

A Legend at Full-Length

Mr. Chapman Paints Colonel Crockett—and Tells About It

BY CURTIS CARROLL DAVIS

I

ON MARCH 6, 1836, David Crockett died at The Alamo in what has since established itself as perhaps the most glamorous demise of American history. In April, 1840, the Baltimore weekly, *Niles' Register*, carried a report from a Boston newspaper to the effect that the Colonel had not been killed after all, but was in fact doing forced labor in a Mexican mine. Clearly, some old soldiers just never die. Crockett never has. A man named Disney reincarnated him in 1955. In May, 1959, he came to life again. This time it was on a ping-pong table at a handsome country home outside Charlottesville, Virginia.

He did so in a manner calculated to titillate all students of that new, inter-disciplinary subject called American Civilization. For the Colonel was called forth from the shadows via a written testimonial from a man much more accustomed to wielding the artist's brush than the author's pen. This was John Gadsby Chapman, a celebrated historical painter now all but lost to public awareness. The method of evocation is a detailed account by Chapman of how he came to paint a full-length portrait of Crockett at Washington in 1834, *i.e.*, about midway in the Colonel's last term as United States Congressman from Tennessee. The painting showed the Colonel standing among three of his hounds, left arm crooked to accommodate his rifle,

right arm upraised and grasping his broadbrimmed hat as he waves the dogs on to the hunt. With his beaked nose, and dark hair plastered down over his forehead, Crockett looks like an Indian to at least one observer. To his ablest biographer he appeared a bit Byronic, with the entire study a "romanticized hunter" affair.¹ This work was eventually purchased by the State of Texas, which hung it in the capitol at Austin. On November 9, 1881, a faulty stove pipe resulted in the total destruction of building and contents.² Though Chapman's portrait of Crockett had been well known, so far as the records go his account of that portrait's evolution was never known to any but a very few people. This number included none of the subject's biographers.

The value of the manuscript is therefore several-fold. First, it demonstrates in detail the brief but close acquaintanceship, hitherto unrecorded, of two prominent nineteenth century personalities. Second, it provides a close-up, candid reaction to one of the most myth-muddled figures in American annals. That the reaction is only one man's, hence liable to distortion, is obvious. But it is equally true that this man was a trained observer, that he was reporting at first-hand, and that if he had grounds for bias in his observations, they are not apparent. Third, the manuscript serves as a unique commentary on a significant, lost American portrait by that portrait's creator.

The result of the commentary is a word portrait of David Crockett which in part substantiates what is already known of him but, more importantly, adds hitherto unsuspected—or at least unemphasized—details. Crockett's ebullient nature in general, his fondness for hunting in particular, his

¹ The late Dr. James Atkins Shackford, then Assistant Professor of English at North Carolina State College. See his *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend*, ed. John B. Shackford (Chapel Hill [1956]), p. 289.

² See Frederick W. Rathjen, "The Texas State House," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LX, pp. 437-438 (April, 1957).

use of pet phrases in his speech, these things are common knowledge. What is considerably more intriguing are certain traits of the man which are less well recognized and which will have to be taken into account when the definitive biography appears. The following aspects of the Colonel's personality impressed Chapman enough for him to lay stress on them: Crockett's gentility (pp. 171-172), his oral articulateness (p. 170), his humane feeling for destitute Indians (pp. 169-170), and his skilled adoption of the "celebrity act" (pp. 172-173). At a lesser level it is diverting to note (third paragraph) how closely this famous hunter's attention to the combat readiness of his equipment looks forward to the care bestowed on the adjustment of their holsters by the cowboy heroes of today's TV westerns.

Just when in the year 1834 was the portrait painted? An examination of Crockett's movements at the time suggests that the bulk of the sittings probably occurred during the period May 15-June 29. The Congressman had just returned to the Capitol from his much heralded "toward through the Eastern states," arranged by Whig politicians as a public-relations campaign against President Jackson. At the end of June Crockett would leave Washington for his Tennessee home. He was forty-seven years, ten months old. In less than two years he would be dead. It is unnecessary to linger over the details of a career which, though far from completely understood even now, has nevertheless become a household word.

