

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded. Note also that Blennerhassett Island is variously spelled herein.

Budget. Hooper Editor. March 27, 1886

### Blennerhasset's Island

“And his enchanted island is destined to soon relapse into a wilderness.” How prophetic these words seemed to me as I repeated them to myself on a dreary morning early in this month, while viewing Blennerhasset Island from the pilot-house of an Ohio River steamboat. Mention the name of William Wirt, and you immediately bring to the minds of old and young alike, Blennerhassett and his island home in the Ohio, for all have read in school-days, if not in riper years the orator's glowing description of that romantic spot. Strangely have Wirt and the island handed each other down to posterity, for to all save the few students of history or law, the one is known only as pictured by the orator, in that part of his argument in the Burr trial that is to be found in every standard School Speaker while the other is remembered but as the author of those lines.

It was more from this island lying just within sight of where Parkersburg now stands that Aaron Burr's famous expedition in 1806 set out upon its task of forming a Western station, but closed at Richmond Va. in 1807 with the great trial for treason of the master spirit. When one has finished reading the two large volumes of the report of that heated trial, there is no part of it that recurs to the mind so often, and with such pleasant affect, as the picture of the island. It is like a ray of sunlight peeping into a prison dark, and full of dread and misery.

“Who was Blennerhassett?” The orator asks in response to the suggestion that he is the arch-traitor, and Burr a mere accessory. “A native of Ireland, a man of letters, who fled from the storms of his own country to find quiet in ours. - - - So far is an army from furnishing the society natural and proper to his character, that, on his arrival in America he retired even from the population of the Atlantic States, and sought quiet and solitude in the bosom of our western forests. But he carried with him taste and science and wealth; and lo, the desert smiled. Possessing himself of a beautiful island in the Ohio, he rears upon it a palace, and decorated with every romantic embellishment of fancy. A Shrubbery that Shenstone might have envied, blooms round him,

music, that might have charmed Calypso and her nymphs, is his. An extensive library spreads its treasures before him. A philosophical apparatus offers to him all the secrets and mysteries of nature. Peace, tranquility, and innocence shed their mingled delights around him. And to crown the embellishment of the scene, a wife, who is said to be lovely even beyond her sex, and graced with every accomplishment that can render it irresistible had blessed him with her love, and made him the father of several children. The evidence would convince you that this is but a faint picture of the real life. In the midst of all this peace, this innocent simplicity, this tranquility, this feast of the mind and this pure bouquet of the heart, the destroyer comes; – he comes to change this paradise into a hell ---And the enchanted island is destined soon to relapse into a wilderness.”

Yes, and the island has relapsed into a wilderness; all its romance and enchantment passed away with the little boat-load of conspirators that dropped down along its northern bank and off into the current several hours before dawn on a December morning in 1806.

We had scarcely cleared the wharf boat at Parkersburg when I made my way to the pilot-house, offered the pilot (a new man just licensed) a good cigar, the one I got here the Saturday evening before, but forgot to smoke, suggested that it must require considerable skill to handle a boat up there where the river is so narrow, and was asked to make myself at home. You are not under headway until the entire upper end of the island is full in sight. Low, flat, and tapering into a sand-bar to the eastward, with a few scattered scrubby willows leaning with the current, the result of floods, you will look in vain over the entire portion that was owned by Blannerhassett, for a single remnant of its past glory. No: not even a remnant is to be seen, and as if God's malediction was resting upon it, not an object pleasing to the eye or suggestion to the imagination, is there. The beautiful paths and lanes that lead down to the waters edge, are gone; and the primeval forest-trees, among which they wound, have been destroyed, and none others have taken their places. Where the house stood, there now is a mere depression in the surface of the land, out of which grows a sycamore; but it is too low and shaggy; – hardly sufficient to protect, from the rays of the morning sun the meager little farmhouse just to the west. The dry stalks of jimsom weed, burr and corn are all of vegetation that indicates what is now the summer's produce. – It is the picture of desolation. The land of course is fertile, and all above high water mark is a cornfield but full of rank weeds, and of late years subject to overflow. A complete fulfillment of Wirt's prophecy; – and a suiting sequel

in the history of the cite (*sic*) used as the center of operation in the first great traitorous conspiracy with which our Government had to contend. It is “according to the eternal fitness of things.” – A living monument to the proverb: “As we sow, so shall we reap.”

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