

# "GENTLEMAN" JOHN PERKINS

Some Account of the Life and Times of "Gentleman" John Perkins, of Lincoln; and of His Contemporaries, Successors and Descendants; Together With a Glance at the History of the Manners, Customs and Development of What is Now Caldwell County and of the Adjacent Country, During the Latter Part of the Eighteenth and the Beginning of the Nineteenth Centuries.

By W. W. SCOTT

(Continued from Last Week)

It is a far cry from Salisbury to London, and it is safe to presume that the term "gentleman" as used in England was not synonymous with the same term as used in Rowan and Mecklenburg in those days. It is but a word, and yet these two uses of it, or rather the use and the non-use of it, are some of the indications that a line of demarcation was being drawn between the colonists and the loyalists that was to separate them into hostile camps in 1775 and 1776. The loyalists, who were back of the Governor and of the official caste, were the ruling class in the colony as long as the King's authority, as represented by his officials, was supreme. A revolt or a revolution is not the easiest thing in the world to foment among Anglo-Saxon people, and it cannot be accomplished unless a large proportion of the masses of the people join in. A belief in the necessity for obedience is bred in the bone of this race, and those living in North Carolina in those days entertained, either from birth or descent, strong prejudices in favor of the mother country and it took something to overcome their loyalty to the King. In spite of their many follies, which eventually hastened their downfall, the ruling class, loyal to the crown, exercised many influences to control the masses and to hold them from going after the colonial agitators. These latter were probably the "intellectuals" of that day, young, educated, enthusiastic, inspired by the writings of the French "encyclopedists," many of them well-born but hostile to the monarchy and favoring separation from England. It was their task to draw over the masses to their side, and they used all the means at hand, preaching the alluring principles of equality and liberty as set forth in the new philosophy. Their efforts met with great success in firing the popular imagination and was greatly assisted by the tactless policy of the royal government, which, as far as it was able, was as ruthless and careless of popular sensibilities as Louis the Fourteenth of France was when he said that it mattered little to him what happened after he was gone—even if the flood should come again! The climax was reached in May, 1775, when the action of the Mecklenburgers stirred the other counties, and, like a match set to shavings, started a fire that was never put out. The Committee of Safety of Rowan county was dominated by earnest, conscientious, fair-minded men whose solicitude was to control the enthusiasm of their followers without damping their ardor, and they desired to do strict justice.

When John Perkins was brought before the committee by Christopher Keekman, upon citation of Capt. Brevard, on Oct. 17, 1775, and gave a "satisfactory account of his political sentiments relative to American freedom," that was his vindication. But, evidently John Perkins protested again "the measures pursued by Christopher Beekman in obtaining the appearance of John Perkins," or the committee would not have taken the trouble to pass a third resolve that these measures were "reasonable and just." It has been suggested that Beekman arrested Perkins and took him to Salisbury as a prisoner from his home at Island Ford. People are not always nice about such matters in war-times or in near-war-times, as we know from recent experiences. There have been instances of the arrest, in good faith, of perfectly loyal and patriotic American citizens upon charges of pro-Germanism, who have been, upon examination, released and exonerated. What would you do? To punish a citizen or an officer for arresting an alleged pro-German might tend to discourage the patriotic efforts of others and might result in injury to the country. One can write about it philosophically; John Perkins protested, and I am satisfied protested vehemently. I can reconstruct the scene: He denounced as an outrage his arrest upon a flimsy charge based upon no evidence, and his being brought to Salisbury as a prisoner, like a sheep-stealer, as if he were guilty of a felony—he, a true colonial and citizen of Rowan county, a gentleman and not a thief! It was a very natural protest and reasonable, but there is no counting for the whims of a mob or crowd. The Committee of Safety was the people's supreme court and was always held with open doors. The mob was there and the term "gentleman" evidently used in the most unobjectionable sense, was taken up as being used in the loyalist sense, a sense that would have allowed of but a few gentlemen in Rowan county, none but great land-holders and justices of the peace. That was bound to be the sense in which John Perkins used it, for was he not brought before the committee on the charge of being unfriendly to American liberty? This was natural, too—natural but totally unjust. And so they echoed back at him—"Gentleman" John Perkins! They builded wiser than they knew, for though the dubbed him "Gentleman John" in reproach, the name spread and became general wherever he was known, and now, 115 years after his death, men call him "Gentleman" John Perkins, not in reproach and not knowing why, but supposing it to be complimentary rather than derogatory.

