

# FRENEAU

# PHILIP MORIN

THE POEMS OF PHILIP  
FRENEAU, POET OF THE  
AMERICAN REVOLUTION.  
VOLUME 1 (OF 3)

**Philip Freneau**  
**The Poems of Philip Freneau,**  
**Poet of the American**  
**Revolution. Volume 1 (of 3)**

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# **Philip Morin Freneau**

## **The Poems of Philip Freneau, Poet of the American Revolution. Volume 1 (of 3)**

### **PREFACE**

The present edition of the poetical works of Philip Freneau was begun at the advice of the late lamented Moses Coit Tyler. In his opinion there were few fields in American history that needed exploring more, and few that would require on the part of the explorer more of the Columbus spirit.

It would be almost impossible for a poet to pass more completely into the shadow than has Freneau during the century since his activities closed. His poems are, almost all of them in their earliest editions, exceedingly rare and costly and only to be read by those who can have access to the largest libraries, his letters and papers have almost entirely disappeared, and his biography in almost every book of reference has been so distorted by misstatement and omission as to be really grotesque.

This neglect has resulted not from lack of real worth in the man, but from prejudices born during one of the most bitter and

stormy eras of partisan politics that America has ever known. What Sidney Smith said of Scotland at this period was true here: "The principles of the French Revolution were fully afloat and it is impossible to conceive a more violent and agitated state of society." Freneau was a victim of this intense era. New England rejected him with scorn and all admirers of Washington echoed his epithet, "that rascal Freneau." Thus it has become the tradition to belittle his work, to vilify his character, and to sum up his whole career, as a prominent New Englander has recently done, by alluding to him as a "creature of the opposition."

Unprejudiced criticism, however, has always exalted Freneau's work. The great Scotch dictator Jeffrey, with all his scorn for American literature, could say that "the time would arrive when his poetry, like that of Hudibras, would command a commentator like Gray;" and Sir Walter Scott once declared that "Eutaw Springs [was] as fine a thing as there is of the kind in the language." E. A. Duyckinck did not hesitate to group him as one of "four of the most original writers whom the country has produced," and S. G. W. Benjamin could say in 1887: "In all the history of American letters, or of the United States press, there is no figure more interesting or remarkable, no career more versatile and varied than that of Philip Freneau." Such testimony might be multiplied. Surely had the poet been an ordinary man, Jefferson would never have said "his paper has saved our Constitution," Madison would not have pronounced him a man of genius, and Adams would hardly have admitted

that he was a leading element in his defeat.

I have endeavored not only to rescue the most significant of Freneau's poems, but to arrange them as far as possible in their order of composition, or at least in the order in which they first appeared in print. It has seemed to me highly important to do this since such an arrangement, especially with a poet like Freneau, who drew his themes almost wholly from the range of his own observation, would be virtually an autobiography, and since it would also furnish a running commentary upon the history of a stirring period in our annals. The task has been no slight one. It has necessitated a search through the files of a large proportion of the early newspapers and periodicals and a minute investigation of every other source of possible information.

Much material has been rescued that, as far as the public was concerned, had practically become extinct. I have introduced the unique fragment of an unpublished drama, "The Spy," which I was the first to explore. I have taken pains to reproduce the poet's early poetical pamphlets dealing with the first year of the Revolution, not one of which has ever been republished. The revisions of many of these used by Freneau in his later collections were so thoroughgoing as to be in reality entirely new poems. "The Voyage to Boston," for instance, published during the siege of Boston, was cut down for the 1786 edition from six hundred and five lines to three hundred and six lines, and of these more than half were entirely changed. From the standpoint of the historian, at least, the original version is much more valuable than

that made several years after the war was over. This is true of all the earlier pamphlet poems. Aside from their value as specimens of Freneau's earlier muse they are valuable commentaries on the history of the stormy times that called them forth, and I have not hesitated to reprint them verbatim in connection with the revised versions. The pamphlet poems "American Liberty" and "General Gage's Confession," (until recently supposed to have been lost) exist only in unique copies. Freneau never attempted to revise them. Some of the other early poems, notably "The House of Night," I have annotated with care, showing the evolution of the poem from its first nucleus to its final fragmentary form. In the case of a few of the more important poems, especially those dealing with the Revolution, I have given variorum readings.

Aside from this early material, which has a real historical value, I have introduced very few poems not included in Freneau's collected editions of 1786, 1788, 1795, 1809 and 1815. Previous to 1795 the poet reprinted with miserly care almost all the verses which he had contributed to the press. In his later years he was more prodigal of his creations. I have, however, reprinted from newspapers very few poems not found elsewhere, and these few only on the best evidence that they were genuine, for it has been my experience that when a poem is not to be found in the collected editions of the poet it is almost certain that it is not genuine. In justice to Freneau, who had the welfare of his writings much at heart, and who cut and pruned and remodeled with tireless hand, I have usually given the latest version.

I wish to acknowledge here my great indebtedness to the descendants of Philip Freneau, especially Miss Adele M. Sweeney, Mr. Weymer J. Mills, Mrs. Helen K. Vreeland, and Mrs. Eleanor F. Noël, who have allowed me to consult freely all the papers and literary remains of the poet and have supplied me with all possible information. I would also express my great obligation to many librarians, collectors, and scholars, who have cheerfully aided me, especially to Mr. Wilberforce Eames, of the New York Public Library, the late Paul Leicester Ford, Mr. Robert H. Kelby, of the New York Historical Society, Mr. John W. Jordan, of the Pennsylvania Historical Society, Mr. A. S. Salley, Jr., of Charleston, S. C., Mr. E. M. Barton, of the American Antiquarian Society, and Dr. E. C. Richardson, of Princeton University, who with their courteous helpfulness have made possible the work. I wish also to express my thanks to Professor A. Howry Espenshade, and Mr. John Rogers Williams, to whose careful and patient work upon the proofs the accuracy of the text depends.

*F. L. P.*

State College, Pa., Sept. 19, 1902.



# **LIFE OF PHILIP FRENEAU**

**1752-1832**

## **LIFE OF PHILIP FRENEAU**

### **I**

In the possession of the Freneau descendants there is an old French Bible, printed in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1587, which preserves an unbroken roll of the heads of the family back to the original owner of the book, Philip Fresneau, who on his death-bed in La Chapelle, France, in 1590, gave it into the hands of his eldest son. For five generations the book remained in the little suburban village, its possessors sturdy, industrious tradesmen, who stood high in the esteem of their community and yet who on account of their Protestant faith were often imposed upon and at times even persecuted. It was doubtless this feeling of insecurity, if not positive persecution, which compelled André Fresneau, like so many of his fellow Huguenots, to leave his native village and to seek a home in a more tolerant land.

He landed in New York in 1707. He was in his thirty-sixth year, an active, handsome man, almost brilliant in certain

directions, of pleasing address, and skilled from his youth in the handling of affairs. He became at once a leader in the little Huguenot Colony whose center was the quaint old church "du St. Esprit" on Pine street. He was soon in the midst of a thriving shipping business, dealing largely in imported wines, and in 1710, three years after his arrival, he was able to furnish a beautiful home on Pearl street, near Hanover Square, for his young bride, Mary Morin, a daughter of Pierre Morin, of the French Congregation. Of the comfort and hospitality of this home there are many contemporary references. John Fontaine, the French traveller, was entertained here in 1716 and he speaks highly of his host and his entertainment.<sup>1</sup>

In 1721 Mrs. Fresneau died at the early age of twenty-seven, leaving behind a family of five children, the oldest only nine years of age. Four years later the father followed. But the young family was far from destitute. The business house in New York had grown to be very profitable and there was a large landed estate in eastern New Jersey, a part of which was sold in 1740. Soon the two eldest sons, Andrew, born 1712, and Pierre, born January 22, 1718, were able to continue their father's business. For years their firm name was familiar in New York.

Pierre Freneau (the family seem to have dropped the "s" about 1725) was married in 1748 to Agnes Watson, daughter of Richard Watson, of Freehold, whose property bordered upon the Freneau estate. They made their home in Frankfort street, New

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Maury's *Memoirs of a Huguenot*.

York, and here on January 2 (O. S.), 1752, was born their eldest child, Philip Morin Freneau, the subject of our sketch. Four other children came from their union, of whom only one, Peter, born April 5, 1757, who in later years became a prominent figure in Charleston, S. C., need be mentioned.

The home of the Freneau's was one of comfort and even refinement. There was a large and well selected library, the pride of its owner. "There," he would say to his visitors, pointing to his books, "use them freely, for among them you will find your truest friends." He delighted in men of refinement, and his home became a social center for the lovers of books and of culture. He looked carefully after the education of his children; and all of them early became omnivorous readers. In such an environment the young poet passed his first ten years.

In 1762 the family decided to leave New York and to make their home permanently on their estate, "Mount Pleasant," near Middletown Point, N. J. The estate at this time contained nearly a thousand acres, and with its large buildings, its slaves and its broad area under cultivation, was in many respects like a southern plantation. Heretofore the elder Freneau had made it of secondary importance. He had used it as a summer resort, and as a pleasant relief to the monotony of his city business, but now, perhaps on account of failing health, he determined to devote to it all of his energies. Philip was left behind in New York. For the next three years he lived at a boarding school in the city, going home only during the long vacations. At the age of thirteen he

was sent to the Latin school at Penolopen, then presided over by the Rev. Alexander Mitchell, to prepare for college.

The father of the family died Oct. 17, 1767. This, however, did not disturb the plans of the eldest son, and on Nov. 7, 1768, he entered the sophomore class at Princeton so well prepared that President Witherspoon is said to have sent a letter of congratulation to his mother.

## II

Of the college life of Philip Freneau we have only fragmentary records. He was in his sixteenth year when he entered, a somewhat dreamy youth who had read very widely, especially in the English poets and the Latin classics, and who already commanded a facile pen, especially in the field of heroic verse. During the year in which he entered Princeton he composed two long poems, "The History of the Prophet Jonah," and "The Village Merchant," – surely notable work for the pen of a college sophomore. During the following year he wrote "The Pyramids of Egypt," and before his graduation he had completed several other pieces, some of them full of real poetic inspiration.

The period during which Freneau resided at Princeton was a most significant one. In the same class with him were James Madison, H. H. Brackenridge, the author of "Modern Chivalry" and a conspicuous figure in later Pennsylvania history, and Samuel Spring, who was to become widely influential in religious

circles. In the class below him were the refined and scholarly William Bradford and the brilliant Aaron Burr. The shadow of the coming struggle with Great Britain was already lengthening over the Colonies and nowhere was its presence more manifest than in the colleges, always the most sensitive areas in times of tyranny and oppression. On August 6, 1770, the senior class at Princeton voted unanimously to appear at commencement dressed in American manufactures.

Another circumstance made the period a notable one. On June 24, 1769, a little band of students, headed by Madison, Brackenridge, Bradford and Freneau, organized an undergraduate fraternity to be called the American Whig Society. One year later The Well Meaning Club, a rival literary organization founded in 1765, became the Cliosophic Society. The act was the signal for a war, the echoes of which have even yet not died away at Princeton. There exists a manuscript book,<sup>2</sup> rescued from the papers of William Bradford, in which are preserved the poetic tirades, called forth in this first onset. Its title page is as follows:

"Satires | against the Tories. | Written in the last War between the Whigs & Cliosophians | in which | the former obtained a compleat Victory.

– Arm'd for virtue now we point the pen  
Brand the bold front of shameless, guilty men

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<sup>2</sup> In the possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Dash the proud Tory in his gilded Car  
Bare the mean heart that hides beneath a star."

It opens with ten "pastorals" by Brackenridge, of which the ninth begins thus:

"Spring's Soliloquy that morning before he hung himself.

O World adieu! the doleful time draws nigh  
I cannot live and yet I fear to die  
Warford is dead! and in his turn Freneau  
Will send me headlong to the shades below.  
What raging fury or what baleful Star  
Did find – ingulph me in the whiggish war  
The deeds of darkness which my soul hath done  
Are now apparent as the noon-day sun  
A Thousand things as yet remain untold  
My secret practice and my sins of old."

Then follow several satires by Freneau, full of fire and invective, but like the work of all the others, not always refined or quotable in print. His satire, "McSwiggen," printed in 1775, contains nearly half of the poems, – the only lines indeed which are of any real merit. The three concluding poems of the collection, and these by all means the worst of the lot, are from no less a pen than Madison's. No patriotic citizen will ever venture to resurrect them.

There is a tradition very widely current that Freneau was for

a time the room-mate of Madison. However this may be, there is no question as to who was his most intimate friend. With Brackenridge he had much in common. Both had dreams of a literary life, both had read largely in polite literature, both scribbled constantly in prose and verse. In the same manuscript volume with the Clio-Whig satires there is an extensive fragment of a novel written alternately by Brackenridge and Freneau, between September 20th and October 22d, 1770. Its manuscript title page is as follows:

"Father Bombo's | Pilgrimage to Mecca in Arabia. | Vol.  
II. | Wherein is given a true account of the innumerable and |  
surprizing adventures which befell him in the course of that  
| long and tedious Journey, | Till he once more returned safe  
to his native Land, as related | by his own mouth. | Written  
By B. H. and P. F. — 1770.

Mutato nomine

Fabula de te narratur —*Hor.*

Change but the name

The story's told of you.

MDVILXX."

The adventures of the hero read like chapters from the "Arabian Nights." He has been for seven days a close captive on a French man-of-war, but he is rescued by an Irish privateer, only to be taken for a wizard and thrown overboard in a cask which is

finally washed ashore on the north coast of Ireland. It would be useless to recount all of his adventures both afloat and ashore. He finally succeeds in reaching Mecca, and in returning safely home to America. The final chapter recounts the details of his death and moralizes on his life and character.

The work is crude and hasty. Whole chapters of it were evidently written at one sitting. The part signed H. B. is unquestionably the best; the prose is vigorous and the movement rapid. The only merit in Freneau's section lies in its lyric lament at the close of one of the chapters. The hero suddenly bursts into minor song, the opening stanzas of which are:

Sweet are the flow'rs that crown the Vale  
And sweet the spicy breathing Gale  
That murmurs o'er the hills:  
See how the distant lowing throng  
Thro' verdant pastures move along,  
Or drink the Limpid Streams and crystal rills.

Ah see in yonder gloomy Grove  
The Shepherd tells his tale of Love  
And clasps the wanton fair:  
While winds and trees and shades conspire  
To fann with Love the Gentle Fire,  
And banish every black and boding care.

But what has Love to do with me  
Unknown ashore, distress'd by sea,



Now hast'ning to the Tomb:  
Whilst here I rove, and pine and weep,  
Sav'd from the fury of the deep  
To find alas on shore a harder doom.

