

THE LIFE
AND
ASTONISHING ADVENTURES
OF
PETER WILLIAMSON,
WHO WAS
CARRIED OFF WHEN A CHILD FROM ABERDEEN
AND
SOLD FOR A SLAVE.



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ESQ.

BY
JOHN H. BROWN



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LIFE AND ADVENTURES
OF
PETER WILLIAMSON.

I WAS born in the parish of Aboyne, Aberdeen Shire, of respectable parents, who sent me very early to live with an aunt at Aberdeen; when, under the years of pupillarity, one playing on the quay with others of my companions—being of a stout robust constitution—I was taken notice of by two fellows belonging to a vessel in the harbour, employed, in the trade called kidnaping; that is stealing young children from their parents, and selling them as slaves in plantations abroad. Being market out by those monsters of impiety as their prey, I was cajoled on board the ship by them, where I was no sooner got, than they conducted me between the decks to some others they had kidnaped in the same manner. At that time, I had no sense of the fate that was destined for me, and spent the time in childish

amusements with my fellow-sufferers in the steerage, being never suffered to go upon deck whilst the vessel lay in the harbour.

In about a month's time the ship set sail for America. I cannot forget that, when we arrived on the coast we were destined for, a hard gale of wind sprung up from the S. E. and, to the captain's great surprise (he not thinking he was near land, although having been 11 weeks on the passage), about twelve o'clock at night, the ship struck on a sand bank off Cape May, near the Capes of Delaware, and, to the great terror and affright of the ship's company, in a short time was almost full of water. The boat was then hoisted out, into which the captain and his fellow-villians, the crew, got with some difficulty, leaving me and my deluded companions to perish, as they then naturally concluded inevitable death to be our fate. Often, in my distresses and miseries since, have I wished that such had been the consequence, when in a state of innocence! But Providence thought proper to reserve me for future trials of its goodness. Thus abandoned and deserted, without the least prospect of relief, but threatened every moment with death, did these villians leave us. The cries, the shrieks and tears of a parcel of infants, had no effect on, or caused the least remorse in the breasts of these merciless wretches. Scarce can I say to which

to give me preference, whether to such as these, who have had the opportunity of knowing the Christian religion; or to the savages herein after described, who profane not the gospel, or boast of humanity; and if they act in a more brutal and butcherly manner, yet it is to their enemies, for the sake of plunder and the rewards offered them for their principles are alike—the love of sordid gain being both their motives. The ship being on a sand bank, which did not give way to let her deeper, we lay in the same deplorable condition until morning, when, though we saw the land of Cape May, at about a mile's distance, we knew not what would be our fate.

The wind at length abated, and the captain, unwilling to lose all her cargo, about ten o'clock, sent some of his crew in a boat to the ship's side to bring us on shore, where we lay in a sort of a camp, made of the sails of the vessel, and such other things as we could get. The provisions lasted us until we were taken in by a vessel bound to Philadelphia, lying on this island, as well as I can recollect, near three weeks. Very little of the cargo was saved undamaged, and the vessel was entirely lost.

When arrived and landed at Philadelphia, the capital of Pennsylvania, the captain had people enough who came to buy us. He, sold us at about £16 per head. What became of my un-

happy companions, I never knew; it was my lot to be sold to one of my countrymen, whose name was Hugh Wilson, a North Britain, who had in his youth undergone the same fate as myself—having been kidnapped from St. Johnstown, in Scotland.

