

THE
L I F E
A N D
C O N F E S S I O N

O F
HERMAN ROSENCRANTZ;

Executed in the City of *Philadelphia*, on the 5th Day of *May*, 1770, for Counterfeiting and Uttering the Bills of Credit of the Province of *Pennsylvania*.

In which is an ACCOUNT who were his
C O N F E D E R A T E S.

Taken from his own Mouth, in one of the Cells of the Goal, a short Time before he was Executed; and, by his Request, Published, as a Warning to all others.

Better is a Little, with the Fear of the LORD, than great Treasure, and Trouble therewith. Prov. xv. 16.

P H I L A D E L P H I A :

Printed for JAMES CHATTIN, and Sold by him at Mr. GRAHAM's, in *Second-street*, the second Door from *Market-street* Corner, and next Door to Mr. MILNE's, Jeweller.

*The Life and Confession of
Herman Rosencrantz*

[1770]

I HERMAN ROSENCRANTZ was born in the county of *Ulster*, in the government of *New-York*, on the 4th day of *April*, 1716; my parents were *Low-Dutch*, and bred me up religiously; they being pious, good people, of the *Presbyterian* persuasion. I liv'd with them until I was 22 years of age; I then made a purchase of WILLIAM ALLEN, Esq; of *Philadelphia*, of a tract of land in *Northhampton* county, in *Pennsylvania*; to which I moved, and continued there one year; when I returned to my Father's, near *Delaware*.

The 27th of *December* following, I married into a honest, reputable family, and continued with my parents, after marriage, two years. In this time I join'd myself to the *Presbyterians*.

For nine years after my marriage, things prospered in my hands, and I was blest with *the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth*.

After this time I mov'd to *Bethlehem*, in *Pennsylvania*, and resided there seven years; during which I met with many losses and misfortunes; which, instead of bringing me to *remember the rock from whence I was hewn, and the hole of the pit from whence I was dug*, had quite a contrary effect upon me.

I gave myself over to an uneasy and restless mind, with an undue desire of gaining riches; which disposition, pushed on by the enemy of my soul, has been a means of my downfall.

With this distemper of mind, I moved myself and family over the river *Delaware*, to land belonging to *Richard Stevens*, in *Bucks* county; here I liv'd two years.

When at this place, *D_____d R_____lds* and *J_____h B_____gs* came to me, and introduced themselves by some frivolous excuses to a further acquaintance.

Much discourse passed between us, at length *R_____ds* called me on side, and shewed me two Thirty Shilling bills, of *New-Jersey* currency, which he said they had made.

This was the first of my knowledge of their concerns in Counterfeiting of money.

Here I had a fair opportunity of being of service to the community, by discovering these pests of civil government, and bringing them to justice: But *the love of money, the root of all evil*, blinded my eyes, so that I received at their hands two of these counterfeit bills.

R_____lds parted with us at my house; but I accompanied *B_____ngs* to one widow *Kelly's*, at whose house we parted.

Four weeks after this *B_____ngs* and myself met at *Tulpabocken*. Here I received of him Forty Pounds of the same sort of money. As I came homewards I passed nine of the bills; but it was not long after, this counterfeit money was advertised. I was then under great apprehensions of being discovered, in passing the nine bills above-mentioned; wherefore, as speedily as I could, I went and took up all but two of them, which I could not get. In consequence of passing these two, I was apprehended, and *Timothy Smith* and _____ *Parowl* were my securities for my appearance at the Quarter Sessions at *Newton*, in *Bucks* county, in order for trial. When the time came, I employed JOSEPH GALLOWAY and JOHN ROSS, Attornies at Law, who laboured the point for me so effectually, that I got acquitted.

After I was discharged at *Newtown*, I went into the *Jerseys*, where I was apprehended for passing the same bills I had stood my trial for in *Bucks*.

The constable took me to Col. *H_____t's*; but he was not at home. He then took me to *D_____R_____lds's*, and when there, I told *R_____lds*, that if they did proceed against me, I would blow them all, meaning Col. *H_____t*, *D_____d R_____lds*, and a certain *J_____n D_____k*, who afterwards made his escape to Ireland.

D_____R_____lds and myself were committed, tried and acquitted.