The nature of the undergraduate work done by Princeton in Freneau's time was thus summed up by President Witherspoon in his "Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica," published in Philadelphia in 1772:

"In the first year they read Latin and Greek, with the Roman and Grecian antiquities, and Rhetoric. In the second, continuing the study of the languages, they learn a compleat system of Geography, with the use of the globes, the first principles of Philosophy, and the elements of mathematical knowledge. The third, though the languages are not wholly omitted, is chiefly employed in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. And the senior year is employed in reading the higher classics, proceeding in the Mathematics and Natural Philosophy and going through a course of Moral Philosophy. In addition to these, the President gives lectures to the juniors and seniors, which consequently every Student hears twice over in his course, first, upon Chronology and History, and afterwards upon Composition and Criticism. He has also taught the French language last winter, and it will continue to be taught to all who desire to learn it. \* \* \*

"As we have never yet been obliged to omit or alter it for want of scholars, there is a fixed Annual Commencement on the last Wednesday of September, when, after a variety of public

exercises, always attended by a vast concourse of the politest company, from the different parts of this province and the cities of New York and Philadelphia. \* \* \*

Of Freneau's proficiency as a student we have no record. Of the details of the Commencement of September 25, 1771, when he received his degree, we have but a brief account. Brackenridge opened the exercises with a salutatory, and following came four other exercises which completed the morning's programme.

The audience assembled again at three, and after singing by the students there came:

"6. An English forensic dispute on this question, 'Does ancient poetry excel the modern?' Mr. Freneau, the respondent, his arguments in favor of the ancients were read. Mr. Williamson answered him and Mr. McKnight replied."

"7. A poem on 'The Rising Glory of America,' by Mr. Brackenridge, was received with great applause by the audience."

Madison on account of ill health did not appear.

The "Rising Glory" had been written conjointly by Brackenridge and Freneau. Although the former was given on the Commencement programme full credit for the exercise, it was surely Freneau who conceived the work and who gave it its strength and high literary value. Brackenridge in later years confessed to his son that "on his part it was a task of labor, while the verse of his associate flowed spontaneously." The poem was printed in Philadelphia the following year, and in 1786 Freneau isolated his own portion for publication in the first edition of his

works.

This detaching of Freneau's portion from the complete work destroyed at the outset the original unity of the piece. The changes and omissions made necessary by the process of separating the part from the whole, the deliberate readjustment of perspective to bring the poem up to the historical conditions of the later date, and the careful editing which strove to remove blemishes and weaknesses due to inexperience, combine to make the 1786 version practically a new poem.

The first glimpse of Freneau after his graduation from Princeton is furnished by a letter to Madison, dated Somerset County, in Maryland, November 22, 1772:<sup>3</sup>

"If I am not wrongly informed by my memory, I have not seen you since last April, you may recollect I was then undertaking a School at Flatbush on Long Island. I did not enter upon the business it is certain and continued in it thirteen days – but – 'Long Island I have bid adieu, With all its bruitish, brainless crew. The youth of that detested place, Are void of reason and of grace. From Flushing hills to Flatbush plains, Deep ignorance unrivalld reigns.' I'm very poetical, but excuse it. 'Si fama non venit ad aures,' – if you have not heard the rumour of this story (which, by the by is told in various taverns and eating houses) you must allow me to be a little prolix with it. Those who employed me were some gentlemen of New York, some of them are bullies, some merchants, and others Scoundrels: They sent me eight

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<sup>3</sup> Madison Papers, Vol. XIII. p. 9.

children, the eldest of whom was 10 years. Some could read, others spell and a few stammer over a chapter of the Bible – these were my pupils and over these was I to preside. My salary moreover was £40, – there is something else relating to that I shall not at present mention – after I forsook them they proscribed me for four days and swore that if I was caught in New York they would either Trounce or Maim me: but I luckily escaped with my goods to Princetown – where I remained till commencement – so much for this affair.

"I have printed a poem in New York called the American Village, containing about 450 Lines, also a few short pieces added; I would send you one if I had a proper opportunity – the additional poems are – A Poem to the Nymph I never saw – The miserable Life of a Pedagogue – and Stanzas on an ancient Dutch house on Long Island – As to the main poem it is damned by all good and judicious judges – my name is in the title page, this is called vanity by some – but 'who so fond as youthful bards of fame?'

"I arrived at this Somerset Academy the 18th of October, and intend to remain here till next October. I am assistant to Mr. Brakenridge. This is the last time I shall enter into such a business; it worries me to death and by no means suits my 'giddy, wandering brain.' I would go over for the gown this time two years, but the old hag Necessity has got such a prodigious gripe of me that I fear I shall never be able to accomplish it. I believe if I cannot make this out I must turn quack, and indeed I am now reading Physic at my leisure hours, that is, when I am neither sleeping, hearing classes, or writing Poetry – for these three take up all my time.

"It is now late at night, not an hour ago I finished a little poem of about 400 lines, entitled a Journey to Maryland – being the Sum of my adventures – it begins 'From that fam'd town where Hudson's flood – unites with Stream perhaps as good; Muse has your bard begun to roam – & I intend to write a terrible Satire upon certain vicious persons of quality in New York – who have also used me ill – and print it next fall it shall contain 5 or 600 lines. Sometimes I write pastorals to shew my Wit.

'Deep to the woods I sing a Shepherd's care,  
Deep to the woods, Cyllenus calls me there,  
The last retreat of Love and Verse I go,  
Verse made me mad at first and – will keep me so.'

"I should have been glad to have heard from you before now; while I was in college I had but a short participation of your agreeable friendship, and the few persons I converse with and yet fewer, whose conversation I delight in, make me regret the Loss of it. I have met with a variety of rebuffs this year, which I forbear to mention, I look like an unmeaning Teague just turn'd out of the hold of an Irish Ship coming down hither I met with a rare adventure at Annapolis. I was destitute even of a brass farthing. I got clear very handsomely.

"Could one expect ever to see you again, if I travel through Virginia I shall stop and talk with you a day or two. I should be very glad to receive a letter from you if it can be

conveniently forwarded – in short 'Non sum qualis eram' as Partridge says in Tom Jones – My hair is grown like a mop, and I have a huge tuft of beard directly upon my chin – I want but five weeks of twenty-one years of age and already feel stiff with age – We have about 30 Students in this academy, who prey upon me like Leaches – 'When shall I quit this whimpering pack, and hide my head in Acomack?' – Shall I leave them and go 'Where Pokomokes long stream meandering flows —

"Excuse this prodigious scrawl without stile or sense – I send this by Mr. Luther Martin who will forward it to Col. Lee – and he to you I hope. Mr. Martin lives in Acomack in Virginia this side the bay. Farewell and be persuaded I remain your

*truly humble Serv't and friend*

*Ph. F-r-e-n-e-a-u-*"

The scene of Freneau's new labors was the famous old school near Princess Anne, Md., which in 1779 was incorporated as Washington Academy. Brackenridge became Master here shortly after his graduation, and in the words of his son and biographer, received "a handsome salary." "He continued here," says his biographer, "during several years until the breaking out of the American Revolution, in the midst of a wealthy and highly polished society, greatly respected as a man of genius and scholarship. He used to speak with the pride of a Porson, of the Winders, the Murrays, the Parnells and others who afterward

became distinguished."<sup>4</sup> For many years the academy drew to it the sons of the best families of Northern Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

The length of Freneau's stay in Maryland is uncertain. There is evidence that he remained as Second Master of the school for several years. There is a tradition in the family that it was the wish of Freneau's father that he study divinity and that for a time he joined with Brackenridge in preparing for this profession; and there is another, which is very persistent, that he left Maryland to study the law in Philadelphia, but I can find no positive evidence. The period between 1772 and 1775 is at best a vague one in our life of the poet.

### III

In the early summer of 1775, Freneau suddenly appeared in New York as a publicist of remarkable fluency. Before November he had issued no less than eight long poems as separate publications, nearly all of them called forth by the new crisis in American affairs. Beginning with "American Liberty," issued by Anderson, the editor of the new patriotic weekly, *The Constitutional Gazette*, he published pamphlet after pamphlet in rapid succession, all of them throwing upon Gage and the British cause in Boston all the satire and invective which he had used so mercilessly in the old society war at Princeton. Two of

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<sup>4</sup> Introduction to the 1846 edition of "Modern Chivalry."

these were published by Hugh Gaine, and another, "The Voyage to Boston," first issued by Anderson, was reprinted at once in Philadelphia. All of them have fared hardly during the years. Several, like "General Gage's Soliloquy," and "Timothy Taurus," which recounts the story of a journey made by Freneau to Passaic Falls, near Paterson, New Jersey, in August, have disappeared entirely, one of them, the "General Gage's Confession," has never been republished in any form, and all the others were cut down and altered by the author for later editions until they were almost in every respect entirely new poems.

That these voluminous and vigorous tirades, which their author evidently poured forth with perfect ease, were criticised and condemned by the fastidious we have no evidence. Certain it is that judging by the contemporary newspaper press they were exceedingly popular. Yet, in November we find Freneau in a sad state of discouragement, ready to give up forever all association with the muses. Some one, envious of his rising fame, has criticised him unmercifully. He seeks out the old Clio-Whig satires and after adapting and reshaping them he hurls them at the head of his enemy whom he designates as McSwiggen.

Great Jove in wrath a spark of genius gave  
And bade me drink the mad Pierian wave,  
Hence came those rhymes with truth ascribed to me,  
That urge your little soul to jealousy.



\* \* \* \* \*

Devoted mad man what inspired your rage,  
Who bade your foolish muse with us engage?  
Against a windmill would you try your might,  
Against a castle would a pigmy fight?

The young poet had begun to realize how barren was the new world in poetic appreciation; how impossible it was for even a true poet to practice his art where few could appreciate, and none really cared:

Alone I stand to meet the foul-mouthed train  
Assisted by no poets of the plain.

He looked longingly across the water where poets were appreciated:

Long have I sat on this disastrous shore,  
And sighing sought to gain a passage o'er  
To Europe's towns, where as our travellers say  
Poets may flourish, or perhaps they may.

The poem was a valedictory.

I to the sea with weary steps descend,

Quit the mean conquest, that such swine must yield  
And leave McSwiggen to enjoy the field.  
In distant isles some happier scene I'll choose  
And court in softer shades the unwilling muse.

Freneau had determined to spend the winter in the West Indies. He had become acquainted during the autumn with a West Indian gentleman by the name of Hanson, who owned large estates in the islands, and who sailed master of his own vessel. Upon his invitation Freneau became a passenger late in November for the Island of Santa Cruz. Early in the voyage the mate died, and the young poet, his education outweighing his inexperience in nautical matters, was chosen to fill his place. The study of navigation, made necessary by this step, doubtless turned the direction of his whole life.

For the next two years Freneau made his home on Captain Hanson's estate on the Island of Santa Cruz. A selection from one of his letters charmingly describes the spot.

"The town at the west end is but mean and ordinary, consisting of a fort and perhaps 80 or 90 wooden houses. The harbor is nothing but an open road, where, however, ships lie in the utmost security at their moorings, the bottom being good for anchorage and the wind always off shore. About two miles to the eastward of this town, along the seashore, is the estate of Capt. Hanson, into which the sea has formed a beautiful little bay, called Buttler's Bay, about 100 yards across; it has a sandy shore and an excellent

landing, though all the rest of the shore is sharp craggy rocks. My agreeable residence at this place for above two years, off and on during the wars in America, renders the idea of it all too pleasing, and makes me feel much the same anxiety at a distance from it as Adam did after he was banished from the bowers of Eden."<sup>5</sup>

He seems to have been employed at intervals by Captain Hanson in voyages about the islands. Thus he records of the Island of St. James, that "I went over July 13, 1777, and remained there eight days. We loaded our vessel with coral rock, which is used in these islands for burning lime of a very excellent quality."

It was while at the ideal retreat at Butler's Bay that Freneau wrote three of his most significant poems, "Santa Cruz," "The House of Night," and "The Jamaica Funeral," the first two of which were contributed to the *United States Magazine* in 1779. Of these the "House of Night" is the most significant, containing as it does evidence of a high creative power and a romantic imagination, rare indeed in English poetry in 1776. There are evidences that Freneau composed the first draught of the poem before leaving for the West Indies, but the point is not an important one. For the edition of 1786 he nearly doubled the original version, but in 1795 he cut it down to a few stanzas, taking from it nearly everything which had made it a notable creation.

On April 1, 1778, Freneau sailed from Santa Cruz for the

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<sup>5</sup> The *United States Magazine*, February number.

Bermuda Islands, where for a time he was the guest of the English Governor. In an elaborate letter to Brackenridge, dated Bermuda, May 10, afterward published in the *United States Magazine*, he describes at length the islands. "These," he says in conclusion, "are a few particulars concerning this little country where I resided upwards of five weeks, and if this slight description gives you any satisfaction, it will amply repay me for the fatigues I underwent in sailing thither."

On June 6th he was again in Santa Cruz; on the 15th he set out on his homeward voyage, after an absence of nearly three years. The run home was destined to be eventful. Off the Delaware capes the vessel was taken by the British, but Freneau, being a passenger, was landed on July 9th and allowed to go his way.

The young poet now retired to Mount Pleasant, where doubtless he quietly remained until the autumn of the following year. In August, 1778, he published with Bell in Philadelphia the pamphlet poem "America Independent." On January 1, 1779, Brackenridge issued in Philadelphia the first number of the *United States Magazine*,<sup>6</sup> and Freneau at once became an important contributor. His work in prose and verse may be found in nearly every number. There are prose papers on the West Indies, purporting to be extracts from the letters of "a young philosopher and *bel esprit* just returned from several small voyages amongst these islands." There are several early poems

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<sup>6</sup> A perfectly preserved copy is in the possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

for the first time put into print, like "Columbus to Ferdinand" and "The Dying Elm," and there are several notable long poems, like "Santa Cruz" and "The House of Night." At least three of the poetical contributions were written expressly for the magazine: "George the Third's Soliloquy," "Psalm cxxxvii Imitated," – signed "Monmouth, Sept. 10," – and the "Dialogue between George and Fox." It is evident, however, that Freneau, though his work very greatly strengthened the periodical, was only a "valued contributor." The psalm in the September issue, the first of the poems to bear his name, had a foot-note explaining that the author was "a young gentleman to whom in the course of this work we are greatly indebted."

The *United States Magazine* is a notable landmark in American literary history. Its methods, as we view them to-day, seem singularly modern, and its materials and arrangement are indeed remarkable when we view them against the background of their times. It was a spirited, intensely patriotic, and highly literary periodical; the single fact that "The House of Night" first appeared in its columns is enough to stamp it as no ordinary work. It died with its twelfth issue, owing to the troubled state of the country and the unsettled nature of the currency. Then, too, the audience to which it appealed was found to be a small one. In his valedictory the editor complains bitterly of the unliterary atmosphere in America. A large class, he declares, "inhabit the region of stupidity, and cannot bear to have the tranquility of their repose disturbed by the villanous shock of a book. Reading

is to them the worst of all torments, and I remember very well that at the commencement of the work it was their language, 'Art thou come to torment us before the time?' We will now say to them, 'Sleep on and take your rest.'"

Late in September, 1779, Freneau shipped as super-cargo on the brig *Rebecca*, Captain Chatham, bound for the Azores. After an exciting voyage, during which they were several times chased by British ships, they arrived at Santa Cruz, in the island of Teneriffe, where they remained two months. A part of Freneau's notebook during this voyage has been preserved. It shows him to have been a careful and conscientious student of navigation, making each day an observation of his own and minutely tabulating his results. His cash account with the crew during the stay in the islands is interesting and suggestive.

