by night I was in a continual ferment. To add to my fears about this time, death entered the family of Mr. Furman and removed his mother-in-law. I was much affected, as the old lady was the first corpse I had ever seen. She had always been so kind to me that I missed her quite as much as her children, and I had been allowed to call her mother.

Shortly after this occurrence I was taken ill. I then thought that I should surely die. The distress of body and the anxiety of mind wore me down. Now I think that the disease with which I was afflicted was a very curious one. The physician could not account for it, and how should I be able to do it; neither had those who were about me ever witnessed any disorder of the kind. I felt continually as if I was about being suffocated, and was consequently a great deal of trouble to the family, as some one had to be with me. One day Mr. Furman thought he would frighten the disease out of me. Accordingly he told me that all that ailed me was this -- that the devil had taken complete possession of me, and that he was determined to flog him out. This threat had not the desired effect. One night, however, I got up, and went out, although I was afraid to be alone, and continued out by the door until after the family had retired to bed. After a while Mr. F. got up and gave me a dreadful whipping. He really thought, I believe that the devil was in me, and supposed that the birch was the best mode of ejecting him. But the flogging was as fruitless as the preceding threat in the accomplishment of his object, and he, poor man, found out his mistake, like many others who act without discretion.

One morning after this I went out in the yard to assist Mrs. Furman milk the cows. We had not been out long before I felt very singular, and began to make a strange noise. I believed that I was going to die, and ran up to the house; she followed me immediately, expecting me to breathe my last. Every effort to breathe was accompanied by this strange noise, which was so loud as to be heard a considerable distance. However, contrary to all expectation I began to revive, and from that very day my disorder began to abate, and I gradually regained my former health.

Soon after I recovered from my sickness, I went astray, associating again with my old school fellows, and on some occasions profaning the sabbath day. I did not do thus without warning, as conscience would speak to me when I did wrong. Nothing very extraordinary occurred until I had attained my eleventh year. At this time it was fashionable for boys to run away, and the wicked one put it into the head of the oldest boy on the farm to persuade me to follow the fashion. He told me that I could take care of myself, and get my own living. I thought it was a very pretty notion to be a man -- *to do business for myself and become rich*. Like a fool I concluded to make the experiment, and accordingly began to pack up my clothes as deliberately as could be, and in which my adviser assisted. I had been once or twice at New London, where I saw, as I thought, every thing wonderful: thither I determined to bend my course, as I expected, that on reaching the town I should be metamorphosed into a person of consequence; I had the world and every thing my little heart could desire in a string, when behold, my companion who had persuaded me to act thus, informed my master that I was going to run off. At first he would not believe the boy, but my clothing already packed up was ample evidence of my intention. On being questioned I acknowledged the fact. I did not wish to leave them -- told Mr. Furman so; he believed me, but thought best that for a while I should have another master. He accordingly agreed to transfer my indentures to Judge Hillhouse for the sum of twenty dollars. Of course after the bargain was made, my consent was to be obtained, but I was as unwilling to go now, as I had been anxious to run away before. After some persuasion, I agreed to try it for a fortnight, on condition that I should take my dog with me, and my request being granted, I was soon under the old man's roof, as he only lived about six miles off. Here every thing was done to make me contented, because they thought to promote their own interests by securing my services. They fed me with

nicknacks, and soon after I went among them, I had a jack knife presented to me, which was the first one I had ever seen. Like other boys, I spent my time either in whittling or playing with my dog, and was withal very happy. But I was home sick at heart, and as soon as my fortnight had expired, I went home without ceremony. Mr. Furman's family were surprized to see me, but that surprise was mutual satisfaction in which my faithful dog appeared to participate.<sup>3</sup>

