A LITTLE more than a year had passed since the Second Continental Congress, assembled in the City of Philadelphia, had declared the thirteen united colonies free and independent states. As the conflict between Great Britain and her erstwhile colonies developed into a full-scale war, with both sides suffering unexpected reverses, the civilian population in the contested areas had found it increasingly difficult to continue a normal and fairly undisturbed life. Those who as Quakers, Mennonites, Dunkers, Moravians, or Schwenkfelders cherished religious scruples against participation in any military struggle and against the taking of oaths of allegiance were particularly unfortunate. Both loyalists and independents regarded them with disapproval and suspicion. Their numbers were considerable in Pennsylvania, where the legislature had recently demanded that every citizen abjure the king of England as his sovereign and swear allegiance to the independent commonwealth. The unpleasantness of their situation became fully evident when suddenly British forces under Sir William Howe approached Philadelphia from the south, defeated General Washington's army in the Battle of the Brandywine, and on September 25, 1777, began an encampment at Germantown. The next day General Howe's troops occupied what had once been the Quaker "City of Brotherly Love."

Early in October Washington attempted a flanking attack on the enemy's positions at Germantown, but he was repulsed. Nevertheless, the main body of the British was soon withdrawn from that city. When on October 19, 1777, the English retired toward Philadelphia, one of Germantown's most distinguished inhabitants accompanied them. He was Christopher Saur, Jr. (1721-1784), bishop of the Dunkers or German Baptist Brethren. Like his pious, industrious father he was conscientiously opposed to war and slavery. A prolific religious-educational publisher, he printed
two editions of the famous Germantown Bible. His sons, Christopher III and Peter, avowed loyalists in word as well as in deed, were already living in Philadelphia, and he had decided to join them for the time being. An explanation of this unwise move and an account of its tragic consequences are given in a manuscript attributed to Christopher Saur himself and reproduced in Martin Grove Brumbaugh’s *A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America*, which was published in 1899 at Mount Morris, Illinois, by the Brethren Publishing House. The report, as printed on pages 415-419, begins as follows:

Having heard how a number of Quakers were punished and carried away to Virginia, and being informed that there were yet some hundreds of substantial inhabitants on the list to be taken up and secured, amongst which my name also was put down, and as there was already a beginning made and some of the millers on the Wissahickon [Wissahickon Creek, in Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties] were actually taken away from their families, I considered what I would do, knowing Germantown would always be a disturbed place. English and Americans would continually march through it forward and backward, and having three of my children already living in Philadelphia, I bethought myself to go there to live in peace, and accordingly went to Philadelphia on the nineteenth day of October, 1777 (many months before the act was made which forbade to go to Philadelphia). I lived there quietly and peaceably till the second day of May, 1778, when I went back to Germantown, and was in my house that night and the next day till ten o’clock at night, when a strong party of Captain McClean’s Company [probably Captain Allan McLane (1746-1829)] surrounded my house and fetched me out of my bed. It was a dark night. They led me through the Indian corn fields, where I could not come along as fast as they wanted me to go. They frequently struck me in the back with their bayonets till they brought me to Bastian Miller’s barn [above Germantown, in the region now called Mount Airy], where they kept me till next morning. Then they strip’d me naked to the skin and gave me an old shirt and breeches so much torn that I could hardly cover my private parts, then cut my beard and hair, and painted me with oil colors red and black, and so led me along barefooted and bareheaded in a very hot sunshiny day. A friend of mine seeing me in that condition asked them whether they would take the shoes
from me if he would give me a pair. They promised not to take them from me. And so he took the shoes from his feet and the hat from his head and gave them to me. But after we had marched six miles, a soldier came and demanded my shoes and took them, and gave me his old slabs, which wounded my feet very much. On the 26th, at nine o'clock, I arrived at the camp and was sent to the Provo.

My accusation in the Mitimus was an Oppressor of the Righteous and a Spy. On the 27th, in the morning, God moved the heart of the generous General Muhlenberg [John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg (1746-1807), brigadier-general and later major-general in the Continental Army] to come to me and enquire into my affairs, and promised that he would speak to General Washington [George Washington, then commander in chief of the Continental Army] and procure me a hearing, and the next day sent me word that I should make a petition to General Washington, which I did; and, through the good hand of Providence and the faithful assistance of the said General Muhlenberg, I was permitted to go out of the Provo on the 29th day of May; but, as I was not free to take the oath to the States, I was not permitted to go hence to Germantown, as appears by the following pass, viz.:

‘Permit the bearer hereof, Mr. Sower, to pass from hence to Meduchin [Metuchten, Mathetchy, Methatchen, or Methacton, a region about four miles northwest of Norristown, in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania], not to return to Germantown during the stay of the enemy in this State, he behaving as becometh. Given under my hand at the Orderly Office this thirtieth day of May, 1778.’