From the records it is learned that John Perkins never held any other office but that of Justice of the Peace and member of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions for Lincoln county. Any library of books he owned must have been a miscellaneous collection, and, like all the collections of those days, would be very interesting to browse over in these days. I know of but one book he possessed, which I have—"Shaw's Justice," an ancient tome published in London in the middle of the eighteenth century, upon which we probably based his judgments delivered in his dusty-foot court of Justice of the Peace and from the bench of the High Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. It may be assumed that sometimes, perplexed by the complicated syllogisms of this old black-letter commentary, he said to himself in the words of Dogberry, "The law is a ass," and fell back upon his chimney corner digests and horse-sense pandects.

### SOME OF JOHN PERKINS' MORE PROMINENT DESCENDANTS AND SUCCESSORS

His son, Ephraim Perkins, represented Lincoln in the Senate of 1805. Ephraim's son-in-law, Franklin D. Rhinehart, represented Lincoln in the House of Commons of four General Assemblies, 1844, 1846, 1848 and 1850, and in the Senate in the General Assembly of 1858.

Two of Franklin D. Rhinehart's grandsons are Wallace A. Rhinehart, son of the late Robert Perkins Rhinehart of Newton, who is a member of the North Carolina State Senate, Legislature of 119; and young lawyer Murphy, son of Rev. J. L. Murphy of the Reformed church at Hickory. Both are prominent citizens of Catawba county.

John Perkins' son, Alexander, represented Burke in the Senate in the General Assemblies of 1815, 1817 and 1819. (Up to 1835 the General Assembly met annually; after that date biennially.)

James Harvey Perkins, son of Joseph and grandson of John, represented Burke in the House of Commons in the General Assemblies of 1834, 1835 and 1836.

And Joseph Perkins' son-in-law, David Corpening, represented Burke in the House of Commons in the General Assembly of 1833.

Elisha Perkins Miller, son of Parson Miller and of his wife Mary, and grandson of John Perkins, represented Burke in the House of Commons in the General Assemblies of 1836, 1838 and 1840 and Caldwell in the House of Commons of the General Assemblies of 1846, 1848 and 1852, and he represented Burke and Caldwell in the Senate of 1858. He was the first Clerk of the Superior Court for the new county of Caldwell, 1840-1844. He was known as Maj. Miller of the old-time broom-stick militia, the officers of which were noted for their gorgeous uniforms, gold lace and ostrich feathers and the rank and file for their lack of uniforms and for their poor discipline; but he had a "war record" of 13 days, as witness the following declaration of Adjutant-General McCain under date of Aug. 3, 1916: "It is shown by the official records that Elisha P. Miller served as captain of Capt. Miller's company, 3rd North Carolina Militia, in the Cherokee war; that he was mustered in to date June 5, 1838, and that he was mustered out at Franklin, North Carolina, June 17, 1838." The Cherokee war was a bloodless conflict arising out of the removal of the eastern band of Cherokee Indians, under treaty, from their old reservation in the extreme western part of North Carolina to the new one in far-off Indian Territory. Some of them refused to go and assumed such a belligerent attitude that the authorities decided on a military "demonstration" and volunteers were raised and sent to Cherokee county. These companies were probably not technically cavalry, but they went on horseback. Two companies were sent from what is now Caldwell county—Capt. Miller's from the Burke section and Capt. Horton's from the Wilkes section. After 13 days of war's wild alarms these volunteers were disbanded in the Indian country, the controversy having been settled without bloodshed. As a matter of fact the Indians appear to have gained their point, for they are living there today on the eastern Cherokee reservation.

Dr. Alfred A. Kent (through Parson Miller), a prominent physician and capitalist of Lenoir, has represented Caldwell in the House; his uncle, A. Vanny Miller, in the House, and his brother-in-law, Edward F. Wakefield, in the Senate. Dr. Kent and his son, Archibald, recently returned from the front in France, where he was with the 30th division, are both city men.

William C. Newland of Lenoir, through Joseph Perkins, has been a member of the House several times, as Lieutenant-Governor he succeeded over the Senate, and was a very able Solicitor of his judicial district for two terms. His nephew, Thomas Newland, a brilliant young lawyer, was also Solicitor of the district afterwards, and died in office, cut off upon with only one leg and was for years a prominent Burke county physician and treasurer of the county until his death. Their sons, Ralph and Fred Laxton, are prominent in Charlotte as electrical engineers and business men generally. The fourth sister, Selina, married Col. Philetus Roberts,

the threshold of a promising career. W. C. Newland's father, the late Dr. Joseph C. Newland, represented Caldwell and McDowell in the Senate and House, an able uncle, Maj. Avery Connelly (through Joseph) represented McDowell in both houses. Dr. Newland's wife was Laura, daughter of Allen and Elizabeth Connelly, Elizabeth being a daughter of Joseph Perkins. Gov. Newland is one of the most popular of the public men in the State, and his wonderful geniality and the amiability of his disposition have won for him the affection and esteem of the people in his district as well as the confidence of the people of the whole State. Mr. Newland is a successful lawyer and began his career under bright auspices, being well equipped professionally, having a most popular turn for engaging the favorable attention of his constituents and being blessed by nature with a handsome person and pleasing address.