Far less familiar to the public ear is the name of Academician John Gadsby Chapman (1808-1889). A native of Alexandria, Virginia, grandson to John Gadsby, proprietor of the popular tavern, he was reared in Winchester, turned early to art as painter-teacher in Washington and New York, went to Rome about 1830 and again in 1848, and stayed there till a few years before his death, which occurred

in New York, where he is buried at Tottenville, Long Island. His manual entitled *The American Drawing-Book* (1847) was long used by art students; and his most celebrated single painting, "The Baptism of Pocahontas" (1840), hangs in the national Capitol.³ Chapman's wife, said to have been a Washington girl, gave him two children, both boys and both artists: Conrad Wise Chapman (1842-1910), the elder and much better-known, and John Linton Chapman (*post* 1842-*post* 1902). Undoubtedly there are a good number of John Gadsby Chapman's letters scattered about this country and Italy, for he was widely acquainted and widely esteemed. The present editor has located only five: three in the Virginia Historical Society, written in 1837-1838 from 62 White Street, New York, to William Bolling of Goochland County, Virginia, discussing the Pocahontas portrait and evidencing Chapman's scrupulousness over historical accuracy; two in the Peabody Library, written in 1861 and 1868 to John Pendleton Kennedy of Baltimore from 161 Via del Babuino, Rome⁴—then, as now, a clustering point for artists of several nations. Recently a *rinascimento* of interest in this neglected American has been effected by a devoted amateur of our native painting, the sculptress Georgia S. Chamberlain.⁵

Crockett's latest biographer, after some years of research, "found a record of eight or nine [oil portraits], of which at

³ See Georgia S. Chamberlain, "The Baptism of Pocahontas": John Gadsby Chapman's Gigantic Mural in the Rotunda of the National Capitol," *The Iron Worker*, XXIII, pp. 15-22 (Summer, 1959).

⁴ In the 1861 epistle Chapman speaks of two mutual friends, Holmes Conrad of Martinsburg, (West) Virginia, and David Strother. Professor Cecil D. Eby, Department of English, Madison College, Harrisonburg, Virginia, author of a forthcoming biography of the most famous Strother, the artist "Porte Crayon," assures me in a letter of October 6, 1959, that "there are many references to him [Chapman] scattered through the Strother journals (including a talk with his son Conrad, I believe, in Mexico)."

⁵ See Mrs. Chamberlain's "John Gadsby Chapman: A Reappraisal," *Antiques*, LXXIII, pp. 566-569 (June, 1958). Both this and the article in note 3, above are lavishly illustrated from the artist's works.

least two no longer survive." The Chapman portrait was one of these—the artist is identified as "John L. Chapman"—and the subject's eldest son, John Wesley Crockett, is said not to have considered it the best likeness of his father.⁶ After completing it, Chapman left Washington for New York, where he was settled at least by the third week of November, 1834.⁷ In October, 1838, he exhibited the painting at the Apollo Association's showing in Washington, announcing that it was for sale. "This portrait would no doubt," the announcement ran, "be very highly valued in Texas."⁸ Crockett had now been dead about two and a half years; and in due course, just when is uncertain, the State of Texas did acquire the portrait. The asking price had been \$1,000.00. (The author of one of the earliest reliable sketches of Chapman's life—see note 14—goes so far as to state: "It was painted for the State of Texas. . . . The State of Texas never paid him for it, by the way.") In 1839 an engraver, one C. Stuart, who was affiliated with the Apollo Association, reproduced the portrait and offered it for sale at the Association's exhibition in its gallery at 40 Broadway, New York, in October of that year. This engraving has been recently illustrated in a trade periodical.⁹

Chapman's written "Reminiscences" of the portrait's provenience are so precise in detail and dialogue it is impossible to believe he did not commit them to paper at the time. However, the reference to Balie Peyton (see note 29) proves that they must have been rewritten some time after that statesman's death in 1878. Hence the manuscript we are here discussing is a copy. This copy could have been

⁶ James A. Shackford, *David Crockett, op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁷ William Dunlap, *Diary* (New York, 1930, three vols.), III, p. 840.

⁸ Mary B. Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union . . . 1816-1852* (New York, 1953, two vols.), II, pp. 64, 66.

