

Rogers  
1/31/39-

JOHN MARRANT'---THE NEGRO MUNCHAUSEN

by J. A. Rogers.

John Marrant, who was said to be the first Christian missionary to the Cherokees, is a sort of combination St. Paul, Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel-in-the-lion's den and Jonah, not to mention Christ and other figures of the Bible.

Like St. Paul, he was stricken down at the moment of his conversion and remained stupefied for days; like Nebuchadnezzar he wandered in the fields and ate grass; like Daniel, he was among wild beasts and was undevoured; like Jonah, he was overboard, not among whales but sharks, and was rescued by the Lord; and like Christ he healed the sick, in a manner that sounds miraculous.

Marrant, according to his own narrative, was born June 15, 1755, in New York City. His father died

when he was four, and his mother took him when he was five to St. Augustine, which he says was seven hundred miles distant, (evidently St. Augustine, Fla.), where he went to school. At the age of six years and six months, he moved to Georgia and lived there until he was eleven, when he went to live in Charleston, S.C.

Being fond of music and dancing, his great desire was to learn them, but his mother objected saying that music was godless. But he insisted and she finally yielded to the extent of paying twenty pounds sterling (\$100) down, a large sum those days, for his lessons. At the violin, he did so well that in six months he could play for the whole school. He also learned the French horn at which he was soon also adept.

Because of his musical ability, he became popular in Charleston, and made considerable money. "I was a stranger to want being supplied with as much money as I had need for. I was now in my thirteenth year devoted to pleasure, and drinking in iniquity like water; a slave to every vice suited to my nature and to my years."

His mother, hoping to reform him, apprenticed him to another master. Then one night as he was going to play at a party he passed a meeting house, where a preacher, named Whitfield, was holding forth. Entering he saw a sign, "Prepare to meet thy God, Oh Israel."

These words so impressed him that "he was struck to the ground and lay both speechless and senseless for twenty-four minutes." When he came to he found two men attending him and a woman sprinkling water in his face. Every word of the minister, he said, was like "a parcel of swords thrust in me." He had to be carried home to bed. For days he lay prostrated, then in a trance, he went wandering for nine days "feeding upon grass and not knowing whither I was going." Bears, wolves, and other wild beasts who saw him left him undisturbed.

After he had wandered a distance of fifty-five miles in the forest, he met an old Indian hunter, who knew his mother and his sister, and he spent ten days with him killing deer and skinning them. Then as it was the end of the hunting season, he followed him to his people, who lived in "a large Indian town belonging to the Cherokee nation."

Regarding him as an intruder, the Indians seized Marrant, sentenced him to death, and threw him into prison. When the time set for his execution came, he started to pray to God, like Daniel in the lion's den, in English and then in Cherokee which so affected the man who was to kill him, that he took him instead to see the Cherokee king.

As it happened the king's daughter was grievously ill---and another man as well---and the king told him that

if he did not cure them, he would cut off his head. He there upon prayed to God, who answered his prayer. From then on, he says, "he was treated like a prince" living in "the king's palace" and winning such power over the king that the latter "would take off his golden ornaments, his chain and bracelets like a child and lay them down if I objected to them."

Wanting to return home, he told the king, who gave him an escort of one hundred and forty men. Reaching home, he found his people in tears believing he had been eaten by wild beasts.

Thereafter he remained in Charleston till the the beginning of the Revolutionary War, when he was impressed on board the British sloop-of-war, Scorpion, as a musician. He was present at the siege of Charleston when General Clinton captured the town. In the triumphal parade, he saw the king of the Cherokees, who was glad to see him again.

He served King George III six years and eleven months, and saw active service again whilst on board the Princess Amelia of eighty-four guns when it engaged the Dutch off Dogger Bank, England. Wounded, he was sent to hospital where he remained three months and ten days after which he went to live in London.