The early spring of 1780 was spent by the poet at the old home, but his mind was evidently tossing upon the ocean. He longed to visit again his beloved West Indies, and accordingly on the 25th of May he took passage at Philadelphia, in the ship *Aurora*, for St. Eustatia. Freneau's account of this voyage and its after results is still extant.<sup>7</sup> A few quotations will tell the story.

"On the 25th of May, in beating down the Delaware Bay, we unfortunately retook a small sloop from the refugees loaded with corn, which hindered us from standing out to sea that night, whereby in all probability we should have avoided the enemy which afterwards captured us.

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<sup>7</sup> In the possession of Miss Adele M. Sweeney, Jersey City.

"Friday morning, May 26. The air very smoky and the wind somewhat faintish, though it afterward freshened up. The wind was so that we stood off E.S.E., after putting the pilot on board the small sloop, handcuffing the prisoners, and sending the prize to Cape May. About three o'clock in the afternoon we discovered three sail bearing from us about E.N.E.; they were not more than five leagues from us when we discovered them from the foretop; at the same time we could see them from the quarter-deck. One appeared to be a pretty large ship, the other two brigs. We soon found they were in chase of us; we therefore tacked immediately, set all sail we could crowd, and stood back from the bay. My advice to the officers was to stand for Egg Harbor or any part of the Jersey shore, and run the ship on the flats, rather than be taken; but this was disregarded. We continued to stand in till we saw Cape Henlopen; the frigate, in the meantime, gaining on us apace; sun about half an hour high. We were abreast of the Cape, close in, when the wind took us aback, and immediately after we were becalmed; the ebb of the tide at the same time setting very strong out of the bay, so that we rather drifted out. Our design was, if possible, to get within the road around the point, and then run the ship on shore; but want of wind and the tide being against us, hindered from putting this into execution. We were now within three hundred yards of the shore. The frigate in the meantime ran in the bay to leeward of us about one-quarter of a mile (her distance from the Cape hindering it from becalming her as it did us) and began to bring her cannon to bear on us. Her two prizes hove

to; one we knew to be the brig *Active*, Captain Mesnard; the other, as we afterward learned, was a Salem brig from the West Indies. The frigate was the *Iris*, returning from Charleston to New York, with the express of the former's being taken. We now began to fire upon each other at the distance of about three hundred yards. The frigate hulled us several times. One shot went betwixt wind and water, which made the ship leak amazingly, making twenty-four inches in thirty minutes. We found our four-pounders were but trifles against the frigate, so we got our nine-pounder, the only one we had, pointed from the cabin windows, with which we played upon the frigate for about half an hour. At last a twelve-pound shot came from the frigate, and, striking a parcel of oars lashed upon the starboard quarter, broke them all in two, and continuing its destructive course, struck Captain Laboyteaut in the right thigh, which it smashed to atoms, tearing part of his belly open at the same time with the splinters from the oars; he fell from the quarter-deck close by me, and for some time seemed very busily engaged in setting his legs to rights. He died about eleven the same night, and next day was sewed up in his hammock and sunk. Every shot seemed now to bring ruin with it. A lad named Steel had his arm broken and some others complained of slight wounds; whereupon, finding the frigate ready and in a position to give us a broadside, we struck, after having held a very unequal contest with her for about an hour... As soon as we struck, one Squires with some midshipmen came on board and took possession of the vessel."

Freneau at first supposed that, being a passenger, he would be



taken with the prize to New York and there released; but despite his protests, he was driven into the barge with the other prisoners and taken to the *Iris*. All his baggage was left behind, and he was destined never to see it again. Arriving on board, the prisoners were driven between decks, where the air was hot and stifling.

"There were about one hundred prisoners forward, the stench of whom was almost intolerable. So many melancholy sights and dismal countenances made it a pretty just representation of the infernal region. I marched through a torrent of cursing and blasphemy to my station, viz., at the blacksmith's vice, where the miserable prisoners were handcuffed two and two. At last it came my turn. 'Pray,' said I, 'is it your custom to handcuff passengers? The Americans, I am confident, never used the English so.'

"'Are you a passenger?' said the blacksmith. At the same time happening to look up, I saw Hugh Ray looking steadily at me, who immediately seized my hand, and asked me how I did. 'Do you know him?' said Holmes, the master-at-arms. 'Then you are free from irons; come over among the gentlemen.'

"This was an unexpected deliverance from a cursed disgrace which I hardly knew how I should get clear of. After this I was used well by everybody."

On the 29th the *Iris* reached New York and the common prisoners were sent to the prison ships in the harbor. Freneau, however, was retained with the officers. He had been promised his liberty at the first possible moment, but on Thursday, June

1st, at the Commissioner's office, the charge was brought by the second mate that Freneau had been among those stationed at the guns during the fight. He was refused parole, though he promised security in any amount up to ten thousand pounds, and the same day was placed on board the *Scorpion* prison ship, "lying off the college in the North River."

Freneau's experiences during his stay upon the *Scorpion* have been described by him in graphic style in his poem, "The Prison Ship."

"On the night of June 4th, thirty-five of the prisoners formed a design of making their escape, in which they were favored by a large schooner accidentally alongside of us. She was one that was destined for the expedition to Elizabeth Town, and anchored just astern of us. We were then suffered to continue upon deck, if we chose, till nine o'clock. We were all below at that time except the insurgents, who rushed upon the sentries and disarmed them in a moment; one they tied by his neck-stock to the quarter rails, and carried off his musquet with them (they were all Hessians); the rest they drove down with their arms into the cabin and rammed the sentry box down the companion in such a manner that no one could get it up or down. One, Murphy, possessed himself of Gauzoo's silver-hilted sword, and carried it off with him. When the sentries were all silent, they manned the ship's boat and boarded the schooner, though the people on board attempted to keep them off with handspikes. The wind blowing fresh at south and the flood of tide being made, they hoisted sail and were out of sight in a few

minutes. Those particulars we learned from some who were on duty, but were unsuccessful in getting into the boat. As soon as the sentries got possession of the vessel again, which they had no difficulty in doing, as there was no resistance made, they posted themselves at each hatchway and most basely and cowardly fired fore and aft among us, pistols and musquets, for a full quarter of an hour without intermission. By the mercy of God they touched but four, one mortally... After this no usage seemed severe enough for us."

On June 22d, Freneau, who was weak with fever, was taken to the *Hunter* hospital ship, lying in the East River. Here he languished with an intermittent fever, that threatened constantly to become "putrid" and fatal, until July 12th, when:

"The flag came alongside and cleared the hospital ship. But the miseries we endured in getting to Elizabeth Town were many. Those that were very bad, of which the proportion was great, naturally took possession of the hold. No prisoner was allowed to go to the cabin, so that I, with twenty or thirty others, were obliged to sleep out all night, which was uncommonly cold for the season. About ten next morning we arrived at Elizabeth Town Point, where we were kept in the burning sun several hours, till the Commissary came to discharge us.

"I was afflicted with such pains in my joints, I could scarcely walk, and besides was weakened with a raging fever; nevertheless I walked two miles to Elizabeth Town; here I got a passage in a wagon to within a mile of Crow's Ferry, which I walked; got a passage over the ferry and

walked on as far as Molly Budleigh's, where I stayed all night. Next morning, having breakfasted on some bread and milk, I set homeward; when I came to Obadiah Budleigh's corner I turned to the right and came home round about through the woods, for fear of terrifying the neighbors with my ghastly looks had I gone through Mount Pleasant."

Some days later he despatched the following note to his friend at Santa Cruz:

"Sir: – I take this opportunity to inform you that instead of arriving, as I fondly promised myself, at the fragrant groves and delectable plains of Santa Cruz, to enjoy the fruits and flowers of that happy clime, I was unfortunately taken and confined on board a prison ship at New York, and afterwards in a Hospital Ship, where the damnable draughts of a German doctor afforded far different feelings to my stomach than the juice of the orange or more nourishing milk of the cocoa."

## IV

On April 25, 1781, there was established in Philadelphia a new weekly newspaper, the *Freeman's Journal or North American Intelligencer*, which was to be "open to all parties but influenced by none," and which had for its object "To encourage genius, to deter vice, and disrobe tyranny and misrule of every plumage." The proprietor and printer of this paper was Mr. Francis Bailey, who not long before had removed his office from

Lancaster, Pa. The editor and ruling spirit, although his name during three years did not once appear in its columns, was Philip Freneau. The mark of the young poet is upon every page. Its opening editorial, which was from his pen, sounded a note that was not once lowered or weakened while he was in control.

"At no period of time, in no era of important events from the first establishment of social government, have the liberties of man, have the rights even of human nature, been more deeply interested than at the time in which we presume to address you. While Liberty, the noblest ornament of society, and without which no community can be well organized, seemed to pine and sicken under the trammels of despotic restraint in every one of the ancient nations of the earth, it fairly promises to resume its pristine majesty here, and the new world begins to emerge from the fangs and tyranny of the old... One of the first sources of her decline in those countries where she last resided spring from the wanton and unhallowed restraints which the jealous arm of despotism hath imposed on the freedom of the press...

"That freemen may be made acquainted with the real state of their affairs, and that the characters of their public servants, both individually and collectively, be made manifest, is our object. With this patriotic view, and under the tutelage of law and the constitution, has the subscriber opened a Free Press, universally free to every citizen indiscriminately, whose principles coincide with those of the Revolution, and whose object is confessedly known to point at public or private good."

From this time until June, 1784, Freneau resided principally in Philadelphia, and edited the journal. During all of this time his muse was exceedingly active. He followed carefully the last years of the war, and put into satiric verse every movement of the "insolent foe." He sang the victory of Jones, and mourned in plaintive numbers the dead at Eutaw Springs. He voiced his indignation over the destructive career of Cornwallis, and burst into a *Laus Deo* at his fall. The ludicrous plight of Rivington and Gaine, the distress of the Tories, and the final departure of the British filled him with glee, which he poured out in song after song. It was his most prolific and spontaneous period.

He wrote, too, an abundance of prose. The series of graceful papers entitled "The Pilgrim" is from his pen, besides many a political study and literary sketch signed with a sounding name. Everywhere are manifest his love of true literature and his desire to lead a merely literary life, but here and there are notes of discouragement. "Barbers cannot possibly exist as such," he writes, "among a people who have neither hair nor beards. How, then, can a poet hope for success in a city where there are not three persons possessed of elegant ideas?"

During the year 1783 Freneau's pen was very busy in various lines of work. It is probable that he assisted Bailey in many ways, – writing introductions to publications issued by the office and performing the various other duties incumbent upon the literary editor of a publishing house. During this year he translated the "New Travels through North America," which had

just been issued by the Abbé Robin, one of the chaplains of the French Army in America, and the translation was issued first by Bailey and later by Powers and Willis of Boston. Freneau's introduction is characteristic:

"Most of those accounts of North America, given to the public by British explorators and others, previous to the Revolution, are generally taken up, with the recitals of wonderful adventures, in the woods beyond the Lakes, or with the Histories and records of the wild Indian nations, so that by the time the reader gets through one of those performances, he never fails to be better acquainted with the *Ottagnies*, *Chereokees*, *Miamees*, *Nadouwessians*, and a hundred others, with their various customs of *paw-wawing*, or methods of making *wampum*, than with the most interesting particulars relative to the *inhabitants* of the then colonies *these* were but rarely thought worthy mentioning by those gentlemen, and when they are, it is mortifying enough to see them constantly considered as mere beasts of burden, calculated solely for the support of the grandeur, wealth and omnipotence of Great-Britain, than as men and Free-Men.

"Our French Author is more liberal – two years before the present peace he considered the United States as a great independent nation, advancing with hasty strides to the summit of power and sovereignty."

It was during this year that the poet, for the first time, met with positive opposition and abuse. Oswald, the editor of the newly established *Gazette*, quarrelled with Bailey, and a poetical battle

was one phase of the contest. The details of this affair will be found in the proper place, and I need not recount them here, but suffice it to say that Freneau soon found his muse assailed by the meanest of all critics. His extremely sensitive nature could brook no criticism. His Celtic temperament could fight fiercely in the presence of an open foe, but it was easily depressed and discouraged by criticism and covert attack. He lost heart in his work, and at the end of the third volume he quietly withdrew from his editorship.

The three volumes of the *Journal* which bear his impress are notable for their vigor of policy, their high ideals, their unswerving patriotism, and their real literary merit. It is to be hoped that a selection from Freneau's prose writings during this critical era in our history may sometime be made. Nowhere else can we gain so distinct a picture of the man, with his sanguine, impetuous temperament, his proud spirit, and his intense hatred of every form of tyranny. He wrote vigorously not only on British oppression, but on such topics as the wrongs of negro slavery, cruelty to animals, the wanton destruction of trees, the evils of intemperance, and the rights of woman.

The "Epistle to Sylvius" was his valedictory. In it he deploras the lack of literary taste in America, and the sad fate which has befallen his youthful poetic dreams. The age is grown mercantile, and Sejanus the mighty tradesman, —

"Sejanus has in house declared



'These States, as yet, can boast no bard,  
And all the sing-song of our clime  
Is merely nonsense fringed with rhyme.'

A bard with more Teutonic blood, if he knew within himself that he was indeed a poet, and the only real poet of his time, would have staid at his post and made himself heard, despite narrow criticism and mean abuse, but Freneau was too proud to fight for recognition. The people had crowned him, to be sure, but if the critics, those who should be the real judges, rejected him, he would strive no longer. He would leave the field.

"Then, Sylvius, come – let you and I  
On Neptune's aid, once more rely:  
Perhaps the muse may still impart  
The balm to ease the aching heart.  
Though cold might chill and storms dismay,  
Yet Zoilus will be far away."

On June 24, 1784, Freneau sailed from Middletown Point as master of the brig *Dromilly*, bound for Jamaica. The voyage was indeed a memorable one. On the night of July 30, while off the end of the island, the ship encountered a violent hurricane. According to contemporary accounts, "No more than eight out of one hundred and fifty sail of vessels in the ports of Kingston and Port Royal were saved." The *Dromilly* survived the storm, but it was a mere wreck when the next morning it crept into Kingston

Harbor.

Freneau remained in Jamaica until September 24, when he left for Philadelphia in the brig *Mars*, arriving November 4. His experiences in trying to fit out the wrecked *Dromilly* are not recorded, but the one incident of his poetic reply to the keeper of the King's water works, who had refused him a puncheon of water, is characteristic.

From this time until 1790, Freneau's life is redolent of the ocean. A complete itinerary of this wandering era may be compiled from the shipping news of the various seaport newspapers, but it is useless to go into details. He was master for a time of the sloop *Monmouth*, plying for freight between Charleston, S. C., New York, and Savannah. His brother Peter, in Charleston, had become a man not only of influence, but of means, and together they owned the vessel and shared its profits. For several years advertisements like this appeared in the Charleston papers:

"For freight to any part of this State or Georgia; for charter in any free port in the West Indies, the sloop *Monmouth*, Philip Freneau, Master, burden about 40 tons. She is new, stanch, well-formed and draws six feet when loaded. Will carry about one hundred barrels of rice. For further particulars inquire of said master on board at Mrs. Motte's wharf or Peter Freneau."