⁹ See the Old Print Shop, Inc., *Portfolio*, XV, cover (November, 1955) and *ibid.*, March, 1958 (p. 164). The engraving was a mezzotint published by James Herring at New York.

made by Chapman either in Italy or in America, following his return about 1884. It could conceivably have been transcribed from his original by either of his sons; but the handwriting resembles that of Chapman's own letters from the 1860s (in the Peabody Library). The first two paragraphs of the manuscript contain a good many cross-outs—placed in brackets by the present editor—and a few erasures and rewritings—uncited by the editor—but despite this fact the document as a whole is neatly and carefully done. It was found folded into four. As the editor slowly turned its thinly ruled pages with their slender, faded characters, he found it difficult to doubt that Chapman would have composed his "Reminiscences" so scrupulously had he not been sure he had something worth while to communicate. How did this communication end up on a ping-pong table?

II

It got there through Chapman's long-time friendship with Henry Alexander Wise (1806–1876). Lawyer Wise, future Governor of Virginia, close to fire-eating politician, was in the second year of his decade's service as Representative in Congress from Virginia at the time the Crockett portrait was done. Unquestionably he knew Crockett, and may even have introduced Chapman to him. It was owing to Wise that Chapman got the commission for the Pocahontas painting. The two men remained friends throughout life, and the artist named his older son, Conrad Wise, after two Virginians one of whom was the future Governor. Chapman did portraits of two of Wise's children, Mary Elizabeth and Obadiah Jennings Wise.¹⁰ After Governor Wise's death the family papers eventually came into possession of his son John Sergeant Wise (1846–1913), also a Congressman from

¹⁰ Presently owned by a Wise kin, Mrs. Henry S. Venn, of Washington, D. C.

Virginia, author, orator, noted field sportsman. It was while going over John S. Wise's collection of papers at his grandson's home near Charlottesville, preparatory to writing a sketch of him for a new edition of his Confederate memoirs,¹¹ that the present editor came upon the Chapman "Reminiscences" of David Crockett. The Wise papers were so voluminous, covering a period from about 1750 to about 1930, that only a ping-pong table could accommodate them—far from all of them, even then—and among this mass the Crockett item was thrust aside as irrelevant. When finally read, however, its freshness and vigor commanded such attention that the ultimate result is this article.

It is probable that John Sergeant Wise did not know John Gadsby Chapman in person.¹² But Wise had often heard his father speak of him and shared his parent's high opinion of the artist's worth. On January 10, 1896, for example, Wise rebuked his lifelong friend, novelist Thomas Nelson Page, for his lack of appreciation of Chapman's sketches: "they are not 'common stuff' by any means. . . . I do'n't want to have pearls cast before swine. Not that you are a *swine*, save as you do not recognize a rare bit of pen & ink work, never copied, by an artist of distinction. You can beat me at literary criticism, but notwithstanding your association with Hop Skip, I have, I believe, a keener appreciation of art than you."¹³

¹¹ *The End of an Era* (1899), to be released later this year by the Indiana University Press.

¹² "I do not think my father ever knew John Gadsby Chapman. I am quite positive he did not" (son Henry A. Wise, Washington, D. C., July 30, 1959, to Curtis Carroll Davis). On the other hand Wise told Thomas Nelson Page (note 16, below): "Mr Chapman Sr: visited Yorktown about 1833 & painted a number of sketches of Yorktown, the Moore house &c. Doubtless your relatives were kind to him for he was a most admirable man." The Yorktown item is doubtless identical with the "View of Yorktown, Virginia," exhibited by Chapman at Alexandria and New York in 1835. See *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record: 1826-1860* (New York, 1943, two vols.), I, p. 74.

¹³ John S. Wise to Thomas Nelson Page, New York City, January 10, 1896. T. N. Page Papers, Duke University Library.

If he did not know John Gadsby Chapman, John S. Wise definitely knew both of his sons. Just a year before his death Wise, at the request of H. R. McIlwaine, State Librarian of Virginia, penned the first "family portrait" of all three Chapmans, which was published as a preface to the long-delayed catalogue of John G. and Conrad W. Chapman's work owned by the Library (since transferred to the Valentine Museum, Richmond).¹⁴ When Conrad Wise Chapman died at Hampton, Virginia, December 10, 1910, the brief obituary in the Richmond newspaper made a point of saying that the deceased had been "a friend of John S. Wise."¹⁵ The younger son, John Linton Chapman, did the illustrations for Wise's charming dog story, *Diomed* (1897)—probably the first, certainly the first important, such book by an American—and Wise was accustomed to rummaging 'round Linton Chapman's studio in New York. The younger son had inherited a good many of his famous father's paintings and drawings, among them a 6" x 6" panel sketch, copied from an unknown artist, of General Thomas Nelson when a youth at school in England. Since the General was Thomas Nelson Page's great-grandfather, Wise wrote the novelist asking if he would not like to purchase it? Linton Chapman, he assured Page, "is a very fine old fellow & I think he intended to give it to me. But I do not think I ought to accept it as a gift because he is as poor as Jobs turkey. . . ."¹⁶ Wise's chief heir, executor, and principal law partner—former United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York—his son Henry A. Wise of "Clif-

¹⁴ Virginia State Library *Bulletin*, XII, pp. 77-81 (July, October, 1919).

