

**M'FINGAL, A MODERN EPIC  
POEM, REVISED AND  
CORRECTED, WITH COPIOUS  
AND EXPLANATORY NOTES**

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John Trumbull

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**JOHN TRUMBULL**

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BATTLE OF THE EGGS.

M'FINGAL,

A MODERN EPIC POEM,

REVISED AND CORRECTED,

WITH COPIOUS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES,

BY

JOHN TRUMBULL, LL. D.

WITH A

MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

HARTFORD:

S. ANDRUS AND SON,

1856.

## MEMOIR

OF THE

LIFE AND WRITINGS OF JOHN TRUMBULL, LL. D.

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**M**ETINGAL, the principal Poem in this collection, has been more than forty years before the public, and has passed through the ordeal of criticism, in all its various forms of gazettes, magazines, and reviews, both in England and America. Being published anonymously, the world were left to their conjectures, as to the author. The first part of the poem, containing the two first cantos, was printed in Philadelphia, in the fall of the year 1775; and in the course of the next year, reprinted in London, where it passed through several editions. The nature of the subject and the situation of the times gave it popularity with the anti-ministerial party, who were averse to the war with America: but it was asserted that the author was an Englishman. Sometimes he was affirmed to be an Oxford scholar, then on his travels in this country; sometimes a British officer, who had been superceded in their service, had joined the Americans and written the poem in revenge. When it was afterwards discovered that the writer

was a native of New England, he of course received his due share of that obloquy and contempt, which is lavished by their compilers of reviews, on every thing which appertains to this country. The *Quarterly Review*, with its usual accuracy of information, has lately declared that the poem was written by one Mr. Fingal, who, it assures us, is no descendant of the hero of Ossian. The *Edinburgh Review* contents itself with simply asserting that "the Americans have no literature." In the United States, the conjectures were for a long time equally various; and after his name became generally known, many false anecdotes, and several erroneous accounts of his life, have been printed by those who had no other information than rumour and hearsay. Hundreds of essays have been charged upon his pen, containing principles which he never held, abuse on persons whom he respected, and low attempts at humor, which would have disgraced the scurrility of PETER PINDAR. In a word, to him have been ascribed, as he once complained,

"Jests he ne'er utter'd, deeds he ne'er achiev'd,  
Rhymes he ne'er wrote, and lives (thank heaven) he never lived."

On these accounts, it seems necessary that a short and accurate Memoir of his life and writings should accompany this collection of his poems.

The family of Trumbull was among the early settlers in New England. Their ancestor came from England, and in 1645 fixed his residence at Ipswich in Massachusetts. His son, named John, removed and established himself at Suffield in Connecticut. He had three sons, John, Joseph, and Benoni, whose descendants are still liv-

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ing in this state. The Rev. Benjamin Trumbull, D.D., the respectable historian of Connecticut, was the grandson of Benoni. Joseph settled in Lebanon, and at his death left one son, Jonathan Trumbull, who was governor of the state during the whole revolutionary war, and whose patriotic exertions are amply recorded in history. Two of his sons were Jonathan Trumbull, afterwards governor of the state, and John Trumbull, the celebrated painter, whose merits have long been distinguished, both in Europe and America.

The author of these poems is the grandson of John Trumbull, eldest son of him who first settled in Suffield. He was born on the 13th day of April, old style, (the 24th according to the present mode of computation,) in the year 1750, in the parish of Westbury, then a part of the town of Waterbury, in New Haven county, but since formed into a separate township, by the name of Watertown, and annexed to the county of Litchfield. The settlement of that village was begun a few years before his birth. His father, who was the first minister of the Congregational church in that place, was a good classical scholar, highly respected by his brethren, and for many years one of the trustees, or fellows, of Yale College. His mother was a daughter of the Rev. Samuel Whitman, of Farmington, in Hartford county, and granddaughter of the Rev. Solomon Stoddard, D.D., of Northampton, in Massachusetts.

Being an only son, and of a very delicate and sickly constitution, he was of course the favorite of his mother. She had received an education superior to most of her

sex, and not only instructed him in reading, from his earliest infancy, but finding him possessed of an extraordinary memory, taught him all the hymns, songs, and other verses, with which she was acquainted. His father's small library consisted mostly of classical and theological books. The Spectator and Watts' Lyric Poems were the only works of merit in the belles-lettres, which he possessed. Young Trumbull not only committed to memory most of the poetry they contained, but was seized with an unaccountable ambition of composing verses himself, in which he was encouraged by his parents. The country clergy at that time generally attempted to increase their income, by keeping private schools for the education of youth. When he was about five years of age, his father took under his care a lad, seventeen years old, to instruct and qualify him for admission as a member of Yale College. Trumbull noticed the tasks first imposed; which were to learn by heart the Latin Accidence and Lilly's Grammar, and to construe the Select Colloquies of Corderius, by the help of a literal translation. Without the knowledge of any person, except his mother, he began in this way the study of the Latin language. After a few weeks, his father discovered his wishes, and finding that by the aid of a better memory, his son was able to outstrip his fellow-student, encouraged him to proceed. At the commencement in September 1757, the two lads were presented at college, examined by the tutors and admitted as members. Trumbull, however, on account of his extreme youth at that time, and subsequent ill health, was not sent to reside at college till the year 1763. He spent these six years in

a miscellaneous course of study, making himself master of the Greek and Latin authors usually taught in that seminary, reading all the books he could meet with, and occasionally attempting to imitate, both in prose and verse, the style of the best English writers, whose works he could procure in his native village. These were of course few. The *Paradise Lost*, Thompson's *Seasons*, with some of the poems of Dryden and Pope, were the principal. On commencing his collegiate life, he found little regard paid to English composition, or the acquirement of a correct style. The Greek and Latin books, in the study of which only, his class were employed, required but a small portion of his time. By the advice of his tutor, he turned his thoughts to Algebra, Geometry, and astronomical calculations, which were then newly introduced and encouraged by the instructors. He chiefly pursued this course during the three first years. In his senior year he began to resume his former attention to English literature. After receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1767, he remained three years longer at college as a graduate. Being now master of his own time, he devoted himself chiefly to polite letters; reading all the Greek and Latin classics especially the poets and orators, and studying the style and endeavoring to imitate the manner of the best English writers.

His acquaintance now commenced with Doctor Dwight, afterwards president of the university, who was then in his third year in college, and two years his junior in age. That young gentleman had translated two of the finest Odes of Horace, in a manner so elegant and poetical, as