



# *Berkshire Tories*

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North American

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The tories of Berkshire, Massachusetts, were men who had been endeared to the king by holding office under warrant from that sacred personage. They have been gently dealt with by historians, but that is “overstrained magnanimity which concentrates its charities and praises for defeated champions of the wrong, and reserves its censures for triumphant defenders of the right.” While the following incidents have been so well avouched that they deserve to stand as history, their picturesqueness justifies renewed acquaintance.

Among the loyalists was Gideon Smith, of Stockbridge, who had helped British prisoners to escape, and had otherwise made himself so obnoxious that he was forced for a time to withdraw and pass a season of penitence and meditation in a cavern near Lenox, that is called the Tories’ Glen. Here he lay for weeks, none but his wife knowing where he was, but at his request she walked out every day with her children, leading them past his cave, where he fed on their faces with hungry eyes. They prattled on, never dreaming that their father was but a few feet from them. Smith survived the war and lived to be on good terms with his old foes.

In Lenox lived a Tory, one of those respectable buffers to whom wealth and family had given immunity in the early years of the war, but who sorely tried the temper of his neighbors by damning everything American from Washington downward. At last they could endure his abuse no longer; his example had affected other Anglomaniacs, and a committee waited on him to tell him that he could either swear allegiance to the colonies

or be hanged. He said he would be hanged if he would swear, or words to that effect, and hanged he was, on a ready-made gallows in the street. He was let down shortly, "brought around" with rum, and the oath was offered again. He refused it. This had not been looked for. It had been taken for granted that he would abjure his fealty to the king at the first tightening of the cord. A conference was held, and it was declared that retreat would be undignified and unsafe, so the Tory was swung up again, this time with a yank that seemed to "mean business." He hung for some time, and when lowered gave no sign of life. There was some show of alarm at this, for nobody wanted to kill the old fellow, and every effort was made to restore consciousness. At last the lungs heaved, the purple faded from his cheek, his eyes opened, and he gasped, "I'll swear." With a shout of joy the company hurried him to the tavern, seated him before the fire, and put a glass of punch in his hand. He drank the punch to Washington's health, and after a time was heard to remark to himself, "It's a hard way to make Whigs, but it'll do it."

Nathan Jackson, of Tyringham, was another Yankee who had seen fit to take arms against his countrymen, and when captured he was charged with treason and remanded for trial. The jail, in Great Barrington, was so little used in those days of sturdy virtue that it had become a mere shed, fit to hold nobody, and Jackson, after being locked into it, might have walked out whenever he felt disposed; but escape, he thought, would have been a confession of the wrongness of Tory principles, or of a fear to stand trial. He found life so monotonous, however, that he asked the sheriff to let him go out to work during the day, promising to sleep in his cell, and such was his reputation for honesty that his request was granted without a demur, the prisoner returning every night to be locked up. When the time approached for the court to meet in Springfield heavy harvesting had begun, and, as there was no other case from Berkshire County to present, the sheriff grumbled at the bother of taking his prisoner across fifty miles of rough country, but Jackson said that he would make it all right by going alone.

The sheriff was glad to be released from this duty, so off went the Tory to give himself up and be tried for his life. On the way he was overtaken by Mr. Edwards, of the Executive Council, then about to meet in Boston, and without telling his own name or office, he learned the extraordinary errand of this lonely pedestrian. Jackson was tried, admitted the charges against him, and was sentenced to death. While he awaited execution of the law upon him, the council in Boston received petitions for clemency, and Mr. Edwards asked if there was none in favor of Nathan Jackson. There was none. Mr. Edwards related the circumstance of his meeting with the

condemned man, and a murmur of surprise and admiration went around the room. A despatch was sent to Springfield. When it reached there the prison door was flung open and Jackson walked forth free.

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