Happy was my lot in falling into my countryman's power, as he was, contrary to many others of his calling, a humane, worthy, honest man. Having no children of his own, and commiserating my unhappy condition, he took great care of me until I was fit for business, and, about the 12th year of my age, set me about little trifles; in which state I continued until my 14th year, when I was more fit for harder work. During such my idle state, seeing my fellow-servants often reading and writing, it incited in me an inclination to learn, which I intimated to my master, telling him I should be very willing to serve a year longer than the contract by which I was sold, if he would indulge me in going to school; this he readily agreed to, saying that winter would be the best time. It being then summer, I waited with impatience for the other season; but, to make some progress in my design, I got a Primer, and learned as much from my fellow-servants as I could. At school, where I went every winter for five years, I made a tolerable proficiency, and have ever since been improving

myself at leisure hours. With this good master I continued till I was seventeen years old, when he died; and, as a reward for my faithful service, he left me £200 currency, which was then about £150 sterling, his best horse, saddle, and all his wearing apparel.

Being now my own master, having money in my pocket, and all other necessaries, I employed myself in jobbing about the country, working for any one that would employ me, for near seven years, when, thinking I had money sufficient to follow some better way of life, I resolved to settle, but thought one step necessary thereto was to be married; for which purpose I applied to the daughter of a substantial planter, and found my suit was not unacceptable to her or her father, so that matters were soon concluded upon, and we married. My father-in-law, in order to establish us in the world in an easy, if not affluent manner, made me a deed of gift of a tract of land, that lay, unhappily for me, as it has since proved, on the frontiers of the province of Pennsylvania, near the forks of Delaware, in Berks County, containing about 200 acres; 30 of which were well cleared, and fit for immediate use, whereon was a good house and barn. The place pleasing me well, I settled on it, though it cost me the major part of my money in buying stock, household furniture, and implements for out-door work;

and happy as I was in a good wife, yet did my felicity last me not long; for about the year 1754, the Indians in the French Interest, who had for a long time before ravaged and destroyed other parts of America unmolested, I may very properly say, began to be very troublesome on the frontiers of our province, where they generally appeared in small skulking parties, with yellings, shoutings, and antic postures, instead of trumpets and drums, committing great devastations. The Pennsylvanians little imagined at first that the Indians, guilty of such outrages and violence, were some of those who pretended to be in the English interest; which, alas! proved to be too true to many of us; for, like the French in Europe, without regard to faith or treaties, they suddenly break out into furious, rapid outrages, and devastations, but soon retire precipitately having no stores nor provisions but what they meet with in their incursions. Some indeed carry a bag with biscuit or Indian corn therein, but not unless they have a long march to their destined place of action. And those French who were sent to dispossess us in that part of the world, being indefatigable in their duty, and continually contriving and using all manner of ways and means to win the Indians to their interest, many of whom had been too negligent, and sometimes, I may say, cruelly treated by those who

pretend to be their protectors and friends, found it no very difficult matter to get over to their interest many who belonged to those nations in amity with us, especially as the rewards they gave them were so great, they paying for every scalp of an English person £15 sterling.

Shocking to human nature were the barbarities daily committed by the savages, and are not to be paralleled in all the volumes of history! Scaree did a day pass but some unhappy family or other fell victims to savage cruelty. Terrible indeed it proved to me, as well as to many others; I that was now happy in an easy state of life, blessed with an affectionate and tender wife, who was possessed of all amiable qualities, to enable me to go through the world with that peace and serenity of mind which every Christian wishes to possess, became on a sudden one of the most unhappy and deplorable of mankind. Scaree can I sustain the shock which for ever recoils on me, at thinking on the last time of seeing that good woman. The fatal 2d of October, 1754, she that day went from home to visit some of her relations. As I staid up later than usual, expecting her return, none being in the house besides myself, how great was my surprise, terror, and affright, when, about 11 o'clock at night, I heard the dismal war-ery, or war-whoop of the savages, and to my inexpressible grief, soon found my