I then removed myself and family to the place I had formerly lived at, in *Bucks* county.

At this time, as I had not much apprehension of further prosecution, I ought to have made a full stop; and it would have been happy for me, if I had. But instead of these difficulties I had gone through, being a warning to me, they rather, as will appear in the end, made me more venturesome. But here I must confess, what with the continual stings of my own conscience, and the reflexions I made from whence I had fallen, even from being considered as a religious good member of society, to that of the companion of the worst sort of men, had such an effect upon me at times, that I had little comfort of my life.

It was not long after this, before *D_____d R_____ds* came to me, and wanted me to join with him in passing fifteen hundred pounds, bills of *New-Jersey*, and Twenty Shilling bills of *Pennsylvania*, upon this condition, that I should advance him some good money. I denied him. He then told me, he would shew me the whole plan, and the person that did counterfeit the money; which was one *J_____s L_____g*, that lived at Carlisle.

The next day I went to *R_____ds's* house, where I met with *J_____s L_____g* and *R_____ds*. They shewed me the plates, and a large number of bills. *L_____g* said, that we all might live a gentleman's life, as he had done for twenty years past; yet I did not then accept of their offer.

The next day I met *L_____g* and *R_____ds* seven miles from my home. Here it was I resolved to join them.

It was now concluded among us, that *R_____ds* and myself should meet *L_____g* soon after this at *Shippenstown*, and that we were to make ourselves strangers to each other in all companies we should fall in with.

At the place appointed *R_____ds* and myself met; but no *L_____g* was there. Concluding in my mind, that we should be disappointed, I returned home to *Shrewsbury*, whither by this time my family had removed.

It was not long after this *J_____s L_____g* came to me at *Shrewsbury*, and staid three weeks. On parting with me, he gave me 274 l. of the 1500 l. before-mentioned. Some time after this I went in company with one *J_____H_____a* to *Elizabeth Town*, and bought four horses with part of the said bad money. The same day both of us were apprehended and committed. Upon trial *H_____a* was condemned to be pillored and to have his ears cropped; my sentence was to be pillored and fined. Which punishments were executed upon us.

From thence *H_____a* and myself were moved to *Amboy*, where we were both tried for stealing a piece of cloth, which I here declare I had no hand in. However we were both convicted, and sentenced to be pillored, which was executed. We then were moved back to *Elizabeth-Town*, where he was confined for his fees, and myself for fine and fees.

After my discharge I returned home to *Shrewsbury*, to the great joy of my family. I industriously set myself to work, and might have lived comfortably, if it had not been for what follows.

My wife and son *Alexander* went in a slay to *Hopewell*. When they returned, they said they had heard a report, that I was one that was concerned with *B_____gs* and *M_____C_____tz* in making counterfeit money. I was much terrified at this piece of news, and hastily moved myself and family to *Egg-Harbour*. In this remove I verified the Scripture, where it says, *that the wicked flee, when no man pursues*.

I had not been above three months at *Egg-Harbour*, when *G_____er S_____t* and *J_____n Le F_____e* came there with a stolen mare, which they

swapped with *John May*. They went home, and in about a month after, they returned with one *J___ M___re*. They came to my house, and in the evening several things not material were discoursed of; but they brought a report, that I was concerned in concealing stolen horses, which I denied; for I never had one left in my care. Hearing this, I was again put in great fear, and went off immediately as far as *George Town*, on *Potowmack* river. I there staid in company with one *B___t*, at the house of one *Graves*, a tavernkeeper. Here I met with *J_____n B_____s*, an old acquaintance, who had with him some bad money, part of which he put into my pocket when in bed, unknowingly to me. The next day we were both apprehended, but made our escapes; we were pursued, and I was retaken, and confined in *Fredrickstown* goal. After sometime I had my trial, and was acquitted. The judges of *New-Jersey* sent for me from this goal, to receive my trial in *Middlesex*, where I was charged with uttering counterfeit money, and was acquitted.

While I was in *Middlesex* goal, my wife and family moved to her friends at *Hopewell*. After my discharge I went home to them, and was received with unspeakable joy.

