

# THE PORT FOLIO.

VOL. XIX.

FROM JANUARY TO JULY,

1825.

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EDITED BY  
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VARIOUS; that the mind  
Of desultory man, studious of change,  
And pleased with novelty, may be indulged.—COWPER.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
PUBLISHED BY HARRISON HALL,  
*No. 64, South Fourth Street.*  
1825.

and of conviviality; he was ardent in his friendships, but inconstant; and, however generally fond of his friends, more apt to be heartily weary of them, than people usually are.

No more epithets need be heaped together; all that men have in general, he had in more than ordinary force; some of the qualities which men rarely have, he possessed to a splendid degree of perfection.

Such is *the PERSONAL character of Lord Byron*, as I have been able to draw it from having had access to peculiar sources of information, and from being placed in a situation best calculated, as I think, to form an impartial opinion.

R. N.

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FOR THE PORT FOLIO.

LETTERS FROM THE WEST.

No. XIV.

*The Missouri Trapper.*

THE varied fortunes of those who bear the above cognomen, whatever may be their virtues or demerits, must, upon the common principles of humanity, claim our sympathy, while they cannot fail to awaken admiration. The hardships voluntarily encountered, and the privations manfully endured, by this hardy race in the exercise of their perilous calling, present abundant proofs of those peculiar characteristics which distinguish the American woodsmen. The trackless deserts of Missouri, the innumerable tributary streams of the Mississippi, the fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains, have all been explored by these bold adventurers; and the great and increasing importance of the Missouri fur trade, is an evidence, as well of their numbers, as of their skill and perseverance.

The ingenious author of *Robinson Crusoe*, has shown, by an agreeable fiction, that man may exist in a desert, without the society or aid of his fellow creatures, and unassisted by those contrivances of art which are deemed indispensable in a state of civilized society; that nature will supply all his absolute wants, and that his own ingenuity will suggest ways and means of living which are not dreamt of in the philoso-

phy of polished circles. That which the novelist deemed barely possible, and which a large portion of his readers have always considered as marvellously incredible, is now daily and hourly reduced to practice in our western forests. Here may be found many a Crusoe clad in skins, and contentedly keeping "bachelor's hall" in the wild woods, unblest by the smile of beauty, uncheered by the voice of humanity—without even a "man Friday" for company, and ignorant of the busy world, its cares, its pleasures, or its comforts.

But the solitary wight whose cabin is pitched in the deepest recess of the forest, whose gun supplies his table, and whose dog is his only comrade, enjoys ease and comfort, in comparison with the trapper whose erratic steps lead him continually into new toils and dangers. Being compelled to procure his subsistence by very precarious means from day to day, in those immense regions of wilderness into which he fearlessly penetrates, he is sometimes known to live for a considerable period upon food over which the hungry wolf would pause for a polite interval before carving. The ordinary food of a trapper is corn and buffaloe-tallow, and although his rifle frequently procures more dainty viands, he is often, on the other hand, forced to devour his peltry, and gnaw his mocasins.

An old man arrived at Fort Atkinson in June last, from the upper Missouri, who was instantly recognized by some of the officers of the garrison, as an individual supposed some time since to have been devoured by a white bear, but more recently reported to have been slain by the Arickara Indians. His name is Hugh Glass. Whether old Ireland, or Scotch-Irish Pennsylvania, claims the honour of his nativity, I have not ascertained with precision, nor do I suppose that the humble fortunes of the hardy adventurer will excite a rivalry on the subject similar to that respecting the birth-place of Homer. The following is his own account of himself for the last ten months of his perilous career:

He was employed by Major Henry as a *trapper*, and was attached to his command before the Arickara towns. After the flight of these Indians, the major and his party set out for the Yellow-Stone River. Their route lay up the Grand River, and through a prairie country, occasionally interspersed with thickets of brush-wood, dwarf-plum trees, and

other shrubs, indigenous to a sandy barren soil. As these adventurers usually draw their food, as well as their raiment, from Nature's spacious warehouse, it is usual for one or two hunters to precede the party in search of game, that the whole may not be forced, at night, to lie down supperless. The rifle of Hugh Glass being esteemed as among the most unerring, he was on one occasion detached for supplies. He was a short distance in advance of the party, and forcing his way through a thicket, when a white bear that had imbedded herself in the sand, arose within three yards of him, and before he could "set his triggers," or turn to retreat, he was seized by the throat, and raised from the ground. Casting him again upon the earth, his grim adversary tore out a mouthful of the cannibal food which had excited her appetite, and retired to submit the sample to her yearling cubs, which were near at hand. The sufferer now made an effort to escape, but the bear immediately returned with a reinforcement, and seized him again at the shoulder; she also lacerated his left arm very much, and inflicted a severe wound on the back of his head. In this second attack, the cubs were prevented from participating by one of the party who had rushed forward to the relief of his comrade. One of the cubs, however, forced the new-comer to retreat into the river, where, standing to the middle in water, he gave his foe a mortal shot, or to use his own language—"I burst the varment." Meantime, the main body of trappers having arrived, advanced to the relief of Glass, and delivered seven or eight shots with such unerring aim as to terminate hostilities, by despatching the bear as she stood over her victim.

Glass was thus snatched from the grasp of the ferocious animal, yet his condition was far from being enviable. He had received several dangerous wounds, his whole body was bruised and mangled, and he lay weltering in his blood, in exquisite torment. To procure surgical aid, now so desirable, was impossible; and to remove the sufferer was equally so. The safety of the whole party—being now in the country of hostile Indians—depended on the celerity of their movements. To remove the lacerated and helpless Glass, seemed certain death to him—and to the rest of the party such a measure would have been fraught with danger. Under these circumstances, Major Henry, by offering an extravagant reward, induced two of his party to remain with the wounded man

until he should expire, or until he could so far recover as to bear removal to some of the trading establishments in that country. They remained with their patient five days, and supposing his recovery no longer possible, they cruelly abandoned him, taking with them his rifle, shot-pouch, &c. and leaving him no means of either making fire or procuring food. These unprincipled wretches proceeded on the trail of their employer; and when they overtook him, reported that Glass had died of his wounds, and that they had interred him in the best manner possible. They produced his effects in confirmation of their assertions, and readily obtained credence.

Meanwhile poor Glass, retaining a slight hold upon life, when he found himself abandoned, crawled with great difficulty to a spring which was within a few yards, where he lay ten days. During this period he subsisted upon cherries that hung over the spring, and *grains des bœufs*, or buffaloberries, that were within his reach. Acquiring, by slow degrees, a little strength, he now set off for Fort Kiawa, a trading establishment on the Missouri River, about three hundred and fifty miles distant. It required no ordinary portion of fortitude to crawl to the end of such a journey through a hostile country, without fire-arms, with scarcely strength to drag one limb after another, and with almost no other subsistence than wild berries. He had, however, the good fortune one day to be "in at the death of a buffaloe calf" which was overtaken and slain by a pack of wolves. He permitted the assailants to carry on the war until no signs of life remained in their victim, and then interfered and took possession of the "fatted calf;" but as he had no means of striking fire, we may infer that he did not make a very *prodigal* use of the veal thus obtained. With indefatigable industry he continued to crawl until he reached Fort Kiawa.