¹⁵ Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, December 13, 1910 (p. 2, col. 5). There are a fair number of C. W. Chapman letters in the Wise Family Papers (see note 22, below) for the last fifteen years of his life.

¹⁶ John S. Wise to Thomas Nelson Page, New York City, December 22, 1895. T. N. Page Papers, Duke University Library. There are four letters to Page from J. Linton Chapman, 1895-1896, about the sale of paintings to Page, in the Page Papers at Duke.

ton," Accomack County, Virginia, now amplifies the story: "Concerning the full length portrait of David Crockett, I have a very distinct recollection of a full length portrait by John G. Chapman. And I am very positive in my recollection that this was sold by my father to some historical society in San Antonio. . . . My father made the sale of the large painting and as I recall the proceeds went to John Linton Chapman who had the portrait at the time it was sold. . . . I don't remember when John Linton Chapman died. He was always in straitened financial circumstances and also had marital troubles. We took care of him for many years and never received any financial compensation."¹⁷

As John S. Wise put it to Thomas Nelson Page: "Really, I do'nt think old Chapman has any idea what anything is worth. He is a regular baby."

Perhaps this is why, when John Gadsby Chapman died on November 28, 1889, and was buried from his son Linton's home at 215 Quincy Street, Brooklyn, his executor became not Linton but a man named S. G. Pardessus. Over five years later Pardessus was still administering Chapman's estate. At that point he sat down and wrote the following letter from his residence at 1268 Pacific Avenue, Brooklyn:

Jan'y 6/95

To the Editor of the "Galveston News"

Dear Sir:

In looking over the effects, for administration, of the late John G. Chapman, Artist (the painter of the great & historic picture of "Col. David Crockett," the notice of the destruction of which by fire I find described in an article from your paper under date of Nov. 11, 1881)¹⁸ I find a personal reminiscence of Col. Crockett written by Mr Chapman in 1834 at Washington, during the time that Col Crockett gave Mr

¹⁷ Henry A. Wise to Curtis Carroll Davis (see note 12, above).

¹⁸ Editorial, "Destroyed Art Treasures," *Galveston Daily News*, November 11, 1881 (p. 2, cols. 2-3).

Chapman the sittings for the *Great Painting* (life size) and a smaller one to be retained by Mr C. as personal property and now in my possession.

Believing that the reminiscence might be of interest to your readers, I will forward you a copy of the same if you would care to have it.

Very truly

S G Pardessus

The Managing Editor of the *News*, John R. Lunsford, replied promptly on January 12th to the effect that "we will be very much pleased to have a copy if you will kindly furnish it to us."¹⁹ Pardessus mailed the copy January 15, the *News* published it in the Sunday issue of January 27—without a word of explanation or provenience—and there the "Reminiscences" have lain buried ever since.

Pardessus' reference to "a smaller [painting] to be retained by Mr. C." doubtless refers to that "study of his head alone" mentioned by Chapman in the opening sentence of his "Reminiscences." This item eventually passed into possession of Wise's son and junior partner in his law firm, John S. Wise, Jr. (1876-1951). In February, 1906, young Wise sold it to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, who had to scrape to get together the \$1,000 asking price.²⁰ They managed, however, and there the item is to this day, hanging in The Alamo museum at San Antonio.²¹

But the important "study" of Crockett by John Gadsby Chapman is the one to which he subsequently devoted so

¹⁹ The Pardessus-Lunsford exchange is among the Wise Family Papers (see note 22, below).

²⁰ Certificate signed by John S. Wise, Jr., New York City, February 23, 1906, notarized same date by Louise C. Rasquin, notary, King's County; certificate filed in New York County. Cf. the address at Goliad, Texas, by Mrs. C. B. Stone, in *Proceedings*, 15th Annual Convention, Daughters of the Republic of Texas, April 20-21, 1906 (p. 19). For a transcript of the Wise certificate, as well as other assistance, I am most grateful to Mrs. R. G. Halter, historian of The Alamo museum.