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It appeared that I had been enlisted for a musician [in the United States army; at the time of the War of 1812], as I was instructed while on the Island [military station at Governor's Island, New York] in beating a drum. In this I took much delight. While on the Island I witnessed the execution of a soldier who was shot according to the decision of a court martial. Two men had been condemned for mutiny or desertion. It is impossible for me to describe the feelings of my heart when I saw the soldiers parade and the condemned clothed in white, with bibles in their hands, come forward. The hand then struck up the dead march, and the procession moved with a mournful and measured tread to the place of execution, where the poor creatures were compelled to kneel on the coffins, which were along side two newly dug graves. While in this position the chaplain went forward and conversed with them -- after he had retired a soldier went up and drew the caps over their faces; thus blindfolded he led one of them some distance from the other. An officer then advanced, and raised his handkerchief as a signal to the platoon to prepare to fire -- he then made another for them to aim at the wretch who had been left kneeling on his coffin, and at a third signal the platoon fired and the immortal essence of the offender in an instant was in the spirit-land To me this was an awful day -- my heart seemed to leap into my throat. Death never appeared so awful. But what must have been the feelings of the unhappy man, who had so narrowly escaped the grave? He was completely overcome, and wept like a child, and it was found necessary to help him back to his quarters. This spectacle made me serious; but it wore off in a few days.

Shortly after this we were ordered to Staten Island, where we remained about two months. Then we were ordered to join the army destined to conquer Canada. As the soldiers were tired of the island, this news animated them very much. They thought it a great thing to march through the country and assist in taking the enemy's land. As soon as our things were ready we embarked on board a sloop for Albany, and then went on to Greenbush, where we were quartered. In the meantime I had been transferred to the ranks. This I did not like; to carry a musket was too fatiguing, and I had a positive objection to being placed on the guard, especially at night. As I had only enlisted for a drummer, thought that this change by the officer was contrary to law, and as the bond was broken, liberty was granted me; therefore being heartily tired of a soldier's life, and having a desire to see my father once more, I went off very deliberately; I had no idea that they had a lawful claim on me, and was greatly surprised as well as alarmed, when arrested as a deserter from the army. Well, I was taken up and carried back to the camp, where the officers put me under guard. We shortly after marched for Canada, and during this dreary march the officers tormented me by telling me that it was their intention to make a fire in the woods, stick my skin full of pine splinters, and after having an Indian pow-wow over me burn me to death. Thus they tormented me day after day.

We halted for some time at Burlington [Vermont]; but resumed our march and went into winter quarters at Plattsburgh. All this time God was very good to me, as I had not a sick day. I had by this time become very bad. I had previously learned to drink rum, play cards and commit other acts of wickedness, but it was here that I first took the name of the Lord in vain, and oh, what a sting it left behind. We continued here until the ensuing fall, when we received orders to join the main army under Gen. [Wade] Hampton. Another change now took place, -- we had several pieces of heavy artillery with us, and of course horses were necessary to drag them, and I was taken from the ranks and ordered to take charge of one wain. This made my situation rather better. I now had the privilege of riding. The soldiers were badly off, as the officers were very cruel to them, and for every little offence they would have them flogged. One day the officer of our company got angry at me, and pricked my ear with the point of his sword.⁴

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. III, pp. 27-31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. V, pp. 56-59.

When the spring opened, we were employed in building forts. We erected three in a very short time. We soon received orders to march, and joined the army under Gen. [James] Wilkinson, to reduce Montreal. We marched to Odletown in great splendour, "Heads up and eyes right," with a noble commander at our head, and the splendid city of Montreal in our view. The city no doubt presented a scene of the wildest uproar and confusion; the people were greatly alarmed as we moved on with all the pomp and glory of an army flushed with many victories. But when we reached Odletown, John Bull met us with a picked troop. They soon retreated, and some took refuge in an old fortified mill, which we pelted with a goodly number of cannon balls. It appeared as if we were determined to sweep every thing before us. It was really amusing to see our feminine general with his night-cap on his head, and a dishcloth tied round his precious body, crying out to his men "Come on, my brave boys, we will give John Bull a bloody nose." We did not succeed in taking the mill, and the British kept up an incessant cannonade from the fort. Some of the balls cut down the trees, so that we had frequently to spring out of their way when falling. I thought it was a hard time, and I had reason too, as I was in the front of the battle, assisting in working a twelve pounder, and the British aimed directly at us. Their balls whistled around us, and hurried a good many of the soldiers into the eternal world, while others were most horribly mangled. Indeed they were so hot upon us, that we had not time to remove the dead as they fell. The horribly disfigured bodies of the dead -- the piercing groans of the wounded and the dying -- the cries for help and succour from those who could not help themselves -- were most appalling. I can never forget it. We continued fighting till near sundown, when a retreat was sounded along our line, and instead of marching forward to Montreal, we wheeled about, and having once set our faces towards Plattsburgh, and turned our backs ingloriously on the enemy, we hurried off with all possible speed. We carried our dead and wounded with us. Oh, it was a dreadful sight to behold so many brave men sacrificed in this manner. In this way our campaign closed.<sup>5</sup> During the whole of this time the Lord was merciful to me, as I was not suffered to be hurt. We once more reached Plattsburgh, and pitched our tents in the neighbourhood. While here, intelligence of the capture of Washington was received. Now, says the orderly sergeant, the British have burnt up all the papers at Washington, and our enlistment for the war among them, we had better give in our names as having enlisted for five years.