Whilst at sea, he had an a dventure unparalleled in maritime annals. He says, "I was cruising about in the

American seas, and cannot help mentioning a singular deliverance I had from the most imminent danger and the use the Lord made of it to me. We were overtaken by a violent storm. I was washed overboard and thrown on again; dashed into the sea a second time and tossed upon deck again. I now fastened a rope around my middle as a security against being thrown into the sea again, but alas, forgot to fasten it to any part of the ship. Being carried away the third time by the fury of the waves, I found the rope both useless and an incumbrance. I was in the sea a third time about eight minutes and the sharks came round me in great numbers; one of an enormous size, that could easily have taken me into its mouth at once, rubbed against my side. I then cried more earnestly to the Lord than I had done for some time; and he who heard Jonah's prayer did not shut out mine for I was thrown aboard again." (Page 21).

Making his home in England, he entered the ministry and was ordained in 1785. The Countess of Huntington, who became his patroness, advised him to go to Nova Scotia, to which place the Maroon Negroes of Jamaica had been exiled by the British government.

His narrative ends with the statement that he expected to sail for Nova Scotia "in a few days." (1)

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Arthur Schomburg credits Marrant with having been the first to carry the gospel to the Cherokees, Creeks, Catamar, and Housaw Indians, but the evidence, since it is based on Marrant's own narrative, is flimsy indeed. In fact, Marrant was so much a romancer, for instance, he gives the impression that the Cherokee chief, king as he calls him, lived in a palace instead of a wigwam, that it is difficult to tell where he is speaking the truth. There are still other evidences of a lack of knowledge of Indian life on Marrant's part.

Marrant's authentic history seems really to begin on his arrival in Nova Scotia, and on this there are only one or two insignificant items. It appears that he finally left Nova Scotia and returned to England.

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1. Narrative of the Life of John Marrant.  
Authenticated by Mr. Aldridge (another minister). J.  
Gadsby, Manchester, England. 3rd. ed. 1838. Class Mark  
HBM. 42nd Street Library. The Reserve Room has an 1813  
edition Class Mark \*KF

2. Arthur Schomburg, Journal of Negro History.  
Vol. 21, pp. 394-400 (1936). 42nd Street Library. Class  
Mark IEC.

Nugent

2/15/39

(On John Marrant)

A great raconteur and master teller of tall tales was lost to the world upon the death of John Marrant. This not-too-simple Negro had the ability to simple truth to the fantastic heights of elaborate myth. No puny, delicate legends for him when he could imbue his embroideries with the robust heartiness of a Paul Bunyan and a John Henry. His slightly unusual life, according to him, contained all the better features of the more popular and spectacular Biblical heroics. He felt that he was, and quite convinced a goodly number of the fact, an amalgamated St. Paul-Nebuchadnezzar-Daniel-in-the-lion's-den-Jonah-Christ, and the first Missionary to the Cherkees.

Like St. Paul he was stricken down at the moment of his conversion and remained stupified for days; like Nebuchadnezzar he wandered in the fields and ate grass; like Daniel, was among the wild beasts and was unmolested; like Jonah he was overboard, not among the whales but sharks; and Christ-like, healed the sick and dieing in a manner most miraculous.

At the age of five, this embryo Munchausen was taken by his mother from New York, where he was born on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1755, to St. Augustine Florida, where he started school. This little genius was fond of music and dancing, those wicked instruments of the godless, and finally prevailed upon his weaker-and-no-wiser mother to allow him to study these evils. They had left Florida for Georgia to come at last to Charleston S.C. His mother had to pay twenty pounds Sterling (\$100) for the sinful lessons, a great sum in those days before America had gained her freedom. However, her money brought rapid returns, for within six months he was doing so well at the violin that he could play before the entire school. He soon became past-master of the French horn as well. This musical genius he turned to use, along with his popular personality, and was content to earn

considerable money. As he puts it, "I was a stranger to want, being supplied with as much money as I had need for. I was now in my thirteenth year devoted to pleasure, and drinking in iniquity like water; a slave to every vice suited to my nature and to my years."

