

JAMES STERLING: POET, PRIEST, AND PROPHET OF EMPIRE

BY LAWRENCE C. WROTH*

*During the preparation of this paper, I have received so much material from correspondents in Maryland and elsewhere that at times I have felt myself to be little more than an instrument appointed for its unification. I wish, therefore, to name as my associates in this production Miss Florence J. Kennedy, Messrs. Percy G. Skirven, J. Hall Pleasants, Louis H. Dielman, and Charles Fickus, Baltimoreans learned in the history and antiquities of their state and unfailingly generous with their time and knowledge. To these must be added the names of the Rev. Edgar L. Pennington, rector of Grace Church, Ocala, Florida, a scholar possessed of a systematic knowledge of the history of the Episcopal church in the colonies; Mr. V. Valta Parma, curator of the Rare Book Collection in the Library of Congress; and Miss Alice J. Mayes, whose thorough researches in my behalf in the Public Record Office, London, have been of the greatest helpfulness.

I.

AFTER the return of the ships *Dobbs* and *California* in October, 1747, the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, promoter of their recent voyage, was reported as having announced that he would himself go forth another year in that search for the Northwest Passage to which for a decade past he had been inciting his fellow countrymen. This declaration stirred an American admirer to a mighty labor of the pen. One who described himself upon his title-page simply as a "Clergyman in America" straightway wrote *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq.*, a poem in three parts, comprising some sixteen hundred lines of high-flown, windy, and very patriotic verse in praise of the princes and potentates, the captains and knights in arms of the expanding British empire. It was four years later, in the early months of 1752, that the poem found publication in London in a handsome quarto.¹ Too much concerned with the commonplace of politics and

¹An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq; In Europe. From a Clergyman in America. Part I. India mittit opus; peregrè sua Thura Camœnæ [ornament]. London: Printed for the Author, and Sold by R. Dodsley, in Pall-mall, and M. Cooper, in Paternoster-row. 1752. 4 to. p. 100.

trade to rank as literature, and too literary to satisfy the serious politicians and merchants, the poem fell neatly enough between the indifferent stools of art and commerce. There, without serious loss to either, it seems to have remained until the recent purchase of one of the few known copies by the John Carter Brown Library¹ brought the valorous production to my attention and set me about the task of identifying its author.

Politician, writer, and one-time royal governor of North Carolina, Arthur Dobbs, the subject of the *Epistle*, is remembered chiefly for the zeal of his efforts to bring about the discovery of the Northwest Passage.² He carried into middle age the passionate interest of his youth in this standing challenge of the North to bold thought and endeavor, and something more than a decade before we encounter him in the pages of our *Epistle*, his insistent urging of the project had met its reward. In 1741 he had seen his dreams transmuted into action when an official expedition under command of Captain Christopher Middleton set out from England to explore a Northwest Passage to Asia and to determine the availability of the Hudson's Bay region for commerce and settlement. After the return in 1742 of the *Discovery* and the *Furnace*, the second a ship well named for Arctic exploration, Dobbs accused Middleton of having reported unfavorably concerning his mission through the instigation of the Hudson's Bay Company. Two years later a second expedition, promoted by a company of which Dobbs was one of the leaders, went out in the ships *Dobbs* and *California* and returned with a similar though rather less discouraging report. It

¹Charles F. Heartman, Catalogue, no. 225, Americana Rarissima, February 7, 1931, no. 53. Another copy is in the British Museum, entered in the British Museum Catalogue under Dobbs, Arthur. Two others have been located in private hands.

²The *Dictionary of National Biography* gives a full account of the life of Arthur Dobbs. The writer of that article seems to suggest that Dobbs was responsible for the introduction of printing into North Carolina, but James Davis began printing in Newbern in 1749, five years before Dobbs came to the colony as governor. Dobbs's biographer may have misunderstood the conflict between the governor and the Assembly in 1764 over the appointment of Andrew Stuart as the successor of Davis.

was after the return of these vessels in October, 1747, that the zealous Dobbs seems to have made the announcement of a third expedition upon which he would sail in person, but his enthusiasm was deflected from the adventure of actual exploration by the intensity of his dislike for the Hudson's Bay Company. Instead of battling the ice and currents of Hudson's Bay our fireside explorer remained in London and organized a movement against the Company which resulted in 1749 in a Parliamentary inquiry into the validity of its charter and the conduct of its business, the first of a series of attacks which that silent and powerful monopoly was successful in withstanding for an ensuing period of one hundred and eighteen years.¹

With the rights of the Dobbs-Middleton controversy,² the pamphlets of which form a rich addition to the literature of the Northwest Passage, we have little to do in this narrative. It has become evident to us, as it seems to have been to many at the time, that Middleton suffered injustice from the accusation of the sincere but headstrong Dobbs, whose hatred of the Honourable Company had unquestionably dulled the edge of his judgment. Nor are we to consider here the rights and wrongs of the fight against the great trading concern beyond mentioning the chief charges against it: that it discouraged exploration in its domain, and that it assiduously maintained the unsuitable character of that domain for settlement, or for any commerce except its own special trade in furs. Upon these points it was attacked by Dobbs and his associates bitterly and with a degree of foresight that, large and extravagant though it seemed to conservative contemporaries, could hardly have included in its

¹An account of this long-continued attack upon the Hudson's Bay Company is found in Beckles Willson, *The Great Company*, 1900.

²A contemporary attempt at an impartial statement of the Dobbs-Middleton Controversy is found in John Harris, *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca. Or, a Complete Collection of Voyages*, II, 440-451. 2v. London, 1764. The argument by the editor of this edition of Harris, John Campbell, strongly favors Dobbs, but in the course of it, the essentials of the controversy are given in moderately compressed form.

range the wheat fields of Manitoba and the mines of British Columbia.

Our American clergyman was not among the conservatives in this matter of colonial expansion. In recognition of the "manifold merit" of Dobbs, he addressed his poem to that "benevolent" gentleman, making of his hero's zeal in the cause of exploration an excuse for a wide-reaching essay on the expansion of British commerce and the establishment of British colonies on the continent of North America. In a quiet Maryland rectory in the early months of 1748 sat one for long weeks drunk, or at least well warmed, with heady dreams of empire, exhorting his fellow countrymen in easy, loud, and uninspired heroic couplets to consider the wide world as their oyster and to proceed without more ado to shuck it. Though the poem may seem to be concerned specifically with the question of colonies and commerce in the chartered domain of the Hudson's Bay Company, it possesses a more universal quality of interest because of its association with the colonial trade propaganda which came unceasingly from the English presses throughout the eighteenth century. The unusual form in which it was cast demands, too, for the *Epistle to Dobbs* a degree of indulgence not ordinarily granted to essays in the literature of trade. These considerations, a strongly rooted interest in the colonial clergy of Maryland, and the satisfaction of properly cataloguing a piece of anonymous writing set me about the task of determining the authorship of the poem. As the investigation took form I found myself deriving pleasure also from being able to extend in detail one of those sketches in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in which the American career of an emigrant personage is treated with a degree of fullness inversely in proportion to the distance between England and America.¹

An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq., gives as the only indications of its author's identity, his calling

¹The reference is to the sketch of James Sterling, M.A.

and his residence in Maryland upon Chester River, where, a footnote tells us, lay the writer's plantations. Examination of the lists of Maryland clergymen of Kent and Queen Anne's Counties,¹ the counties contiguous to this stream, show only two clergymen of literary tendencies there resident in 1747; namely, the Rev. Alexander Malcolm of Queen Anne's County and the Rev. James Sterling, M.A., rector of St. Paul's Parish in Kent County, and possessor, at the time, of plantations in that county called Rousbys Recovery, Huddles Right, and Rushmore. Mr. Malcolm's contribution to letters took the form of a Latin grammar² and of other works, not published I believe, which are said to have been in the realm of music and mathematics. Years earlier, in London and in Dublin, Mr. Sterling had acquired, through several publications, reputation of a sort as poet and man of letters. An examination of his only known Maryland publication, a sermon of the year 1754, gave evidence of his fervor in the cause of his country and its colonies. It became obvious at this point that an investigation of the life of Mr. Sterling might be pertinent to the task in hand.

II

James Sterling was born in Ireland at Dowrass, King's County, in the year 1701, the son of James Sterling, described in the register of Trinity College, Dublin, as "generosus" or gentleman.³ In a letter of his later life, the younger Sterling referred to his father as one who had held a "Post of Dignity in the Army for near fifty Years,"⁴ and in the dedication of his first tragedy, *The Rival Generals*, published in 1722, he

¹The manuscript collections of the Rev. Ethan Allen, D.D. in the Maryland Diocesan Library, Baltimore, contain important biographical sketches of the colonial Maryland clergy. A photostat copy of Dr. Allen's "List of Parishes and Incumbents" is in the Maryland Historical Society.

²*The Maryland Gazette* for June 9, 1757, announces that the first volume of his Latin Grammar is ready for the subscribers at Mr. Green's printing-office in Annapolis. No copy of the work is recorded.

³Burtchaell and Sadleir, *Alumni Dublinenses*, page 780.

⁴James Sterling to the Bishop of London, June 15, 1736, quoted in full, *post*.

expressed gratitude to the Right Honourable William Conolly¹ because, among other public and private services, he had "so generously contributed in the first Session of this Parliament, to do my Father that Justice in his Pretensions, which was deny'd him in a late Reign." A search which ended finally with the Papers of the Lords of the Treasury uncovered incidents in the life of a Captain James Sterling which served to identify him as the father referred to in this dedication. In a memorial found among the Treasury Papers, originally presented to the Irish House of Commons in December, 1715, Captain James Sterling set forth that when in Spain in 1702 as a captain in the Earl of Donegal's regiment of foot, then employed against Cadiz under command of James Butler, Duke of Ormond, his health had been so injured by lying in flooded trenches as to make it impossible for him to follow his regiment to the West Indies. In spite of the recommendation of the Earl of Donegal and the army physicians, the Duke had refused him sick leave and had deprived him of his commission. In later years the Duke had expressed regret for this action and, promising to procure him either a new commission or a pension, had kept him in attendance at Dublin for two years, greatly to the injury of himself and his numerous family. Captain Sterling prayed, therefore, that he be awarded half-pay for the years since his commission had been taken away, and that he be continued on the halfpay establishment until something else could be found for him. A committee of the House, of which William Conolly was Speaker at this time, reported favorably upon Captain Sterling's memorial and requested the Lords Justices of Ireland to bring the case to His Majesty's attention. On December 8, 1715, the memorial was sent by the Justices to the Lords of the Treasury, with the request that it be laid before the King accompanied by the favorable recommenda-

¹William Conolly was chosen speaker of the Irish House of Commons, November 12, 1715. He served as one of the Lord Justices of Ireland, 1716-1729.

tions of themselves and the Irish House of Commons.¹ The case of Captain Sterling was promptly considered and acted upon by the Treasury Board. On January 18, 1715/16, according to the endorsement upon the memorial, their Lordships ordered a warrant to be prepared in his favor, and judging from the grateful tone of the younger Sterling's dedication to William Conolly, the old soldier was afforded prompt and ample relief from his unhappy situation.

It does not seem to be taking too much for granted to assume that in the long-suffering author of this memorial we recognize the father of the Rev. James Sterling.² Upon this assumption, we may conclude that the boyhood of Sterling was passed in a distressed household, and that just as he was changing from boyhood to youth his family entered upon a period of greater ease. It is known that this promising member of the Sterling family was sent to the school of Mr. Lloyd of Dublin, whence he entered Trinity College

¹The papers relating to Captain Sterling's affair are found in the Public Record Office, T. 1/193, Nos. 53, 53^a, 53^b, 53^c.

