

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

A Touch of the Ridiculous: 1834 College Humor

ON December 16, 1852, Horace Binney Wallace cut his throat at the Hotel des Bains in Paris. Thus ended the brief career of one of Philadelphia's most promising writers. Characterized by Professor Willard Thorp as "an enigma wrapped in a cloak of mystery," he had been a literary, art, and legal critic as well as the author of a novel and two collections of essays.

News of his death reaching Philadelphia, his uncle, the celebrated lawyer Horace Binney, composed a touching obituary while another intimate associate, Charles J. Biddle, searched his papers for material on his deceased friend. On January 9, 1853, Biddle wrote the following letter to John W. Wallace, later the distinguished President of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania:

I find among my papers a copy of a periodical, in which there is an article (New Theory of Comets) by your brother; it was, I believe, his first contribution to the press. With it I also send you the prospectus of a Journal, which he at one time intended, with a friend, to edit, but the project was not carried into effect. They may be interesting to you at this time, as slight memorials of the earlier years of one so worthy of your affection, and of the respect and esteem of all who knew him.

Biddle refrained from mentioning an even earlier literary effort in which he and Wallace had collaborated. Such a mention at that time would not have been in good taste, and, in any event, the three-page leaflet would have appeared too trivial. On what may be its only surviving copy, Biddle endorsed his opinion of it: "A Foolery of H. B. Wallace and C. J. Biddle." "Foolery" it certainly was; it was also presumably Wallace's and Biddle's first appearance in print and is not mentioned in George E. Hatvany's recent (1977) biography, *Horace Binney Wallace*. Better known as a soldier, politician, and journalist, Colonel Biddle, while lacking Wallace's literary reputation, was a frequent contributor to newspapers. Many of his speeches

in and out of Congress appeared in print. And he was to be the author of a 100-page essay, "The Case of Major André, With a Review of the Statement of it in Lord Mahon's History of England," which was published by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in its 1858 *Contributions to American History*.

In 1834, when their farcical leaflet was created to ridicule the pompousness of some Washington Birthday celebrations with their inevitable and frequently tiresome orations, Wallace was but seventeen years old, Biddle fifteen. Both were attending college at Princeton, Wallace as a Junior and Biddle as a Freshman, and both were boarding at Mrs. Gibson's inn. The humorously disparaging reference to President Jackson and the laudatory resolution respecting the Bank of the United States reflect Biddle's relationship to its President.

Wallace and Biddle's "Foolery" follows in facsimile. The leaflet and Biddle's retained copy of his letter to John W. Wallace were discovered recently at Andalusia in a mass of Biddle manuscripts which have been presented to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

N. B. W.

CENTENNIAL BIENNIAL CELEBRATION.

A large and respectable meeting of the citizens of Princeton, was held at the Inn of Mrs. M. H. Gibson, on the evening of the 23d of February, for the purpose of celebrating the birth day of the immortal Washington.

Mr. H. B. WALLACE was called to the chair.

Mr. C. I. Biddle was appointed Secretary.

The Farewell Address of General Washington was then read by Mr. A. H. Bishop, but so indistinctly that it was not heard.

Mr. Leaming, who had been appointed the orator of the night, then rose, and drawing six pages of foolscap from his pocket, began: Friends and Countrymen! being* unexpectedly called upon to address you, you can imagine better than I can express my feelings on this occasion (loud cheering.) Friends and Countrymen!! the hundred and second† anniversary has at length arrived! Upon this blood-stained battle ground a band of pure patriots have assembled to commemorate the rising of the natal star of Washington and Liberty. (Hear

* The orator had been appointed twelve weeks before.

† This is supposed to refer to the birth day of General Washington; the eloquence of the passage warrants the presumption.

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him, hear him.) The place! the occasion!! the time*!!! fill me with emotions which "words is wantin to express;"† for as Lactantius observes—"Substantiam ignis calorem esse, aquæ humorem." (Here the orator was for some time interrupted by the applause of the audience.) It is usual on such occasions as the present to give a sketch of the manner in which that illustrious man ambled through life. This is the manner of ordinary speakers, who vainly imagine military renown to be the brightest gem in the coronet of fame; but I myself have fought the battles of my country; I have bled and died in freedom's cause; and the battle ground of ninth and Chesnut will long be remembered in the history of my country. The orator here fainted. No water being at hand, Mr. Bishop spit in his face until he recovered. But being too unwell to proceed, Mr. Bishop rose and said—Gentlemen, Olives of a superior kind grow on the banks of the Mediterranean; and to establish this fact I will relate a short anecdote of the Duke of Marlborough and Lord Cadgerton, (loud cries of Cadogan, Cadogan, from all sides of the house,) I beg pardon. Lord Cadogan, the name is Cadogan; as these gentlemen were reviewing the army in Flanders, a shower of rain coming on they sent for their cloaks, Lord Cadogan's was immediately brought; but the Duke's servant was so sluggish that his Grace reproved him; the fellow replied, I came as fast as I could. (Mr. Bishop here sat down amidst profound applause.)

* After careful inquiry we have ascertained that this sentence was uttered about half past nine o'clock.

† English Grammar, by Andrew Jackson, L. L. D.

‡ For an account of this great battle, see Lives of celebrated Generals by Josiah Snooks.

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The following resolutions were then unanimously adopted.

On motion of Mr. Leaming, Resolved, That Mr. Bishop and Mr. Wallace be appointed a committee to receive subscriptions for erecting an Exchange in Princeton, with an equestrian statue of Washington on horseback, to be placed on the roof.

On motion of Mr. Biddle,

Resolved, That the exchange be erected after the model of the United States Bank, the most perfect institution on the face of the earth, and that the opinion of this meeting be taken on the removal of the deposits. (Loud cheers.)

On motion of Mr. Wallace,

Resolved, That the statue of Washington be made after the model of that of George the III. in Hyde Park.

Resolved, That the proceedings of this meeting be published.

*A Goolery of M. B. Wallace
and C. J. Biddle.*