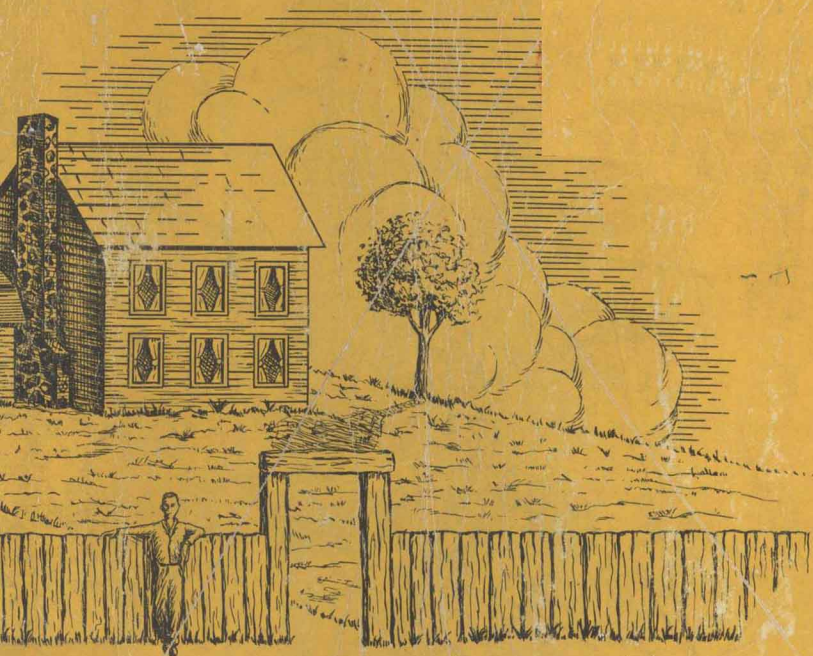


# SWALLOW BARN

JOHN PENDLETON KENNEDY



Introduction and Notes by WILLIAM S. OSBORNE

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No. 22

# SWALLOW BARN,

OR

A SOJOURN IN THE OLD DOMINION.

BY

J. P. KENNEDY

with

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

WILLIAM S. OSBORNE

*Illustrations by Strother*



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[Number Twenty-Two: SWALLOW BARN]



DEDICATION OF THE FIRST EDITION OF  
SWALLOW BARN

To William Wirt, Esq.

DEAR SIR,

I have two reasons for desiring to inscribe this book to you. The first is, that you are likely to be on a much better footing with posterity than may ever be my fortune; seeing that, some years gone by, you carelessly sat down and wrote a little book, which has, doubtless, surprised yourself by the rapidity with which it has risen to be a classic in our country. I have sat down as carelessly, to a like undertaking, but stand sadly in want of the wings that have borne your name to an enviable eminence. It is natural, therefore, that I should desire your good-will with the next generation.

My second reason is, that I have some claim upon your favour in the attempt to sketch the features of the Old Dominion, to whose soil and hearts your fame and feelings are kindred. In these pages you may recognize, perhaps, some old friends, or, at least, some of their customary haunts; and I hope, on that score, to find grace in your eyes, however I may lack it in the eyes of others.

I might add another reason, but that is almost too personal to be mentioned here: It is concerned with an affectionate regard for the purity and worth of your character, with your genius, your valuable attainments, your many excellent actions, and, above all, with your art of embellishing and endearing the relations of private life. These topics are not to be discussed to your ear,—and not, I hope, (to their full extent,) for a long time, to that of the public.

Accept, therefore, this first-fruit of the labours (I ought rather to say, of the idleness) of your trusty friend,

Mark Littleton

April 21, 1832.

## WIRT'S REPLY TO KENNEDY'S DEDICATION

To John P. Kennedy, Esq.