²The identity of this unfortunate soldier with the father of the Rev. James Sterling seems sufficiently certain. The Trinity College register gives "James" as the father's Christian name; the son thanks William Conolly in 1722 for helping his father to obtain his rights in "the first Session of this Parliament"; the *Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland*, 2d. edition, iv, 54, 58 and 59, and the Treasury Papers as cited above give details of a petition for redress of wrongs by a Captain James Sterling in December, 1715, at which time was sitting the first session of a parliament, William Conolly, Speaker, that was still in being in 1722, when Sterling wrote his dedication. (This Parliament expired with its fifth session in 1724.)

Sterling is remarkable for a high degree of filial devotion. In a letter accompanying a poem published in the *American Magazine* (Philadelphia) for September, 1758, entitled "An Epitaph on the late Lord Howe," our poet writes to the proprietors of the magazine in the following terms:

GENTLEMEN,

If you shou'd be of opinion that the following epitaph is not unworthy of the noble subject, you wou'd oblige a correspondent by inserting it in one of your Magazines, as a tribute of not only Public but Personal, gratitude, which ought not to be confined to a benefactor, but extended to his posterity; for, please to know, that the grandfather of the late Lord Howe, when in a high employment in the reign of queen Anne, was a generous patron to the father of the author of these lines, by presenting to her majesty a memorial of his long services in the wars of Ireland, Spain, and Flanders; and by farther promoting his pretensions to an honourable post in the army, of which he wou'd have been otherwise deprived by a court-interest in favour of a younger and unexperienc'd officer.

Kent in Maryland, August 14th, 1758.

For a discussion of Sterling's contributions to the *American Magazine*, see the present article, pages 56-65.

as pensioner on April 17, 1716, at the age of fifteen years. He is described as scholar of that college in 1718, and as having obtained his bachelor's degree in the spring of 1720. In the common practice of the time it was many years later, actually in 1733, that he proceeded to the degree of Master of Arts.¹ The college pensioner of that period paid a fixed annual fee to the college, so that we can think of Captain Sterling's arrears of half pay as having come in the nick of time for application to a good purpose.

Sterling proved to be one of those precocious youths who are at once the despair and the glory of literature. Between his eighteenth and twenty-first years he composed among other pieces a tragedy, entitled *The Rival Generals*, which was performed at the Theatre Royal in Dublin and was there received, its author assures us, with "uncommon applause." Genest declares, however, that the *Rival Generals* was "on the whole a poor play," excusing its imperfections by a charitable reference to the youth of its author.² The

¹Burtchaell and Sadleir, *Alumni Dublinenses*, page 780, give these details as to Sterling's birthplace, age, school and college career.

²Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage*, X. 282. The preliminary matter of Sterling's first tragedy makes it clear that the writing of this play was regarded by its author and his friends as an event of importance in the history of the Irish drama. In his dedication to William Conolly, Sterling writes:

"I must here congratulate myself, that I have first awak'd the Irish Muse to Tragedy, and with some Vanity reflect, I have an Opportunity of presenting the first Tribute of this Nature to You, Sir, whose generous and national Temper naturally induces You to take into Your Protection the Product of Your Country, and to favour each laudable Design that may advance its Reputation and Improvement: Nor can I omit this Occasion of testifying my Gratitude to Your Excellency, who so generously contributed in the first Session of this Parliament, to do my Father that Justice in his Pretensions, which was deny'd him in a late Reign."

In one of the two eulogistic poems in the volume Sterling's friend, Matthew Concannon, proclaims in these lines his achievement in the cause of nationalism in Irish writing:

"Long had our Stage on foreign Refuse fed,
To a proud Mistress bow'd her servile Head;
Her Leavings trasur'd up, and curs'd the Land
With broken Scraps of Wit at second Hand;
While not one Muse arose in our Defence,
Spoke our Resentment, or proclaim'd our Sense;
With scarce one native Note our Island rung,
Her Bards untuneful, and her Harp unstrung:
By you her home-born Rage she now displays,
Inspir'd to merit independant Praise."

(Footnote continued on next page)

play appeared in print in London in 1722, and soon afterwards its author and his friend Matthew Concannen went to London, carrying to that market, in the old tradition, their sheaves of unpublished poems, their courage, and their facility in letters. It is told of these youthful Irish adventurers that, having no fixed political principles, they began their London careers by tossing a coin to determine their respective party affiliations, and that as the result of this classic invocation of Destiny, it fell to the lot of Sterling to become a writer for the Opposition.¹ He never attained even the moderate success of his friend Concannen as a political writer, and it has been said of him that as poet and dramatist he was so little conspicuous as to fail of inclusion in the *Dunciad*, though Concannen is preserved to memory by that distinction at least. One infers from the scanty memorials of him in this period that like James Ralph, his American neighbor in Grub Street, Sterling lived precariously as a political hack writer, spending his insufficiently employed energies upon excursions into the field of polite letters. It is probable that his residence in London was as short as his activities there were undistinguished, for the few biographical indications found in his own works seem to place him in Dublin for the greater part of this period of his life. He may still have been in London, however, when his second work, *The Loves of Hero and Leander*, was published in that city in 1728.

The result of Sterling's poetical efforts in the sixteen years following his graduation from Trinity College

Genest, work cited above, X. 283, questions Sterling's assertion that he had "first awak'd the Irish Muse to Tragedy," mentioning the publication of Charles Shadwell's *Rotherick O'Connor* in 1720 as an earlier production, but suggesting that the *Rival Generals* may have been acted some years before its publication in 1722. The date of the first performance of Sterling's tragedy, however, does not appear.

¹Baker, *Biographia Dramatica*, 1812, I. 687; *Notes and Queries*, 8th series, IX. pages 23, 195, 237. The story of Sterling and Concannen tossing a coin to determine their respective political affiliations seems to go back to the sketch of Concannen in Theophilus Cibber's *Lives of the Poets*, V. 27-28, London, 1753, though in that relation of the anecdote, Sterling is not mentioned by name. The incident is first associated with Sterling by name to my knowledge, in Baker's *Biographia Dramatica*, edition of 1782. See citation in *Notes and Queries*, 8th series, IX, page 196, by W. A. Henderson.

in 1720, is found embodied in four books—*The Rival Generals*, London, 1722; *The Loves of Hero and Leander. From the Greek of Musaeus*, London and Dublin, 1728; *The Poetical Works of the Rev. James Sterling*, Dublin, 1734; and *The Parricide*, London, 1736. The small literary value of the first of these may be regarded as compensated for by its historic position in the development of the Irish drama. The *Musaeus* translation

The following represent the whole of Sterling's published works as far as my knowledge of them goes. In these entries I have made no attempt at bibliographical completeness.

The Rival Generals: A Tragedy. As it was Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Dublin, By his Majesty's Servants. By J. Sterling, A.B. LONDON: Printed for A. Bettesworth, at the Red Lion in Pater-Noster-Row. 1722. Price 1 s. 6 d. 8 vo. Copies in British Museum, Harvard College Library, and Library of Congress. Daniel Hipwell, in *Notes and Queries*, 8th. S. IX, March 7, 1896, records editions in octavo and twelvemo printed in Dublin in this year, but I have not found copies of these Dublin editions. *The Rival Generals* was reprinted in *Poetical Works*, see below.

The Loves of Hero and Leander from the Greek of Musaeus. By Mr. Sterling. To which are Added, some New Translations from various Greek Authors, viz. Anacreon, Sappho, Julian, Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, Homer. By ***** Esq; DUBLIN: Printed by Andrew Crooke, Printer to the King's most Excellent Majesty at the King's Arms in Copper-Alley, 1728. 12 mo. Copy in the Harvard College Library. The British Museum has a copy bearing a London imprint of the same year. *The Dictionary of National Biography* says, under Ogle, George (1704-1746), that the added translations were by George Ogle, to whom the book is dedicated. *The Loves of Hero and Leander* was reprinted in *Poetical Works*, see below. On page 67 of *The Parricide*, London, 1736, (see next title) is the note: "Lately published, *The Loves of Hero and Leander.* From the Greek of Musaeus. By Mr. Sterling. Musaeum ante omnes. Printed for J. Walthoe. Price one shilling." This edition, presumably of London, 1736, has not been identified.

The Poetical Works of the Rev. James Sterling. DUBLIN: Printed by and for George Faulkner, in Essex-street, M, DCC, XXX, IV. 8 vo. Copy in the Library of St. Paul's Cathedral, London.

The Parricide. A Tragedy. As it is Acted at the Theatre in Goodman's-Fields. LONDON, 1736. 8 vo. Title from *Notes and Queries*, 8th S. IX. March 7, 1896, page 196. Copy in the British Museum, and another in the Library of Congress lacking title and all matter before the dedication.

An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq; Full title given in note No. 1, page 25. Copies in British Museum, John Carter Brown Library, and in two private libraries.

A Sermon, preached before his Excellency the Governor [sic] of Maryland, and both Houses of Assembly, at Annapolis, December 13, 1754. By James Sterling, A.M. Rector of St. Paul's Parish, in Kent County. ANNAPOLIS: Printed by Jonas Green, Printer to the Province. MDCCCLV. Sm 4to. Described in Wroth, *History of Printing in Colonial Maryland*, Maryland Imprints, No. 186. Copies are found in the British Museum and the Library of Congress. For a London reprint of the same year, see next title.

Zeal against the Enemies of our Country pathetically recommended: In a Remarkable Sermon, Preached before His Excellency the Governor of Maryland, and Both Houses of Assembly, at Annapolis. December 13, 1754. By James Sterling, A.M. Rector of St. Paul's Parish, in Kent County. Published at the Request of the Lower House of Assembly. Annapolis, Printed: LONDON reprinted, for J. Whiston and B. White, in Fleet-street, MDCCCLV. (Price Six-Pence) 8 vo. The London reprint of the title entered above. Copies in the British Museum, Library of Congress, John Carter Brown Library, and in private hands.

American Magazine. Philadelphia 1757-1758. For poetical contributions to this magazine by Sterling, see section V of the present article.

and the *Poetical Works* are sincere creations, not greatly worse than the average verse of the eighteenth century. They have been the object of some exceedingly supercilious criticism by a modern writer, whose term "high-falutin," however, we are bound to accept as descriptive of their style.¹ Genest enters *The Parricide* under date of January 29, 1736, and remarks that it was a poor tragedy, acted only five times at Goodman's Fields, adding, "the plot is improbable, and the language unnatural."² It seems necessary to admit that one may not claim for Mr. Sterling's works any great degree of literary merit, but it is an arid mind that does not recognize in them excellent material for the social and literary history of the period and place in which they were written and presented to the public.

If one approach the *Poetical Works of the Rev. James Sterling*³ in search of details bearing upon its author's life, he will find a certain measure of reward for his pains. The volume is dedicated to Colonel Charles Lanoe and the officers of "His Majesty's own Royal Regiment of Foot by their faithful servant and chaplain, James Sterling." The author's style on the title-page and this designation of himself in 1734 as a regimental chaplain are the first indications of his new profession that we encounter, and we may assume that he had entered Holy Orders soon after he received his Master's degree in 1733. It is from this volume that we learn of the early age, between eighteen and twenty-one, at which *The Rival Generals* and many of the poems were composed. Sterling tells us further, that he had been at pains to give the names of those who

¹W. Sparrow Simpson in *Notes and Queries*, 8th series, IX. page 24.

²Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage*, III. 432. W. A. Henderson in *Notes and Queries*, 8th series, IX. page 196, allows only three performances to the *Parricide*, on January 29 and 31 and February 2, 1736.