²¹ It was first illustrated in Charles F. Allen, *David Crockett: Scout* (Philadelphia and London [1911], facing p. 14. It appears less sharply in Georgia S. Chamberlain, "John Gadsby Chapman: A Reappraisal," *op. cit.*, p. 569, and Louise W. Reynolds, "The Pioneer Crockett Family of Tennessee," *D.A.R. Magazine*, LV, p. 187 (April, 1921).

much painstaking reminiscence. Let us now read this reminiscence in full. It has been transcribed *verbatim et literatim*, and even a cursory perusal will suggest that the author was not primarily a literary man. It will also suggest that he managed to turn a trick many authors fail to do: create character.

III

REMINISCENCES OF COLONEL DAVID CROCKETT IN 1834²²

[The] Idea of attempting a full-length, life size portrait of Col. Crockett originated during progress of a study of his head alone for which he kindly gave [me] required sittings, which, although it seemed to interest [him very much] obviously did not altogether satisfy him. frankly remarking, when it was near completion "dare say its like enough, because it's like all the other painters make of me, a sort of cross between a clean-shirted Member of Congress and a Methodist Preacher. — If you could catch me on a bear-hunt in a "harricane," with hunting tools and gear, and team of dogs, you might make a picture better worth looking at. —"

I admitted, that I would be delighted to try it, but [it would have to be a large picture and,] as I never saw a harricane, or bear hunt, I should be obliged, [I fear,] to give him a great deal [of] more bother to explain [to me] all about them, and to show me what to do, than would be right to impose upon his kindness." With a small sketch of a general idea of such a picture, [with (-?-)] he was very well pleased. "That's the sort of thing," he said, "to start with. I'll show you how to [make all] have all

²² This Ms. is in nine numbered pages, unsigned, written in ink on one side only, each sheet measuring 8" x 12½", with 1½" left-hand margin; it is tied together by a pink string at top centre. The Ms. is part of the Wise Family Papers, owned by the Honorable Henry A. Wise of "Clifton," Accomack County, Virginia, and in custody of his son, John S. Wise, of Farmington, near Charlottesville, Virginia. The author is grateful to these gentlemen for their indefinite loan of the Ms. and permission to reproduce it in its entirety.

[the small matters] right. We'll make the picture between us, first rate, mind if we do'nt. So *Go ahead!* just as soon and fast as you like."

The Colonel entered [into the matter] upon the undertaking with interest and earnestness, that could scarcely have been anticipated, managed to find somewhere in Washington a well worn *linsey-woolsey hunting shirt*, a good deal faded and soiled by use, of a prevailing color harmonising with that of the woods and thickets during the hunting season—"the very thing"—The *leggings* and *moccasins* equally satisfied him. The *butcher knife* he "set great store by," frequently dilating upon its value as a "hunting tool" that did its work as noiselessly and surely, as well as being a mighty saver of lead and powder. "A single bullet" he woul'd add "may settle up a buck or bear into a right sort of fix to finish him with a 'butcher' and give no sign, as the rifle does by crack and smoke, of your whereabouts—or what you are after, that you may want to keep to yourself, especially if some sculking red-skin or vagabond should be upon your tracks for mischief." [note, directed to left margin:] He was very precise in belt-arrangement of his "tools." The "*butcher*" in easy and prompt reach of his right hand—as well as powder horn and bullet-pouch. The *Hatchet*, as reserve, on the left hip, sufficiently accessible, just balancing weight, leaving nothing in the way, belt upwards—of free handling of his rifle—and limbs clear for any sort of work they might be wanted for.

A *rifle-gun* to conform to his fastidious ideas of perfection, proved difficult to procure about Washington. He had insurmountable objections to every sort of ornamental mountings on a gun, especially if of brass or polished metal, even to breech plate. At last one was found, belonging to an old sportsman on the Potomac "wanting only two or three inches of length of barrel to suit him to a tee." It was a rough affair to look at, as the picture bears witness of, but he was so well pleased with it, that on a sunday visit, made to my home in Alexandria he proposed and we made its owner a special visit.