It was shortly after his initial success as an entertainer that the tender lad was smitten with religion. It seems as though, while passing a meeting house on his way to play for a party one night, he felt impelled by some strange and mysterious force to look in upon the meeting. Entering he saw a sign that read, "Prepare to meet thy God, Oh Israel." The sight of these words so impressed him that "he was struck to the ground and lay both speechless and senseless for twenty-four minutes." He came around to find two men attending him and a woman sprinkling his face with water. Every word spoken by the minister was, in his words, like--"a parcel of swords thrust in me." He had to be carried home to bed. For days he lay in a trance and spoke strange words, and in a trance went wandering for nine days "feeding upon ~~the~~ grass and not knowing wither I was ~~going~~ going." Bears, wolves and all of the other many wild beasts of the land about Charleston saw him and left him undisturbed.

He wandered to the great distance of fifty-five miles into the forest, where he met an old Indian hunter who knew his mother and sister, and he spent ten days with him, killing deer and skinning them. By which time it was the end of the hunting season and he followed the hunter to his people, who lived in "a large Indian town belonging to the Cherokee nation."

They did not see the light of God upon him as apparently the simple and believing hunter had, and regarding him as an intruder, which indeed he was, the Indians seized the young Marrant, sentenced him to death, and threw him into 'prison'. But the intrepid John was not over-

come. The youth called upon God in English. Then in Cherokee. This second second linguistic exhibition so impressed and affected the man who was to kill him, that he took him to see the Cherokee 'King' instead.

Now it so happened, we are told, that the daughter of the King was grievously ill as was also a man---and the 'King' told Marrant to cure them or to lose his head. This the young man took easily in his now rapidly growing stride. He prayed to God, who at once answered his prayer and they were healed. From that time on, needless to state, he was treated like a prince, "living in the King's palace" and winning such power over the King that the latter "would take off his golden ornaments, his chain and bracelets and lay them down if I objected to them."

But such earthly glory palled after a while, and he was stricken with an humble desire to see his home again. The "King" gave him an escort of one hundred and forty men. It is not quite clearly stated where or when or how this escort left him, but he came upon his home alone and wierdly garbed. As he walked throught the streets dressed in his furs and feathers and skins and no one knew him. He came upon his home and was not at first recognized by his mother or sister. They did not know him even when he spoke his name to them. But, (And a little child shall lead them,) the youngest member of the family looked on him and at once ran to him weeping tears of joy and calling him by name and saying that this was his brother. And only then did his mother know him. At that it may have been a slight shock to them for they had been certain that he had been devoured by the wild beasts.

He remained now in Charlestown until the beginning of the Revolutionary War, when he was impressed on board the British sloop-of-war, 'Scorpion', as a musician. He was present at the siege of Charleston when

General Clinton captured the town, and in the triumphal parade saw the "King" of the Cherokees, who was glad to see him again. Marrant served King George III, six years and eleven months, and saw active service again while aboard the "Princess Amelia", a sloop of eighty-four guns, when it engaged the Dutch off the Coast of Dogger Bank, England. Wounded, he was sent to a hospital where he remained three months and ten days, after which he went to live in England.

While at sea, he had an adventure of Biblical and Arabian Nights proportions. This Sinbad says in words which can not be improved upon,

"I was cruising about in the American seas, and cannot help mentioning a deliverance I had from the most imminent danger and the use the Lord made of it to me. We were overtaken by a violent storm. I was washed overboard and thrown on again; dashed into the sea a second time and tossed upon the deck again. I now fastened a rope around my middle as a security against being thrown into the sea again, but alas, forgot to fasten it to any part of the ship. Being carried away a third time by the fury of the waves, I found the rope both useless and an incumbrance. I was in the sea a third time about eight minutes and the sharks came round me in great numbers; one of an enormous size, that could easily have taken me into its mouth at once, rubbed against my side. I then cried more earnestly to the Lord than I had done for some time; and He who heard Jonah's prayer did not shut out mine for I was thrown aboard again."

After making his home in England he entered the ministry and secured as patron the Countess of Huntington. He was ordained in 1785. His patron advised him to go to Nova Scotia, to which place the Maroon Negroes of Jamaica had been exiled by the British government. It is pretty certain that this was advise which he accepted.

And the truth of the life and adventures of John Marrant ~~etc.~~

Nugent

(on John Marrant )

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is attested to by Mr. Aldridge (another minister) who heard it from the Countess of Huntington who should know having heard it herself from the very lips of her protege.