³The only copy of Sterling's *Poetical Works*, Dublin, 1734, that I have been able to locate is that in the Library of St. Paul's Cathedral, described in the article cited in note No. 1, above. Through the kindness of one of the Cathedral vergers, I was enabled to visit that lofty library beneath the dome in the summer of 1931, and permitted to examine this rare volume.

wrote the complimentary verses addressed to him in the book because it had been meanly insinuated that he was himself their author. He asserts, too, that his purpose in collecting and publishing his poems was that their lofty and serious cast might relieve him of the imputation of having written several scurrilous satires lately current in Dublin. We find in the volume a "Funeral Poem on the Death of . . . William Conolly, Esq." Evidently Sterling's admiration of the Irish statesman and his gratitude for the service rendered his father endured beyond the lifetime of this friend and family patron.

From many standpoints the most interesting poems in the collection are those which have to do with Sterling's wife, a successful and admired Dublin actress for whom it was his pleasure, it seems, to compose pieces to be spoken as prologues and epilogues. Among these were an epilogue to Richard the Third, in which Mrs. Sterling had taken the part of Lady Anne; an epilogue to the Tragedy of Lady Jane Grey, spoken by Mrs. Sterling, representing the ghost of Lady Jane; and "An Epilogue spoken by Mrs. Sterling on her quitting the Stage." In the last of these the popular actress deploras the failing health which compels her to give up her profession, and in another place in the book we find a poem entitled, "Verses on the Death of a beloved Wife. As written by her Husband." This lament for departed grace and virtue is not without genuine feeling, even though the "Emilia" whom the author mourns in sober verse was to have two successors in his affections within the next fifteen years. This lady's performance in 1731 as Leiza in Darcy's *Love and Ambition* won for her warm praise from the author of the play. "Mrs. Sterling," he wrote in his preface, "in every one's opinion, as well as in mine, deserves all the encomiums we can bestow on her."¹ It was probably soon after this performance that Mrs. Sterling quit the stage.

¹Genest, work cited, X-292.

III

We have come now to the dividing line in Sterling's career. A few months after the last performance of *The Parricide*, on February 2, 1736, we find him determined upon going as a missionary to America, having given over, one would say, the struggle for fame through the medium of poetry and the drama. Mr. Sterling's own words are our assurance that his motive in going to the Plantations had its rise in a conviction that he could best perform his sacred function in a missionary situation. The earliest record of his intention of emigrating is found in a letter, dated simply June 15, in which he begs the Bishop of London for appointment to the lectureship of King's Chapel, Boston, just then become vacant through the death of "Mr. Harwood." Knowledge of the fact that the Rev. Thomas Harward's death occurred in Boston on April 15, 1736,¹ enables us to fix the date of Sterling's letter to the Bishop of London as June 15, 1736. The communication is given here in full:²

MY LORD

I had the Honour of waiting on You lately at Fulham with Mr. Hamilton, where I communicated to You my Design of going to Boston in America to supply the new Church there; being invited over by the principal Inhabitants and in particular by Mr. Auchmuty, Judge of the Admiralty, my near Relation.

I then inform'd your Lordship of what, I believe, no Body can doubt (who know my present Income, and what Probability I have of being wel provided for in the Church) that my sole Motive of transplanting myself to that remote Part of the World is the Prospect of contributing more there to the Cause of Religion in my sacred Function, than the Corruption of the Times wil allow in my own Country.

The indulgent Reception, I met with from You, encourages me to make a second Application to You.

By a Ship, just arriv'd from New-England, I am assur'd that Mr. Harwood, Lecturer of the King's Chappel is lately dead; I therefore humbly offer myself to You, as a Candidate to fil that

¹See F. W. P. Greenwood, *History of King's Chapel, Boston*, page 97.

²Fulham Mss. Massachusetts, Box II. No. 209. Transcript in the Library of Congress.

Vacancy; and hope, on a strict Inquiry into my Character, that your Interposition in my Favour wil dispose her Majesty to present me to that smal, and uninvidious Preferment; to which, I beg Leave to say, my late Father's Services in a Post of Dignity in the army for near fifty Years give me some Pre-tensions.

I shal come recommended to You next Friday, not from a Number of our Nobility, who are ready to use their good Offices on this Occasion, but from some of the Worthiest Clergymen in your own Diocese.

If by your Lordship's Means I shal happily succeed, I purpose, with God's Grace, to conduct myself not unworthy of your Patronage, and it shal be my only Ambition to emulate in a low Station that Zeal for the Good of Mankind, which You have so eminently exerted in a high one.

I am, My Lord, with all Deference, and Sincerity, Your most dutiful Servant

JA: STERLING

June 15th
Endorsed Sterling
Boston K^s Chapel.

It is evident from the content of this letter that Sterling's desire for missionary service had been brought to a head by the interposition in his affairs of Robert Auchmuty, the elder, at this time and for years afterwards Judge of Admiralty in Boston.¹ At first invited to come as rector of the "new church;" that is, Trinity Church, he had determined, upon hearing the news of Mr. Harward's death to ask for appointment as lecturer, or assistant-minister, of the more important King's Chapel. But unfortunately for his hopes, the Bishop determined to appoint as lecturer of King's Chapel a missionary already in service in Massachusetts, and as an arrangement was made locally for the conduct of Trinity, he was disappointed in that expectation too.² One speculates but vainly in

¹I regret that I have not been able to determine the degree of relationship existing between Judge Auchmuty and Sterling. For an account of the elder Auchmuty, see F. S. Drake, *Town of Roxbury*.

²The Rev. Addington Davenport, missionary at Scituate, was appointed by the Bishop of London to the lectureship of King's Chapel in January, 1737. Mr. Davenport and Mr. Price, rector of King's Chapel, conducted the services at Trinity until 1740, when Mr. Davenport became rector of that church. See work cited in note 1, page 37, pages 97-100.

suggesting that if Sterling, eloquent and orthodox, had served his long years in America in King's Chapel, Boston, instead of in various Maryland parishes, Unitarianism in the United States would have arisen elsewhere than in the old center of Massachusetts episcopacy.

Though Robert Auchmuty's interest in Sterling seems to have been of little effect in this specific case, yet it may be that his invitation to the "new church" in Boston, "that remote Part of the World," definitely fixed his kinsman's thoughts upon a life of missionary service in America. It may be, too, that his influence upon the younger man was not confined to the planting of this particular seed, for when we observe, a few years later, the quality and degree of Sterling's interest in colonial affairs, we are justified in asking whether this strong emotion also had not been given intensity by the example of his Boston relative. One of the outstanding American political tracts of the eighteenth century was Robert Auchmuty's *The Importance of Cape Breton to the British Nation*, London, 1745. In this curt and vigorous essay, first printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July, 1745, was set forth the plan of action that had already, a month earlier, resulted in the capture of Louisburg. It is not certain that Auchmuty was the original sponsor of the plan proposed in his belated publication, so that the importance of his part in the taking of Cape Breton has been justly questioned. But disregarding this problem of wider interest, one finds it easy to believe that the aggressiveness in the cause of empire of his admired relative may well have given direction to Sterling's imperialistic enthusiasm. The fact that the crusty old Boston judge of admiralty was reputed to be able to sit all night with his bottle and to argue clearly and effectively next morning would not, one fancies, have greatly prejudiced our cosmopolitan clergyman against his political ideas.

It was something more than a year after the failure

of Mr. Sterling's application for appointment to King's Chapel that on September 16, 1737, he took the royal bounty for passage to Maryland as a missionary of the Church of England.¹ On November 16, 1737, he received from the governor of that province a letter of induction to the rectorship of All Hallows Parish in Anne Arundel County. He retained his incumbency of All Hallows until July 18, 1739, when he was inducted rector of the neighboring parish of St. Ann's, within the bounds of which lay Annapolis, the capital city of the Province. This rectorship, formally assumed on August 5, 1739, he resigned on August 26, 1740, receiving the same day induction to St. Paul's Parish in Kent County on the Eastern Shore.² One may well inquire what lay behind Mr. Sterling's resignation of the urban parish of St. Ann's, Annapolis, comprising within it the church of governor and Assembly, for the important but distinctly rural parish of St. Paul's, Kent. I should like to think that he had been drawn to the Eastern Shore by the desire for a rural retreat, that perhaps he had seen the glorious oaks of St. Paul's Churchyard, venerable even then, and mighty beyond belief in spread and girth, and seeing them had said, "Here, another Herbert, in this new-world Bemerton will I walk and pray and meditate my poems," but I have a fear that sooner or later I shall be compelled to adopt the economic rather than the sentimental interpretation of history to explain this townsman's removal from the pleasant bustle of Annapolis to the quiet of an Eastern Shore rectory.³

Settled in St. Paul's Parish, where he was to remain

¹Fothergill, *List of Emigrant Ministers to America*, page 57. Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers, 1735-1738, page 433.

²These inductions are recorded in Commission Book No. 82, manuscript state archives of Maryland in the Maryland Historical Society, and with much other personal material in the "Henry Fenwick Thompson Ms. Papers, Colonial Clergy" in the same institution. See also "Vestry Proceedings, St. Ann's Parish, Annapolis," in the *Maryland Historical Magazine*, VIII, 353.

³One gigantic oak in this famous grove measures 32 feet in circumference one foot above ground. Its greatest spread of branches is 128 feet.

until his death twenty-three years later, Mr. Sterling seems to have taken on easily enough the duties of a country clergyman. He acquired land,¹ married, was bereaved and remarried, tended his cure of souls with diligence, and engaged in the labors of literary and homiletic composition. On September 19, 1743, he was married to Rebecca Holt, widow of the Rev. Arthur Holt, late of St. Luke's Parish, Queen Anne's County.² A daughter Rebecca was born of this marriage. Following the death of Rebecca (Holt) Sterling, his second wife, he was married September 7, 1749, to Mary Smith, granddaughter of James Smith, a landowner of Kent County.³ At this juncture of his life, after twelve years in Maryland, he must have looked with satisfaction upon his achievement in the new country. Rector of one of the most important parishes in the Province, twice married in that period to women of position and property, a landowner in his own right—he could reflect with comfort upon his earlier life of small success. And the dream of greater accomplishment in letters and in worldly advancement was still with him.

¹Sterling's plantation of Rousbys Recovery, a tract of 500 acres on Langford's Bay, Chester River, came into his possession by purchase, October 9, 1747, for the sum of 750 pounds currency. The deed is recorded in Kent County Land Records, J. S. 26, folio 89. For the later history of this tract, see note 1, page 66. His smaller plantations of Huddles Right and Rushmore must have come to him through his marriage to Rebecca Holt. See act of Assembly of May, 1750, archives of Maryland, XLVI, 487-489, by which he was empowered to sell these tracts, giving bond to pay a certain part of the proceeds to his daughter by Rebecca (Holt) Sterling, at her marriage or majority, or in case of her death to Arthur Holt, son of Rebecca (Holt) Sterling by her former husband. Sterling gave bond for this purpose in the form of a deed to Rousbys Recovery, dated October 4, 1750, and a year later on October 4 and 5, 1751, consummated the sale of Huddles Right and Rushmore. (Kent County Land Records, J. S. 26, folio 375; J. S. 27, folio 41; J. S. 27, folio 43.)

²Records of St. Luke's Parish, Queen Anne's county, page 48, copy in Maryland Historical Society. Mrs. Holt was the daughter of Colonel Nathaniel Hynson (d. 1721) of Kent County and his first wife, Hannah. See note 3, below. On August 27, 1746, James and Rebecca Sterling filed an administration account of the estate of Rebecca's former husband, the Rev. Arthur Holt, of which she was executrix. (Administration Accounts, No. 3 (1743-1754) folio 103, Kent County, Md.)