Capt. Nelson A. Miller, son of Elisha P. Miller and great-grandson of John Perkins, was captain of a Confederate cavalry company, was for many years on the Board of County Commissioners, was a successful and up-to-date farmer and was esteemed one of the most public-spirited of Caldwell's citizens. He was a popular man and was frequently pressed to become a candidate for political office, but he had no taste for politics and always declined.

William S. Miller, grandson of Parson Miller, a prominent business man in Lenoir, has been Sheriff of Caldwell, was long Postmaster of Lenoir, a position which son, W. Eugene Miller, filled for several years also.

Miss Mary Perkins was married to Horatio Miller Kent, descended from John Perkins through Parson Miller and his wife, Mary Perkins Miller.

Charles L. Schiefflin Corpening ("Shuff"), through Joseph, was the son of David Corpening and Mary, daughter of Joseph Perkins. David Corpening came of fine old Dutch stock, with the same tracings as the New York Schiefflins. "Shuff" Corpening, as he was universally called, was the successor to "Squire" Robert C. Pearson of Morganton as leader of the broad-minded business men of the mid-western section of the State, west of Salisbury. Besides his wide business activities he was for many years Clerk of the Superior Court for McDowell county. His son, Charles M. Corpening, of McDowell, is a retired captain in the U. S. navy, having left the service during the Klondike excitement to establish and conduct an electrical plant for Dawson City. He is now living the life of a retired sailor on his farm. He goes back to John Perkins through John the second by his mother, Martha A. Michaux. His son, Max, recently graduated from West Point, is an officer in the regular army.

C. L. S. Corpening had four sisters, and his sister Laura married Leland Martin of Wilkes and they have a son, Philetus, who is a Judge of a Superior Court in a Texas judicial district. His sister Laura married Leland Martin's brother Philetus of Wilkes, and their son, Julius C. Martin, is a prominent and wealthy lawyer and capitalist in Asheville. His sister Julia married Joseph Lavender Laxton (whose mother, Selina, was a daughter of Joseph Perkins), a gallant Confederate soldier who came out of the war a brave Confederate officer who was killed at the battle of Bethel.

Joseph Perkins had two daughters, Myra and Elizabeth, who married two brothers, George Connelly of Caldwell and Allen Connelly of Burke. From Allen and Elizabeth Connelly are derived the Newlands of Caldwell, the Bergner Forneys of Burke and Maj. Avery Connelly of McDowell.

George and Myra Connelly had several sons and two daughters, and all of those surviving raised up families of children who have prospered and are among the best of the citizenship of North Carolina and of the country. Reference to the descendants of one of their children is made below:

Jane Connelly, great-granddaughter of John Perkins, was married to Sidney P. Dula, a well-to-do planter in Caldwell and for many years Clerk of the Court. On both the paternal and maternal sides Mr. Dula belonged to colonial families in Wilkes county who took prominent parts in the War of the Revolution. On the maternal side he was of the family of the eminent Presbyterian divine, Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, president of Princeton College, who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence for the State of New Jersey. John and David Witherspoon of Wilkes were Revolutionary patriots, whose general service for the colonies and whose especially signal service at the battle of King's Mountain and elsewhere are graphically described in Draper's "Heroes of King's Mountain." Mr. Dula and his wife raised a large family of children, sons and daughters, and, soon after the civil war, moved to Missouri, where Mr. Dula went into the business of tobacco farming. Without going through all the details from the beginning of this venture until this time, it is sufficient to note its success: Caleb Connelly Dula, president of the Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company, and Robert B. Dula, a retired officer of the American Tobacco Company, both of New York and both great-grandsons of John Perkins, make the nearest approach to financial solvency of any of the old gentleman's living descendants, as they are accounted to be very wealthy, the pleasing epithet of "multimillionaire" being applied to them. Most of the members of this Dula family have shared in the wealth brought by tobacco, but Caleb and Robert are supposed to be the richest members of the family. "Bob" Dula, as he was called in Caldwell, was 17 years old in the last years of the war and when he arrived at that age went into the Confederate army, and, though he is not an old man, has to confess to being a Confederate "veteran." His father was in the army, as well as an older brother, George. His sister, Mrs. Laura D. English, of St. Louis, is much interested in everything connected with her great-great-grandfather, Gentleman John. It was she who furnished the photographs of his house.

