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The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

London, 1774

VI. Mercury - An English Duellist - A North American Savage.

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DIALOGUE VI.

MERCURY—An English DUELLIST—
A North-American SAVAGE.

THE DUELLIST.

MERCURY, Charon's boat is on the other side of the water. Allow me, before it returns, to have some conversation with the North-American Savage, whom you brought hither with me. I never before saw one of that species. He looks very grim.—Pray, sir, what is your name? I understand you speak English.

SAVAGE.

Yes, I learnt it in my childhood, having been bred for some years among the English of New York. But, before I was a man, I returned to my valiant countrymen, the Mohawks; and having been villainously cheated by one of yours in the sale of some rum, I never cared to have any thing to do with them afterwards. Yet I took up the hatchet for them with the rest of my tribe in the late war against France, and was killed while I was out upon a scalping party. But I died very well satisfied: for my brethren were victorious; and, before I was shot, I had gloriously scalped seven men, and five women and children. In a former war I had performed still greater exploits. My name is *the Bloody Bear*: it was given me to express my fierceness and valour.

DUELLIST.

Bloody Bear, I respect you, and am much your humble servant. My name is Tom Pushwell, very well known at Arthur's. I am a gentleman by my birth, and by profession a gamester and man of honour. I have killed men in fair fighting, in honourable single combat; but don't understand cutting the throats of women and children.

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SAVAGE.

SAVAGE.

Sir, that is our way of making war. Every nation has its customs. But, by the grimness of your countenance, and that hole in your breast, I presume you were killed, as I was, in some scalping party. How happened it that your enemy did not take off your scalp?

DUELLIST.

Sir, I was killed in a duel. A friend of mine had lent me a sum of money. After two or three years, being in great want himself, he asked me to pay him. I thought his demand, which was somewhat peremptory, an affront to my honour, and sent him a challenge. We met in Hyde-Park. The fellow could not fence: I was absolutely the adroitest swordsman in England. So I gave him three or four wounds; but at last he run upon me with such impetuosity, that he put me out of my play, and I could not prevent him from whipping me through the lungs. I died the next day, as a man of honour should, without any snivelling signs of contrition or repentance: and he will follow me soon; for his surgeon has declared his wounds to be mortal. It is said, that his wife is dead of grief, and that his family of seven children will be undone by his death. So I am well revenged, and that is a comfort. For my part, I had no wife.—I always hated marriage: my whore will take good care of herself, and my children are provided for at the Foundling-hospital.

SAVAGE.

Mercury, I won't go in a boat with that fellow. He has murdered his countryman: he has murdered his friend: I say positively, I won't go in a boat with that fellow. I will swim over the river: I can swim like a duck.

MERCURY.

Swim over the Styx! it must not be done; it is against the laws of Pluto's empire. You must go in the boat, and be quiet.

S A V A G E.

Don't tell me of laws: I am a Savage: I value no laws. Talk of laws to the Englishman: there are laws in his country, and yet you see he did not regard them. For they could never allow him to kill his fellow-subject, in time of peace, because he asked him to pay a debt. I know indeed, that the English are a *barbarous nation*; but they can't possibly be so brutal as to make such things lawful.

M E R C U R Y.

You reason well against him. But how comes it that you are so offended with murder; you, who have frequently massacred women in their sleep, and children in their cradle?

S A V A G E.

I killed none but my enemies: I never killed my own countrymen: I never killed my friend:—Here, take my blanket, and let it come over in the boat; but see that the murderer does not sit upon it, or touch it. If he does, I will burn it instantly in the fire I see yonder. Farewell.—I am determined to swim over the water.

M E R C U R Y.

By this touch of my wand I deprive thee of all thy strength.—Swim now if thou canst.

S A V A G E.

This is a potent enchanter.—Restore me my strength, and I promise to obey thee.

M E R C U R Y.

I restore it; but be orderly, and do as I bid you: otherwise worse will befall you.

D U E L L I S T.

Mercury, leave him to me. I'll tutor him for you. Sirrah Savage, dost thou pretend to be ashamed of my company? dost thou know that I have kept the best company in England?

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S A V A G E.

SAVAGE.

I know thou art a scoundrel.—Not pay thy debts! kill thy friend who lent thee money for asking thee for it! Get out of my sight. I will drive thee into Styx.

MERCURY.

Stop.—I command thee. No violence.—Talk to him calmly.

SAVAGE.

I must obey thee.—Well, sir, let me know what merit you had, to introduce you into good company? what could you do?

DUELLIST.

Sir, I gamed, as I told you.—Besides, I kept a good table. I eat as well as any man either in England or France.

SAVAGE.

Eat! did you ever eat the liver of a Frenchman, or his leg, or his shoulder! There is *fine eating!* I have eat twenty.—My table was always *well served*. My wife was esteemed the best cook for the dressing of man's flesh in all North-America. You will not pretend to compare your *eating* with mine?

DUELLIST.

I danced very finely.

SAVAGE.

I'll dance with thee for thy ears.—I can dance all day long. I can dance the *war-dance* with more spirit than any man of my nation. Let us see thee begin it. How thou standest like a post! Has Mercury struck thee with his enfeebling rod? or art thou ashamed to let us see how awkward thou art? If he would permit me, I would teach thee to dance in a way that thou hast never yet learnt. But what else canst thou do, thou bragging *rascal*?

DUELLIST.

O heavens! must I bear this! What can I do with this fellow? I have neither sword, nor pistol. And his shade seems to be twice as strong as mine.

MERCURY.

MERCURY.

You must answer his questions. It was your own desire to have a conversation with him. He is not well bred; but he will tell you some truths, which you must necessarily hear when you come before Rhadamanthus. He asked you what you could do besides eating and dancing.

DUELLIST.

I sung very agreeably.

SAVAGE.

Let me hear you sing your *death song*, or the *war whoop*. I challenge you to sing.—Come, begin.—The fellow is mute.—Mercury, this is a *liar*.—He has told us nothing but *lies*. Let me pull out his tongue.

DUELLIST.

The lie given me!—and alas! I dare not resent it. What an indelible disgrace to the family of the Pushwells! This indeed is *damnation*.

MERCURY.

Here, Charon, take these two Savages to your care. How far the barbarism of the Mohawk will excuse his horrid acts, I leave Minos to judge. But what can be said for the other, for the Englishman? The custom of duelling? A bad excuse at the best! but here it cannot avail. The spirit that urged him to draw his sword against his friend is not that of *honour*; it is the spirit of the Furies, and to them he must go.

SAVAGE.

If he is to be punished for his wickedness, turn him over to me. I perfectly understand the art of tormenting. Sirrah, I begin my work with this *kick on your breech*.

DUELLIST.

Oh my honour, my honour, to what infamy art thou fallen!

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