³Records of St. Luke's Parish, Queen Anne's County, page 56, copy in Maryland Historical Society. Mary Smith was the granddaughter of James Smith, a large landholder of Kent County. (See *Maryland Historical Magazine*, XVIII, 189-192.) I am indebted to Dr. J. Hall Pleasants of Baltimore for details concerning Rebecca Holt and Mary Smith, the second and third wives of Mr. Sterling.

IV

About two years after his marriage to Miss Smith in September, 1749, Mr. Sterling returned to England on a visit of such importance in the present inquiry as to make it necessary to fix its limitations as closely as possible. It was certainly after October 5, 1751, when he signed a land indenture in Maryland,¹ that he set out upon his journey. The time of his return is more exactly known, for in the *Maryland Gazette* for August 13, 1752, a notice informs us that six days earlier the Rev. Mr. James Sterling "came Passenger" to Annapolis in the ship *Nancy* after a voyage of nine weeks. From consideration of these dates it appears that the time of his visit to England lay roughly between the closing months of 1751 and the first of June, 1752. The letter given below, addressed by him to the Bishop of London during this visit, and dated simply April 20th, shows him once more a suppliant, but this time for a common favor. His return to Maryland in August, 1752, and his reference in the letter to a service there of fifteen, or, strangely, "fiveteen," years, sets the date of the petition as April 20, 1752. From its endorsement, we learn that he was successful in his appeal for the royal bounty, though a second payment of it to him is not recorded in Fothergill's *List of Emigrant Ministers*. Sterling's appeal to the Bishop for this assistance is given below in full:²

April 20th

MY LORD

As I resolve to reimbarke, by the Beginning of next Week, for Maryland, and to continue there during the Residue of my Days in the faithfull Discharge of my sacred Function; my Duty obliges me now to wait on your Lordship, in Order to receive such of your Commands, as You may judge Me qualify'd to execute in a remote Part of your Jurisdiction.

The Desire of availing my Country in its civil, as well religious, Interests, by my Travels, Discoveries, and Observations; (in which I have not been disappointed; as the Lords

¹Kent County Records, J. S. 27, folio 43.

²Fulham Mss. box: "Letters of Orders 1748-1756." Transcript in the Library of Congress.

Commissioners of Trade and Plantations will amply testify) And the Hopes of recovering my Health, much impair'd by the Inclemency of various Climates, and some disastrous Accidents among Savage Nations, were the true Motives of my late Return to Europe, as indeed Those of my Going at First to America were solely consciencious; of which, Sir George Lyttleton and many other worthy Personages will assure You, I gave an incontestible and unprecedented Proof by resigning a Presentation to a Rectory of considerable Income, and the Chaplainship of a Regiment, in Order to pass into a Part of his Majesty's Dominions, where my Zeal induc'd me to believe I could be more usefull than at Home, and where the Effects of my Ministry might be extensive.

The Charges of my Passage, the Fees of Physicians, and other unavoidable Disbursements in this expensive Place, (to which my small Living is not adequate) have lay'd me under a most disagreeable Necessity of requesting from your Lordship's Benevolence What shame and the Fear of the least Imputation of Mercenariness have prevented Me from applying for to the Generosity of other Great Men, whose Offers of immediate Preferment in England I have lately declin'd, as inconsistent with the scheme of Life I have purpos'd invariably to pursue. The Favor, I ask, (and really want, my Lord) is the Donation of the Royal Bounty, usually confer'd on Missionaries to enable them to undertake their Voyage; and tho' I plead my present Exigency rather than the past services of fiveteen Years; yet, I humbly hope, Those may intitle me to the same Gratuity, which all Persons, sent to propagate the Gospel in our Plantations, have receiv'd before any Trial at all of their Conduct or Abilities in such a Station.

I am, my Lord, (with my incessant Prayers for your own, and the Prosperity of the Church You preside in with so much Dignity) Your Lordships most Dutifull and Devoted servant

JAMES STERLING

Endorsed The Rev^d M^r. James Sterling had my L^{ds} Lre to the Treasury for 20^{li}. Maryland

In this letter, Sterling does not seem to have thought it necessary to acquaint the Bishop with the secular business in which he must just then have been engaged. One may not doubt that the prelate would have been interested, if not pleased, to learn that this applicant for passage money to America, under the provisions of the King's Bounty, was at the moment seeking a civil appointment in Maryland whereof the salary and

emoluments were considerable. It might have amused him, however, as it does us, to learn that Sterling had himself recommended the creation of the office to which he was asking appointment. Nine days after the spiritual lord at Fulham had read and endorsed favorably the foregoing letter, the very temporal Lords of the Treasury at Whitehall were reading and approving "a mem^l of James Stirling re Appointment as Coll^r of the Customs in Maryland." On the next day, April 30, 1752, their Lordships addressed the following communication to the Commissioners of the Customs:¹

GENT

By Order of the Right Hon^{ble} the Lords Comm^{rs} of his Ma^{ty}'s Treasury I send you the inclosed Mem^l of Ja^s Sterling Clerk, representing the Great necessity of appointing a Collector in Maryland, for the District mentioned in the said Mem^l. And it having been represented also, by Gentlemen of Distinction (very well acquainted with those parts) that the appointing such an Officer would be of singular Utility to the Publick, and the s^d M^r Sterling being very strongly Recommended as a Person very fit for, & capable of doing very good Service in that Station; My Lords are pleased to direct You to take this matter immediately into your Consideration, And, if you have no objection, to present M^r Sterling to them by their next Board, & propose a Salary to be placed for him on the Establishment. I am &c 30th April 1752 J. WEST

Apparently there was nothing for the recipients of this polite mandate to do except comply with its terms. Doubtless the Commissioners of the Customs realized that a colonial clergyman, fifteen years out of England, who was able to suggest the creation of an office with himself as its incumbent and to secure the approval of the Lords of the Treasury to the suggestion had behind him influence which might not be withstood. It is probable that they knew very well who was supporting the estimable Sterling and could have told us surely what we are surmising in a later section of this study; that is, that the ancient friendship of Sterling with Sir George Lyttelton, now one of the Lords of

¹Public Record Office, T. 11/24, page 154.

Treasury, was bearing fruit of a pleasant character for the Maryland clergyman. And they may have possessed as certain knowledge a piece of information which then or later, came to Governor Sharpe of Maryland as hearsay. In connection with this appointment the Governor wrote years later, in 1760, that he understood the District of Chester had been created for Mr. Sterling "a few years before I left England at the Instance of Mr. Nugent who having promised Mr. Sterling some Ecclesiastical Preferment which he was afterwards unwilling or unable to bestow on him fell upon that method to get quit of him."¹ As the event will show, the Governor was doing a bit of special pleading in this case, so that the uncomplimentary tone of his concluding words need not affect our judgment of the gentleman to whom they were applied. Just before the appointment to the collectorship was made, Mr. Sterling had assured the Bishop of London that he intended returning to Maryland for the rest of his days, and further, that he had just declined "Offers of immediate Preferment in England" made him by certain "Great Men." There is no reason to doubt his truthfulness. He was probably not anxious to secure an English living in view of his comfortable position as rector and landowner in Maryland. The creation of a civil office in that place in his behalf was doubtless his own choice—as it seems certainly to have been his own suggestion—rather than a device hit upon by Mr. Nugent to rid himself of an importunate candidate for ecclesiastical preferment. In spite of its probable inaccuracy in details, however, the Governor's gossip advances immensely our understanding of a situation otherwise difficult of comprehension. The Mr. Nugent referred to by Governor Sharpe as Sterling's unwilling patron could only have been Robert of that name, later Viscount Clare, and, finally, Earl Nugent. A man of great wealth, acquired chiefly through fortunate

¹Correspondence of Governor Sharpe, *Archives of Maryland*, IX, 437.

marriages, member of Parliament, poet and patron of men of letters, this "jovial and voluptuous Irishman," as a contemporary described him, was now well launched upon a distinguished, but not particularly noble, political career. The nature of his earlier connection with Sterling does not appear. He was about the same age as the Maryland clergyman; they were schoolboys in Dublin at much the same time, though at different schools; they came to London in the same decade, and attached themselves, it seems, to the same political party. If Sharpe's gossip was based upon fact, and Sterling had Robert Nugent as well as Sir George Lyttelton among his supporters, one is better able to understand the attitude of the Commissioners of Customs in acceding without ado, but with an air of resignation, to the recommendations concerning him made by the Lords of the Treasury. In their reply to the Treasury Board, the Commissioners recommend the appointment in terms that seem quietly to disclaim responsibility for the action.¹

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR LORDSHIPS.

In obedience to your Lordps Commands signified to Us by M^r West, in his Letter of the 30th ultimo, inclosing a Memorial of James Sterling representing the great necessity of appointing a Coll^r in Maryland for the District mentioned in the said Memorial, directing us to take this matter immediately into consideration, and if We have no objection to present M^r Sterling to your Lordps and to propose a Salary to be placed for him on the Establishm^t.

We humbly report, that We have never had any application to us, either by the Surveyor General, or the Merchants trading to Maryland, relating to the appointment of a Collector at the place proposed by M^r Sterling, but "as it hath been represented to your Lordps by Gentⁿ of distinction, who are very well acquainted with those parts, that the appointing of such an Officer, will be of singular utility to the Publick, and that M^r Sterling is a person very fit for, and capable of doing very good Service in that Station." We have no objection to his being placed on the Establishment as Collector of Chester and Patapsco at the Salary of 80^l per Ann, to keep a Boat, in the

¹Public Record Office, T. 11/24, pages 155-156.

same manner as the Collectors of North Potomack, and Pocomak, in the Province of Maryland.

All which is humbly submitted
 Custom h^o London W. L. R. C. W. G. W. E. Hooper.
 2 May 1752.

The final document in the case is this formal authorization of Mr. Sterling's appointment, addressed by the Treasury Board to the Commissioners of the Customs:¹

After &c^s Having considered your Report dated the 2^d day of May 1752, which is hereunto annexed, on the Memorial of James Sterling, We think it will be of advantage to the Revenue that he should be appointed Collector of the Customs at Chester and Patapsco, in Maryland, at the Salary of 80^l per Annum. These are therefore to authorize and require you to issue forth your Deputation to the said James Sterling to be Collector there accordingly, at the said Salary of 80^l per Ann, and to keep a Boat, in the same manner as the Collectors of North Potomack, and Pocomoke, in the Province of Maryland do: And We do hereby authorize and require you to cause the said Salary of 80^l per Annum to be placed for the said James Sterling on the Establishment, to commence from Lady day 1752, and to be paid and payable to him in like manner, as other the Salaries of the Officers on the said Establishment are paid and payable: And for so doing this shall be your Warrant, Whitehall Treary Chambers the 12th day of May 1752.

H. P. G. L. J. C.

To Comm^{rs} Customs.

This piece of business happily concluded, the new Collector of Chester sailed for Maryland about the first of June, 1752, for it was on August 7, as we have seen, that he arrived in Annapolis after a voyage of nine weeks. On the 27th of the same month, under date of August 26, 1752, the following announcement appeared in the *Maryland Gazette*:

The Subscriber hereby gives public Notice to all Masters of Ships and other sea vessels, bound to the Northern Parts of Chesapeak Bay, and purposing to trade, or take in their Ladings, in any of the Ports or Rivers thereof, within the limits assigned to his charge; that he is appointed by the Honourable the commissioners of the Customs in London,

¹Public Record Office, T. 11/24, page 155.

Collector of His Majesty's Duties in the following District; viz: From the River of Chester on the Eastern Shore, and round the Head of the said Bay to the River of Patapsco, inclusive on the Western Shore; And he being duly qualified, according to Law, to execute his Office, requires all such Masters or Commanders, to make due Entry and Clearance of their respective Ships, or Sea Vessels, and perform all other legal Requisites, at his office in New Town on Chester River; or with his Deputy, Mr. William Lux, at Patapsco; where constant and regular attendance shall be given.