Baltimore. May 23, 1832

MY DEAR SIR,

If you should chance to know a certain Mark Littleton, author of "a righte merrie and conceited work," called Swallow Barn, which is occupying all the public attention that can be spared from politics, I would thank you to make my respects and acknowledgments to him for a handsome copy of this work, and the well-turned dedication with which he has complimented me. He might have chosen a patron more auspicious for himself, but no one with kinder and warmer feelings and wishes for his success. The dedication proves his ability to give interest to trifles. With regard to the Book itself, I have been so engaged as to have been able to make but little progress in it. But as far as I have read, it is full of gaiety & goodness of heart, and the author trips it along, on "light fantastic toe," with all imaginable ease and grace. The characters are well sketched & grouped, and the plan as well as the incidents are new & fresh, so far as I have gone. But I have read too little of it to play the critic with merits. The object of this note is simply to carry my thanks to the author, without delay, for the present of the book and the honor of the dedication—and I trouble you with this agency, because of the *on dit* that the author is in the circle of your acquaintances. Good night—

W[illia]m Wirt

### KENNEDY'S PREFACE, 1832<sup>2d</sup> ed.

I have had great difficulty to prevent myself from writing a novel. The reader will perceive that the author of these sketches left his home to pass a few weeks in the Old Dominion, having a purpose to portray the impressions which the scenery and the people of that region made upon him, in detached pictures brought together with no other connexion than that of time and place. He soon found himself, however, engaged in the adventures of domestic history, which wrought so pleasantly upon him, and presented such a variety of persons and characters to his notice, that he could not forbear to describe what he saw. His book therefore, in spite of himself, has ended in a vein altogether different from that in which it set out. There is a rivulet of story wandering through a broad meadow of episode. Or, I might truly say, it is a book of episodes; with an occasional digression into the plot. However repugnant this plan of writing may be to the canons of criticism, yet it may, perhaps, amuse the reader even more than one less exceptionable.

The country and the people are at least truly described; although it will be seen that my book has but little philosophy to recommend it, and much less of depth of observation. In truth, I have only perfunctorily skimmed over the surface of a limited society, which was both rich in the qualities that afford delight, and abundant in the materials to compensate the study of its peculiarities. If my book be too much in the mirthful mood, it is because the ordinary actions of men, in their household intercourse, have naturally a humorous or comic character. The passions that are exhibited in such scenes are moderate and amiable; and a true narrative of what is amiable in personal history is apt to be tinged with the hue of



a lurking and subdued humour. The undercurrents of country-life are grotesque, peculiar and amusing, and it only requires an attentive observer to make an agreeable book by describing them. I do not think any one will say that my pictures are exaggerated or false in their proportions; because I have not striven to produce effect: they will, doubtless, be found insufficient in many respects, and I may be open to the charge of having made them flat and insipid. I confess the incompetency of my hand to do what, perhaps, my reader has a right to require from one who professes a design to amuse him. Still I may have furnished some entertainment, and that is what I chiefly aimed at, although negligently and unskilfully.

As to the events I have recounted, upon what assurance I have given them to the world, how I came to do so, and with what license I have used names to bring them into the public eye, those are matters betwixt me and my friends, concerning which my reader would forget himself if he should be over-curious. His search therein will give him but little content; and if I am driven into straits in that regard, I shelter myself behind the motto<sup>1</sup> on my title-page, the only one I have used in this book. Why should I not have my privilege as well as another?

If this my first venture should do well, my reader shall hear of me anon, and much more, I hope, to his liking: if disaster await it, I am not so bound to its fortunes but that I can still sleep quietly as the best who doze over my pages.

The author of the *Seven Champions* has forestalled all I have left to say; and I therefore take the freedom to conclude in his words:

“Gentle readers,—in kindness accept of my labours, and

be not like the chattering cranes nor Momus' mates, that carp at every thing. What the simple say, I care not; what the spightful speak, I pass not: only the censure of the conceited I stand unto; that is the mark I aym at, whose good likings if I obtain, I have won my race."