Now I had a second opportunity of taking up, and becoming a new man; as I had in each place where I had committed offence, been tried, and acquitted, or received punishment according to sentence. But that fatality which always attended me, or the evil disposition of my own heart, still pushed me on to my ruin. So harrassed as I had been, sometimes having to labour through cold, nakedness and want, with pockets full of bad money, and afraid to use it; yet I could not help returning *like the dog to his vomit, and as the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire*, to my old *sin that so easily beset me*.

I remained sometime with my family at *Hopewell*; then removed to *Delaware*, to the place I formerly lived on.

I was there three years as a farmer, with great uneasiness of mind, on account of my former conduct. While I lived there, one *B___et* and *J___e A___son* came to me with two horses they had stolen, as they informed me. *A___son* lay off in the woods with the horses, while *B___et* came to my house for victuals: But they did not stay long before they departed.

A rumour soon spread abroad through the country, that I was confederate with them. I declare myself innocent, except in the knowledge of what they had done. Warrants were issued for apprehending me upon that occasion: Upon this, and several other accounts, I set off for *Virginia*, in order to procure a place for my family.

In *April*, 1769, I passed through the city of *Philadelphia*, on my journey there.

When I arrived in *Virginia*, I soon found a place to my mind. I returned, and immediately set forward with my family to the place I had procured.

In my journey with my family, I met with *J___h B___ngs*, on *Shennadore* mountains; but no conversation material then happened between us.

After fixing my family, I staid there nine days, and then returned back as far as *Charles McCormick's*. On my journey to *Charles McCormick's*, I met with *J___h B___ngs*. I asked him what brought him there? He told me, that he was going to make tavern money, that is, as he explained himself, Eighteen Penny bills. I was not then joined with the party that I shall hereafter mention.

After this I passed on my journey to a place called *Deep-Run*, to receive some money due to me there.

From thence I went to *Allen-Town*, in *Northampton* county; and was at many other places, accomplishing business I had to settle, which I compleated.

On my return home, I stopped at one *M___an's*, in *Carlisle*. He invited me to be concerned with him in Counterfeiting money. I gave him no satisfactory answer; but pro[c]eeded on in my journey.

I got as far as *M'C___k's*, where I stopped, and staid all night. In the morning he invited me to ride with him to look for some beeves, in company with *W___m C___n*. We proceeded on in hunt for the beeves about twenty miles, and came to a cabbin, in an unfrequented place, in the woods: Here we met with *J___h B___ngs*, *S___l P___n* and *G___e* _____. They comforted us by setting before us such things as they had. They disclosed to me no matters of consequence that night. In the morning they all concluded, that I must stay and assist them; which I did. They shewed me and *M'C___k* several bills. *M'C___k*, after looking at them, said, They were not fit for him, and threw them in the fire. *M'C___k* soon after went home, leaving me with the rest of them.

A few days after I was sent off for provisions; I procured what I wanted, at the nearest place in my power, and returned with flour, meat and butter.

During eight days that I staid with them, I saw them make, and assisted in making, a number of Three Pound bills, *Pennsylvania* currency. After this was compleated, we all quit our cabbin; first destroying the press we made use of in counterfeiting.

We all went to *C___s M'C___k's*. At *M'C___k's* we had a great frolic; drinking and carousing the chief part of the night.

Next morning I received part of the money we had been counterfeiting. *B___ngs* gave me two bills that he had signed, the rest were blanks.

I proceeded from thence to *Carlisle* to the fore-mentioned *M_____n's*. When I got to *M_____n's*, I told him that I had got some blanks: he replied to me, that he would sign them, and pay himself with some of them.

I staid at *M_____n's* two days, and then set off towards *Philadelphia*.

On my way down nothing happened particular till I came to *Michael Stadleman's*, tavernkeeper, on *Lancaster* road; to him I past one of my counterfeit bills, and got my change in good money.

The next I passed was to *William Stadleman*, of him I likewise got my change in good money.

From *William Stadleman's* I came into *Philadelphia*; the next day I passed one of these bad bills to *Hannah Lithgow*, and got the value of it to my satisfaction in the same manner as if the bill had been good.