JAMES STERLING.

There is hardly need for an elaborate defense of Sterling for allowing secular interests to divert him from the path of his sacred profession. It is clear enough that his evangelical ardor was not sufficiently great in intensity to fill his life, and it is a matter of knowledge that there existed little scope in the Established Church of colonial Maryland for the play of ambition in his calling. The theoretical requirements of his position as priest in that establishment were decent personal living and enough attention to his pastoral duties to keep the machinery of his parish in operation. He seems to have given no scandal to his community by neglect of either requisite and, the essentials of his position cared for, his alert mind and energetic nature led him to look for advancement in another quarter. The title of this account of him would be meaningless, furthermore, if I did not believe that the evangelical zeal which would have characterized his service in a more active missionary field found sublimation under the existing circumstances in enthusiasm for the political and commercial growth of his country. He seems to have been genuinely religious and genuinely patriotic, and it is not difficult to believe that in his mind the service of his country was only another form of the service of God to which he was vowed.

Whatever Sterling's motives may have been in seeking civil office, his success in obtaining it is to be deplored, for his entry upon the larger stage of provin-

cial life worked harm to his reputation and to his own peace of mind. The announcement of his appointment to the newly created revenue district must have caused chagrin as well as surprise in Maryland, where the clergy had been expressly forbidden election to the Assembly and, tacitly, appointment to civil office, since the conflict between the Proprietary and the Jesuits in the very earliest days of the colony.¹ More specific than this cause of dissatisfaction with the appointment was the fact that the collectorship of the Port of Patuxent, in which lay Annapolis, the principal city of the Province, was held by Benedict Calvert, natural son of Charles, 5th Lord Baltimore, and a man of property and local influence, who stood to lose directly in fees and perquisites by this division of his district. Furthermore, the new district had no sooner been established than Governor Sharpe saw in it a desirable reward for the faithful services of his secretary, Mr. John Ridout. Add to these factors of opposition the displeasure, promptly expressed, of the London merchants and mariners in the Maryland trade, and it becomes evident that Mr. Sterling's incumbency of his office was not to be as pleasant as it had seemed to him in prospect.

The first evidence of an existing dissatisfaction with the appointment appears in a letter of October 2, 1753, in which Governor Sharpe begged Mr. Cecilius Calvert, Lord Baltimore's secretary in London, to use his personal influence in favor of Mr. Ridout in case Mr. Sterling's commission should be withdrawn.² It was some months later that the affair became a matter of official interest. On February 20, 1754, a petition from the merchants and masters in the Maryland trade was presented to the Lords of Treasury praying that Mr. Sterling's appointment be vacated. The

¹The precedent established by Mr. Sterling's appointment to civil office was cited more than once when the last Lord Baltimore was insisting upon the appointment of the notorious clergyman, Bennet Allen, to a lucrative civil office in addition to the incumbency of two parishes. (See *Archives of Maryland*, XIV, 432, 458.)

²Correspondence of Governor Sharpe, *Archives of Maryland*, VI. 8.

petition was referred to the Commissioners of Customs and to the Board of Trade. The matter appears again in the Board of Trade proceedings on March 12 and October 18, 1754, in minutes which seem to indicate an unwillingness for action on the part of the Board until the Commissioners of Customs had reported on the petition.¹ But that the business continued to drag is evident. On May 11, 1754, Cecilius Calvert wrote to Governor Sharpe that "the affair of Mr Calvert & Mr Sterling is not as yet determin'd here by the Lords of Treasury 'tis Mr. Philpots fault who has neglected it with the Commissioners of Customs your Brother John promises me faithfully if opportunity serves to do Mr. Ridout Service therein."²

The following petition from the London merchants to the Treasury is presented here in the form in which it was referred on February 27, 1754, to the Lords of Trade.³ Its interest as a document of colonial commerce is somewhat wider than its immediate application to the affairs of Mr. Sterling.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORDS COMMISS^{RS}.
OF HIS MAJESTYS TREASURY.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR LORDSHIPS,

The Merchants Owners and Masters of Ships trading to Maryland whose Names are hereunto subscribed on behalf of themselves and others concerned in that Trade having from their own Experience as also from such Information of others as they can sufficiently depend on found great Charge and Inconvenience arising from the late Creation of a New Officer of his Maty's Customs The Rev^d Mr James Stirling as Collector at Chester and Potapsco River in that Province Beg leave to represent to your Lordships the Nature of such Charge and Inconvenience that if it be your Lordships pleasure an immediate stop may be put to them.

Annapolis the Chief Town is scituated at the Mouth of the River Severn where is a most commodious Harbour very con-

¹Public Record Office, T. 29/32, page 177; T. 11/24, page 354; C. O. 5/1273 (Proprieties); C. O. 391/61, pages 53, 233-234.

²Correspondence of Governor Sharpe, *Archives of Maryland*, VI. 67.

³Public Record Office, C. O. 5/1273.

venient and safe for Ships to call and enter at, which are bound to the two great Rivers above mentioned, to wit, Potapsco on the same side as Annapolis and Chester on that side opposite to it or there is good Anchoridge and safe riding in the Road before the Town, the great Bay of Cheasapeak being in this part of it no more than Seven Miles from Shore to Shore, at Annapolis resides M^r Tasker the Naval Officer and M^r Calvert the present Collector there who had those two Rivers within his District before the new Alteration.

This Situation of Annapolis is in the Heart of the whole Country and of convenient distance to every part of the Bay above it, Here by himself and in other places by his Deputies M^r Calvert managed and executed his office with great Ease and Content to the Trade.

And We further beg leave to assure your Lordships that whatever may have been said of wanting a Collector at Chester We never heard the Surveyor General or any other Officer of the Customs thought it necessary if they had, a Deputy from Annapolis added there as was done at Patuxent, woud have been fully sufficient to answer all purposes and no new Charge or Inconvenience would have attended it; Potapsco River (which is now made a part of M^r Sterlings District) lying on the same side of the Bay with Annapolis Town and is but a little distance from it, to what it is from Chester Town, as will visibly appear to your Lordships upon having recourse to the Mapp annexed [not in vol.]; Before this new Appointment of M^r Sterlings the Captains or Masters entering their Ships with any one Collector had free liberty to proceed to any part of the Province after, without being obliged to make further Entry, And this is so Essential to the Ease and Convenience of the Shipping, that we greatly wish (if it were your Lordships pleasure) that it might be a standing Instruction from the Commissioners of His Majestys' Customs to every Collector appointed in that Service to observe it. For now if a Ship is to deliver Goods at Annapolis it must enter there as usual, and afterwards as this New Officer insists must make a fresh Entry on passing into his District when it is likewise to deliver Goods or Load either in Potapsco or Chester. This Second Entry creates a Second Charge to the Shipping besides Attendance and delay for this purpose and without the least Use or benefit to any one but the Officer as a Perquisite of his Office, This we must beg leave to add is a new and severe Clog upon the Trade and as an Additional Expence sensibly affects it, and in the most essential part of the Shipping, which is such a heavy and loseing Article already, that it will bear no more Burthen upon it.

We therefore beseech your Lordships from your known attention Care and Protection of the trading part of this Nation you will extend your favours to this Province and be pleased to order that the Deputation of M^r Sterling be withdrawn that this new office may be Vacated, or that the Shipping may be relieved and delivered from this New Charge and Inconvenience in such other manner as may be more agreeable to your Lordships, And if your Lordships shall think proper with respect to the preventing any illicit Trade between Maryland and Pensilvania which we have heard M^r Sterling represented to your Lordships as a reason for creating this New Office in Order to prevent it, We beg leave to say that we apprehend it will not answer that End, although we do believe if your Lordships should think fit to order a Riding Surveyor to be appointed to the Head of Chester this illicit Trade might in a great measure be put a stop to.

We now beg leave to repeat it with Our earnest Wishes and with all imaginable deference to your Lordships Wisdom and Judgment that your Lordships will be pleased to restore the Course of our Shipping business to its former easy regulation—that the Merchants, Owners, Captains and Masters may upon their due Entry of their Ships at Annapolis or other Port in this Province have free liberty to proceed afterwards to deliver and load at any other Port without being obliged to further Entry, Charge or Trouble on that Account And that this New Office may be vacated that the Trade may be carried on in the same manner as it hath been for so many years past without Complaint or cause of Complaint from either Trade or Officers.

All of which is humbly submitted to your Lordships.

Patrick White	Sil. Grove	J. Hanbury
Henry Carroll	Matthias Gale	W ^m Hunt
W ^m Gracie	Jn ^o Stewart	John Buchanan
Isaac Blackburn	Torver & Philpot	William Anderson
Geo: Cole	W ^m Perkins	James Buchanan
David Pollock	John Philpot	Tho ^o Flowerdeive
Jon ^a Sydenham	Antho: Bacon	Will ^m Black
		James Kemp.

[Endorsed]

Reced Feb. 27	} 1754.
Read March 12	
reced with M ^r Hardinge's Lre of Feby 27. 1754.	

The Lords of the Treasury and the Lords of Trade and Plantations seem to have been anxious to allow the Commissioners of Customs to take the responsibility

for a decision on this memorial. It is probable, however, that the Customs, having made the Sterling appointment under pressure from the Treasury in the first place, was not now in the mood to pull their lordships' chestnuts out of the fire. The records of all three boards are silent as far as concerns the final disposition of Mr. Sterling's case. There seems to have been a certain amount of working at cross purposes among Mr. Sterling's opponents. The appointment of Mr. Ridout, urged by Governor Sharpe, could hardly have benefitted Mr. Calvert. This interested gentleman must have hoped for the discontinuance of the office altogether, an expectation and desire in which, as their memorial shows, he was joined by the London merchants. And it may have been this very confusion, combined with the exertion of influence in support of him by Sterling's patrons, that prevented action upon the petition of the London merchants.

It may indeed have been felt by the authorities that the institution of a new customs district on the Eastern Shore of Maryland was not, after all, so useless and so generally undesirable an action as the merchants represented in their petition. The new district included the young town of Baltimore on the Patapsco, then beginning to acquire importance as an outlet for the grain of northern and western Maryland, and it had in its jurisdiction a number of rivers, which flowed through lands soon to become more important agriculturally than the southern Maryland tobacco counties served by the District of Patuxent. But whether it was extraordinary foresight or merely favoritism of Mr. Sterling that kept the home authorities from taking action upon the merchants' memorial, the fact remains that no further reference to that protest is found in the papers of either of the three boards concerned. But hope was slow to die among those who would have gained by its success. More than a year after its presentation to the Lords of the Treasury, Secretary Calvert, on May 20, 1755, wrote as follows

to Governor Sharpe: "I beg you will acquaint Mr. Calvert that Mr. Philpot has been with me who says the Commissioners of the Customs will soon make report of the Affair between him & Mr. Sterling to the Lords of Trade & Plantation, the Effect of w^h he apprehends Certain will be Dismission of the Latter from his Employ^{mt} at Chester River, I think he deserves it for chicanary."¹

One admits to a certain degree of satisfaction in learning that Governor Sharpe and the crabbed Secretary Calvert were disappointed in their expectation. In this instance, certainly, Mr. Sterling was one of Fortune's spoiled children. The merchants' petition to the Treasury, of February 27, 1754, was received by a board of which his friend Sir George Lyttelton was still a member, and to which, as if for his special salvation, Robert Nugent, his reputed patron, was appointed on April 6 of the same year.² With these facts understood, one ceases to wonder that the outspoken memorial of the merchants and the devious workings of Sharpe and the Calverts against the Collector of Chester were met with evasions by the Lords of the Treasury, the Board of Trade, and the Commissioners of the Customs. It is, indeed, Governor Sharpe's own pen that gives us final assurance that Mr. Sterling remained long in office, protected by the walls of ancient friendship and party service. Still intent, as late as July 18, 1760, upon securing one of the Maryland collectorships for his secretary, John Ridout, Sharpe sent to his brother on that day an account of the existing Maryland customs districts, concluding his informative summary with the following remarks, one passage from which has already been quoted:³ "The other which brings in little more than the Sallary of £60 a year that is annexed to it & paid out of the Treasury is I think

¹Correspondence of Governor Sharpe, *Archives of Maryland*, XXXI, 481.