Nich. Gilman,
Asst. Ad. General.

The second part of the pathetic account, relating in detail the confiscation of Christopher Saur’s property, is likewise printed in what is evidently a revised form. Mr. Brumbaugh states that the text of the document was copied from Saur’s own manuscript in the possession of Mrs. Mary Knauer, daughter of Samuel Sower, of Charlestown, Chester County, Pennsylvania. However, the whereabouts of the Mary Sower Knauer copy are at present unknown, and at least the spelling in the Brumbaugh copy appears to have been modernized.
An entirely different version of what happened to Saur during his brief imprisonment at Valley Forge is given in a manuscript written by Charles Gilbert Sower (1821-1902), a great-grandson of Christopher Saur, Jr. This account is based on information obtained from Abraham H. Cassel (1820-1908), also a great-grandson, who has long been regarded as Pennsylvania's most eminent antiquarian and a competent historian of the Church of the Brethren. The scene of Saur's disrobement and subsequent mocking arrayal is here transferred from Bastian Miller's barn to the American encampment at Valley Forge; the shoe episode is completely missing, but another incident, concerning Saur's "religious garb," is introduced; General Muhlenberg, who is pictured in the Brumbaugh account as a friendly intercessor, becomes a complacent witness of Saur's maltreatment; and Washington, instead of merely receiving a petition from a spy suspect who has previously been investigated and found not guilty by one of his higher officers, is reported to have instantly recognized the bishop-printer and to have restored to him without delay his property and his freedom. Here is the text of Charles Gilbert Sower's interesting record:

Jan. 2 / 57.

Ab. H. Cassel of Harleysville, Montgomery C., called on me and related among other things the following anecdote of Ch. Sower.

When he was taken a prisoner into the American Camp during the revolution, he was taken into the presence of Col. Muhlenberg and other officers who obliged him to take off his suit of plain clothes—gave them to a dying soldier, and obliged Sower to assume the clothing of the latter, sword, plume and all. He begged them not to compel him to retain this suit, but they derided him, and notwithstanding the entreaties of the soldier who said he could not die in peace dressed in the religious garb of a man who acted so contrary to his conduct, they utterly refused to accede to his desires. They had his long beard dyed Red, painted his face like an Indian's, Stuck feathers all over his dress, and subjected him to all Kinds of indignities. Finally, as it happened, Genl. Washington came by, immediately recognized Ch. Sower, and said: Why, Mr. Sower! Is that you? Why do you dress so fantastically? Sower answered: I am just as your people made me. Washington at once ordered his dress to be restored to him, gave him his liberty, and dismissed him from the camp.
I was still wondering about the great differences between this biographical anecdote and Brumbaugh's account of apparently the same events, when I came across a 32-page booklet entitled *Historical Sketches, Anecdotes, &c. Compiled by Abrm. H. Cassel, And Contributed to I. D. Rupp towards An Original History of German, Swiss, and other early Settlers in Pennsylvania* (Dec., 1856. Harleysville, Pa.). These manuscript notes of Abraham H. Cassel, like Sower's record of Cassel's story, are part of the Abraham H. Cassel collection at Juniata College, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. Beginning on page ten of the booklet we read the following:

> With the above ends the journal of Mr. Sowers but I shall add a few Anecdotes as a further Illustration of his Character &c. for the truth of which I shall hold myself Responsible as I have all from Reliable Sources.

Christopher Saur, after being taken captive, he was shamefully abused in the camp by the colonells Mülenburgh, Thompson and Schmidt—among many other abuses and cruel mockeries they stript him of his usual clothing and put them on a wounded Soldier who was just about dieing and arrayed him with those of the Soldier's including the full uniform, Sword, Plume, and all—After amusing themselves for a while in this way they proceeded to painting his beard with a Scarlet Red and tattooing his face like an Indian's, besides Sticking him full of various kinds of feathers in Imitation of an Ostrich. Meanwhile the dying Soldier was groaning in the most agonizing pains and begging of them to take this Holy man's clothing off, as he could not die in these Sacred Habiliments. But they paid no attention to his groans untill General Washington happened to come by. He espied Sowers from a distance and notwithstanding his fantastic appearance he recognised him Immediately (being familiarly acquainted), Step'd up to him and call'd out with a look of Surprise: 'Why! Mr. Sowers? How do you look?' just like your People made me, was the prompt reply, upon which his clothing and all were instantly restored, and himself Honorably dismissed.