On the 1st of June, 1786, there was issued from Bailey's press the first collected edition of Freneau's poetry. During the

entire year its author was at sea almost continuously. It is evident that he had little to do with the edition. The copy furnished to Bailey consisted of the manuscript of a few early poems, revised copies of the 1775 pamphlets, and corrected and enlarged versions of his contributions to the *United States Magazine*. The bulk of the book is made up of Freneau's contributions to the *Freeman's Journal*, printed *seriatim* and without change. The poem "Rivington's Confessions" is even divided into two parts, with another poem between, as it first appeared in the paper. An index of the poetry in the first four volumes of the *Journal* is a nearly perfect index of the 1786 edition, after the poem "The Prison Ship."

Bailey wrote for the edition the following introduction:

"The pieces now collected and printed in the following sheets, were left in my hands, by the author, above a year ago, with permission to publish them whenever I thought proper. A considerable number of the performances contained in this volume, as many will recollect, have appeared at different times in Newspapers (particularly the *Freeman's Journal*) and other periodical publications in the different States of America, during the late war, and since; and from the avidity and pleasure with which they generally appear to have been read by persons of the best taste, the Printer now the more readily gives them to the world in their present form, (without troubling the reader with any affected apologies for their supposed or real imperfections) in hopes they will afford a high degree of satisfaction to the

lovers of poetical wit, and elegance of expression."

This edition is the most spontaneous and poetic of the poet's works. In it we see Freneau before he has lost his early poetic dream, before he has become hardened by close contact with the world of affairs and the cold, practical round of political life. This and the 1788 edition contain by far the most valuable part of his poetic work.

In those days before the invention of book reviews, the fate of a book turned largely upon its immediate reception by the reading public. Criticism was by word of mouth: the poems were discussed in polite circles and over the morning coffee. Thus we have nothing to quote to show how America received her bard. We know, however, that the poems were successful even beyond Bailey's expectations. In less than five months he was out with proposals for "an additional collection of entertaining original performances in prose and verse by Philip Freneau." The book was to be published as soon as five hundred subscribers could be secured, and the subscribers' names were to be printed at the beginning of the volume.

"Such persons as are disposed to encourage American authors (particularly at a time when we are surfeited with stale publications retailed to us from British presses) and are not unwilling to be known as promoters of polite literature and the fine arts in these Republican States are requested to deliver in their names."

One bit of contemporary praise, however, has been preserved.

On June 8th, one week after the appearance of Freneau's first volume, Col. Parke of Philadelphia composed the following, which was first published in the *Journal* of June 21st, and afterward included in his volume of "The Lyric Works of Horace, ... to which are added a Number of Original Poems," issued later in the year:

**"To Mr. Philip Freneau, on  
his Volume of excellent Poems,**

**Printed by Mr. Bailey**

**"Difficile est Satiram non Scribere." – Juv**

"Tho' I know not your person, I well know your merit,  
Your satires admire – your muse of true spirit;  
Who reads them must smile at poetical story  
Except the k – g's printer, or some such like tory;  
Sir William, sir Harry, and would-be sir John,  
Cornwallis, the devil, those bucks of the ton;  
Black Dunmore and Wallace with sun-setting nose,  
Who steak hogs and sheep, secure —*under the Rose*.[\[A\]](#)  
But a fig for the anger of such petty rogues,

To the devil we pitch them without shoes or brogues!

[A] He commanded the *Rose* sloop.

"Pythag'ras' choice scheme my belief now controuls,  
I sign to his creed – transmigration of souls;  
Euphorbas's shield he no doubt did employ,  
And bravely let blood on the plains of old Troy:  
The souls of great Marlbro' and warlike Eugene  
Conspicuous in Washington's glory are seen:  
Sage Pluto beams wisdom from Franklin's rich brain,  
And sky-taught sir Isaac[B] is seen here again.  
But Hugh when he migrates may daily be found  
Cracking bones in a kitchen in form of a hound;  
When his compeer shall die – while no Christian shall weep  
him,  
Old Pluto, below, for a devil will keep him;  
Unless he's sent up on some hasty dispatch,  
The whigs to abuse, and more falsehoods to hatch.  
Thou red-jerkin'd fops, whom your muse I've heard sing  
From Hounslow's bold heroes successively spring;  
From Tyburn they tumble as supple as panders,  
Then migrate straightway into knights and commanders.  
But you, worthy poet, whose soul-cutting pen  
In gall paints the crimes of all time-serving men,  
The fiend of corruption, the wretch of an hour,  
The star-garter'd villain, the scoundrel in pow'r,  
From souls far unlike may announce your ascension,

The patriot all-worthy, above bribe or pension,  
The martyr who suffered for liberty's sake  
Grim dungeons, more horrid than hell's bitter lake:  
Your name to bright honor, the spirits shall lift,  
That glow'd in the bosoms of Churchill and Swift.

[B] David Rittenhouse, Esq., the Ingenious inventor of  
the celebrated perpendicular Orrery.

"And when you are number'd, alas! with the dead,  
Your works by true wits will forever be read,  
Who, pointing the finger, shall pensively shew  
The lines that were written, alas! by Freneau."

*Philadelphia, June 8, 1786.*

The second volume of poems did not appear promptly. One year after the first proposals, Bailey advertised that the book was at last in press. "An unusual hurry of other business (of a nature not to be postponed), has unavoidably delayed the printer in its publication to so late a period." It is notable that of the four hundred and sixty-three subscribers, two hundred and fifty, or over half, were in Charleston, S. C., and one hundred and twenty-six in New York. Philadelphia subscribed for very few of the volumes.

The printer's advertisement was as follows:

"The following Essays and Poems, selected from some printed and manuscript papers of Mr. Freneau, are now

presented to the public of the United States in hopes they will prove at least equally acceptable with his volume of poems published last year. Some few of the pieces in this volume have heretofore appeared in American newspapers; but through a fatality, not unusually attending publications of that kind, are now, perhaps, forgotten; and, at any time, may possibly never have been seen or attended to but by very few."

Of the forty-nine poems in the volume, one, "Slender's Journey," had been published separately by Bailey early in 1787, and nearly half of the others had first seen the light between April, 1786, and January, 1788, in the columns of the *Freeman's Journal*. The greater number of the others were doubtless printed from the poet's manuscripts. A few of the prose papers, like "The Philosopher of the Forest," were selected from the columns of the *Journal*, especially from the series entitled "The Pilgrim," but much of the rest was from the poet's manuscripts now first published.

In the meantime the poet was leading a stormy and adventurous career upon the sea. As master of the sloop *Industry*, and later of the schooner *Columbia*, plying irregularly on all kinds of coastwise voyages between Georgia and New York, he experienced every phase of life upon the ocean. As a sample of his adventurous career during this period, note the following letter<sup>8</sup> to Bailey, written from Norfolk, Va., in the summer of

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<sup>8</sup> Published in the *Freeman's Journal*, August 20, 1788.



*"Norfolk, Virginia, August 6, 1788.*

*"Mr. Bailey,*

"I have the mortification to inform you that, after leaving New-York on the 21st of July, I had the misfortune to have my vessel dismasted, thrown on her beam ends, shifted and ruined the bulk of her cargo, lost every sail, mast, spar, boat, and almost every article upon deck, on the Wednesday afternoon following, in one of the hardest gales that ever blew upon this coast. Capt. William Cannon, whom I think you know, who was going passenger with me to Charleston, and Mr. Joseph Stillwell, a lad of a reputable family in New-Jersey, were both washed overboard and drowned, notwithstanding every effort to save them. All my people besides, except one, an old man who stuck fast in one of the scuttles, were several times overboard, but had the fortune to regain the wreck, and with considerable difficulty save their lives. – As to myself, I found the vessel no longer under any guidance – I took refuge in the main weather shrouds, where indeed I saved myself from being washed into the sea, but was almost staved to pieces in a violent fall I had upon the main deck, the main-mast having given way six feet above the deck, and gone overboard – I was afterward knocked in the head by a violent stroke of the tiller, which entirely deprived me of sensation for (I was told) near a quarter of an hour. – Our pumps were now so choaked with corn that they would no longer work, upward of four feet of water was in the hold, fortunately our bucket was saved,

and with this we went to baling, which alone prevented us from foundering in one of the most dismal nights that ever man witnessed.

"The next morning the weather had cleared away and the wind came round to the N. E. which during the gale had been E. N. E. – the land was then in sight, about 5 miles distant, latitude at noon 36-17, I then rigged out a broken boom, and set the fore top-sail, the only sail remaining, and steered for cape Henry; making however but very little way, the vessel being very much on one side and ready to sink with her heavy cargo of iron, besides other weighty articles. We were towed in next day, Friday, by the friendly assistance of capt. Archibald Bell, of the ship Betsey, from London – I have since arrived at this port by the assistance of a Potowmac pilot. – Nothing could exceed our distress – no fire, no candle, our beds soaked with sea water, the cabbin torn to pieces, a vast quantity of corn damaged and poisoning us to death, &c. &c. &c. As we entered this port, on the 29th of July, the very dogs looked at us with an eye of commiseration – the negros pitied us, and almost every one shewed a disposition to relieve us. In the midst of all this vexation the crew endeavoured to keep up their spirits with a little grog, while I have recourse to my old expedient of philosophy and reflection. I have unloaded my cargo, partly damaged, partly otherwise – This day I also begin to refit my vessel, and mean to proceed back to New-York as soon as refitted, which cannot be sooner than the 25th, perhaps the 30th of this month. It is possible, however, that I may be ordered to sell the vessel here; if so, I shall take

a passage to Baltimore, and go to New-York by the way of Philadelphia, to look out for another more fortunate barque than that which I now command.

## **Your's &c**

*Philip Freneau."*

I cannot forbear quoting another letter<sup>9</sup> written nearly a year later, since it gives us a charming glimpse of the Freneau of this period:

*"Yamacraw, Savanna, March 14th, 1789.*

"Sir: Amongst a number of my good natured acquaintance, who have lately sympathized with me, on account of what they term my misfortunes, during great part of last year, I know of no one more entitled to my acknowledgments, on the occasion, than yourself. When an old woman talks of witches, ghosts, or blue devils, we naturally make an allowance for bad education, or the imbecility of intellect, occasioned by age. When one man seriously supposes another unfortunate, for the sake of two or three successive disasters, which no prudence or foresight could have avoided, the same allowance ought to be made, provided the same excuses could be assigned.

"Can you be serious, then in advising me to quit all future intercourse with an element, that has for some years,

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<sup>9</sup> Published in the *Freeman's Journal*, July 8, 1789.

with all its dangers and losses, afforded to your humble servant attractions, far more powerful than those of Apollo! Formerly, when I wrote poetry, most of those that attended to it, would not allow my verses to be good. I gave credit to what I deemed the popular opinion, and made a safe retreat in due time, to the solitary wastes of Neptune. I am not, however, inclined to believe people so readily now, when they alledge my vessel is not sound, and when several gentlemen, for reasons best known to themselves, and perhaps not over willing to risque the uncertainties of the world to come, effect to doubt of her ability to waft their carcases in safety.

But my ambition is greatly concerned in this matter: a schooner is confided to my care, humble, indeed, when compared to those lofty piles which I have seen you so much admire, but which is, nevertheless, really capable of an European, nay of an India voyage. Read all history, ransack libraries, call tradition to your aid, search all records, examine a million of manuscripts on vellum, on parchment, on paper, on marble, on what you please, and I defy you to find the most distant hint of any *poet*, in any age or country, from Hesiod down to Peter Pindar, having been trusted with the controul or possession of anything fit to be mentioned or compared with the same barque, which you say, *I have the misfortune to command*.

"To be serious: misfortune ought to be only the topic of such men as do not think or reason with propriety, upon the nature of things. Some writer says, it is but another name for

carelessness or inattention: Though that may not at all times be the case, it is in the power of every man to place himself beyond the supposed baneful influence of this inexorable deity, by *assuming* a dignity of mind, (if it be not the gift of nature) that will, in the end, get the better of the untoward events, that may frequently cross our best purposes. Indeed, the *sea* is the *best* school for philosophy (I mean of the moral kind); in thirteen or fourteen years' acquaintance with this element, I am convinced a man ought to imbibe more of your right genuine *stoical* stuff, than could be gained in half a century on shore. – I must add that, be our occupations what they may, or our fortunes what they will, there is a certain delectable, inexpressible satisfaction in now and then encountering the rubs and disasters of life, and I am entirely of the opinion which (says Dr. Langhorne)

"Weakness wrote in Petrarch's gentle strain,  
When once he own'd at love's unfavouring shrine  
*A thousand pleasures art not worth one pain!*"

"I must now conclude this scrawl, with telling you, that I am receiving on board my vessel a small cargo of lumber, at a place called Yamacraw, a little above Savanna. The weather is extremely warm, I am tired of my letter, and must, of course, conclude. I do not know whether you ever mean to make a voyage to sea – if you should, thrice welcome shall you be to such accommodations as my little embarkation affords. Poets and philosophers, shall ever

travel with me at a cheap rate indeed! Not only because they are not generally men of this world, but because, even supposing the barque that bears them, should make an external exit to the bottom of the ocean, the busy world, as things go, will regret the loss of most of them very little, perhaps not at all.

**Your's, &c.,**

*P. Freneau."*

On the 24th of April, 1789, when Washington arrived in New York to enter upon the duties of the presidency, in the fleet that accompanied him from Elizabethtown Point was the schooner *Columbia*, Capt. Freneau, eight days from Charleston. In June the *Columbia* again entered New York Harbor, and on December 28th she was at Sunbury, Georgia. On February 12th, 1790, Freneau arrived in New York, passenger from Middletown Point in the brig *Betsy*, Capt. Motley, to become editor of Child and Swaine's *New York Daily Advertiser*. For several months negotiations had been pending. Every appearance of the poet in New York for a year past had been marked by a small budget of poems in the *Advertiser* from the pen of "Capt. Freneau," but it was not until February, 1790, that he was induced to leave his beloved *Columbia* and settle down to a life upon shore. The poem "Neversink," written some months later, is his valedictory to the ocean.

"Proud heights: with pain so often seen  
(With joy beheld once more)  
On your firm base I take my stand,  
Tenacious of the shore:  
Let those who pant for wealth or fame  
Pursue the watery road; —  
Soft sleep and ease, blest days and nights,  
And health, attend these favoring heights,  
Retirement's blest abode."

The poem "Constantia" may record the poet's reasons for leaving the ocean, for on the 19th of May, 1790, there appeared in Peter Freneau's Charleston paper, the *City Gazette, or the Daily Advertiser*, the following:

"*Married*, on the fifteenth of April, at Middletown Point, East New Jersey, Capt. Philip Freneau to Miss Eleanor Forman, daughter of Mr. Samuel Forman, of that place."