The day following I passed another of the same sort to *Robert Taggart*, on his looking on the bill, I thought that he suspected that it was bad; he told me he would go and enquire about the bill; he staid a considerable time. *A guilty conscience needing no accuser*, I got so uneasy about it, that I quit the house; and in the quickest manner set about preparing to leave the city: But before I could get ready, I was apprehended, and carried before JOHN GIBSON, Esq; here I was searched, and a large number of bad bills were found in the seat of the breeches I had on, where I had put them for my better security. Upon this I was committed to goal that evening.

The next day but one I was taken before Judge ALLEN: He examined me; but I gave him small satisfaction.

I was then returned to goal, and the next day took before him again. The Judge advised me to confess the whole, as the most likely way to influence the Governor to mercy. I still remained obstinate and fearful; and told him, that was no surety for me. I then asked him if he would give me any assurance of safety if I did confess? Upon his answering, that it was out of his power, I concluded to give him but little account of the affair; and was remanded back to prison again.

The next day I was taken before JOHN GIBSON, Esq; and there *Hannah Lithgow* confronted me; to whom I had passed one of the counterfeit bills, as aforesaid. Finding that I was now further hampered, and concluding in my mind that it could be of no use to me to stand out any longer, upon examination, I confess'd my confederacy with others, in making and uttering the aforesaid counterfeit money, mentioning the names of all the confederates, except *M_____an*.

I was returned to goal, and some few days after was had before Judge ALLEN; he shewed a letter from *M_____an* to me, about some of our affairs, and told me that *M_____an* was apprehended for uttering counterfeits; the Judge then asked me if *M_____an* was concerned? I told him

no, except in signing my blanks. I then gave him a more full account than I had done before; I was remanded back to prison.

Some days after I heard that our whole gang was taken. I then thought that if Judge ALLEN would please to hear me, I would give him an additional account to what I had already done. He sent for me, when before him, I informed, that they (meaning the gang I was concerned with) had got stamps for making of dollars, and that *M'C_____k* was the man that procured a Three Pound bill at *York-Town*, by which *B_____ngs* cut the plate, as they told me.

I was remanded back to prison, where I continued close confined till *April, 1770*, when I was arraigned for Counterfeiting and Uttering the bills of credit of the government of *Pennsylvania*: To which I confessed myself *Guilty*. The reason of my pleading guilty was, that as I had before made a full discovery of my confederates, by giving the Court little trouble, I should stand the better chance to find mercy.

Sentence of death was passed upon me, and I confess that I deserved the same sentence before.

It has been rumoured, that in the *Jerseys* I had been concerned in stealing of horses; but declare myself innocent of the accusation:—*The command in my heart was, THOU SHALT NOT STEAL*; which I always kept.

I knew of persons that were concerned in stealing horses, as already mentioned, and I hope they will repent, and do so no more. As my time is short, it is taken up in preparing for my final change. I have been careful, only to relate such things as concerned myself, or knew by certain knowledge.

And as I have here made this open confession to the world professing my sorrow and true penitence (as my life is to be taken for my faults) I hope all people whom I have injured, will *forgive me my trespasses*.

My conscience convicts me, that I have imposed on the world, by uttering counterfeit money for good, in confederacy with others; which I candidly and openly confess. And if this dying and open confession should fall into the hands of any of my old confederates, I would have them solemnly reflect, that though they may escape the hands of man, they cannot screen themselves from the swift justice of Almighty God. Consider, O my companions! that I am made a spectacle to the world; involved my innocent wife, and four children, in the disgrace; I have offended them that were most dear to me; I have offended man, and, more than all, I have offended God! Let this be a warning to you all; and may God grant you repentance and amendment of life, is the last prayer of your dying companion.

I now stand a candidate for happiness or misery to all eternity, the charitable prayers of all good Christians, I ask.—To the Supreme Creator I appeal, to rectify me in my last moments. My wife and children I beg may not be treated ill on my account.

I leave the world in true charity, forgiving all men; acknowledging myself a sinner; I resign my soul to God, hoping that He, through the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, will accept my life as a sacrifice, and receive my soul into bliss. AMEN.

WHEREAS it has been reported that several reputable people in the county of *Hunterdon* have been brought in by H. ROSENCRANTZ in his Confession, it is thought necessary, for the clearing of the character of such persons, to publish the following List, and to insert the Certificate signed by the said ROSENCRANTZ, annexed to the said List.