²Claud Nugent, *Memoir of Robert, Earl Nugent*, page 62.

³Correspondence of Governor Sharpe, *Archives of Maryland*, IX, 437.

called the Collectorship of Chester (for I perceive it is not entered with the Rest in the present State of Great Britain) & is enjoyed by the Rev^d Mr. James Sterling for whom I understand it was created a few years before I left England at the Instance of Mr. Nugent who having promised Mr. Sterling some Ecclesiastical Preferment which he was afterwards unwilling or unable to bestow on him fell upon that method to get quit of him. As this Gentleman is now pretty far advanced in Years & hath been lately much afflicted with the Stone his Death may possibly make a Vacancy within these few years, but perhaps as his Office was created purposely to serve him it might be thought fit to let it drop at his Decease." One learns from these sentences that in spite of the attacks made upon his position by those who coveted it and by those who conceived its existence as a detriment to their legitimate interests, Mr. Sterling had been able to hold on to his office. It is probable that when his illness overcame him in 1763, he was still acting as His Majesty's collector at Chester, though no mention of this office is found in his obituary, in his will, or in the accounts of his estate. In the inventory of his personal effects, however, one finds an entry which fixes the value of ten shillings upon "the office Seal."¹ One may hope that he had continued the use of that instrument until the end.

V

After returning from his momentous visit to London in 1752, Mr. Sterling continued to figure prominently in the business of the Maryland church, even though his interests were now divided. At the convention of the clergy held in Annapolis in 1753,² he was a leading figure. His associates on this occasion joined him with the Rev. Thomas Bacon, scholar and gentleman,

¹Inventories, Kent County, Maryland, No. 5, page 358.

²*Maryland Historical Magazine*, III, 257 et seq.

remembered as compiler of the great collection of Maryland laws of 1765, to prepare their address to the Governor. He was chosen to preach the sermon at the opening of a special Assembly convened on December 13, 1754, to vote men and supplies for the forthcoming campaign against the French. Published soon afterwards by Jonas Green of Annapolis, this *Sermon preached before his Excellency and both Houses of Assembly* was the only piece from the pen of James Sterling to issue from the Maryland press.¹ It was a thoughtful, virile exhortation, informed by learning and sound political sense, and expressed in forthright language. It was reprinted in London in the same year with the title, *Zeal against the Enemies of our Country pathetically recommended*. We shall return later to an examination of this address. Whatever Mr. Sterling's "chicanary" may have been in connection with his office of collector, it is clear that the Governor did not scruple to employ his golden tongue for the inciting of a stubborn Assembly to patriotic action. The reputation of this prominent Maryland clergyman seems to have spread to some extent beyond the borders of his own province, for when the friends of Mr. Robert McKean of New Jersey were recommending him for Holy Orders, various persons in Pennsylvania and elsewhere solicited Mr. Sterling to write to the Bishop of London in support of the candidate. His letter of November 1, 1756, bears cordial testimony to Mr. McKean's learning and to his fitness for the holy office.²

It was not to be expected that so constant a votary of the Poetic Muse as James Sterling had shown himself to be in his early and middle years should become indifferent to her as age came upon him and as prosperity and relative leisure entered his life. In October, 1757, appeared in Philadelphia, published by William

¹Wroth, *History of Printing in Colonial Maryland*, Maryland Imprints, no. 186.

²Fulham Mss. box: "Letter of Orders, 1748-1756." Transcript in the Library of Congress.

Bradford, edited by the Rev. William Smith, provost of the College of Philadelphia, the first number of a promising monthly periodical entitled the *American Magazine, or Monthly Chronicle for the British Colonies*. Though this publication had a life of only thirteen months, it well deserved a longer existence. In his *History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*, Frank Luther Mott writes that it "was bold and outspoken, and sincerely devoted to liberty and the orderly development of an American civilization." A note by the editor in the *American Magazine* of May, 1758, informs the readers that the author of a poem in that issue entitled "A Pastoral" had been "one of the first encouragers of our magazine." From various indications, one is able to say with some degree of certainty that this contributor, further described as a "gentleman of education and genius" was our Mr. James Sterling. One need not be surprised, indeed, to find this writer's ephemeral pieces in the pages of a magazine notable for grave patriotism and for the anti-French trend of its political policy.

In the Library of Congress copy of the *American Magazine*, October, 1757-October, 1758, three poems have opposite them pencilled notes attributing their authorship to James Sterling.¹ One of these reads in

¹My attention was directed to these contributions to the *American Magazine* by Mr. V. Valta Parma of the Library of Congress, who has given me very much appreciated aid throughout the preparation of this study of James Sterling. I regret that this article was already in process of printing when the information was received, so that I was not able to make a thorough investigation of the aspect of Sterling's work opened to view by this discovery. In his *History of American Magazines*, page 81, Frank Luther Mott has named James Sterling as one of the contributors of verse to the *American Magazine*, but has made no attempt to identify him. In Lyon N. Richardson's *History of Early American Magazines, 1741-1789*, (1931), a study directed exclusively to the periodicals of the colonial period, appears on pages 119-121, a more elaborate examination of the attribution of these poems to James Sterling. Dr. Richardson accepts as Sterling's the three poems so designated in the Library of Congress copy of the *American Magazine* and adds three more on the basis of his own excellent judgment. He refers to Albert H. Smyth, *The Philadelphia Magazines and their Contributors, 1741-1860*, (1892), in which, pages 35-41, that writer calls attention to his discovery of a British Museum copy of the *American Magazine* bearing a contemporary note attributing the poem "On the Invention of Letters" to Sterling. Dr. Smyth discusses the responsibility of Sterling for other poems in the volume and shows himself familiar with Sterling's authorship of *The Rival Generals* and *The Parricide*.

specific detail: "James Sterling, rector of St. Paul's Parish, Kent Co. Maryland, is the author of the poem." Two of the poems in question possess a common feature that helps one accept the attribution of them to Sterling, namely, the fact that each is dated from Kent County in Maryland. With this practice of the anonymous author as a guide, one looks through the volume for other poems by the Kent County contributor, with the result that one is able to suggest the following pieces as the product of the same hand:

ISSUE	TITLE	DATE LINE
March 1758	A Poem. On the Invention of Letters and the Art of Printing. Address to Mr. Richardson, the Author and Printer of Sir Charles Grandison, and other works, for the Promotion of Religion, Virtue and polite Manners, in a corrupted age. (Attributed to James Sterling in ms. note in Library of Congress copy of the <i>American Magazine</i> .)	Kent County, Maryland December 15, 1757
April 1758	The Patriot. (General resemblance in style and in matter to the poems attributed to Sterling in the Library of Congress copy.)	Kent in Maryland
May 1758	A Pastoral. To his Excellency George Thomas, Esq., formerly Governor of Pennsylvania, and now	

- General of the Leeward Islands.
(Attributed to James Sterling in Library of Congress copy of the *American Magazine*.)
- August 1758 The Royal Comet Kent in Maryland
(A poem in praise of the Protestant Hero, the King of Prussia.) July 14th, 1758
- September 1758 Elogium E Comitatu Canti
(Latin poem praising King George II, the King of Prussia, Pitt, and others.) in Mariae Provincia
- An Epitaph on the late Lord Howe Kent in Maryland
(Attributed to James Sterling in the Library of Congress copy of the *American Magazine*.) August 14th, 1758
- October 1758 Ode in imitation of Horace I. 22. Kent in Maryland
(In parallel columns with the Horatian ode on the Sabine wolf. The author celebrates his encounter with a buffalo in the garden of the late Governor Ogle of Maryland. It is dedicated to Mrs. Ogle and is in reality a tribute to the late governor.) October 25th, 1758

Other poems in the *American Magazine* might be attributed to this anonymous Maryland writer, but it is only in the case of the eight pieces specified that the indication is clear. Whatever variety the titles of these pieces may express, the themes are the same; that is, religion, politics, patriotism, and praise of contemporary political leaders. It is hardly a distinguishing description of the work of an eighteenth

century poet to say that its style is high flown, its form the heroic couplet, and its allusions profuse and indicative of a classical training. These, however, are features that impress themselves upon the reader of the present group of poems. It may be said, though, that in comparison with Sterling's earlier poems the imagery of these seems better disciplined and the language less resounding, a form of improvement that might be expected in the later work of a studious writer.

In the editorial introductions to this group of poems, and in the author's letters to the editor which sometimes accompany them, are found biographical references that enable us to think with comfort of this writer of "Kent in Maryland" as our Mr. Sterling of St. Paul's Parish of that province and county. The pencilled annotations in the Library of Congress copy of the *American Magazine* are of the greatest importance as evidence of this identity, but though in an early hand, their writer and the exact period of their insertion are unknown, and consequently they may be accepted only as factors in the whole sum of evidence. Their authority is strengthened by the circumstance that in the British Museum copy of the same periodical occurs an annotation, suggested as contemporary by a careful student, ascribing to Sterling one of the poems also attributed to him in the notes written in the Library of Congress copy. Turning now to the evidence of the poems themselves, and of the letters and editorial comment published with them, additional basis is discovered for belief in Sterling's authorship of these contributions from "a neighboring government." In note 2, page 31 of this memoir is quoted in full a letter to the proprietors of the *American Magazine* in which the writer from "Kent in Maryland" refers to his father as an army officer who had seen service in the wars in Ireland, Flanders, and Spain. This reference seems to point clearly enough to

the identity of its writer with the Rev. James Sterling of Kent County, Maryland, whose father, Captain James Sterling, is known to have served before Cadiz, and who as an officer in the Earl of Donegal's regiment doubtless had seen active service in Ireland and Flanders. One finds, too, in the very phrasing and tone of the reference to Lord Howe's service to the father a likeness to these features in the dedication to Sterling's *Rival Generals*, in which the author thanks William Conolly for his later and similar service to that perennially unfortunate officer.

With the foregoing considerations in mind, the evidence now to be offered regarding the identity of James Sterling with the Kent County contributor to the *American Magazine* will seem, I believe, virtually conclusive in character. Poems in celebration of the art of printing are rare in eighteenth-century writing, and when one learns that such a poem is attributed to Sterling in the Library of Congress and British Museum copies of the *American Magazine* and recalls that a poem on a similar theme was published under his name in Dublin years earlier, a comparison of the two pieces seems to be demanded. The earlier poem, entitled, "A Poem on the Art of Printing," occupies pages 118-121 of James Sterling's *Poetical Works*, Dublin, 1734, the only recorded copy of which is in the Library of St. Paul's Cathedral. Comparison of these verses with "A Poem on the Invention of Letters," pages 281-287 of the *American Magazine*, Philadelphia, March, 1758, shows two pieces in the heroic couplet, alike in matter and identical in tenor. The later and longer is more ambitious in historical and philosophical scope, but it includes, with the artist's fine economy, practically the whole matter of the earlier. At times the ideas and language of the earlier poem have been allowed to stand without change, and again the ideas remain unaltered, though emendations of greater or less importance have been

made in their expression. The fusion of the earlier poem with the enlarged conception of later years has been skillfully accomplished, and has resulted in an ode of great dignity, embellished by an unusual display of learning and remarkable for its sensitiveness to the larger aspects of literary culture. It is with satisfaction that one accepts it as the work of James Sterling.