The Forman family with which the poet allied himself was one of great respectability and even prominence in New Jersey. Its record during the Revolution had been a conspicuous one, and its connection included the Ledyards, the Seymours, and many other prominent families. Mrs. Freneau, in the words of her daughter, "was remarkable for her gentle, lady-like manners, amiable disposition and finely informed mind. She was affable and sprightly in her conversation, and there were, even when she had reached the advanced age of eighty-seven, few handsomer

women." In her early years she dabbled a little in poetry herself, and there is a tradition in the family that the prenuptial correspondence was for a long time wholly in verse.

Freneau was now fairly settled in life, and for the next seven or eight years he was engaged almost continuously in newspaper work.

## V

During the next year and more Freneau, as editor of the *Daily Advertiser*, brought to bear upon the paper all the vigor and literary skill which had so marked the *Freeman's Journal*. The tone of the editorial comment was patriotic and spirited. The note of reform, of opposition to everything that was degrading to high ideals, or that in any way threatened personal liberty, was never absent. Despite the manifold duties incumbent upon the editor of a city daily, he found time to write finished prose sketches and to woo the muses. His poetry of this period is notable both as to quantity and quality. Some of it was drawn from the notebooks of his years of wandering, but the greater part dealt with more timely topics. In June he published the advertisement:

"Mr. Freneau proposes publishing a volume of original poems, to contain about two hundred and fifty pages, 12mo, neatly printed... As soon as there appears a sufficiency of subscribers to defray the expenses of paper and printing, the collection shall be put to press."



Judging from several poems of this period which were printed as from the author's new volume, "The Rising Empire," this was to be the title of the book. The advertisement was dropped in October, and "The Rising Empire" never appeared, though most of its poems were printed in the edition of 1795.

On September 20, 1791, Freneau's daughter, Eleanor, was born at Mount Pleasant. His salary as editor of the *Advertiser* was not large; the little family, it appears, was in straightened circumstances. A letter<sup>10</sup> from Aedanus Burke of Charleston to Madison, dated September 13, 1801, throws light upon the period.

"I remember, it was about the last fortnight that we served together in Congress, in 1791, I one day called you aside, and mentioned the name of Mr. Phillip Freneau to you, as one I knew you esteemed, and then lay struggling under difficulties, with his family. My memory brings to my recollection, that you mentioned the matter to the Secretary of State, Mr. Jefferson. Freneau was invited from N. York, and had the place of interpreter, with a mere trifle of Salary. Little did William Smith know, that you were the author or cause of bringing Freneau from New York; or he might have turned against you, his terrible battery of the slanders and invectives which he poured forth against Mr. Jefferson for three or four years afterwards."

Madison acted promptly. On the 28th of February, 1791,

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<sup>10</sup> *American Historical Review*, January, 1898.

Jefferson wrote to Freneau as follows:

"Sir: The clerkship for foreign languages in my office is vacant the salary indeed is very low, being but two hundred & fifty dollars a year; but also it gives so little to do as not to interfere with any other calling the person may chuse, which would not absent him from the seat of government. I was told a few days ago that it might perhaps be convenient to you to accept it – if so, it is at your service. It requires no other qualification than a moderate knowledge of the French. Should anything better turn up within my department that might suit you, I should be very happy to bestow it as well. Should you conclude to accept the present, you may consider it as engaged to you, only be so good as to drop me a line informing me of your resolution. I am with great esteem, Sir, Your very humble serv't,

*Th. Jefferson."*

Freneau's letter in reply has been lost. On May 1st, however, Madison wrote Jefferson, so that we may gather its import:

"I have seen Freneau also and given him a line to you. He sets out for Philada. today or tomorrow, though it is not improbable that he may halt in N. Jersey. He is in the habit, I find, of translating the *Leyden Gazette* and consequently must be fully equal to the task you have allotted for him. He had supposed that besides this degree of skill, it might be expected that he should be able to translate with equal propriety into French: and under this idea, his delicacy had taken an insuperable objection to the undertaking. Being

now set right as to this particular and being made sensible of the advantages of Philada. over N. Jersey for his private undertaking, his mind is taking another turn; and if the scantiness of his capital should not be a bar, I think he will establish himself in the former. At all events he will give his friends there an opportunity of aiding his decision by their information & counsel. The more I learn of his character, talents and principles, the more I should regret his burying himself in the obscurity he had chosen in N. Jersey. It is certain that there is not to be found in the whole catalogue of American Printers, a single name that can approach towards a rivalship."

Jefferson replied on May 9th:

"Your favor of the 1st came to hand on the 3d. Mr. Freneau has not followed it. I suppose therefore he has changed his mind back again, for which I am really sorry."

That Jefferson had made overtures to Freneau about the establishing of a paper at the seat of government, or at least had discussed the matter with those who had, is evident from the following letter written to his son-in-law, Randolph, six days later:

"I enclose you Bache's as well as Fenno's papers. You will have perceived that the latter is a paper of pure Toryism, disseminating the doctrines of Monarchy, aristocracy, & the exclusion of the people. We have been trying to get another *weekly* or *half weekly* set up, excluding advertisements, so that it might go through the states & furnish a *whig vehicle*

of intelligence. We hoped at one time to have persuaded Freneau to set up here, but failed."

It is a testimonial to the energy and the ability of Freneau that leaders like Madison and Jefferson should have sought him so persistently. Notwithstanding Freneau's refusal, Jefferson, on July 21st, wrote to Madison:

"I am sincerely sorry that Freneau has declined coming here. Tho' the printing business be sufficiently full here, yet I think he would have set out on such advantageous ground as to have been sure of success. His own genius in the first place is so superior to that of his competitors. I should have given him the perusal of all my letters of foreign intelligence & all foreign newspapers; the publication of all proclamations & other public notices within my department, & the printing of the laws, which added to his salary would have been a considerable aid. Besides this, Fenno's being the only weekly, or half weekly paper, & under general condemnation for its toryism & its incessant efforts to overturn the government, Freneau would have found that ground as good as unoccupied."

This being brought to Freneau's attention, he determined to hold out no longer. On July 25th he wrote to Madison from Middletown Point:

"Some business detains me here a day or two longer from returning to New York. When I come, which I expect will be on Thursday, if you should not have left the City, I will give you a decisive answer relative to printing my paper at

the Seat of Govt. instead of in N. York. If I can get Mr. Childs to be connected with me on a tolerable plan, I believe I shall sacrifice other considerations and transfer myself to Philadelphia."

Mr. Francis Childs, who was one of the proprietors of the *Advertiser*, as we have already seen, agreed to the enterprise, and the following document was soon signed:

"Department of State of the United States.

"Philip Freneau is hereby appointed Clerk for foreign languages in the office of Secretary of State with a salary of two hundred & fifty dollars a year, to commence from the time he shall take the requisite oaths of qualification. Given under my hand and seal this 16th day of August 1791.

*Th. Jefferson."*

I have considered this episode somewhat minutely since it throws light upon what follows.

The first number of *The National Gazette* appeared on Monday, October 31st. It was issued Mondays and Thursdays. Its typography and arrangement were neat and attractive; its news columns were well filled, and its literary department was carefully attended to. Its success was all that had been predicted by Madison. On May 7, 1792, the editor announced that the subscription to the *Gazette* had succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations.

The period covered by the two years of the *National Gazette* was one of singular unrest in America. The French Revolution

was in progress; everything seemed tottering. America believed that all Europe was soon to cast off its chains of monarch; she believed that the torch of the Rights of Man had been lighted in America, and she looked with almost paternal interest on the progress of the Revolution. In his poetical salutatory in the first number of the *Gazette*, Freneau writes:

"From the spark that we kindled, a flame has gone forth  
To astonish the world and enlighten mankind:  
With a code of new doctrines the universe rings,  
And Paine is addressing strange sermons to Kings."

The columns of the *Gazette* are full of ringing words on the Rights of Man, the Age of Reason, the final doom of monarchy. In poem after poem the editor pours out his sympathy for republicanism and the cause of the French insurgents. That the French had been largely instrumental in the gaining of our own independence, increased the interest. "On the Fourteenth of July," "On the French Republicans," "On the Anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille," "Ode to Liberty," and "Demolition of the French Monarchy," are a few of the poems that Freneau poured forth during this incendiary period. It is significant that he included none of these verses in his edition of 1809. That he was honest to the core in his belief cannot for a moment be doubted. His impulsive Celtic temperament threw his whole soul into his work.

"Ah! while I write, dear France allied,  
My ardent wish I scarce restrain,  
To throw these sybil leaves aside  
And fly to join you on the main."

The frenzy among the American Republicans culminated with the arrival of Citizen Genet, in 1793. At the Republican dinner given Genet, May 18th, Citizen Freneau was elected by acclamation to translate Pichon's ode. On June 1st, at the civic feast, Freneau's ode, "God Save the Rights of Man," was received with thunderous applause.

One must study carefully this incendiary period of Freneau's life before he can understand fully the much discussed episode of the *National Gazette*. The wine of French Republicanism was sadly intoxicating. It could make Freneau write such a stanza as this:

"*Virtue, Order and Religion,*  
Haste, and seek some other region;  
Your plan is fixed to hunt them down,  
Destroy the mitre, rend the gown,  
And that vile b-tc-h – Philosophy – restore,  
Did ever paper plan so much before?"

And then explain it by saying that "*The National Gazette* is the vehicle of party spleen and opposition to the great principles of order, virtue and religion."

In view of all this, it is not strange that he should have been impatient with the conservative party, who not only did not grow enthusiastic over the French Revolution, but even looked upon it with actual disapprobation. From the very first, the editor of the *Gazette* criticised the leading Federalists, especially Adams and Hamilton, and he even mildly rebuked Washington, the hero of his earlier muse. The administration, in his mind, was leaning toward monarchial ideas. Washington, in his opinion, had exceeded his power in the matter of the banks, and the precedent was a dangerous one. The ceremonials with which the President had hedged himself about were greatly at variance with simple democratic ideas; and, to crown all, the ingratitude of the administration (to the extremists it could have no other name) in its attitude toward Genet and the French people hurt him deeply. I believe that Freneau was fundamentally honest in his position. It is almost impossible to believe that a note like this, in the *Jersey Chronicle* of 1795, is not sincere:

"The conduct of the Federal Executive of this country toward the Republic of France, so far as it may appear inimical, has given great and general disgust to the citizens of the United States... It would be well if some that might be mentioned would recollect the nation that supported us in the late war when our infant Republic was on the point of annihilation. Enmity to France is treason against Republicanism."

In regard to Adams, who had danced at the King's ball



in a scarlet suit, and Hamilton, the father of the Federalists, Freneau had no scruples. The attacks of the *Gazette* became more and more pointed with every issue, though much of the more incendiary matter was not from Freneau's pen. The "Probationary Odes," for instance, attributed to him by contemporary enemies, and in later years quoted by Buckingham and Duyckinck as from his pen, were written by St. George Tucker. They were published in book form by Tucker in 1796. In the sensitive state of party politics at this time, such frank criticism could not fail to raise a tempest of rebuttal and of counter abuse. It was soon noted that the *Gazette*, in its attacks upon the administration, spared the State department. Jefferson was never mentioned except for praise. The inference was obvious: either he had "muzzled" the paper by granting it certain favors, or he was making use of it as a weapon against the very administration of which he was a member.

Hamilton naturally inclined toward the latter view, and much bitterness was the result. On July 25, 1792, he inserted this anonymous bit in *Fenno's Gazette of the United States*, the Federalist organ:

"The Editor of the *National Gazette* receives a salary from Government:

"Quere – Whether this salary is paid him for *translations*; or for *publications*, the design for which is to vilify those to whom the voice of the people has committed the administration of our public affairs – to oppose the

measures of Government, and, by false insinuations, to disturb the public peace?

"In common life it is thought ungrateful for a man to bite the hand that puts bread in his mouth; but if the man is hired to do it, the case is altered.

*T. L."*

This was the beginning of a series of anonymous attacks in the *Federalist* newspaper, written undoubtedly by Hamilton. A second article, still more definite, appeared on August 4th. In it the writer directly charged Jefferson with being the soul and spirit of the *National Gazette*. "Mr. Freneau was thought a fit instrument," and so was deliberately engaged; he was simply the "faithful and devoted servant of the head of a party from whose hands he received a boon." The article then proceeds at length to arraign Jefferson and to appeal to the American people, whether they will consent to see the precious legacies which are theirs "frittered away" in so shameless a manner.

This attack called forth (from Freneau) an affidavit which was printed in the *Gazette*, August 8, 1792:

"Personally appeared before me, Matthew Clarkson, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, Philip Freneau, of the City of Philadelphia, who, being duly sworn, doth depose and say, That no negotiation was ever opened with him by Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, for the establishment or institution of the *National Gazette*: that the deponent's coming to the City of Philadelphia, as publisher of a Newspaper, was at no time urged, advised, or influenced

by the above officer, but that it was his own voluntary act; and that the said Gazette, nor the Editor thereof, was ever directed, controuled, or attempted to be influenced, in any manner, either by the Secretary of State, or any of his friends; nor was a line ever, directly or indirectly, written, dictated, or composed for it by that officer, but that the Editor has consulted his own judgment alone in the conducting of it – free – unfettered – and uninfluenced.

*"Philip Freneau.*

*"Sworn the 6th August, 1772, before*

*"Matthew Clarkson, Mayor."*

Hamilton followed, August 11th, with another article. He emphatically discredited Freneau's oath, declaring that "facts spoke louder than words, and under certain circumstances louder than oaths;" that "the editor of the *National Gazette* must not think to swear away their efficacy;" that "if he was truly, as they announced, the pensioned tool of the public character who had been named, no violation of truth in any shape ought to astonish; equivocations and mental reservations were the too common refuge of minds struggling to escape from disgraceful imputations." The article then proceeded to show that Jefferson did really establish the *Gazette* through a particular friend.

Freneau at once declined to answer further the attacks, on the ground that they were mere "personal charges," and Hamilton promptly branded this as "a mere subterfuge." Thus Freneau found himself in the midst of a perfect hornet's nest of partisan strife that involved the country from end to end. The Federal

organ continued its attacks, and Freneau, always restive under criticism, increased in bitterness.