house was attacked by them. I flew to my chamber window, and perceived them to be twelve in number. They making several attempts to get in, I asked them what they wanted. They gave me no answer, but continued beating, and trying to get the door opened. Judge, then, the condition I must be in, knowing the cruelty and merciless disposition of those savages, should I fall into their hands. To escape which dreadful misfortune, having my gun loaded in my hand, I threatened them with death if they should not desist. But how vain and fruitless are the efforts of one man against the united force of so many, and of such merciless, undaunted, and blood-thirsty monsters as I had here to deal with. One of them that could speak a little English, threatened me in return, that, if I did not come out, they would burn me alive in the house—telling me farther, that they were no friends to the English; but if I would come out and surrender myself prisoner, they would not kill me. My terror and distraction at hearing this is not to be expressed by words, nor easily imagined by any person, unless in the same condition. Little could I depend on the promises of such creatures, and yet, if I did not, inevitable death, by being burnt alive, must be my lot. Distracted as I was, in such deplorable circumstances, I chose to rely on the uncertainty of their fallacious promis-

es, rather than meet with certain death, by rejecting them; and, accordingly, went out of my house with my gun in my hand, not knowing what I did, or that I had it. Immediately on my approach, they rushed on me like so many tigers, and instantly disarmed me. Having me thus in their power, the merciless villians bound me to a tree near the door; they then went into the house, and plundered and destroyed every thing, carrying off what moveables they could; the rest, together with the house, they set fire to, and consumed before my eyes. The barbarians, not satisfied with this, set fire to my barn, stable, and out-houses, wherein were about 200 bushels of wheat, six cows, four horses, and five sheep, which were entirely consumed to ashes. During the conflagration to describe the thoughts, the fears, and misery that I felt, is utterly impossible, after this, they untied me, and gave me a great load to carry on my back, under which I travelled all that night with them, full of the most terrible apprehensions, and oppressed with the greatest anxiety of mind, lest my unhappy wife should likewise have fallen a prey to those cruel monsters. At day-break, my infernal masters ordered me to lay down my load, when, tying my hands again round a tree with a small cord, they then forced the blood out of my finger-ends. They then kindled a fire near the

tree whereto I was bound, which filled me with dreadful agonies, concluding I was going to be made a sacrifice to their barbarity.

The fire being thus made, they for some time danced round me after their manner, with various odd motions and antic gestures, whooping, halloeing, and crying in a frightful manner, as it is their custom. Having satisfied themselves in this sort of their mirth, they proceeded in a more tragical manner, taking the burning coals and sticks, flaming with fire at the ends, holding them near my face, head, hands, and feet, with a deal of monstrous pleasure and satisfaction, and at the same time threatening to burn me entirely if I made the least noise or motion of my body. Thus tortured, as I was, almost to death, I suffered their brutal pleasure without being allowed to vent my inexpressible anguish otherwise than by shedding tears; even which, when these inhuman tormentors observed, with a shocking pleasure and alacrity, they would take fresh coals and apply near my eyes, telling me my face was wet, and that they would dry it for me. How I suffered these tortures, I have here faintly described, has been matter of wonder to me many times; but God enabled me to wait with more than common patience for a deliverance I daily prayed for.

Having at length satisfied their brutal pleasure,

they sat round the fire and roasted their meat of which they had robbed my dwelling. When they had prepared it, and satisfied their voracious appetites, they offered some to me; though it is easily imagined I had but little appetite to eat, after the tortures and miseries I had undergone, yet was I forced to seem pleased with what they offered me, lest, by refusing it, they had again resumed their hellish practices. What I could not eat, I contrived to get between the bark and the tree where I was fixed, they having unbound my hands until they imagined I had eat all they gave me; but then they again bound me as before, in which deplorable condition was I foreed to continue all that day. When the sun was set, they put out the fire, and covered the ashes with leaves, as is their usual custom, that the white people might not discover any traces or signs of their having been there.