I regret not to retain in memory the incidents of the interview

between the veteran sportsmen, their animated and prolonged discussions over relative value of various "tools," and narrations of individual adventure and exploits, the cordial hand shaking at leave-taking, and the Colonel's warm invitation to "come out to Tennessee for a riproarious bar-hunt" He brought away, in gift of friendly remembrance, the *powder horn* and *pouch* that are in the picture and a bit of old leather, from which he cut and fashioned the *hatchet sheath*. "A grand old fellow!" he exclaimed as we strolled homeward. "A grand old fellow that!—When I'm President, I'll be shot if I dont put him into the War Department."

My apprehension of difficulty to find models of the right sort of dogs to suit him he relieved at once. "There's plenty of first-rate fellows to be found about the country carts any market day. Come with me tomorrow and I'll show you. It does my eyes good to look at some of them, and think what a team of beauties they would be—with their tails chopped off—in a roll-and-tumble tussle with a big bear."

The market-dog "beauties" proved to be in my unappreciative judgment the veriest untraceable mongrels that I ever beheld, but I could not otherwise than defer to his higher estimation of their qualifications!²³

I owned a dog, combining rare qualities, as a general sporting animal, of a highly valued breed, with remarkable record for scent, intelligence, courage and endurance—besides being thoroughly trained for service as a model—that I wished to introduce into the picture, but the Colonel never took to him, and I said no more about it, leaving the space to be filled by one more to his liking. "Well," at length he concluded "I have had my way with three of 'em, and I reckon your dog might be stuck into one corner upon

²³ The anonymous editorialist of "Destroyed Art Treasures" (see note 18, above), in bemoaning the loss of "the historic portrait of David Crockett, a painting that bore the true mark of genius in conception as well as in artistic treatment," had singled it out as the finest picture at the capitol, but failed to name the artist and denigrated the dogs as "representing a rather inferior breed. . . ."

One of the country's leading professional hunters, Bill Hulet of Aberdeen, Washington, would agree with Crockett. Hulet raises his own mongrel breed of hound in the conviction that thoroughbreds lack several traits necessary for best coping with a bear. See "The Bear Hunter," *Time*, LXXV, p. 46 (January 4, 1960).

his reputation in the slim line of *coon* and *'possum*—but there's no devil—if you will not have to cut his plaguy tail off, to make him fit for decent company, or hide it out of sight in the picture with bushes or in some other way that you may be up to.”

The picture was considerably advanced upon design of attitude of the figure very different from that which it now presents, the hat being on his head and the right arm otherwise disposed. I had remarked that he was fidgety about something in the picture for several days, which I could not make out the reason of, until one morning that he came in my studio with evident determination of purpose—lifted his hat, and gave a shout that raised the whole neighborhood—the alteration could be no longer questionable, and it was made to great advantage to the picture

From its beginning to completion Colonel Crockett's interest in the execution of the picture never abated, and it received his unqualified approval in every respect.

During its exhibition by the National Academy of Design in 1835 in New York,²⁴ a prominent literary friend²⁵ expressed desire to possess his autograph, and if attainable one of his letters, many of which I had from time to time received from him, but had bestowed upon eager seekers for them “Write to him,” said my friend “and tell him that I say, he do'nt know how to stick his hatchet in his belt, and that the picture should be altered”

His reply came by return mail—

* * * “Do'nt you go to altering my picture for any body's nonsense. If any man in New York says that I do'nt know how, or where, to stick my hatchet, send him to me and I'le show him”

While the picture was in progress Col Crockett made very frequent allusions to his autobiography or “Narrative”* [*in left margin.*]

²⁴ In its notice of this, Chapman's first exhibit with the Academy, the *New-York Mirror* for June 20, 1835 (No. 51), XII, p. 406, referred to the painting as “No. 172. The Backwoodsman, portrait of Colonel David Crocket.”

²⁵ Perhaps the New York author, James Kirke Paulding (1778-1860), whose *Life of Washington* (1835) was illustrated by Chapman and who owned a Chapman portrait of Daniel Boone.

