

STORIES of New Jersey

ole by Captain Hawkes of the British ship, he was aghast when he was sent with the others to the prison ship *Scorpion* on June 1.

Flung into the hold of the *Scorpion*, a ship as poisonous as its name, Philip was almost suffocated by the heat and stench. The prisoners were treated brutally. A report at midnight of the 3rd that the ship was sinking threw the hold into a frenzy, and the men stormed the hatchways only to be beaten back by the swords of their captors. The next night 35 of the men rushed to the deck, overwhelmed the sentries and escaped in a ship that was anchored near by. The remaining prisoners, including Freneau, stayed quietly below decks, and the sentries regained control of the vessel without difficulty. Then, standing at each hatchway, the British shot at random into the hold, certain that they could hit at least some of the men crowded together in the blackness. Freneau luckily escaped injury.

The poet was kept on the *Scorpion* until June 22, when he was taken with fever and sent to the hospital ship *Hunter*, which was "miserably dirty and cluttered," and so rotten that the sick prisoners were "deluged with every shower of rain." He had to endure the miseries of his illness and the discomforts of the ship until he was released at Elizabeth Town Point (Elizabeth Port) July 13. Fever was still raging in his stiff, sore body as he trudged homeward. For part of the way he was successful in getting a ride on a wagon, but much of the distance he walked. Nearing his house, he took a roundabout way through the woods because he feared that his "ghastly looks" would terrify the neighbors.

He described the experience in *The British Prison Ship*, which tells the whole story of the capture of the *Aurora* and the miseries endured by the wretched prisoners who found "That Death was better than the prisoner's fate." With all the hate and invective of his earlier poems, intensified by the brutalities which he had undergone, he cursed the

Foes to the rights of freedom and of men,
Flush'd with the blood of thousands you have slain,
To the just doom the righteous skies decree
We leave you, toiling still in cruelty,
Or on dark plans in future herds to meet,
Plans form'd in hell, and projects half complete:
The years approach that shall to ruin bring
Your lords, your chiefs, your miscreant of a king
Whose murderous acts shall stamp his name accur'd,
And his last triumphs more than damn the first.

After he had recovered from his illness, he went to Philadelphia to take a position in the post office. While in Philadelphia he contributed to the *Freeman's Journal* and encouraged the Continental troops and the people with a series of timely poems celebrating American victories, hailing British defeats and castigating traitors to the cause of liberty and democracy. These years were, according to Fred Lewis Pattee, the literary historian, "his most prolific and spontaneous period." Several poems were written about Cornwallis, the

...great destroyer (equalled yet by none)
Of countries not your master's nor your own.

Some of the others during this period were: *To the Memory of the Brave Americans*, a eulogy of those who had died at the battle of Eutaw Springs; *Arnold's Departure*, wishfully describing the disasters that would befall "the ill-fated barque that worthless Arnold bears..."; *On Sir Henry Clinton's Recall*; and *A Picture of the Times*, which was written in Freneau's most savage mood:

Of all the plagues that e'er the world have curs'd
Name George, the tyrant, and you name the worst!