

STORIES of New Jersey

preserved among the papers of William Bradford, later the attorney general, who gives the Whig Society credit for winning the literary war. Bradford, however, was one of the founders of that organization.

The patriotic fervor of the students at Princeton was stimulated by President Witherspoon, whose students often expressed their desire for freedom from tyranny. At the commencement of 1770, for example, all those in the graduating class wore clothes made in America. Many of Freneau's college mates were to attain prominence in the new country. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Philip's best friend, became a judge; Brockholst Livingston was appointed a Supreme Court justice; Aaron Burr was afterward the Vice President; and James Madison, who, some say, was Freneau's roommate, was elected fourth President of the United States.

Commencement exercises were long in those days, and the Class of 1771 was not stinted. Half the program was given in the morning. At three in the afternoon, after a program of singing by the students, Philip Freneau took part in a debate, arguing that ancient poetry surpassed the modern. As the applause died, a young man rose and approached the speaker's stand. The audience, glancing at their programs, saw that Hugh Brackenridge was about to read his commencement ode, *The Rising Glory of America*. The poetry was prophetic:

...I see
A thousand Kingdoms raised, cities and men
Numerous as sands upon the ocean shore.
The Ohio then shall glide by many a town
Of note; and where the Mississippi stream
By forest shaded, now runs weeping on,
Nations shall grow, and states not less in fame
Than Greece and Rome of old!

Few, if any, in the audience knew that Brackenridge was not alone responsible for the long poem. Philip Freneau had written the lines envisioning great cities where a wilderness then stood. And yet a few minutes before this modern poet had acclaimed the superiority of the poetry of Greece and Rome. The verse that Philip Freneau had contributed to the ode "flowed spontaneously," Brackenridge said later. This song of the glory of America was the keynote of Freneau's lifelong poetic efforts, but in this first instance of its expression he sat quietly and heard another speak his thoughts.

For a time after leaving Princeton he tried teaching, but he was not suited to that profession. In the early summer of 1775 Freneau was in New York turning out satiric verse supporting the cause of American independence. By November he had published eight long poems, most of them stinging attacks on the British, and worthy of the long hours Freneau had spent in studying the ancient masters of satire. Written for the moment, none of these poems lived much longer than the people they assailed, but their sincerity and daring helped prepare the ground for the Declaration of Independence and the Revolution.

The poems were very popular, but approval was not unanimous. A critic, perhaps a jealous competitor, attacked the verses, and Freneau answered with the satire, *MacSwiggen*. But he was deeply wounded by the criticism and felt that America did not offer a poet proper encouragement.

That winter he made the first of the sea voyages which were to occupy him intermittently for most of his life. He accepted the offer of a position from