The foregoing bits of evidence provide more than reasonable assurance that the author of the specified poems in the *American Magazine* was the Rev. James Sterling of Kent County, Maryland. Certainly they are of such a character as to justify the assumption of this identity for the purposes of the present study. Upon that assumption, it will be interesting to quote several of the letters to the editor printed in conjunction with them in the Philadelphia periodical. In the issue of February, 1758, the editor had apologized to the "ingenious author of the Poem on the Invention of letters" for inserting "a collection of inferior productions—in the room of his performance," and had explained that the poem was too long for the space hitherto at his disposal. In the March number the poem appeared with this introduction: "The author of the following poem is a gentleman of acknowledged taste and learning, in a neighboring government. It was transmitted to us with this modest apology, that he would never have attempted to write on a subject of so great dignity, if he could have seen any other person likely to undertake it. His intimacy with Mr. Pope, he says, obliged him to tell that great Poet, above twenty years ago, that it was peculiarly ungrateful in him, not to celebrate such a subject as the *Invention of Letters*, or to suffer it to be disgraced by a meaner hand.

"Mr. Pope, no doubt, saw that it was a very unpromising theme; and our ingenious author himself seems conscious of this, when he complains of the 'difficulty of keeping clear of vulgar thoughts; on such

an occasion, and of expressing in verse those that are abstruse, with perspicuity and precision.' We think, however, he has happily effected both, and has likewise given as much harmony to his periods, and spirit to his expression, as the measure of the piece would well admit. There are, indeed, many beautiful passages in it, equally worthy of the Poet and of the Philosopher."

Whether another reader find in the "Poem on the Invention of Letters" the "many beautiful passages" referred to by Dr. Smith is a matter of the current taste and judgment of his time. One interested in the history of printing, however, will have certain observations to make upon the piece. The first of these is that Sterling proves himself to be a Costerian, supporting Laurens Coster as the inventor of the art of printing as opposed to Johann Fust. Gutenberg, who in our day has taken the place of Fust in this ancient quarrel of priority, is mentioned only casually in a note. A more interesting remark to be made about the poem is that it seems to have been overlooked by historians of the bibliography of printing in America. It may be that in point of time this poem of 1758 follows next after John Markland's *Typographia*, Williamsburg, 1730, as a contribution to the literature of printing in the United States.

It is evident that the author of the "Pastoral" in the issue of May, 1758, had become impatient for the appearance in print of his poem, for in introducing it, the editor of the *American Magazine* remarks upon the criticism he had suffered because of the delay, and counters most effectively that criticism by quotation of the following passages from the letter in which the author had submitted the poem for publication: "As this poetical Brat," he wrote, "was conceived in North America, you may, if you please suffer it to give its first squeak in the world, thro' the channel of the *American Magazine*. But if it should appear of a monstrous nature, stifle the wretch by all means in

the birth, and throw it into the river *Delaware*, from whence, you will observe, it originally sprung. The parent, I can assure you, will shed no tears at the funeral. If *Saturn* presided at its formation, instead of *Apollo*, it will want no *Lead* to make it sink, but fall quickly to the bottom, by its own natural Heaviness, as I doubt not many other modern productions, both in prose and verse,

(sinking from thought to thought—a vast profound)

would have done, had they been put to the trial.”

One need not comment upon a certain quirk in the mentality of the man of letters that makes itself apparent in this incident—his gentle depreciation of his work in submitting it for publication and his fierce protectiveness of the same work when he fears that his insincere estimate of it has been accepted by another at its face value. The breed does not vary greatly in type through the centuries.

There is matter for amusement found in the letter with which Mr. Sterling accompanied his poem in imitation of Horace's ode on the Sabine wolf. One feels, however, that he protests too much when he assures the world that he had not been at all frightened by the encounter with a buffalo in a Maryland garden which he celebrates in the poem. He had good cause for alarm, one would say, and his denial of experiencing it convinces us no more than apparently it did Governor Ogle. “The incident, that gave rise to the following travesty,” he writes, “was a real one. In a visit, several years ago, to the late governor of this province, at his country-seat, I was surprized, in the manner below related, by a Buffalo he kept there; and happening to find last week a letter of his among some other papers I had occasion to look into, where he humorously rallied me on my supposed fright, and made a comparison between his *American* wild beast and *Horace's* wolf in the *Sabine* wood; it recalled the celebrated Ode

to my memory, which with pleasure I got by heart, when a boy; and I thence struck out the stanzas, I now send to you, in a presumption they wou'd prove some entertainment to those readers of your Magazine, who can taste the original, and who wou'd not be displeas'd to see an imitation of it with reference to our own times and circumstances."

In reading the poems which are here assumed to have been contributed to the *American Magazine* by James Sterling, I have found them in no degree inferior to the bulk of American verse of the century in which they were written. They are characteristic of that century in qualities which have already been mentioned, and characteristic of their supposed author in their learning, their knowledge of details of British political life and history, their patriotism, and their strong belief in the American colonies. They are entirely without the condescension often displayed by the transplanted Englishman. More than this they are interesting for themselves. The letter published with "The Royal Comet" informs us that the poem was first composed hastily for the entertainment of some friends who were coming to the author's house to drink the health of the Protestant Hero, and in these words is found the excuse for all the modern investigation of early poetry. Good, bad, or worse, one factor is present in all this verse: it was written for the entertainment of the educated men and women of the age. It interested them and gave them pleasure. It must inevitably, on that account, have importance for us.

VI

Remaining incidents known to us in the life of Mr. Sterling are few and personal in character. We have only to record his death in Kent County on November

10, 1763,¹ and to quote somewhat fully from the long letter to the printer, enclosing an epitaph, which appeared from one signing himself "Euphranor," in the *Maryland Gazette* of November 17 of that year. The bereaved Euphranor began his communication with a series of reflections upon the folly of panegyric, hinted at qualities in the subject of his encomium which had brought him criticism from low and shallow minds, and then proceeded to a more definite account of the qualities and character of the deceased clergyman. A sympathetic reading of this portion of Euphranor's letter enables us to see Mr. Sterling as he appeared to his friendly contemporaries: "Agreeable to what has been premis'd, I am now to offer somewhat briefly respecting the late Reverend Mr. Sterling. And First, I shall not hesitate one Moment in affirming, that by His Death the Province of Maryland has lost a Great and Good Man, a most valuable Member of Society; and in spite of his Failings (for these no doubt he had) I am not afraid to add, that he was an Honour and Ornament to the sacred Cloth he wore, as well as

¹His will was drawn October 31, 1763. By its terms he left to his wife Mary a tract of land on Chester River called "The Birthright," six hundred pounds currency, the negroes "Dick, Phill, Tom, Raine, Ham and Hamlett, Sarah her two children and Little Sam," and one third of the residue of his personal estate. The widow, Mary Sterling, very soon married Benjamin Binney. To his daughter Rebecca, born November 22, 1744, by his wife Rebecca (Hynson Holt) Sterling, he left his dwelling plantation Rousbys Recovery and all other undesignated lands, all his sterling money, and all his negroes except those devised by name to his wife, and the residue of his personal estate. The will was witnessed by William Ringgold, Thomas Smyth, and John Scott, and it was admitted to probate on November 21, 1763. (Kent County Wills, E. C. No. 4, folio 169.) Rebecca Sterling, about 1764, became the wife of William Carmichael, of Maryland, who in 1780 went to Spain with the Jay commission and remained there until 1794, acting most of the time as U. S. Chargé d'Affaires. See the article under his name in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, where reference is given to a work by Samuel G. Coe, *The Mission of Wm. Carmichael to Spain* (1928). Rousbys Recovery went to William Carmichael upon the death of Rebecca, and at his death in 1795, to his second wife, Antonia Reynon Carmichael. Their daughter Alphonso Jane Antonia married James Blake. Together, in 1809, James and Alphonso Blake made over a part of Rousbys Recovery to Dominick T. Blake of New York. (Abstracts of Deeds in Land Commissioner's Office, Annapolis, Maryland.) In addition to his lands, Sterling died possessed of a personal estate valued at £2139 as shown by the final account submitted November 30, 1767, by Mary Sterling, his widow, and her husband, Benjamin Binney. (Administration Accounts, Kent County, Maryland.)

to the Country he liv'd in; for I will venture to assert, without fear of being contradicted by competent Judges, that his uncommon Abilities and extensive Learning, particularly in all Branches of polite Literature, stand unrival'd in this Part of the World, and I doubt not but several of the elegant Performances he has favour'd the Public with, will be accounted an incontestable Proof of the Assertion. Then he was most certainly a Man of a warm, friendly, and feeling Heart, very easily melted down into Tenderness and Compassion for the Sufferings of his Fellow Creatures; and ready on all Occasions to relieve and assist them, as far as ever lay in his Power. It is impossible that a Man of such universal Benevolence shou'd not perform all the domestic Duties of Husband, Parent, and Master, with the utmost Care and Tenderness; and accordingly it is well known he had a most amiable Character, in every one of these Particulars. He was no Bigot in Religion, yet active and zealous in discharging the Duties of his Function; greatly admir'd as a noble, elegant and pathetic Preacher, by all who ever hear'd him; and in particular much esteem'd by his Parishioners, which alone is no small Test of his Merit. The many joyous Hours spent in his Company (for he was a most delightful Companion) together with a just Sense of his Worth, have drawn these few hasty Lines from a Pen, not fond of appearing in Public on such Occasions: And as he was himself a very considerable Poet, 'tis a Pity methinks he shou'd drop into the Grave, without some little Notice at least from the Muse.—"

It is partly by way of reflection upon the inconsistency of man that I copy here the poetical "epitaph" which Euphranor wished to see engraved upon the tombstone of his lamented friend. Here, indeed, is the very panegyric that its author had so sensibly deprecated in his sober and well-modelled eighteenth century prose:

EPITAPH,
ON THE LATE REV. MR. JAMES STERLING

Stranger, whoe'er thou art, one Moment stay,
 And take a useful Lesson in your Way.
 No Tomb superb, or speaking Marble Bust
 Here courts your Eye,—this covers nought but dust;
 And yet this Dust (now tremble human Pride,
 And lay your gaudy Trappings all aside)
 This humble Dust, by Worms possest, contains,
 All of Great Sterling that on Earth remains.
 All that remains of Talents so sublime,
 As ne'er before adorn'd this Western Clime.
 Buried in Silence lies that rapt'rous Tongue,
 On which admiring Crowds have often hung;
 To hear God's comforts to a World dismay'd,
 With all the Charms of Eloquence, display'd:
 Or when with sweetest Notes he tun'd his Lay,
 Enraptur'd Souls with Pleasure dy'd away:
 But all the mortal Frame is now dissolv'd in Clay. }
 His nobler Part has upwards wing'd it's flight,
 To where congenial Spirits dwell in Light:
 And thence, with Pity views vain Man, who must,
 With his whole Race, consume to Worms and Dust.

VII

The foregoing excursion into the life of an eighteenth century Maryland clergyman has seemed to carry us far from *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, but in reality that poem has not been lost sight of in the course of our long digression.