Ward and Frank Powell are two rich young farmers living near Lenoir. Ward was County Commissioner a term of two, but resigned upon the plea that his official duties interfered with his private business. They are grandchildren of Sidney P. and Jane Connelly Dula, but have another line by which to reach John Perkins, being grandsons of Rev. John B. Powell, a fine old Baptist preacher, who married Margaret Sudderth, a granddaughter of Parson Miller and Mary Perkins Miller.

Jim and Ralph Connelly, bright boys who went through the University, are sons of Harvey Perkins Connelly, brother of Jane Dula, and the late James B. Connelly, Clerk of the Iredell Superior Court—and don't they all seem to have had it in for the Superior Court clerkships?—was a son of James Mortimer Connelly of Caldwell, brother of Jane Dula.

John Theodore Perkins, only child of smond and Mary Avery Perkins, is a Morganton lawyer and rated as being one of the ablest members of the Western North Carolina bar.

### COMMITTEE SAYS STRIKE IS INDUSTRIAL BARBARISM

Characterizing all strike as "industrial barbarism" and declaring that "there is no place in this country either for industrial despotism or labor despotism," the Senate committee authorized to investigate the steel strike last Saturday presented a report covering its hearings both in Washington and in Pittsburgh, and criticizing both the workers and the employers in the controversy which resulted in at least partial disruption of the steel industry.

The committee's plain conclusion, concurred in by all members, was expressed in the statement that "the public has a right to determine that capital shall not arrogate to itself the right to determine in its own way those industrial questions, and it is the same as to labor, and the duty is upon Congress to provide some way of adjusting these difficulties."

As a permanent preventive of strikes, which the committee concedes "are apparently the only way for labor to secure even its just demands if employers refuse to grant them," it is recommended that Congress authorize the establishment of some such mediation agency, with well-defined powers, as the recently dissolved war labor board.

"This board would have the power of compulsory investigation," the report adds on this subject, but "not to the extent of compulsory arbitration. A just decision of the board would be endorsed by the public. There is good sense enough in the American people to bring about an adjustment of these difficulties."

### GERMAN STUDENTS ARE BEING TRAINED IN GUNNERY

A dispatch from Berlin says that Charlottenburg scholars in the higher schools are being trained for two hours in the afternoon in the art of using machine guns, hand grenades and rifles, according to a Charlottenburg citizen who writes to the People's Gazette, a popular edition of the Tageblatt. The writer declares that during the past few weeks he has had repeated opportunity to witness the training in a military sense of children between 12 and 16 years of age on a big field in Charlottenburg. The training was carried out in the same way as during the best days of imperial regime. The man in charge was a lieutenant and non-commissioned officers conducted the training with the use of all the military course and command terms used in the old army.

The People's Gazette appeals to Minister of Education Haenisch, "who is responsible for the upbringing of youth," to investigate and eliminate what it calls a "scandalous situation."

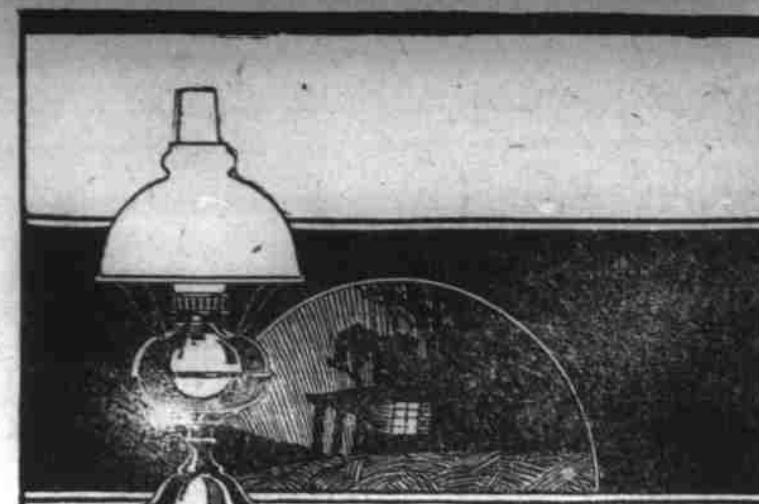
The independent socialist newspaper Freiheit had a similar story of hand grenade and machine gun instruction recently. Although it was printed conspicuously no attention was paid to it by either the police or the ministry of education. The People's Gazette asks whether the authorities cannot or will not answer.

### JUDGE WEBB TO HAVE HIS OFFICE IN CHARLOTTE

Judge E. Yates Webb, whose nomination to the Federal judge bench was confirmed by the Senate last week, has announced that he will make Charlotte his home, or at least have his office in that city.

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