Mark Littleton

<sup>1</sup> "And, for to pass the time, this book shall be pleasant to read in. But for to give faith and believe that all is true that is contained therein, ye be at your own liberty.—*Prologue to the Morte D'Arthur.*"

## Note on the Text

*Swallow Barn* was first published by Carey and Lea in Philadelphia in two volumes in 1832. Kennedy wrote under the pen name of Mark Littleton. The second edition, somewhat revised and including David Strother's twenty illustrations, was brought out by George P. Putnam's publishing house in New York in one volume in 1851. This edition of *Swallow Barn* in the Hafner Library of Classics follows the text of the second edition. The original preface, the letter of dedication to Wirt and Wirt's reply to the dedication are, however, reprinted here.

Poe complained in his review of *Horse Shoe Robinson* of Kennedy's excessive punctuation: "A slovenly punctuation will mar, in a greater or less degree, the brightest paragraph ever penned. . . . A too frequent use of the *dash* is the besetting sin of the volumes now before us. It is lugged in upon all occasions, and invariably introduced where it has no business whatever. Even the end of a sentence is not sacred from its intrusion." If one admits the rules of present-day English punctuation regarding the dash and the comma and the semicolon, perhaps Poe's charge is still valid. I have not, nevertheless, modernized either the punctuation or the spelling, with the exception of misspelled words which are obviously typographical errors; nor have I attempted to make Kennedy's practice in these matters consistent. I have only corrected some of these errors in the two manuscripts printed here for the first time, "An Inn" and "Hoppergallop House."

Kennedy's revision of *Swallow Barn* was casual and unsystematic. He recast some hundred pages: reworking

mainly the openings of the first eleven chapters; cutting out the forty-five-page essay in the first edition on the life of Captain John Smith; and writing a new preface, "A Word in Advance, from the Author to the Reader." In fact, he seriously questioned the revision of the book. "I doubt the policy of labouring on old books," he wrote in his journal. "Why not let them go as they are?"

W.S.O.



## AN INTRODUCTION

JOHN PENDLETON KENNEDY (1795-1870) belonged to the first generation of American writers born after the Revolution—a few years younger than Irving and Cooper, yet some years older than Poe, Simms and the New England writers. Like Irving and Cooper, he found only the beginnings of a native literature; and like Cooper especially, he wanted to bring something American to the books he wrote. He was perhaps encouraged in this belief by reading George Tucker's *Letters from Virginia* [1816] (which he apparently had in his own library), where Tucker had commented at some length about the lack of an American literature. Tucker declared that writers in America, too quick to undervalue their own talents, had little "hope of fame"—"perhaps the greatest motive to literary enterprise"—until they stopped comparing their works (too often imitative) with those by English authors. The one area where our writers could excel they found "disgraceful," for no one—he maintained—could better write about America than Americans. By choosing "domestic subjects"—such as "history, manners, poetry, and other things of their own country, where they would run no risk of competition from abroad," American authors could earn recognition for themselves and develop an honest American literature. Some years later when Kennedy came to write about the South, he may have remembered Tucker's advice; for his material was distinctively American.

The first of these books, in some respects the most significant, was *Swallow Barn* (1832). *Swallow Barn* began as a series of letters written by a Mark Littleton (Kennedy) to his hometown neighbor, Zachary Huddleston of Preston Ridge, New York. Littleton, visiting his

Virginia relatives at their farm called Swallow Barn on the James River not far from Richmond, told his friend that he would write a "full, true and particular account of all my doings, or rather my seeings and thinkings" while he was among his genial relatives. Kennedy soon dropped the pose of letter writer and devoted successive chapters to sketches of Virginia country life. In choosing to write about the "manners" of his own country, he won not only esteem as an American author but recognition—hopefully, respect—for a way of life toward which an open hostility was developing in the North.

*Swallow Barn* sold well for a first book by an unknown writer. Kennedy's publisher, Henry Carey of the Philadelphia publishing house, Carey and Lea, reported in June, 1832, that "it was better than anything Cooper and Irving had written" and urged him "to make another trial" with another book. "Your success on this occasion is certainly sufficient to warrant it." The book was printed again, in 1851, with a few revisions and a new preface. Subsequent editions, as does this one, have given the text of the second edition.