Before his wounds were entirely healed, the chivalry of Glass was awakened, and he joined a party of five *engagés*, who were bound, in a *piroque*, to Yellow Stone River. The primary object of this voyage was declared to be the recovery of his arms, and vengeance on the recreant who had robbed and abandoned him in his hour of peril. When the party had ascended to within a few miles of the old Mandan village, our trapper, of hair breadth 'scapes, landed for the purpose of proceeding to Tilton's Fort at that place, by a nearer route than that of the river. On the following days, all the

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companions of his voyage were massacred by the Arickara Indians. Approaching the fort with some caution, he observed two squaws whom he recognised as Arickaras, and who, discovering him at the same time, turned and fled. This was the first intelligence which he obtained of the fact, that the Arickaras had taken post at the Mandan village, and he at once perceived the danger of his situation. The squaws were not long in rallying the warriors of the tribe, who immediately commenced the pursuit. Suffering still under the severity of his recent wounds, the poor fugitive made but a feeble essay at flight, and his enemies were within rifle shot of him, when two Mandan mounted warriors rushed forward and seized him. Instead of despatching their prisoner, as he had anticipated, they mounted him on a fleet horse, which they had brought out for that purpose, and carried him into Tilton's Fort without injury.

The same evening, Glass crept out of the fort, and after travelling thirty-eight days, alone, and through the country of hostile Indians, he arrived at Henry's establishment.

Finding that the trapper he was in pursuit of had gone to Fort Atkinson, Glass readily consented to be the bearer of letters for that post, and accordingly left Henry's Fort on the Big Horn River, on the 29th of February, 1824. Four men accompanied him. They travelled across to Powder river, which empties itself into the Yellow Stone, below the mouth of the Horn. They pursued their route up the Powder to its source, and thence across to the Platte. Here they constructed skin boats, and descended in them to the lower end of *Les Cotes Noirs* (the Black Hills) where they discovered thirty-eight lodges of Arickara Indians. This was the encampment of *Gray-eyes'* band. That chief had been killed in the attack of the American troops upon his village, and the tribe was now under the command of *Langue de Biche*, (Elk's Tongue.) This warrior came down and invited our little party ashore, and, by many professions of friendship, induced them to believe him to be sincere. Glass had once resided with this *tonguey* old politician during a long winter, had joined him in the chase, and smoked his pipe, and cracked many a bottle by the genial fire of his wigwam; and when he landed the savage chief embraced him with the cordiality of an old friend. The whites were thrown off their guard and accepted an invitation to smoke in the Indian's lodge.

While engaged in passing the hospitable pipe, a small child was heard to utter a suspicious scream. Glass looked towards the door of the lodge and beheld the squaws of the tribe bearing off the arms and other effects of his party. This was the signal for a general movement;—the guests sprang from their seats and fled with precipitation, pursued by their treacherous entertainers:—the whites ran for life; the red warriors for blood. Two of the party were overtaken and put to death: one of them within a few yards of Glass, who had gained a point of rocks unperceived and lay concealed from the view of his pursuers. Versed in all the arts of border warfare, our adventurer was enabled to practice them in the present crisis, with such success, as to baffle his blood-thirsty enemies; and he remained in his lurking place until the search was abandoned in despair. Breathing once more a free air, he sallied forth under cover of the night, and resumed his line of march towards Fort Kiawa. The buffaloe calves, at that season of the year, were generally but a few days old; and as the country through which he travelled was abundantly stocked with them, he found it no difficult task to overtake one as often as his appetite admonished him to task his speed for that purpose. “Although,” said he, “I had lost my rifle and all my *plunder*, I felt quite rich when I found my knife, flint, and steel, in my shot-pouch. These little fixens,” he added, “make a man feel rich *peart*, when he is three or four hundred miles *from any body or any place*—all alone among the *painters* and wild *varments*.”

A journey of fifteen days brought him to Fort Kiawa. Thence he descended to Fort Atkinson, at the Council Bluffs, where he found his old traitorous acquaintance in the garb of a private soldier. This shielded the delinquent from chastisement. The commanding officer at the post ordered his rifle to be restored; and the veteran trapper was furnished with such other appliances, or *fixens*, as he would term them, as put him in plight again to take the field. This appeased the wrath of Hugh Glass, whom my informant left, astounding, with his wonderful narration, the gaping rank and file of the garrison.