Thus arise a few curious questions. *Did* Mr. Saur meet George Washington? Were the two men indeed familiarly acquainted?
And if so what did the leader of the Dunkers and the leader of the independents have in common?

I have tried in vain to find any reference to Christopher Saur, Jr., in the letters and diaries of our first President. I have located, however, three additional copies of what was supposedly the great printer's own account of his military and civil prosecution. One of these copies, strangely enough, is a four-page manuscript in the handwriting of Charles Gilbert Sower, now in the possession of Juniata College Library. Another copy, owned by Albert M. Sower, publisher in Philadelphia, was reputedly made some fifty years ago from a copy in the possession of the same Abraham H. Cassel who seems responsible for the anecdote. This Cassel-Sower transcript has a brief introduction and in addition gives the text of three queries which Christopher Saur, Jr., brought before the Brethren's Yearly Meeting held in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the year 1780. The third copy is a translation into German of the English version formerly owned by Cassel and is printed on pages 160-164 of Oswald Seidensticker's *Bilder aus der deutsch-pennsylvanischen Geschichte* (New York, E. Steiger & Co., 1885).

While frequently different in spelling and sentence structure, the Charles Gilbert Sower copy, the Cassel-Sower transcript, and the Cassel-Seidensticker translation are substantially alike, even in detail, and virtually duplicate the text of the Brumbaugh copy. The first two give as the correct date of Saur's return to Germantown May 23, 1778, instead of May 2, as Brumbaugh mistakenly prints; the Cassel-Seidensticker translation identifies the person who offered Saur his shoes and his hat as "the father of the reverend Peter Keyser"; and the Cassel-Sower transcript specifically says that the camp to which Saur was taken was located "near Valley Forge." Otherwise there is nothing in the three additional copies which would tend to discredit the authenticity of the Brumbaugh report or to strengthen belief in the Cassel anecdote.

For the sake of historical accuracy let us recall that on October 21, 1777, only two days after Saur and the main body of the British troops had moved to Philadelphia, the council of safety, established previously by the assembly at Lancaster, had ordained that the personal estate of all inhabitants of Pennsylvania who had resorted to any city or place in the possession of the British
army should be seized by commissioners appointed for that purpose. Also, on May 8, 1778, Christopher Saur, Jr., had been named in an official proclamation as under suspicion of treason and given until June 25 to appear before a magistrate. It is not at all surprising that his utter disregard of political-military complications did arouse grave suspicions on the part of the commonwealth government and that he was arrested almost immediately upon his return to Germantown. Various incidents seem to support the theory that he had loyalist leanings. Yet General Muhlenberg and the commander in chief of the American army, George Washington, must have respected the printer's religious background and assumed that Saur was not interested in politics as such and would never take a hand in any military struggle—not even in favor of those whom he was generally inclined to regard as the lawful government.

There is no doubt that Abraham H. Cassel had a very high opinion of his ancestor and coreligionist. His admiration for the man whom the poor of Germantown called "the Bread Father" was evidently greater even than his devotion to antiquarianism and historical research. When he invented the anecdote of George Washington and the Bible printer of Germantown, he used historical facts as an effective setting but took the liberty of changing certain incidents so that the personalities of the two main characters might create lasting impressions on the listener or the reader. He fictionized his material in a most ingenious manner and lent to it a touch of perfection. While General Washington, contrary to our better knowledge, is reduced to the level of an inconspicuous officer, Washington and Saur stand out magnificently as symbols of two philosophies of life, and in their greatness they are strikingly akin. General Washington happens to come by; he espies Saur from a distance; notwithstanding the bishop-printer's ridiculous disguise, he recognizes him immediately, being familiarly acquainted; and all those small minds who have entertained themselves with making a fool of the plain-clothed Dunker become an utter nothing, a gray cloud, a veil, a haze on the distant horizon, when George Washington steps up to the publisher of the first essay on education in America and calls out with a look of surprise: "Why! Mr. Sowers! How do you look?"

Except for the facts that Washington and Saur did indeed meet on the broad pathway of tolerance and understanding, and that
Saur "was permitted to go out of the Provo on the 29th day of May, 1778," the anecdote, then, is clearly not historic truth, but Abraham H. Cassel's beloved vision.