We were again under marching orders, as the enemy it was thought contemplated an attack on Plattsburgh. Thither we moved without delay, and were posted in one of the forts. By the time we were ready for them, the enemy made his appearance on Lake Champlain, with his vessels of war. It was a fine thing to see their noble vessels moving like things of life upon this mimic sea, with their streamers floating in the wind. This armament was intended to co-operate with the army, which numbered fourteen thousand men, under the command of the captain general of Canada [Sir George Prevost], and at that very time in view of our troops. They presented a very imposing aspect. Their red uniform, and the instruments of death which they bore in their hands, glittered in the sun beams of heaven, like so many sparkling diamonds. Very fortunately for us and for the country, a brave and noble commander [Alexander Macomb] was placed at the head of the army. It was not an easy task to frighten him. For notwithstanding his men were inferior in point of number to those of the enemy, say as one to seven, yet relying on the bravery of his men, he determined to fight to the last extremity. The enemy in all the pomp and pride of war, had sat down before

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<sup>5</sup> Regarding Odletown or the battle of Lacolle Mills (30 March 1814), Henry Adams writes: "The Lacolle was a small river, or creek, emptying into the Sorel four or five miles beyond the boundary. According to the monthly return of the troops commanded by Major-General de Rottenburg, the British forces stationed about Montreal numbered, Jan. 22, 1814, eight thousand rank-and-file present for duty. Of these, eight hundred and eighty-five were at St. John's; six hundred and ninety were at Isle aux Noix, with outposts at Lacadie and Lacolle of *three hundred and thirty-two men*. [Edit. My italics]

"Wilkinson knew that the British outpost at the crossing of Lacolle Creek, numbering two hundred men all told, was without support nearer than Isle aux Noix ten miles away; but it was stationed in a stone mill, with thick walls and a solid front. He took two twelve-pound field-guns to batter the mill, and crossing the boundary, March 30, with his *four thousand men*, advanced four or five miles to Lacolle Creek. The roads were obstructed and impassable, but his troops made their way in deep snow through the woods until they came within sight of the mill. The guns were then placed in position and opened fire; but Wilkinson was disconcerted to find that after two hours the mill was unharmed. He ventured neither to storm it nor flank it; and after losing more than two hundred men by the fire of the garrison, he ordered a retreat, and marched his army back to Champlain.

"With this last example of his military capacity Wilkinson disappeared from the scene of active life, where he had performed so long and extraordinary a part. Orders arrived, dated March 24, relieving him from duty under the form of granting his request for a court of inquiry. Once more he passed the ordeal of a severe investigation, and received the verdict of acquittal; but he never was again permitted to resume his command in the army." *History of the United States of America during the Administrations of James Madison: 1809-1817*, Part II, vol. II, ch. II, p. 924.