*
A
Narrative
of the
Life of David Crockett
of the State of Tennessee

This rule I leave for others when I'm dead
Be always sure you're right then, *Go ahead!*
The Author

Written by himself

E L Carey and A Hart
Philadelphia
and
Baltimore
1834

then passing through its sixth edition.²⁶ He did not affect indifference to the popular notoriety it had brought upon him, but at the same time very freely expressed annoyance at what he considered the very unnecessary perversion of sense to which his manuscript had been subjected by assumed corrections of a friend [*in left margin:*] Senator Ewing, of Ohio,²⁷ I think but am not sure by whom it had been supervised for publication “twisting his spelling out of all natur and befogging his meaning with grammar nonsense”

There were, moreover, many portions of his manuscript, cancelled by the counsel of his advisers, that gave him special vexation—chiefly such relating to inhuman massacres of indian women and children, which, if he wrote of with half the intensified bitterness of reprobation that I have heard him express

²⁶ An almost 100% accurate transcript of the title page of this famous book, which was published in late February or early March, 1834, and had reached its 6th edition by the closing months of that year. See James A. Shackford, ed., “The Autobiography of David Crockett: An Annotated Edition (with Portraits, Maps, and Appendices),” unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of English, Vanderbilt University (Nashville [1948]), p. 566.

²⁷ The lawyer, Thomas Ewing (1789–1871), a native of West Liberty, Ohio County, (West) Virginia, served as a Whig senator from Ohio, 1831–1837, became Secretary of the Treasury and then of Interior under Presidents W. H. Harrison and Tyler. Shackford has demonstrated that the virtual co-author of the *Narrative* was in fact Thomas Chilton, a Representative from Kentucky.

towards the perpetrators of such atrocious acts, and the officials by whom they were permitted, suppression of their narrative may have been better for the credit of the nation and humanity.²⁸

With all the disadvantages consequent upon deficiency in timely educational training, Col Crockett's command of verbal expression was very remarkable, say what he might his meaning could never be misinterpreted. He expressed opinions, and told his stories, with unhesitating clearness of diction, often embellished with graphic touches of original wit and humor, sparkling and even startling, yet never out of place or obtrusively ostentatious. As for his back-woods slang—it fell upon the ear meaningfully and consistent as might the crack of his rifle or his "halloo" from a harricane or from a cane-brake. It was to him truly a mother-tongue, in which his ideas flowed most naturally and found most emphatic and unrestrained utterance. and it may be deplored that the manuscript of his "Narrative" was ever subjected to hypercritical pruning and correction, and that it was not given to the world in its integrity—as it came from his pen.

On recent occasion of close examination, with view to reparation of the picture from accidental injuries that it had sustained, I was reminded, by discovery of his name upon the handle of the butcher-knife in his belt, of the circumstance to which is attributable its spelling with one t. When the picture was near completion I requested his suggestion of most appropriate places to introduce his name and maxim: to which he replied with promptness—"Name on the butcher Knife—Go ahead on the rifle"—He looked on while I did it. There occurred some crowding to get two *t*s upon the knife handle which elicited, with characteristic chuckle, an exclamation, "That's it—there you are—slap dash into one of my plaguy botherations. Where's either sense or use of *two*, when *one's* a plenty, or of the middle C either? there'll be enough left to tell who the "butcher" belongs to, and three letters saved. however a Member of the Congress

²⁸ An interesting passage, since in his recently completed *Narrative* Crockett had spoken of killing the Indians "like dogs" in the War of 1812. Shackford, *David Crockett, op. cit.*, pp. 116-117, concludes that "David's love for Indians was new-found and short-lived." He had, however, voted against the Indian-removal bill in 1830.

of the United States may want all that he can rake together to cut it in full "David Crockett."

Hon. Balie Peyton, late of Tennessee, decd,²⁹ who served with Col Crockett in his last term in Congress, from 1833 to 1835, and many others of his personal friends, very certainly, always wrote his name with but one t, although it is most generally written and almost invariably printed otherwise.

One morning the Colonel called on his way to the capitol for an appointed sitting. I at once noticed a marked change in his manner and general bearing, his step less firm and his carriage less erect and defiant. He held a crumpled letter evidently just received. There was a subdued expression in his face that I had never before seen there. The whole man seemed to have undergone a change.

"I hope you have had no bad news this morning" I remarked. "No," he languidly replied "'spose not—only a son of mine out west has been and got converted. Thinks he's off to Paradise on a streak of lightning. Pitches into *me*, pretty considerable. That's all"—

It was plain that his thoughts and sympathies had been abruptly and touchingly recalled from present surroundings to home and heart memories and associations in which the world could not participate or rightly appreciate

The awkwardness of his efforts to resume his usual dash of manner was painful to witness. The "Davy Crockett" that I had decided to make the subject of my picture was no longer before me and the posing for it useless. It was the only unavailable one that I remember ever to have had of him.