Going from thence along by the river, for the space of six miles, loaded as I was before, we arrived at a spot near the Apalachian mountains, where they hid their plunder under logs of wood, and Oh, shocking to relate! from thence did these hellish monsters proceed to a neighbouring house, occupied by one Joseph Suider and his unhappy family, consisting of his wife, five children, and a young man, his servant. They soon got admittance into the unfortunate man's house, where

they immediately, without the least remorse, and with more than brutal cruelty, scalped the tender parents and the unhappy children; nor could the tears, the shrieks, or cries of these unhappy victims prevent their horrid massacre; for having thus scalped them, and plundered the house of every thing that was moveable, they set fire to the same, where the poor creatures met their final doom amidst the flames, the hellish miscreants standing at the door, or as near the house as the flames would permit them, rejoicing and echoing back, in their diabolical manner, the piercing cries, heart-rending groans, and paternal and affectionate soothing, which issued from this most horrid sacrifice of an innocent family, not contented with what they had already done, they still continued their inordinate villiany, in making a general conflagration of the barn and stables, together with all the corn, horses, cows, and every thing on the place.

Thinking the young man belonging to this unhappy family would be of some service to them in carrying part of their plunder, they spared his life, and loaded him and myself with what they had here got, and again marched to the Blue Hills, where they stowed their goods as before. My fellow-sufferer could not long bear the cruel treatment which we were both obliged to suffer, and complaining bitterly to me of being unable

to proceed any farther, I endeavoured to condole him as much as lay in my power, to bear up under his afflictions, and wait with patience till, by the divine assistance, we should be delivered out of their clutches; but in vain, for he still continued his moans and tears, which one of the savages perceiving as we travelled on, instantly came up to us, and with his tomahawk gave him a blow on the head, which felled the unhappy youth to the ground, where they immediately scalped and left him. The suddenness of this murder shocked me to that degree, that I was in a manner like a statue, being quite motionless, expecting my fate would soon be the same; however, recovering my distracted thoughts, I dissembled the uneasiness and anguish which I felt, as well as I could, from the barbarians; but such was the terror that I was under, that for some time I scarce knew the days of the week, or what I did, so that, at this period, life indeed became a burden to me, and I regretted being saved from my first persecutors, the sailors.

The horrid fact being completed, they kept on their course near the mountains, where they lay skulking four or five days, rejoicing at the plunder and store they had got. When provisions became scarce, they made their way towards Busquehana, where still, to add to the many barbarities they had already committed, passing near

another house inhabited by an unhappy old man, whose name was John Adams, with his wife and four small children; and, meeting with no resistance, they immediately scalped the unhappy wife and her four children, before the good old man's eyes. Inhuman and horrid as this was, it did not satiate them, for when they had murdered the poor woman, they acted with her in such a brutal manner, as decency, or the remembrance of the crime, will not permit me to mention, and this even before the unhappy husband, who not being able to avoid the sight, and incapable of affording her the least relief, entreated them to put an end to his miserable being; but they were as deaf and regardless to the tears, prayers, and entreaties of this venerable sufferer, as they had been to those of the others, and proceeded in their hellish purpose of burning and destroying his house, barn, cattle, hay, corn, and every thing the poor man a few hours before was master of. Having saved what they thought proper from the flames, they gave the old man, feeble, weak, and in the miserable condition he then was, as well as myself, burdens to carry, and loading themselves likewise with bread and meat, pursued their journey on towards the Great Swamp, where, being arrived, they lay for eight or nine days, sometimes diverting themselves in exercising the most atrocious and barbarous cruelties on

their unhappy victim, the old man; sometimes they would strip him naked, and paint him all over with various sorts of colours, which they extracted, or made from herbs and roots; at other times, they would pluck the white hairs from his venerable beard, and tauntingly tell him, he was a fool for living so long, and that they would show him kindness in putting him out of the world; to all which the poor creature could but add his sighs, his tears, his moans, and entreaties, that, to my affrighted imagination, were enough to penetrate a heart of adamant, and soften the most obdurate savage. In vain, alas! were all his tears, for daily did they tire themselves with the various means they tried to torment him—sometimes tying him to a tree, and whipping at others, scorching his furrowed cheeks with red-hot coals, and burning his legs, quite to the knees; but the good old man, instead of re-
 viling, or wickedly arraigning the divine justice, like many others in such cases, even in the greatest agonies, incessantly offered up his prayers to the Almighty, with the most fervent thanksgivings for his former mercies, and hoping the flames, then surrounding and burning his aged limbs, would soon send him to the blissful mansions of the just, to be a partaker of the blessings there. And during such his pious ejaculations, his internal plagues would come round him, mimicking