On September 9, 1792, Jefferson put himself on record in a letter to Washington.<sup>11</sup> The letter is extremely long, since it covers the entire contest with Hamilton from the beginning. In it he declared:

"While the Government was at New York I was applied to on behalf of Freneau to know if there was any place within my department to which he could be appointed. I answered there were but four clerkships, all of which I found full, and continued without any change. When we removed to Philadelphia, Mr. Pintard, the translating clerk, did not choose to remove with us. His office then became vacant. I was again applied to there for Freneau, and had no hesitation to promise the clerkship for him. I cannot recollect whether it was at the same time, or afterwards, that I was told he had a thought of setting up a newspaper there. But whether then, or afterwards, I considered it a circumstance of some value, as it might enable me to do, what I had long wished to have done, that is, to have the material parts of the Leyden Gazette brought under your eye, and that of the public, in order to possess yourself and them of a juster view of the affairs of Europe than could be obtained from any other public source. This I had ineffectually attempted through the press of Mr. Fenno, while in New York, selecting and translating passages myself at first, then having it done by Mr. Pintard, the translating clerk, but they found their way

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<sup>11</sup> Randall's *Life of Jefferson*, vol. ii, 78.

too slowly into Mr. Fenno's papers. Mr. Bache essayed it for me in Philadelphia, but his being a daily paper, did not circulate sufficiently in the other States. He even tried, at my request, the plan of a weekly paper of recapitulation from his daily paper, in hopes, that that might go into the other States, but in this too we failed. Freneau, as translating clerk, and the printer of a periodical paper likely to circulate through the States (uniting in one person the parts of Pintard and Fenno) revived my hopes that the thing could at length be effected. On the establishment of his paper, therefore, I furnished him with the Leyden Gazettes, with an expression of my wish that he could always translate and publish the material intelligence they contained, and have continued to furnish them from time to time, as regularly as I received them. But as to any other direction or indication of my wish how his press should be conducted, what sort of intelligence he should give, what essays encourage, I can protest, in the presence of Heaven that I never did by myself, or any other, or indirectly, say a syllable, nor attempt any kind of influence. I can further protest, in the same awful presence, that I never did, by myself, or any other, directly or indirectly, write, dictate or procure any one sentence or sentiment to be inserted *in his, or any other gazette*, to which my name was not affixed, or that of my office... Freneau's proposition to publish a paper, having been about the time that the writings of Publicola, and the discourses on Davila, had a good deal excited the public attention, I took for granted from Freneau's character, which had been marked as that of a good Whig, that he would give free place

to pieces written against the aristocratical and monarchical principles these papers had inculcated. This having been in my mind, it is likely enough I may have expressed it in conversation with others, though I do not recollect that I did. To Freneau I think I could not, because I had still seen him but once, and that at a public table, at breakfast, at Mrs. Elsworth's, as I passed through New York the last year. And I can safely declare that my expectations looked only to the chastisement of the aristocratical and monarchical writers, and not to any criticisms on the proceedings of Government. Colonel Hamilton can see no motive for any appointment, but that of making a convenient partisan. But you, sir, who have received from me recommendations of a Rittenhouse, Barlow, Paine, will believe that talents and science are sufficient motives with me in appointments to which they are fitted; and that Freneau, as a man of genius, might find a preference in my eye to be a translating clerk, and make good title to the little aids I could give him as the editor of a gazette, by procuring subscriptions to his paper, as I did some before it appeared, and as I have with pleasure done for the labors of other men of genius. I hold it to be one of the distinguishing excellences of elective over hereditary successions, that the talents which nature has provided in sufficient proportion, should be selected by the society for the government of their affairs, rather than this should be transmitted through the loins of knaves and fools, passing from the debauches of the table to those of the bed. Colonel Hamilton, alias 'Plain Facts,' says, that Freneau's salary began before he resided in Philadelphia. I

do not know what quibble he may have in reserve on the word 'residence.' He may mean to include under that idea the removal of his family; for I believe he removed himself before his family did, to Philadelphia. But no act of mine gave commencement to his salary before he so far took up his abode in Philadelphia, as to be sufficiently in readiness for the duties of the office. As to the merits or demerits of his paper, they certainly concern me not. He and Fenno are rivals for the public favor. The one courts them by flattery, the other by censure, and I believe it will be admitted that the one has been as servile, as the other severe. But is not the dignity, and even decency of Government committed, when one of its principal ministers enlists himself as an anonymous writer or paragraphist for either the one or the other of them? No government ought to be without censors; and where the press is free, no one ever will. If virtuous, it need not fear the fair operation of attack and defence. Nature has given to man no other means of sifting out the truth either in religion, law, or politics. I think it as honorable to the Government neither to know, nor notice, its sycophants or censors, as it would be undignified and criminal to pamper the former and persecute the latter."<sup>12</sup>

But if the *National Gazette* concerned Jefferson not at all, as he alleged, it certainly did exasperate Washington. Later on, when the Genet affair had urged Freneau into still greater excesses, Washington, on the 23d of May, 1793, had a conversation with Jefferson, which the latter recorded in his *Ana*:

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<sup>12</sup> Randall's *Life of Thomas Jefferson*, ii, 81.

"He [the President] adverted to a piece in Freneau's paper of yesterday, he said he despised all their attacks on him personally, but that there never had been an act of the government, not meaning in the Executive line only, but in any line, which that paper had not abused. He had also marked the word republic thus – where it was applied to the French republic [see the original paper]. He was evidently sore & warm, and I took his intention to be that I should interpose in some way with Freneau; perhaps withdraw his appointment of translating clerk to my office. But I will not do it. His paper has saved our constitution, which was galloping fast into monarchy, & has been checked by no one means so powerfully as by that paper. It is well and universally known, that it has been that paper which has checked the career of the monocrats, & the President, not sensible of the designs of the party, has not with his usual good sense and *sang froid*, looked on the efforts and effects of this free press and seen that, though some bad things have passed through it to the public, yet the good have preponderated immensely."<sup>13</sup>

Washington even brought the affair into a meeting of the Cabinet, declaring, according to Jefferson's *Ana*, that,

"That rascal, Freneau, sent him three copies of his paper every day as if he thought he (Washington) would become the distributor of them; that he could see in this nothing but

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<sup>13</sup> *Writings of Jefferson*, i, 231.



an impudent design to insult him; he ended in a high tone."<sup>14</sup>

The *National Gazette* published its last issue, October 23, 1793. The collapse of the Genet bubble – the revulsion of feeling after the Frenchman had threatened to appeal from Washington to the people, brought on a tidal wave which swept away all the idols of French Republicanism in America, and the *National Gazette* could not withstand the tide. Subscribers withdrew their subscriptions at a ruinous rate, the notes of the proprietors were protested, and the paper was abandoned. Freneau had no idea, however, of final surrender. His last word was a promise which, however, was never fulfilled.

"With the present number concludes the second volume and second year's publication of the *National Gazette*. Having just imported on his own account a considerable quantity of new and elegant printing types from Europe, it is the editor's intention to resume the publication of this paper in a short time and previous to the meeting of Congress in December next."

It is upon this episode that the reputation of Freneau among the generality of people chiefly rests. "That rascal Freneau" is the epithet that has clung to his name through all the intervening century. It is this one affair, more than anything else, that has kept him from the recognition he deserves, both as a patriot and a poet. The attitude of New England may be expressed in the words of President Dwight, written during the summer of 1793:

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<sup>14</sup> *Writings of Jefferson*, i, 251.

"Freneau, your printer, linguist, &c., is regarded here as a mere incendiary, or rather as a despicable tool of bigger incendiaries, and his paper as a public nuisance."

Letters might be multiplied in showing the same spirit in all of the Federalists.

It must not be forgotten, however, that Freneau acted from pure and honest motives; that the excitement and bitter partisanship of the period were extraordinary, and that the air was heavily charged with the subtle magnetism that in France had created a reign of terror. It cannot be denied that Freneau went to excess in his denunciations; but so did Hamilton, who in reality began the conflict; so did Jefferson; so did many others. As to the extent to which Jefferson went in subsidizing the *Gazette* for his own use, the reader may judge for himself. Neither side is free from blame; Freneau is certainly no more culpable than the others who held far higher positions than he. It is but justice to say of Freneau, in the words of Jefferson's biographer, Randall

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"He was always a warm, and after the period of which we write, became a violent partisan. It is but justice to his memory, however, to say that his honor and his veracity as a man were never questioned by those who knew him, and that his reputation in these particulars is now as free from all taint of suspicion as is that of any of the distinguished gentlemen whose names were associated with his in the controversy."

The following words of Madison, taken from Mr. Trist's memoranda of a conversation, May 25, 1827, and published in Tucker's Life of Jefferson, probably presents the affair in its true light:

"Mr. Madison said: 'Freneau's paper was another cause of soreness in General Washington. Among its different contributors, some were actuated by over-heated zeal, and some, perhaps, by malignity. Every effort was made in Fenno's paper, and by those immediately around him (Washington) to impress on his mind a belief that this paper had been got up by Mr. Jefferson to injure him and oppose the measures of his administration. Freneau himself was an old College mate of mine, a poet and man of literary and refined tastes, knowing nothing of the world. He was a French scholar, and employed at first as translator. Henry Lee, who was also his College mate, and had also a friendly feeling for him, was the more immediate cause of his establishing a paper. Our main object in encouraging it, was to provide an antidote against Fenno's paper, which was devoted to monarchy, and had begun to publish extracts from Mr. Adams's book. I used occasionally to throw in an article, all of which I have marked, and some of which I have shown you, with a view chiefly to counteract the monarchical spirit and partisanship of the British government which characterized Fenno's paper. I never engaged in the party criminations.'"

It deserves mention that Freneau stuck to his post during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, and that for weeks he was the

only active editor in the city. On October 1st he resigned his position as translator, and soon after removed to his old home at Mount Pleasant. For a time he was without employment. He contemplated several newspaper enterprises. He evidently took steps toward the publication of a paper in Monmouth County, New Jersey, as the following advertisement, published in the *Jersey Chronicle*, May 30, 1795, would show:

"A number of persons in Freehold and other parts of Monmouth subscribed last year to a paper the editor then proposed to set on foot. As various causes delayed him prosecuting his intended purpose until the present spring, and as he supposes, many of them might in the meantime have engaged with other printers, he hopes they will if possible transfer their subscription to the *Chronicle*."

On November 2, 1794, he writes Madison, recommending his old friend Bailey for the office of public printer, and on May 6th following, he received a reply:

"I delayed acknowledging your favour long ago received, until I could inform you of the prospects of Mr. Bailey in whose favor it was written. I have now the pleasure to tell you that although his wishes are not to be immediately fulfilled he is looking to obtain under the auspices of Mr. Beckley and Mr. Randolph a share of employment hereafter which may be very valuable to him. I congratulate you on the public intelligence just received from Holland which gives joy to all true Republicans, and wish you all the private happiness which an exchange of your former

travelled scenes for the shade and tranquility of your present life can afford. Remember, however, as you have not chosen any longer to labor in the field of politics it will be expected by your friends that you cultivate with the more industry your inheritance on Parnassus."

On May the 20th following, Freneau continued the correspondence:

"My respected friend: By some accident your kind letter of April 6th was a long time in finding its way hither, having not come to hand till the 17th inst. I sincerely thank you for the interest you have taken in Mr. Bailey. He is a good Republican and a worthy honest man, which qualifications, I have thought, entitled him to some notice from the Government, in his line of business – I was heartily laughed at, however, a few weeks ago in N. York, by some Aristocrats, for having in my Letter to you or Mr. Beckley, I forget which, extolled his Military services in the late War – I am sensible he never cut off the heads of Giants or drove hosts before him, as some have done; at the same time it ought to be remembered that he was an officer in the Pennsylvania Militia in the season that tried men's souls (as Paine says) and I believe never acted otherwise than became the character in which he acted. —

I meet you at least half way in your congratulations on the public intelligence received from Holland. It is but another step toward the advancement and completion of that great and philanthropic System which I have been anticipating for many

years, and which you as well as myself, I hope, will live to see realized – When I first went to reside in Philada. in 1791 I wished to be one of those who would have the honour and happiness of announcing these great events to the public through the medium of a newspaper: A variety of circumstances however, needless to trouble you with, urged my departure from that city after completing a two years publication – As I mean to pass the remainder of my days on a couple of hundred of acres of an old sandy patrimony, I have, by the way of filling up the vacuities of time set on foot a small weekly Newspaper calculated for the part of the country in which I am. Should you have any curiosity to see it I will forward it to you free of all expence except that of postage. I will not make high promises in regard to what it may contain. It will scarcely be expected that in a rude barbarous part of the country I could calculate it for the polite taste of Philadelphia. – Should your fixed residence be in Philada. I can transmit the papers to you once a week by the Public Post, who stops every Wednesday at my door. A Letter put into the Post Office at Philadelphia on Saturday morning, will be sure to reach me on Wednesday. – The public papers some time ago announced your Marriage. – I wish you all possible happiness with the lady whom you have chosen for your Companion through life – Mrs. Freneau joins me in the same, and desires me to present her best respects to your lady and yourself – and should you ever take an excursion to these parts of Jersey, we will endeavour to give Mrs. Madison and yourself

– 'if not a costly welcome, yet a kind.'"

The *Jersey Chronicle*, an eight-paged paper of the size of a sheet of letter paper, issued its initial number from the editor's little office at Mount Pleasant, Saturday, May 2, 1795. It bore the motto, "*Inter Sylvas Academi quaerere verum.* – Hor.;" and its object, in the words of its editor, was "to present ... a complete history of the foreign and domestic events of the Times, together with such essays, remarks, and observations as shall tend to illustrate the politics, or mark the general character of the age and country in which we live." The editor's salutatory is characteristic of its author:

"Never was there a more interesting period than the present, nor ever was there a time within the reach of history when mankind have been so generally united in attending to the cultivation of the mind, examining into the natural and political rights of nations, and emancipating themselves from those shackles of despotism which have so long impeded the happiness of the human species, and rendered the rights of the many subservient to the interests of the few.

"At this time, when new Republics are forming and new Empires bursting into birth; when the great family of mankind are evidently making their egress from the dark shadows of despotism which have so long enveloped them, & are assuming a character suitable to the dignity of their species, the Editor seizes the opportunity to renew his efforts for contributing, in some small degree, to the

general information of his fellow citizens in the present history and politics of the world. No pains shall be spared, on his part, to procure the best, the most authentic, and earliest intelligence from every quarter, and circulating it by every method and means in his power; and to whatever parts his subscription will enable him to do it.

"When it is considered that few Advertisements are reasonably to be expected in these more eastern parts of New-Jersey, the terms of subscription will appear low, and, it may be added, are within the power of almost every man who has the will and inclination to encourage literature, promote the interests, or enlarge the ideas of the rising generation, and contribute to the general diffusion of knowledge among his fellow citizens.

"Should the publication of *The Jersey Chronicle* be suitably encouraged, the Editor will in due time enlarge the size of the sheet; but that now published on is, in his opinion, every way adequate to an experiment whether the attempt be practicable or not."

Freneau's essays contributed to the *Chronicle* are among the most notable prose productions from his pen. He began a series of studies "On Monarchial and Mixed Forms of Government;" he wrote "Observations on Monarchy," and discussed at length the leading arguments for and against Jay's Treaty with England. On May 23d he began to publish a series of papers entitled "Tomo Cheeki, the Creek Indian in Philadelphia," in which the manners and absurdities of the Americans are described from the standpoint of an observant savage. In nearly every issue of the



paper there was an elaborate essay on some political subject. Of poetry there was very little. The *National Gazette* had contained little poetry from the editor's pen, save earlier verses reprinted, and a few political satires and republican lyrics. The influence of Peter Pindar was becoming more and more manifest in the poet's style. Politics and party strife had for a time displaced the muse. This is nowhere more evident than in the collected edition of his poems printed on his own press and issued in June, 1795.