From the "Advertisement" of the poem, we learn that it had been "written in Maryland, before an Account arriv'd there that the late Treaty of Peace was sign'd; and hence some warm and vindictive Sentiments in the Cause of Liberty, and against the Enemies of Great Britain, were, not unseasonably, interspers'd." In the same place the writer tells us that "It owes its Rise to an Information the Author receiv'd, after the Return of the *Dobbs* and *California* from their Expedition to explore the North-West

Passage, that the generous Reviver of that noble Design had determined to prosecute the Discovery the Year following in his own Person." These statements fix Maryland as the place of the poem's origin and the time of its composition in the period between the return of the Northwest Passage expedition in October, 1747, and the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in October, 1748, or, more exactly, between December, 1747, and December, 1748, because news of the events in question could hardly have reached Maryland much under six weeks after their occurrence. The author explains the late appearance in print of his work, 1752, by remarking upon the death of an "ingenious Gentleman" who more than two years earlier had carried the manuscript to England with intention of publication. "This Disappointment," he proceeds "has laid him under a Necessity, since his late Return from America, of making a few Alterations in it," and in his concluding sentence, he assures his readers that during his absence from England, he has employed himself "in devising and executing, to the best of his Abilities, the Means of Advancing its Religious and Civil Interests." We learn from the poem itself that its author lived on his own plantations on the Chester River in Maryland, and from another passage in the "Advertisement" that the partiality of his friends allowed him certain talents in poetry. The poem makes evident its author's patriotism and his interest in the colonial expansion and the commerce of his country.

Brought together, these scattered personal references in the *Epistle* seem to construct a figure not unlike that of the Rev. Mr. James Sterling, incumbent of St. Paul's Parish, Kent County, Maryland, owner of plantations on Chester River, a recognized poet with at least four London and Dublin publications to his credit and, finally, an aspirant for office in the customs service of his country. There is no conflict in dates to render untenable the supposition that Sterling was the

anonymous author of the *Epistle*. The poem was composed in Maryland between December, 1747, and December, 1748, and about two years before the writing of its Advertisement in 1752, it was sent thence to London, by the hand of an "ingenious Gentleman," for publication. Sterling is known to have been in Maryland in October, 1747, for on the ninth of that month, he purchased Rousbys Recovery, his plantation on Chester River. Other documents show him there in September, 1749, when he married Mary Smith of Kent County, and in June of the year 1750, and again in 1751 as late as the fifth of October.¹ We have no record of his movements between this date and April 20, 1752, when we come upon him in England asking the Bishop of London for passage money to Maryland in terms that indicate the approaching end of a visit. While in England he had been consulting physicians and conducting the negotiations which led to his appointment as collector of customs. It will be allowed, I think, that he may well have been in England in January or February, 1752, when a Maryland Clergyman, then visting London, published the *Epistle to Dobbs*.² Consideration of these dates leads one to conclude with reasonable assurance that at the time of the composition of the poem and of its first transmission to England, Mr. Sterling was living on the Chester River in Maryland, where the anonymous author of *An Epistle to Dobbs* represented himself in the poem as then in residence, and further that at the time of the poem's publication in London, Mr. Sterling was in all probability in

¹Sterling's purchase of Rousbys Recovery, a tract with five hundred acres of land and buildings, is recorded in the Kent County Land Records, J. S. 26, folio 89. His marriage to Mary Smith occurred on September 7, 1749. See note 3, page 41. His presence in Maryland in June, 1750, is vouched for by a private act of assembly enabling him to convey certain lands. See *Archives of Maryland*, vol. 46, index. On October 5, 1751, he signed an indenture in conveyance of one of these tracts. See Kent County Land Records, J. S. 27, folio 43.

²The publication of the *Epistle to Dobbs* occurred some time in 1752 between January and March. In March, 1752, the poem was reviewed in the *Monthly Review*, and must, of course, have been issued some weeks earlier.

England, where the same anonymous author in his Advertisement declares himself then to be. The parallel here shown to exist between the movements of Mr. Sterling and those of the anonymous author of *An Epistle to Dobbs* seemed to me sufficiently arresting to justify a further search for evidence to prove them one and the same person. The results of that search appear in the following sections, designated, for convenience, (a) and (b):

(a) Reading the *Epistle to Dobbs*, we find the following lines claiming Sir George Lyttelton as the special patron of the anonymous author:

Nor yet, good Sir, thy gen'rous Talk be done!
Sidney display, reviv'd in Lyttleton!
Heir of his Candor, Eloquence, and Bays:

* * *

Nor, O! what Gratitude enjoins, forget!
In public Tribute pay my private Debt:
To Pollio pay; and with the Muse combine
To tell Society its Friend is mine:
Whose Praise impow'r'd my lisp'ing Tongue to sing,
Whose Favors Flush'd Ambition's Infant-Wing:
Who nor to Others, nor Himself, a Slave;
By Judgment right, by Principle was brave.
In whom I mark'd the dawning Rays of Truth;
And Hail'd the Patriot bright'ning in the Youth;
'Till the self-kindled Fire, that scorn'd Controul,
In bursting Flame illumin'd all his Soul;
Diffusive shed an Effluence unconfin'd,
And shone to warm his Country, and Mankind!

In a letter of April 20, 1752,¹ Sterling wrote the Bishop of London that Sir George Lyttelton, among others not specified, could assure his Lordship of the conscientious nature of the motives which had led him first to go to America. And we know that Sterling's probably unnecessary appointment as collector had been rather forced upon the Customs by a Treasury Board of which Lyttelton was one of the members.

(b) I am aware of the danger of proclaiming identity of authorship on the basis of similarity in phrase and

¹*Ante.*

idea. For all the pitfalls of that method, however, it may be employed acceptably to add to evidence already in hand, provided always that the investigator does not claim too much from the presence of real or seeming similarities in the pieces examined. In any case such an exercise is a fascinating employment, and I will forego further apology and set forth the results of an afternoon of pleasant fluttering of leaves of the Maryland clergyman's *Epistle* of 1752 and the Rev. James Sterling's *Zeal against the Enemies of our Country*, the sermon preached before the Assembly on December 13, 1754.

POEM

Expressed belief in the
Northwest Passage.

page 47:

"Groan We beneath an
Eighty Million Load

page 11:

"Louisiana's high Pretensions
fail,
And boastful Maps at once
contract their Scale!

footnote:

"[Louisiana] So the French pompously name their new-arrogated Empire, which comprehends the most desirable Latitudes; and which they extend in their Maps to the South-Sea, excluding us from our prior Claim, and usurping

SERMON

page 23:

"to fix garrisons on all the navigable straits . . . Ontario, Erie, Huron, Illinois, and the superieur lake; behind which there are others, that probably communicate both with Hudson's bay and the Pacific ocean; as these do with one another."

page 20:

"especially as she is loaded with an eighty million debt . . ."

page 22:

"that while they are ever and anon edging on us from the west, and striving to confine us to a comparatively narrow slip of land by hemming us in between the Apalachean hills and the ocean; that while they are laying the foundations of a monarchy, greater than the four ancient ones together, and extend their enormous Louisiana in their impudent

in their public Declarations a Right to confine us [to] a narrow Slip on the Sea-Coast."

page 12, footnote:

[Pepperel] Well known, and renowned for reducing with his Countrymen of New-England . . . the strong and important Town of Cape-Breton."

maps and hot imagination to the very south-seas, and perhaps to Japan . . ."

page 26:

"Remember the brave achievements of your brethren of New England in the late war; think, how an handful of undisciplined farmers, fresh from the plow, took the bull by the horns, possess'd themselves of their impregnable Cape-Breton, and in its rendition as an equivalent for all Flanders, purchased a peace for Europe."

These parallels of phrase and idea might well have occurred in two compositions of different authorship if the writer of the later had kept before him, while composing, the text of the earlier. It is clear that Mr. Sterling in preparing this sermon had consulted an *Epistle* addressed some years earlier to Arthur Dobbs by an anonymous Maryland clergyman, but considered in the light of the evidence previously set forth in this place, these strong similarities between his sermon and the *Epistle* to Dobbs seem to support the hypothesis that the *Epistle* too was of Sterling's composition. Here the case in his behalf must rest.

If one may assume for a moment that the Rev. James Sterling was, in fact, responsible for a poem in which the author professed his "Intent . . . to do occasional Justice by an honorary Notice to those other great examples of true Patriotism, who have contributed to raise our Naval Glory, to establish flourishing Colonies, and . . . to extend our holy Faith," one is justified in asking whether in its publication in January or February of 1752, Mr. Sterling was to some extent seeking patronage in the business of personal preferment he had in hand at this time. We know that it had been written years earlier in a burst

of genuine patriotic fervor, and no one who reads it can question the emotion of patriotism as its fundamental reason for being. We know also that its author had made alterations in it since that time, and it could not have been harmful to the cause of a suppliant for office that a poem published by him should contain eulogies of Halifax, whom he describes as "Brittania's greater Colbert"; of Lyttelton, whom he hails and praises as his personal patron and the father of his Muse; of Chesterfield; and of the brilliant Granville. All of these political leaders had been members of the Opposition when, twenty years earlier, Sterling had served as one of its lesser political hacks, and now in 1752, Halifax was president of the Board of Trade; Lyttelton, his earlier patron, was one of the Lords of the Treasury; Chesterfield, though just then without office was still an influential personage; and Granville was lord president of the Council. An aspirant for a place in the Customs could hardly have aimed his delicate arrows at a group more likely to be of benefit to his purpose, and if the reader will turn back to that interchange of correspondence between the Treasury and the Customs in regard to Mr. Sterling's appointment he will feel, in rereading it, that the Commissioners of Customs were perfectly aware that the Lords of the Treasury were supporting a favorite, and that they were gravely and politely sarcastic as a consequence of their knowledge. It is not by way of criticism that I suggest this secondary motive in the publication of Mr. Sterling's poem. Our age has subtler methods of gaining appointment than the frank appeal to patronage of the eighteenth century, but one may doubt if there has occurred genuine increase in the dignity of the procedure, or if the service given in office is notably of a higher order. Before and since men have been appointed to the Customs for less worthy activity than the writing of a chauvinistic poem, and one may hope that the *Epistle to Dobbs* served its author in this matter of personal aggrandize-

ment as well as the cause of his country in the rivalry of the nations. That the patriotic purpose of the *Epistle* gained the indulgence of his contemporaries for its artistic imperfections is apparent from the tone of the notice that found place in the *Monthly Review* for March, 1752. After a page of description the reviewer proceeds to the following comment:

“This epistle may not improperly be termed a Poem, tho’ it cannot be ranged under any known class. It consists of a mixture of the heroic, the philosophical, the descriptive, and the ethic. The subject-matter of it is not more various than it is new and interesting, to an enterprizing, mercantile and free nation. The author’s main design is to show, ‘how, by cultivating and improving, in its various climates, our large and fertile empire on the continent, and by introducing new and valuable staples of trade, the maternal kingdom would be greatly strengthened and enriched, the dependancy of our colonies better secured, and the ambitious schemes of France to rival us in trade, and maritime power, rendered abortive.’ —With respect to his poetry, it is manly, spirited, warm, and ornamented with a variety of invention; but incorrect, and his numbers are sometimes inharmoniously turned. However, upon the whole, the performance will not fail to entertain a candid reader, as it chiefly breathes the language of the heart, and abounds with good moral sentiments, and striking descriptions of many awful appearances in nature, peculiar to the northern regions; all tending to prove with Pope,

That storms and earthquakes break not heav’ns design.”

In concluding this sketch of James Sterling and its attempted identification of him as the author of *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq.*, I am fain to express regret that the poem about which I have made so much ado is not a better poem, but I am consoled by the thought that much may be forgiven a poet who fears not to court the Muse, crying aloud the curt,

sibilant, and inflexible name of Dobbs, a name that may be rhymed only with sounds of humorous connotation, and that must in its nature play havoc with all known metrical schemes. But it is courage, after all, that matters, and the *Epistle to Dobbs* represents a valiant flinging to the breeze of the banner of Empire. It has its peculiar place in an important but singularly dull group of writings. It is better than most of that group because it is different in form and nobler in expression, and because beneath it lay a motive that only the cynical will question and only the loftiest of political moralists will condemn.

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