his heart-rending groans and piteous wailings. One night after, he had thus been tormented whilst he and I were sitting together, condoling each other at the misfortunes and miseries we daily suffered, twenty scalps and three prisoners were brought in by another party of Indians. They had unhappily fallen in their hands in Cannojigge, a small town near the river Susquehanna, chiefly inhabited by the Irish. These prisoners gave us some shocking accounts of the murders and devastations committed in their parts. The various and complicated actions of these barbarians would entirely fill a large volume; but what I have already written, with a few other instances which I shall select from the information, will enable the reader to guess at the horrid treatment the English, and Indians in their interest, suffered for many years past. I shall therefore only mention, in a brief manner, those that suffered near the same time with myself. This party who now joined us, had it not, I found, in their power to begin their wickedness as soon as those who visited my habitation, the first of their tragedies being on the 25th day of October, 1754, when John Lewis, with his wife and three small children, fell sacrifices to their cruelty, and were miserably scalped and murdered, his house, barn, and every thing he possessed being burnt and destroyed. On the 28th,

Jacob Miller, with his wife and six of his family, together with every thing on his plantation, underwent the same fate. The 30th, the house, mill, barn, twenty head of cattle, two teams of horses, and every thing belonging to the unhappy George Folke, met with the like treatment—himself, wife, and all his miserable family, consisting of nine in number, being inhumanly scalped, then cut in pieces and given to the swine, which devoured them. I shall give another instance of the numberless and unheard of barbarities they related of the savages, and proceed to their own tragical end. In short, one of the substantial traders belonging to the province, having business that called him some miles up the country, fell into the hands of these devils, who not only scalped him, but immediately roasted him before he was dead; then, like cannibals for want of other food, eat his whole body, and of his head made what they called an Indian pudding.

From these few instances of savage cruelty, the deplorable situation of the defenceless inhabitants, and what they hourly suffered in that part of the globe, must strike the utmost terror to a human soul, and cause in every breast the utmost detestation, nor only against the authors of such tragie scenes, but against those who, through perfidy, inattention, or pusillanimous and erroneous principles, suffered these savages at first, un-

repelled, or even unmolested, to commit such outrages and incredible deprivations and murders; for no torments, no barbarities that can be exercised on the human sacrifices they get into their power, are left untried or omitted.

The three prisoners that were brought with these additional forces, constantly repining at their lot, and almost dead with their excessive hard treatment, contrived at last to make their escape; but being far from their own settlements, and not knowing the country, were soon after met by some others of the tribes or nations at war with us, and brought back to their diabolical masters, who greatly rejoiced at having them again in their infernal power. The poor creatures, almost famished for want of sustenance, having had none during the time of their elopement, were no sooner in the clutches of the barbarians, than two of them were tied to a tree, and a great fire made round them, where they remained till they were terribly scorched and burnt, when one of the villians, with his scalping knife, ripe open their bellies, took out their entrails, and burnt them before their eyes, whilst the others were cutting, piercing, and tearing the flesh from their breasts, hands, arms, and legs, with red-hot irons, till they were dead. The third unhappy victim was reserved a few hours longer, to be, if possible, sacrificed in a more