In many respects this is the most interesting of Freneau's collections: it brings us into the very presence of the poet. The earlier editions had been published without his supervision, the material for this one passed all of it under the author's critical eye. Scarcely a poem escaped revision. After noting the scrupulous care with which he changed adjectives, improved rhymes, added new stanzas, or cut out old ones, repunctuated sentences, and rearranged material, one cannot join the somewhat large band of hasty and superficial critics who allude flippantly to the poet as a hasty and careless improviser of ephemeral trash. As a matter of fact, Freneau was a miser with his verses. When a newspaper poem suspected to be his, especially in the period previous to 1795, cannot be found in any of his collections, grave doubts at once arise as to whether the poem is his. He was never tired of revising, and cutting, and pruning. The poems so carefully edited in 1795 were again carefully revised in 1809. As an instance of his concern for the fate of his poems let me quote a letter, written August 29, 1781, to Matthew Carey:

"I see by this day's paper that my verses on General Washington's arrival, etc., are to appear in your next *Museum*. If it is not too late, I would request the favour of you to rectify an error (which was entirely of the press) in the fifth line of the thirteenth stanza, as it materially affects the sense. Instead of 'whom' please to read 'who.'"

The 1795 edition is interesting from another standpoint. The resources of the little country office were taxed to the utmost in the production of the book. At best it is a crude piece of printing. There is manifest everywhere an effort to keep the work within bounds, to economize space. Titles are abbreviated, mottoes dropped, foot notes cut out, and many earlier poems reduced, or omitted entirely. The list of omissions is very suggestive: scenes one and two were cut from the "Pictures of Columbus," the long song of Ismenius was dropped from "The Monument of Phaon," "The Jamaica Funeral," and "The House of Night" were reduced to mere fragments, "Female Frailty" was dropped save for the opening lyric, and there were other notable changes. In every case it will be found that the poet threw overboard the light and imaginative element, the purely poetic.

The reason for these omissions has been often sought. Prof. C. F. Richardson in particular has wondered at the dropping of the intensely original and weirdly strong poem "The House of Night," – in his opinion the best thing Freneau ever did. It is not difficult to answer the question after a careful study of the evolution of Freneau's poetic ideals. He began to write poetry

after a thorough course of reading in the Latin and English classics. His early work is redolent of Virgil's "Eclogues," of Horace, of Shakespeare, of Milton's minor poems, of Gray's "Elegy." If ever there was a sensitive, beauty-loving, poetic soul, the young Freneau was one. In his early inexperience he even dreamed of a poetic career in which he might perhaps win a place beside the great masters of song. His early work like the "Ode to Fancy," and similar pieces, and the strong and original "House of Night" and "Santa Cruz" show what he might have done in another environment.

But Revolutionary America had little encouragement for an imaginative poet. There was something in the air that seemed to put into men the Franklin spirit. It was the era of common-sense, of stern reality, of practical affairs. Madison voiced the age when in 1774 he advised Bradford, the cultured and imaginative young lover of poetry and all art, to turn to sterner things:

"I was afraid you would not easily have loosened your affections from the Belles Lettres. A Delicate Taste and warm imagination like yours must find it hard to give up such refined & exquisite enjoyments for the coarse and dry study of the Law. It is like leaving a pleasant flourishing field for a barren desert; perhaps I should not say barren either because the Law does bear fruit but it is sour fruit that must be gathered and pressed and distilled before it can bring pleasure or profit... I myself use to have too great a hankering after those amusing studies. Poetry wit and Criticism Romances Plays &c. captivated me much: but I

begin to discover that they deserve but a moderate portion of a *mortal's* Time and that something more substantial more durable more profitable befits our riper age. It would be exceeding improper for a labouring man to have nothing but flowers in his Garden or to determine to eat nothing but sweet-meats and confections. Equally absurd would it be for a Scholar and man of Business to make up his whole Library with Books of Fancy and feed his mind with nothing but such Luscious performances."<sup>15</sup>

The first half of Freneau's life, as we have seen, was one of disillusion. It took twenty-five years to kill the spark in his breast, but the process though slow was sure. After the fierce period of the *National Gazette* he thought of himself only as a worker in the tide of practical affairs, a champion of the rights of man, a protestor against tyranny and wrong, and his muse had become a mere drudge, aiding by satire and song what he now conceived to be his life work. He had taken a deliberate though sorrowful leave of his early muse in 1787, one year after the appearance of his first volume of poems:

"On these bleak climes by fortune thrown  
Where rigid Reason reigns alone,  
Where flowery Fancy holds no sway  
Nor golden forms around her play,  
Nor Nature takes her magic hue,  
Alas what has the muse to do!

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<sup>15</sup> Wallace Papers, vol. i. Pa. Hist. Soc.

An age employed in painting steel  
Can no poetic raptures feel;  
No fabled Love's enchanting power  
No tale of Flora's shady bower.  
Nor wood-land haunt, or murmuring grove  
Can its prosaic bosom move.  
The muse of love in no request,  
I'll try my fortune with the rest;  
Which of the nine shall I engage  
To suit the humor of the age?  
On one, alas, my choice must fall,  
The least engaging of them all!  
Her visage stern, severe her style,  
A clouded brow, a cruel smile,  
A mind on murdered victims placed,  
She, only she, can please the taste."

One cannot read long the columns of the *Jersey Chronicle* without realizing forcibly the change that had come over Freneau. The poet who emerged from the crucible of the *National Gazette* was not at all like the poet of "The House of Night" period. He could look upon this product of his early imagination much as Madison would have done, and he could in cold blood cut it down to a mere fragment which would voice his new French Deistic ideas, that he might have room for his Republican songs. The poem "To the Americans of the United States," written in 1797, gives us a true picture of this later Freneau. He would be no courtly singer "beneath some great

man's ceiling placed," no solitary dreamer. He would be a man of action travelling over lands and seas, a poet who caught his subjects from the varying scene of human things.

"To seize some *features* from the faithless past;  
Be this our care – before the century close:  
The colours strong! for, if we deem aright,  
The *coming age will be an age of prose*:  
When *sordid cares* will break the muses' dream,  
And common sense be ranked in seat supreme."

With the fifty-second number of the *Chronicle*, published April 30, 1796, the paper came to an end. Freneau's final editorial stated that:

"In number one of the Jersey Chronicle the editor announced his intention of extending the publication beyond the first year, provided the attempt should in the meantime be suitably encouraged and found practicable. But the necessary number of subscribers having not yet appeared, scarcely to defray the expenses of the undertaking, notwithstanding the very low rate at which it has been offered, the editor with some regret declines a further prosecution of his plan at this time. He embraces the present opportunity to return his sincere thanks to such persons in this and the neighboring counties as have favored him with their subscriptions; and have also by their punctuality in complying with the terms originally proposed, thus far enabled him to issue a free, independent,

and republican paper."

A letter<sup>16</sup> written by Freneau from New York, to Madison, dated December 1, 1796, reveals what was in the poet's mind during the months following the abandonment of the *Chronicle*:

"Having three or four months since formed a resolution to bid adieu for a few years to some old Trees in Jersey under the shade of which I edited, amongst ditching and grubbing, a small weekly Paper entitled the Jersey Chronicle, I did not know how to employ that interval better than in striking out here with some printer, if such could be found, already engaged in supporting the good old Republican cause. After experiencing one or two disappointments in accomplishing this object, I am now through the kind aid of some friends here nearly completing the project of a copartnership with Thomas Greenleaf in his two Papers, *The Argus*, a daily publication, and the New York Journal, twice a week; both on a pretty respectable footing, and noted for a steady attachment to Republican principles, though open to all decent speculations from any party if they choose to transmit them. In short, I would wish to revive something in the spirit of the National Gazette, if time and circumstances allow, and with proper assistance hope to succeed – Thus,

A Raven once an acorn took  
From Bashan's strongest stoutest tree;  
He hid it near a murmuring brook,

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<sup>16</sup> Madison Papers, vol. xxi, p. 70.

And liv'd another oak to see.

As I consider the bargain the same as concluded, my next object is to make all the friends here that I decently can among men of eminence and ability. This I have in some small degree attempted and gained, but for want of certain insinuating qualities, natural enough I suppose to some men, I feel myself sadly at a loss to get acquainted with some characters here to whom I could wish to be known upon motives of public as well as private utility.

"Among these is the chancellor of this State, Robert R. Livingston, with whom, if I recollect right, you are upon terms of intimacy. If I am not mistaken in this point, and you can with propriety accede to my request, you would confer a favor upon me by mentioning me to him in your next Letter, in such manner as you may think best, so that this new connexion may attract some share of his attention, and thereby the countenance of the Livingston family in general, which would operate greatly, through this State at least, in advancing our Subscription and printing Interest in general."

The partnership with Greenleaf, mentioned to Madison, for some reason was never consummated. On March 13, 1797, however, Freneau issued in New York the first number of a new journal, *The Time Piece and Literary Companion*, to be devoted to "literary amusement and an abridgement of the most interesting intelligence foreign and domestic." He "associated himself," as he expressed it, "as a partner in the typographical



line of business with Mr. Alexander Menut of that profession, sometime since from Canada," though, during the first year at least, Freneau had entire control of the editing of the paper. His address to the public is of considerable interest:

"Several months having elapsed since the publication of a periodical paper in this city was first contemplated by the subscriber, he now informs his friends and the public in general that he has at length so far matured his plan as to attempt a paper of this kind to be published three times a week and transmitted to city subscribers early on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings.

"The *Time Piece and Literary Companion* will on all occasions be open to political, moral, or other interesting discussion from any quarter whatever provided such communications are written with candor, decency, and liberality, their object such as to promote the general good of our great Confederate Commonwealth, or the common interest of man, and conceived in that disinterested spirit which while it carefully avoids as far as possible irritating the feelings of individuals, holds itself obligated under any circumstances whatever to consider truth, the moral and political happiness of our species, social harmony, and good order, the basis of all its exertions, the end of all its aims, views and endeavors."

The paper is a tastily arranged and neatly printed sheet, and its contents show constantly its editor's rare ability to cater to the public needs. Refinement and a fastidious taste

are evidenced everywhere in its columns. Duyckinck comments on "the skill of the selection and the general elegance of the material," which were certainly unusual in those early days of American journalism. The paper had a large number of feminine contributors, who gave freely of their sentimental lyrics and sprightly letters. The poet himself contributed many poems, the most of them, as usual, concerned with contemporary affairs. He republished his translation from the Abbé Robin made in 1783 since, as he declared, only a small edition was then printed, and the work was in the hands of a very few. He republished also his "Tomo Cheeki" letters, introducing them thus:

"A number of eccentric writings under the subsequent title and to the amount of a considerable volume are in the hands of the editor of the Time Piece said to be translated from one of the Indian languages of this country. They were transmitted to him more than two years ago and a few numbers published in a gazette edited by him in a neighboring State, but discontinued with that paper. If the contributions of a rude aboriginal of America shall appear to afford any gratification to the generality of our readers the whole will be occasionally offered to the public through the medium of the Time Piece."

His pen was constantly active. He wrote vigorous editorials on all passing political measures, and on September 1, 1897, proposed to edit Ledyard's Journals:

"The subscriber having procured from the hands of his

relatives the original MSS. of Mr. Ledyard now offers to the public of the United States an opportunity of gratifying their curiosity and at the same time paying a token of respect to the memory of Ledyard. Ledyard's travels will be compiled by P. Freneau from the original MSS. of the author, consisting of letters, journals, notes, etc., etc., and such documents as have appeared in print, both in America and Europe, particularly a work published by the British African Society, in whose service, with a view of exploring the interior of Africa, his last expedition was undertaken and terminated in his death at Cairo, in Egypt.

"One vol. at least 250 pages

"A life of the author collected from authentic materials will be prefixed to the work, with some other preliminary matter."

Freneau evidently made some progress with the work, for on August 30, 1798, the following advertisement appeared in the *Time Piece*, as well as in the *Charleston City Gazette*:

"The interesting travels of John Ledyard, with a summary of his life, are now in the hands of the printer.

"It shall be printed on fine paper with new type ornamented with a full length portrait of the author in the attitude of taking leave on his departure for Africa. Page octavo, handsomely bound and lettered. Calculated to contain between 400 and 500 pages. \$2 per volume."

The volume, whether from a failure to secure subscribers or other reasons, was never published.

The partnership of Freneau and Menut was dissolved September 13, 1797, and shortly after, the imprint of the paper was changed to read "Published by P. Freneau and M. L. Davis, No. 26 Moore Street, near Whitehall." On January 3, 1798, Freneau made a visit to Charleston, taking passage in the sloop *Katy*, and arriving after a rough voyage of thirty-one days. During the following month he was the guest of his brother, Peter, and in the words of his daughter, of "his many friends there, among whom were Charles Pinckney, Governor of South Carolina, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, General Bull, Edge, and many others where he was as much at home as at his brother's." He embarked from Charleston March 7th and arrived in New York after a week's voyage.

The affairs of the *Time Piece* were in a critical condition. A part of the subscribers lived at a distance from New York and the expenses were large. Freneau was unwilling to run further risks, and a few days after his return from the South, he withdrew from the firm, having been editor of the paper just one year. He thereupon retired with his family to the little estate at Mount Pleasant, where he made his home for the rest of his life.

## VI

The quiet period after the anxiety and stress of editorship in a great city was for a time grateful to the poet. He managed the farm in a desultory way, but his main occupation was composing

verses under his favorite locust tree which had been planted by his father and which had increased in size and numbers until in the words of his daughter, "it was a complete grove of locust trees surrounding a house grown old with its time worn owner, his venerable mother and maiden sister beloved and respected for her many virtues. Her decease, which took place a few years previous to his own, he says in an obituary, he can say no more nor less than that 'she was as good and innocent as an angel.'" This sister, Mary Freneau, a beautiful woman, had been wooed at one time by Madison, but for some reason she had refused him.

Freneau's family consisted of four daughters: Eleanor, born in 1791; Agnes W., born June 22, 1794; Catherine L., born February 25, 1798; and Margaret Alaire, born June 10, 1801. Eleanor married a Mr. Hammill, and the four daughters of this union died unmarried; Agnes married Dr. Edward Leadbeater, and the eldest son of this union, at the earnest request of the poet, was christened Philip Leadbeater Freneau, his grandfather putting into his infant hands the ancestral Bible, which was the family treasure. The descendants of Agnes Freneau and Dr. Leadbeater are very numerous. The two younger daughters of the poet never married.