David Reynolds	John Le Fevere
Joseph Billings	John Moore
Col. Hacket	_____ Bennet
John Dick	Jesse Anderson
James Long	_____ Mooran
James Hanna	Charles M'Cormick
Michael Contz	William Culbertson
Grover Stout	Samuel Pelton
	George _____

AT present, to my knowlege, in my dark Cell, I cannot remember any others of my Associates.

HERMAN ROSENCRANTZ.

Philadelphia goal, May 4, 1770.

Source Notes

The Life and Confession of Herman Rosencrantz was printed in Philadelphia by Joseph Crukshank at the request of James Chattin "and Sold by him at Mr. GRAHAM's, in *Second-street*, the second Door from *Market-street* Corner, and next door to Mr. MILNE's Jeweller" (title page). In his *History of Printing in America*, Isaiah Thomas included information concerning both Crukshank and Chattin (i, 246–7, 252, 262). Kenneth Scott's account of Rosencrantz in *Counterfeiting in Colonial America* agreed with the *Life and Confession* on all major points (216–18). Scott, however, located the dates of Rosencrantz's various arrests and trials and thus was able to piece together the counterfeiter's career more accurately. Moreover, according to Scott, Rosencrantz was less of a reluctant counterfeiter than his narrative portrayed him to be. Several times Rosencrantz declared that he was coaxed into the counterfeiting business by "Doctor" Joseph Billings

and David Reynolds. While Scott found evidence that Billings certainly was one of the primary counterfeiters in the mid-Atlantic region, he established that Rosencrantz had lured Reynolds into counterfeiting. Scott stated: "It is known that Reynolds was a farmer. In an evil hour he chanced to make the acquaintance of the notorious Herman Rosencrantz and by him was led into the scheme of making and passing counterfeit money" (244). When Rosencrantz was apprehended for the last time in 1770, he was "a rather corpulent man of about sixty [54], some five feet ten inches tall" (217).

On December 21, 1769, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* reported that Rosencrantz had been arrested:

On Saturday Night last, One ROSEY GRANT, was taken up, and committed to the Goal of this City, on Suspicion of counterfeiting the THREE POND Bills of this Province, dated March 1, 1769. On Searching him 68 of the above counterfeit Bills were found upon him. They are in general badly engraved on Copper-plate, the Letters very irregular, and may easily be distinguished from the true Bills, which are done with common Printing Types. Both the Back and the Face of the Counterfeits are blacker than the true Bills; the Signers Names, and Number, all wrote with the same Ink, very pale, and seem to be done by the same Hand; the Paper thinner, smoother and whiter than the genuine Bills; and we think after this Notice, no Person, acquainted with the Money of this Province, can be deceived by them.

One week later (December 28, 1769), *The Pennsylvania Gazette* corrected its first report: "The Person's Name, committed on Suspicion of counterfeiting the Three Pound Bills of this Province, is HARMAN ROSENCRANTZ." Undoubtedly due to Rosencrantz's cooperation, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* soon printed an official proclamation calling for the apprehension of Billings (January 18, 1770), and two months later the paper announced that he had been arrested: "We hear from Carlisle, that an Account is received there, that the notorious Billings (the principal Person concerned in counterfeiting the Three Pound Bills of this Province) was lately taken up, with another Man, after a long and obstinate Resistance, at Winchester, and committed to the Goal of that Place" (March 29, 1770). Despite what he might have hoped for, Rosencrantz's cooperation did not change the outcome of his trial; on April 19, 1770, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* reported: "Last Week, at a Court of Oyer and Terminer, held in this City, came on the Trials of Thomas and David Jones, and Mary-Ann Bryan, for Burglary, who were all convicted, and received Sentence of Death. Herman Rosencrantz, was indicted for uttering Counterfeit Three Pound Bills of Credit of this Province, to which he plead Guilty, and also received Sentence of Death." A month later the paper announced: "Last Saturday Harman Rosencrants, and David and Thomas Jones, were executed here pursuant to their Sentence. Mary Brian, who also received Sentence of Death, is reprived."

Brief notices mentioning Rosencrantz's trial and execution also were published in *The Pennsylvania Chronicle* on April 16 and May 7, 1770.