the town and its slender fortifications, and commenced a cannonade, which we returned without much ceremony. Congreve rockets, bomb shells, and cannon balls, poured upon us like a hail storm. There was scarcely any intermission, and for six days and nights we did not leave our guns, and during that time the work of death paused not, as every day some shot took effect. During the engagement, I had charge of a small magazine. All this time our fleet, under the command of the gallant M'Donough [Thomas MacDonough], was lying on the peaceful waters of Champlain. But this little fleet was to be taken, or destroyed: it was necessary, in the accomplishment of their plans. Accordingly the British commander [George Downie] bore down on our vessels in gallant style. As soon as the enemy showed fight, our men flew to their guns. Then the work of death and carnage commenced. The adjacent shores resounded with the alternate shouts of the sons of liberty, and the groans of their parting spirits. A cloud of smoke mantled the heavens, shutting out the light of day -- while the continual roar of artillery, added to the sublime horrors of the scene. At length the boasted valour of the haughty Britons failed them -- they quailed before the incessant and well directed fire of our brave and hardy tars, and after a hard fought battle, surrendered to that foe they had been sent to crush. On land the battle raged pretty fiercely. On our side the Green Mountain boys [from Vermont] behaved with the greatest bravery. As soon as the British commander had seen the fleet fall into the hands of the Americans, his boasted courage forsook him, and he ordered his army of heroes, fourteen thousand strong, to retreat before a handful of militia.

This was indeed a proud day for our country. We had met a superior force on the Lake, and "they were ours." On land we had compelled the enemy to seek safety in flight. Our army did not lose many men, but on the lake many a brave man fell -- fell in the defence of his country's rights. The British moved off about sundown.

We remained in Plattsburgh until the peace. As soon as it was known that the war had terminated, and the army disbanded, the soldiers were clamorous for their discharge, but it was concluded to retain our company in the service -- I, however, obtained my release. Now, according to the act of enlistment, I was entitled to forty dollars bounty money, and one hundred and sixty acres of land. The [U.S.] government also owed me for fifteen months pay. I have not seen any thing of bounty money, land, or arrearages, from that day to this. I am not, however, alone in this -- hundreds were served in the same manner. But I could never think that the government acted right towards the "Natives," not merely in refusing to pay us, but in claiming our services in cases of perilous emergency, and still deny us the right of citizenship; and as long as our nation is debarred the privilege of voting for civil officers, I shall believe that the government has no claim on our services.<sup>6</sup>

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At Troy I found a number of good Christian friends, with whom I had several very good meetings, and the power of the Lord was made manifest. One evening as I was preaching to some coloured people, in a school house, the power of the Lord moved on the congregation, both white and coloured -- hard hearts began to melt, and inquire what they must do to be saved. We had a very *refreshing season from the presence of the Lord*.

I now went into all surrounding villages preaching the word of eternal life and exhorting sinners to repentance. Before the quarterly meeting, I took a tour to the west, as far as Utica, holding meetings by the way and I found God as precious as ever, and being absent three weeks, I returned in order to attend the conference, which was to be held on the 11th of April.

I can truly say that the spirit of prejudice is no longer an inmate of my bosom; the sun of consolation has warmed my heart, and by the grace of God assisting me, I am determined to sound the trump of the gospel -- to call upon men to turn and live. Look brethren, at the natives of the forest -- they come, notwithstanding you call them "*savage*," from the "east and from the West, the north, and the south," and will occupy seats in the kingdom of heaven before you. Let us one and all "contend" valiantly "for that faith once delivered to the saints"; and if we are contented, and love God with all our hearts, and desire the enjoyment of his peaceful presence, we shall be able to say with the poet,

⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. V, pp. 61-66.

“Let others stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore;
Grant me the visits of his grace,
And I desire no more.”⁷

Now, my dear reader, I have endeavoured to give you a short but correct statement of the leading features of my life. When I think of what I am, and how wonderfully the Lord has led me, I am dumb before him. When I contrast my situation with that of the rest of my family, and many of my tribe, I am led to adore the goodness of God. When I reflect upon my many misdeeds and wanderings, and the dangers to which I was consequently exposed, I am lost in astonishment at the long forbearance, and the unmerited mercy of God. I stand before you as a monument of his unfailing goodness -- may that same mercy which has upheld me, still be my portion -- and may author and reader be preserved until the perfect day, and dwell forever in the paradise of God.

[signed] WILLIAM APES.⁸

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#### **Other works by Apess**

- \* *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ: A Sermon* (1831)
- \* *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequod Tribe* (1833), and which contains the particularly notable essay “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man”
- \* *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts, Relative to the Marshpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained* (1835)
- \* *Eulogy on King Philip, as Pronounced at the Odeon, in Federal Street, Boston* (1836)

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<sup>7</sup> [Edit. Note.] Quoted from the hymn “My God, My Portion” by Isaac Watts.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. IX, pp. 108-110.