The active pen of Freneau, so long practiced in discussing the affairs of the day, could not rest idle during his period of retirement. He began a series of letters to the Philadelphia *Aurora* and other papers, and on December 30, 1799, issued them in a volume entitled "Letters on Various Interesting

and Important Subjects, many of which have appeared in the Aurora." It bore his old pen name, Robert Slender, with the added title, O. S. M., interpreted later to mean "One of the Swinish Multitude." The book has surprising merit. The letters are written in a breezy, colloquial style, and the simple-minded old cobbler is well characterized. Freneau has actually succeeded in making him a living creature, and his opinions and "whim whams" are full of hard sense and practical wisdom. The book is by all means the best prose that Freneau ever wrote. So easy is the style and so natural is the characterization that I cannot forbear quoting at some length from a chapter chosen almost at random:

## LETTER XXII

Mr. Editor,

Having heard that there was a tavern at about the distance of a mile or so from my favourite country spot, where now and then a few neighbours meet to spit, smoke segars, drink apple whiskey, cider or cider-royal, and read the news – a few evenings ago, I put on my best coat, combed out my wig, put my spectacles in my pocket, and a quarter dollar – This I thought was right; for although Mrs. Slender told me elevenpence was enough, says I, I'll e'en take the quarter dollar, for a man always feels himself of more consequence when he has got good money in his pocket – so out I walks with a good stout stick in my hand, which I always make a point to carry with me, lest the dogs should make rather freer with

my legs than I could wish. But I had not gone more than half the way, when, by making a false step, I splash'd my stocking from knee to the ankle. Odds my heart, said I, see what a hand I have made of my stocking; I'll be bail, added I, I'll hear of this in both sides of my head – but it can't now be helped – this, and a thousand worse accidents, which daily happen, are all occasioned by public neglect, and the misapplication of the public's money – Had I, said I, (talking to myself all the while) the disposal of but half the income of the United States, I could at least so order matters, that a man might walk to his next neighbour's without splashing his stockings or being in danger of breaking his legs in ruts, holes, gutts, and gullies. I do not know, says I to myself, as I moralized on my splash'd stocking, but money might with more profit be laid out in repairing the roads, than in marine establishments, supporting a standing army, useless embassies, exorbitant salaries, given to many flashy fellows that are no honour to us, or to themselves, and chartering whole ships to carry a single man to another nation – Odds my life, continued I, what a number of difficulties a man labours under, who has never read further than Lilly's grammar, and has but a poor brain – had I been favoured with a good education, I could no doubt readily see the *great usefulness* of all these measures of government, that now appear to me so unaccountable – I could then, said I, still talking to myself, see the reason why the old patriots, whose blood flowed so freely in purchasing our independence, are cast aside, like a broken pitcher, (as the scripture says) and why the old tories and active refugees are advanced to

places of power, honour and trust – I could then be able to explain why Robbins, an American citizen, for killing an Englishman who held him a slave, and so gaining his liberty, was delivered to the English to be hanged – and Sterret, who killed a veteran sailor, who had formerly fought and bled in the cause of his country, and then was bravely doing his duty, yet, remains unpunished. . . As I said this, by accident I looked up, and perceived to my surprise, that if I had gone but one step further, I would have actually knocked my nose against the sign-post – I declare, said I, here I am, this is a tavern indeed. I then felt in my pocket, if I had my quarter dollar, which to my joy I found – I then unbuttoned my coat, to shew my silk waistcoat, pulled my watch chain a good piece longer out of my pocket, fixed my hat a little better on my head – and then advanced boldly into the tavern – But I see I am got to the end of my page, and therefore must defer the remainder of my adventure to another opportunity."

In the advertisement of the book, the author made the half promise of more letters in the same vein:

"Should these letters meet with a favourable reception in their present form, a second volume will shortly be published, containing besides those that have since appeared separately a variety of original ones upon such interesting subjects as may hereafter claim the public attention."

The volume was never published. The little family at Mount Pleasant could not subsist alone on letters and poems, however



brilliant. The outlook was not a bright one, as the following letter<sup>17</sup> to his brother Peter, in Charleston, dated March 1, 1801, would indicate:

"Having been here [New York] a day or two and finding the brig Echo, Capt. Webb, to sail for Charleston, I take the opportunity of dropping you a line by him.

"I left all well at home last Thursday, and the place, etc., as well as could be expected after my poor mother's absence. I have been and shall be for some time busy in repairing old fences and making new ones, and some other small improvements, as far as I personally can with the money you let me have. Helen goes to school here, the other two girls are at home, but Agnes is to come here next month for the same purpose for awhile. There are more cares and vexations coming on, but still they must be got through with at some rate. Probably I shall have to embark on some new expedition or plan before long wherever or to whatever the devil, etc., shall see fit to drive me. But I shall attempt nothing if I can before I see you here, in April or May, as you promised.

"I return this morning to Jersey. Mr. Hunn, Peggy, Mamma and Polly all desire their love to you. My love and respects to Mrs. Freneau and Miss Dora with her mother and family. Remembrances, love, etc., to Mr. Davis, and may I expect to have a line from you by Capt. Peter."

Freneau was at best a half-hearted farmer. A little anecdote

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<sup>17</sup> In the possession of Adele M. Sweeney.

told by the family is eloquent. One day the poet and his wife, who had walked together into the field to inspect the work, found a slave asleep in the young corn. Mrs. Freneau seizing his hoe declared that she would show him how to work. At the very first attempt, however, she cut down a hill of corn, whereupon the slave remarked gleefully: "Ho, ho, Missie Freneau, if that's the way you hoe, the corn'll never grow." She threw down the hoe in disgust, declaring that "No wonder the farm doesn't pay when even the slaves talk in rhymes."

The affairs of the poet were soon such as to give real concern to his friends. In a letter dated September 13, 1801, a part of which we have already quoted, Aedanus Burke wrote Madison:

"I am sorry to have it to say that Freneau, with his wife and two children, is still in embarrassed circumstances. He is a virtuous, honest man, and an undeviating Republican; yet utterly incapable of soliciting anything for himself. The best apology I can offer for mentioning it, is that I know you have great regard for him. You were at College together, as I heard you often say."

However this letter may have been received, Freneau obtained no appointment either from Madison or Jefferson, though there is a persistent tradition among his descendants that he was offered a good position under President Jefferson but refused it on the ground that the latter had deserted him in the *National Gazette* affair. On October 23, 1803, his old-time friend, Francis Bailey, addressed Madison:

"My dear sir: The death of Col. Bauman of New York has left the Post Office without a Master. I know of no man in the United States who would fill the office with more ability, or greater integrity, than Philip Freneau."

As far as we know, there was no response, though the family declare that Madison sent for him and that the poet proudly said, "James Madison knows where I live, let him come to see me."

The "expedition" to mend his fortunes, which he had mentioned to his brother as a disagreeable possibility, became at length inevitable. On Saturday, November 27th, he embarked at New York as Master of the schooner *John*, bound for Fredericksburg, Virginia, with a cargo of salt. A minute log book of this voyage is still to be seen.<sup>18</sup> After an exceedingly hard experience he returned to New York, January 12, 1803, and the last entry in the log reads "Finished discharging the wheat – 1264 bushels at 17 cents a bushel freight – 214 dollars and 88 cents."

This was the opening voyage of his last period at sea. His brother Peter had fitted out at Charleston a new brig for the Madeira trade, and until 1807 Freneau was busy plying between Charleston and the Azores. In one of his books of navigation is inscribed the following:

"Sailed from Charleston for Maderia with brig Washington, May 12, 1803. Got there June 23. Arrived back at Charleston Aug. 16.

"Sailed in ditto from Charleston Jan. 25, 1804. Arrived

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<sup>18</sup> In the possession of Mrs. Helen K. Vreeland.

in Maderia March 7th following. A hurricane of wind the whole way. April 12, sailed from Funchal Road for Teneriff. Arrived at Santa Cruz the 15th; at Arasava, 22nd. Sailed May 11th. Arrived in Charleston, June 10."

On June 30, 1806, he was in Savannah, Georgia, as Master of the sloop *Industry*. He made his last voyage to the Azores in the *Washington* in 1807. During this last period of sea life we find evidences everywhere that this old enthusiasm for nautical adventure had greatly waned. He was a sailor now from sheer necessity; he was approaching old age and he longed for the quiet of his home and his family. In one of his books of navigation of this period is penned a verse made in mid Atlantic:

"In dreams condemned to roam  
He left his native home  
O'er land and ocean vast and wide  
With oar and sail, with wind and tide,  
Proceeding an imaginary way."

In 1809, Freneau now in retirement at Mount Pleasant, began a new edition of his poems. On April 8, he wrote Madison:<sup>19</sup>

"Sir, – I do myself the pleasure to enclose to you a copy of Proposals for the publication of a couple of Volumes of Poems shortly to be put to the Press in this city. Perhaps some of your particular friends in Virginia may be induced from a view of the Proposals in your hands to subscribe

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<sup>19</sup> Madison Papers, xxxiv, p. 77.

their names. If so, please to have them forwarded to this place by Post, addressed to the Publisher at No. 10 North Alley, Philadelphia. "Accept my congratulations on your late Election to the Presidency of the United States, and my hopes that your weight of State Affairs may receive every alleviation in the gratitude and esteem of the Public whom you serve in your truly honourable and exalted Station."

Madison's reply has been lost, but on May 12th, Freneau answered from Philadelphia:<sup>20</sup>

"Sir, – After a month's ramble through the States of New Jersey and New York, I returned to this place on Saturday last, and found your friendly Letter on Mr. Bailey's table, with the contents. There was no occasion of enclosing any Money, as your name was all I wanted to have placed at the head of the Subscription list. – I hope you will credit me when I say that the republication of these Poems, such as they are, was not a business of my own seeking or forwarding. I found last Winter an Edition would soon be going on at all events, and in contradiction to my wishes, as I had left these old scribblings, to float quietly down the stream of oblivion to their destined element the ocean of forgetfulness. However, I have concluded to remain here this Summer, and have them published in a respectable manner, and free as possible from the blemishes imputable to the two former Editions, over which I had no controul, having given my manuscripts away, and left them to the mercy of chance. – I am endeavouring to make the whole

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<sup>20</sup> Madison Papers, vol. xxxv, p. 17.

work as worthy of the public eye as circumstances will allow. 1500 copies are to be printed, only; but I have a certainty, from the present popular frenzy, that three times that number might soon be disposed of. – I will attend to what you direct on the subject, and will forward the ten you mention by the middle of July or sooner. – I will consider of what you say relative to the insertion of a piece or two in prose, but suspect that anything I have written in that way is so inferior to the Poetry, that the contrast will be injurious to the credit of the Publication. – I feel much in the humour of remaining here about two years, to amuse myself, as well as the Public, with such matter as that of the fat man you refer to, and if the public are in the same humour they shall be gratified. – But I am intruding on your time and will add no more at present. – I had almost said —

"Cum tot sustineas et tanta negotia solus  
Res Italas armis tuteris, moribus ornes  
Legibus emendes, in publica commoda peccem  
Si longo sermone mores<sup>21</sup> tua tempora, Caesar – "

"My best wishes, Sir, will ever await you, and in particular that your Presidential Career may be equally honourable though less stormy than that of your predecessor."

It is evident that Freneau wrote also to Jefferson, for on May

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<sup>21</sup> Morer. Horace, *Epistles*, Lib. ii, lines 1-4.

22, 1809, the latter wrote from Monticello.<sup>22</sup>

"Dear Sir, – I subscribe with pleasure to the publication of your volumes of poems. I anticipate the same pleasure from them which the perusal of those heretofore published has given me. I have not been able to circulate the paper because I have not been from home above once or twice since my return, and because in a country situation like mine, little can be done in that way. The inhabitants of the country are mostly industrious farmers employed in active life and reading little. They rarely buy a book of whose merit they can judge by having it in their hand, and are less disposed to engage for those yet unknown to them. I am becoming like them myself in a preference of the healthy and cheerful employment without doors, to the being immured within four brick walls. But under the shade of a tree one of your volumes will be a pleasant pocket companion.

"Wishing you all possible success and happiness, I salute you with constant esteem and respect."

The reply to Freneau's second letter to Jefferson has also been lost, but Freneau's letter dated Philadelphia, May 27th, has escaped destruction:<sup>23</sup>

"Sir, – Yesterday your Letter, dated May 22d came to hand. – Perhaps you a little misunderstood me, when I wrote to you from this place in April last, inclosing the Proposal

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<sup>22</sup> Jefferson Papers, series 2, vol. 34, p. 135.

<sup>23</sup> Jefferson Papers, series 2, vol. 34, p. 134.

Paper, respecting the Poems. – I only wished your name to be placed at the head of the list, and did not wish you to be at the pains of collecting Subscriptions, further than as any of your neighbours might choose to put down their names – Indeed, the whole Subscription plan was Set a going without my knowledge or approbation, last Winter. But as I found the matter had gone too far to be recalled, I thought it best to submit, in the present Edition, to the course and order of things as they are and must be. – Sir, if there be anything like happiness in this our State of existence, it will be such to me, when these two little Volumes reach you in August ensuing, if the sentiments in them under the poetical Veil, amuse you but for a single hour. – This is the first Edition that I have in reality attended to, the other two having been published, in a strange way, while I was wandering over gloomy Seas, until *embargoed* by the necessity of the times, and now again, I fear, I am reverting to the folly of scribbling Verses.

"That your shades of Monticello may afford you complete happiness is the wish and hope of all the worthy part of Mankind, and my own in particular. In such the philosophers of antiquity preferred to pass life, or if that was not allowed, their declining days.

"Will you be so good as to read the inclosed Verses? They were published early in March last in the Trenton True American Newspaper, and in the Public Advertiser, of New York."



On August 7, 1809, Freneau wrote finally to Madison:<sup>24</sup>

"Sir, – The two Volumes of Poems that in April last I engaged to have published, are finished, and will be ready for delivery in two or three days. The ten Setts you subscribed for I am rather at a loss how to have safely transmitted to you at your residence in Virginia, where I find by the Newspapers, you mean to Continue until the end of September. Will you on receipt of this, send me a line or two, informing me whether you would prefer having the Books put into the hands of some Confidential person here, to be sent or; that they be sent to the Post Office at Washington; or that they be forwarded directly to yourself in Orange County. The precise direction is not in my power."

The 1809 collection is the most elaborate of all the earlier editions of Freneau's works. His statement that it was the only one which received his personal supervision is certainly wrong, for he had carefully supervised the 1795 edition. On the title page he announced that the poems were "now republished from the original manuscripts," and that he had added several "translations from the ancients and other pieces not heretofore in print," but the new poems that had not previously appeared in the *Time Piece* were very few. On the title page also he placed the stanza:

"Justly to record the deeds of fame,  
A muse from heaven should touch the soul with flame;

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<sup>24</sup> Madison Papers, vol. liv, p. 49.

Some powerful spirit in superior lays  
Should tell the conflicts of the stormy days."

The poet's advertisement is as follows:

"The Poems, included in these two volumes, were originally written between the years 1768 and 1793; and were partly published in the transient prints of the times, and afterwards collected into two editions of 1786 and 1795. The present is a revision of the whole, and now published agreeable to the terms of the subscription issued in this city, in April last. Such, perhaps, as are not attracted by mere novelty or amusement, will attend more particularly to the Poems originating from the temporary events of the American war. These Poems were intended, in part to expose to vice and treason, their own hideous deformity; to depict virtue, honour and patriotism in their native beauty. Such (says a most distinguished foreign author) was the intention of poetry from the beginning, and here her purpose should end. Whether the following verses have any real claim to the attention of the citizens of the American United States, who may honour them with a reading, is left for the Public to decide.

"To his Countrymen, the real *Patriotic Americans*, the *Revolutionary Republicans*, and the rising generation who are attached to their sentiments and principles, the writer hopes this collection will not prove unacceptable. A more complete edition might have been published, so as to include a great number of miscellaneous Poems and animadversions on public events down to the present year,

1809; but it has been judged most proper, to restrict what is now printed to the date of 1793; with the exception of only a very few pieces of later composition which have been retained, and inserted in the body of the work, but not so as to materially interrupt the general tenor of the Poems that arose from the incidents of the American revolutionary contest.

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