## I

"In the attempt to sketch the features of the Old Dominion . . .," Kennedy told Wirt in the letter of dedication, "you may recognize, perhaps, some old friends, or, at least, some of their customary haunts." And in the pages which followed, he "sketched" in soft colors the landscape of Virginia and the people—and sometimes in harsher tones their habits and beliefs. Despite an earlier work, another book by George Tucker, *The Valley of the Shenandoah* (1824), he drew for the first time a full portrait of the Southern scene—reproducing country life in Virginia with the same delight Cooper had found in re-creating upstate New York in the Leatherstocking tales.

*Swallow Barn* became a pioneer study in American realism: as Kennedy said in the preface to the second edition, it "[exhibited] the lights and shades of . . . society with the truthfulness of a painter who has studied his subject on the spot."

Any writer's attempt to picture Virginia life, Kennedy knew, would show those habits popularly associated with Southerners: their good fellowship, their hearty companionableness, their "overflowing hospitality which knew no ebb." But a truthful account would depict the sober "features" of Virginia life and would consider in particular the Virginians' "dogged . . . invincibility of opinion," so distasteful to many Americans. Although Kennedy, always a nationalist in his outlook, believed that this doggedness of opinion would destroy the Southerners and their way of life, he was honest enough in his portrait not to minimize its significance. Reality required that he give a clear-minded, patient account of their invincible opinions: their feeling of self-importance; their insensibility to national interests; their determination to support slavery, to uphold the doctrine of states' rights, to assert a belief in the doctrine of secession.

These opinions, which were expressed by Frank Meriwether, the master of *Swallow Barn* and spokesman for the Southern point of view, were never deprecated but were simply shown as *one* aspect of Virginia life. Meriwether had, for instance, canceled his subscription to the *Richmond Whig*, nationalist in its policy, and begun to read the rival newspaper, the *Enquirer*, whose editor held ideas dear to states' righters. Meriwether opposed manufacturing interests and internal improvements. "The steamboat," he said on one occasion, "is destined to produce valuable results—but after all . . . we [would be] better without it . . . it strikes deeper at the supremacy of the states than most persons are willing to allow. . . .



Our protection against the evils of consolidation consists in the very obstacles to our intercourse." On another occasion he declared that "the home material of Virginia was never so good as when her roads were at their worst." In fact, any encroachment of the national government upon the sovereignty of the states was like the rod of Aaron to Meriwether. "Mark me, gentlemen,—you and I may not live to see it, but our children will see it, and wail over it . . . it will turn into a serpent, and swallow up all that struggle with it."

Meriwether did not speak for the planter alone. The yeomanry, the largest segment of Southern society, was just as "invincible" in its opinion of governmental interference. During the Fourth of July celebration at the Landing, Kennedy "overheard" and accurately recorded for his readers the popular point of view.

"Can't Congress," said Sandy, "supposing they were to pass a law to that effect, come and take a road of theirs any where they have a mind to, through any man's land? . . . They can just cut off a corner, if they want it, or go through the middle, leaving one half here, and t'other there, and make you fence it clean through into the bargain; or," added Sandy, giving more breadth to his doctrine, "go through your house. . . . Sweeping your bed right out from under you, if Congress says so. Arn't there the canal to go across the Allegheny mountain? What does Congress care about your state rights, so as they have got the money?"

"Things are getting worse and worse," replied the other. "I can see how it's going! Here, the first thing General Jackson did when he came in, he wanted to have the President elected for six years; and, by and by, they will want him for ten! and now they want to cut up our orchards and meadows. . . . What's the use of states if they are all to be cut up with canals and railroads and tariffs? No, no . . . Old Virginny's not going to let Congress carry on in her day!"

"How can they help it?" asked Sandy.

"We hav'nt *fout* and bled," rejoined the other . . . ,  
"we hav'nt *fout* and bled for our liberties to have our