cruel manner—his arms were tied close to his body, and a hole being dug deep enough for him to stand upright, he was put therein, and earth rammed and beat in all round his body, up to the neck, so that his head only appeared above the ground; they then scalped him, and there let him remain for three or four hours in the greatest agonies; after which they made a small fire near his head, causing him to suffer the most excruciating torments imaginable, whilst the poor creature could only cry for mercy in killing him immediately, for his brains were boiling in his head. Inexorable to all his complaints, they continued the fire, whilst, shocking to behold, his eyes gushed out of their sockets; and such agonizing torments did the unhappy creature suffer for near two hours till he was quite dead! They then cut off his head and buried it with the other bodies—my task being to dig the graves, which, feeble and terrified as I was, the dread of suffering the same fate, enabled me to do. I shall not here take up the reader's time, in vainly attempting to describe what I felt on such an occasion, but continue my narrative, as more equal to my abilities.

A great snow now falling, the barbarians were a little fearful lest the white people should, by their traces, find out their skulking retreats, which obliged them to make the best of their

way to their winter quarters, about two hundred miles farther from any plantation or inhabitants, where, after a long and tedious journey, being almost starved, I arrived with this infernal crew. The place where we were to rest, in their tongue is called Alamingo. There were found a number of wigwams full of their women and children. Dancing, shooting, and shouting, were their general amusements; and in all their festivals and dances they relate what successes they have had, and what damages they have sustained in their expeditions, in which I became part of their theme. The severity of the cold increasing, they stript me of my clothes, for their own use, and gave me such as they usually wore themselves, being a piece of blanket, a pair of mogganes, or shoes, with a yard of coarse cloth to put round me instead of breeches. To describe their dress and manner of living may not be altogether unacceptable to some of my readers; but, as the size of this book will not permit me to be so particular as I might otherwise be, I shall just observe, that they, in general, wear a white blanket, which in war-time they paint with various figures, but particularly the leaves of trees, in order to deceive their enemies, when in the woods. Their mogganes are made of deer-skins, and the best sort have them bound round the edges with little beads and ribbands. On their legs they

wear pieces of blue cloth for stockings, some like our soldiers' splatter-dashes. They reach higher than their knees, but not lower than their ankles. They esteem them easy to run in. Breeches they never wear, but instead thereof two pieces of linen, one before and another behind. The better sort have shirts of the finest linen they can get, and to these some wear ruffles; but these they never put on till they have painted them of various colours, which they get from the pecone root and bark of trees, and never pull them on to wash, but wear them till they fall to pieces. They are very proud, and take great delight in wearing trinkets, such as silver plates, round their wrists and necks, with several strings of wampum, which is made of cotton, interwoven with pebbles, cockleshells, &c. down to their breasts, and from their ears and noses they have rings or beads which hang dangling an inch or two. The men have no beards, to prevent which they use certain instruments and tricks as soon it begins to grow. The hair of their heads is managed differently; some pluck out and destroy all, except a lock hanging from the crown of the head, which they interweave with wampum and feathers of various colours. The women wear it very long, twisted down their backs with beads, feathers, and wampum, and on their heads most of them wear little coronets of brass or copper; round

their middle they wear a blanket instead of a petticoat. The females are very chaste and constant to their husbands; and if any young maiden should happen to have a child before marriage, she is never esteemed afterwards. As for their food, they get it chiefly by hunting and shooting, and boil or roast all the meat they eat. Their standing dish consists of Indian corn soaked, then bruised and boiled. Their bread is likewise made of wild oats, or sun-flower seeds. Their gun, tomahawk, scalping-knife, powder and shot, they carry with them in time of war. They in war decline open engagements; bush fighting or skulking is their discipline; they are brave when engaged, having great fortitude in enduring tortures and are the most implacably vindictive people upon the earth; for they revenge the death of any relation, or any affront, whenever occasion presents, let the distance of time be never so remote. After long enduring the greatest of hardships with these Indians. I at last escaped out of their hand and went to Quebee; where, I was put on board a French Packet, bound for England, and after a passage of six weeks. We, at last, to our great joy, arrived at Plymouth, on the 6th of November, 1756.