During the progressive intimacy that grew out of familiar intercourse with Col. Crockett, while engaged upon his portrait, he rarely, if ever, exhibited either in conversation or manner, attributes of coarseness of character that prevailing popular opinion very unjustly assigned to him. I cannot recall to mind

²⁹ Peyton, born near Gallatin, Tennessee, in 1803, died there August 18, 1878. He had been United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana and Minister to Chile under President Taylor.

an instance of his indulgence in gasconade or profanity. There was an earnestness of truth in his narrations of events, and circumstances of his adventurous life, that made it obvious: while the heroic type of his grand physical development, equal to any emergency of achievement—his clear unflinching eye, and with all gentle and sympathetic play of features, telegraphing, as it were, directly from a true heart, overflowing with kind feeling and impulse, irresistibly dispelled suspicion of insincerity and braggartism.

The ease and readiness with which Col Crockett adapted himself to circumstances of personal position and intercourse were remarkable, at times even masterly. He would seem to catch, in the first moment of introduction, the tone and characteristics of a new acquaintance and as well to comprehend, and rarely failed in agreeably confirming preentertained opinions in reference to himself.

On an occasion of being at his rooms on Pennsylvania Avenue opposite Brown's Hotel³⁰—and in the midst of one of his interesting narratives of western adventure—visitors were announced. "Who are they?" he enquired in his brusque way. "Two strange gentleman sir, from the hotel, with Mr. W ***" (a well known volunteer Cicerone of sight-seers about Washington). "Show 'em up, show em up," he said with comical air of resignation, at the same time putting on his hat, and throwing one leg over the arm of his chair, and greeting them with cordial extension of hand, but not rising—

"Take seats, gentlemen—make yourselves at home—glad to see you—hope you find yourselves well—"

Mr. W *** volunteered one of his stereotype set speeches in formal introduction of his "distinguished friends" whom he reported as having come from the Lord only knows how far off "expressly to pay their respects to Colonel Crockett"—under whose quizzical yet not repulsive or discourteous stare, however,

³⁰ Chapman himself was exhibiting copies of old masters and his own original sketches at rooms on Pennsylvania Avenue nearly opposite Brown's and Gadsby's hotels, according to the *Alexandria Gazette*, April 11, 1834, as quoted in Georgia S. Chamberlain, "The Baptism of Pocahontas," *op. cit.*, p. 18.

he very soon broke down amidst a general giggle, while his friends seem to take all in due course for which they were quite prepared

A lively conversation was very soon improvised. The colonel told several of his best stories—"hoped the gentleman would have a safe and pleasant journey home, and find all right when they got there" adding "his best regards to the ladies of their families"—Evidently highly gratified with their visit, with a cordial hand shaking all round, they took their leave—

As the door closed the Colonel shook himself out of dramatic pose, replaced his hat upon the table, and, as it were, thinking aloud, murmured, "Well!—they came to see a bar, and they've seen one—hope they like the performance—it did not cost them any thing any how—Let's take a horn"—

Pausing in the act, he said to me "You sometimes talk of cutting out from here to try your luck in New York. If ever you do, there's one man there you ought to know, Mr. H*** for he's the most through and through gentleman, to the very backbone, I have ever had the good luck to come across in all my life—the only man who ever asked me to step up to his sideboard for a pull, and turned his back when I filled up, not to see the number of fingers of my charge from his decanter— I'll give you a letter to him"—which he did—

The most irksome of his duties as a Member of Congress was requirement to listen to long speeches, from which he would escape whenever he could—³¹ There was, on occasion of an exciting debate, a great throng to the Capitol. I met him at the foot of the descent to Pennsylvania Avenue coming away—and looking very much fagged—

"You look as tired, Colonel," I remarked "as if you had just got through a long speech in the House."

"Long speech to thunder," he exclaimed "there's plenty of 'em up there for that sort of nonsense, without my making a fool of myself, at public expense. I can stand *good nonsense*—rather like it—but *such nonsense* as they are digging at up yonder, it's no use trying to—I'm going home"—

³¹ Shackford, *David Crockett*, *op. cit.*, p. 154, asserts that "one of the serious charges which had helped defeat him for Congress in 1831 had been his absences from roll calls. . . ."

Here the document stops. Does it end here, too? Let each reader make up his own mind, as he watches Colonel Crockett's figure dwindle in the distance, heading homeward. One thing is certain. Since some old soldiers just never die, this one will be coming back—some time, somewhere.

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