

The Nature of American Loyalism

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DURING the century or so before 1765 conservative tendencies had been apparent in many aspects of colonial life. America was a new and growing country and it was natural that new and liberal—if not radical—ideas and attitudes should appear. But at all times and in every sphere of interest a conservative force had also been present and men of a conservative attitude had prevented the frontier environment from effecting too marked a change upon colonial thinking and upon the face of colonial life. The Old World idea that political leadership was the province of men of rank and substance still prevailed in nearly every colony. Established churches still held their place in several colonies and even such a widespread movement as the Great Awakening could only make inroads upon, but not destroy, the orthodox worship and organization of the various denominations. Social levelling gained some headway in a land where every white man might aspire to economic independence, but class distinctions were far from being obliterated and the term “gentleman” was not one to be used carelessly or indiscriminately. The political thinking of nearly all men was still founded on the premise of a “balance” between the royal, aristocratic, and democratic elements of a “mixed monarchy,” and few radicals there were who dared challenge the right of the first two of these three to a place in any decent government. In these and in other respects conservative attitudes had persisted and, in fact, had greater strength in 1765 than might have been expected in view of the new environment in which colonial life had developed. As the

Revolutionary Era began, conservatism held a strong and respected place in the American scene. This fact must be recognized if we are to understand why many Americans became Loyalists at the time of the Revolution.

The years from 1765 to 1783 brought many changes. What had been basic assumptions of many men's lives were rudely challenged. Not only was there questioning of the authority of Parliament over colonial taxation, but there was also denial of the very basis of the British connection, and a repudiation of the principle of monarchy itself. Further, these years brought new elements of society into political prominence and power—the previously unenfranchised town laborer and the under-represented frontier farmer. These men and their leaders were vigorously to challenge the leadership of their “betters” and to attempt to weaken the aristocratic, as well as destroy the royal, element in government. Along with all this was a revolutionary tendency to substitute public clamor and even mob violence for the “decent” procedures of civil government. A trend toward social levelling and an attack upon the position of privileged religious groups were important by-products of a movement which seemed to many Americans to go much too far beyond the issues which had brought it into being. All in all, the period was one in which society seemed to be shaken to its very foundations.

Naturally, in such times, many men of a conservative temperament refused to follow the lead of radical agitators. They might—as most of them did—believe that Britain was pursuing a mistaken policy in beginning to tax the colonies by act of Parliament. Here was an innovation, on principle quite as distressing to colonial conservative as to a radical. But when the reaction to the parliamentary and ministerial measures went beyond the stage of respectful protest and led to violence and civil disobedience, some of

the colonials drew back. When civil disobedience was followed by armed resistance, and then by a declaration of independence, and these were accompanied by an internal revolution in the institutions of colonial society itself, many Americans found themselves siding with the mother country. Not only was Britain the rightful claimant to their allegiance, but she was also the only agency which could be relied on to restore society to its proper foundations. Therefore, they joined with Great Britain. By contemporary Americans such men were bitterly called "Tories"; by their proud descendants in Canada and elsewhere and by a more understanding generation of Americans today they are more often referred to as "Loyalists."

Considerable effort has been made to determine just what classes and groups of men composed the Loyalists. The task is not an easy one because in almost no case can it be said that all the members of a particular group ultimately took one side or the other. But certain broad generalizations have been established as a working basis for classification.¹ On the whole it may be said that loyalism was to be found most strongly in the following special groups:

1. Officeholders under royal or proprietary authority
2. Anglican clergymen and (in the North) their parishoners
3. Quakers and other conscientious pacifists
4. Large landholders (particularly in the North)
5. Merchants

¹ Among the studies which are most useful in this connection are the following: C. H. Van Tyne, *The Loyalists of the American Revolution* (New York, 1902); A. C. Flick, *Loyalism in New York during the American Revolution* (New York, 1901); H. J. Eckenrode, *The Revolution in Virginia* (Boston and New York, 1916); I. S. Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia; Chapters in the Economic History of the Revolution* (Durham, N. C., 1926); R. O. DeMond, *The Loyalists in North Carolina during the Revolution* (Durham, 1940). Space forbids the mention of many other helpful works which discuss the attitude of particular groups or individuals and have contributed to the general summary here given.

Such a list by no means exhausts the groups from which substantial numbers of Loyalists emerged.² In every class and walk of life there were men whose innate conservatism, devotion to Great Britain and the monarchy, or personal self-interest led them to side with the mother country in the contest. But before dealing with the broader aspects of loyalism it may be well to consider more fully the special groups listed above, which contributed proportionately the largest numbers of Loyalists.

In nearly every colony there was a distinct ruling class, best exemplified, perhaps, by the closely knit group which dominated the provincial council. These men of eminence and power had a vested interest, partly economic and partly social and psychological, in the maintenance of political leadership and in the dignity and prestige which accompanied high public office. In large measure (although with many individual exceptions) direction and control of the Revolutionary movement, which was originally in the hands of the accustomed political leaders, tended to pass in course of time to men of little or no previous political distinction and even to those who stood on the very fringe of political enfranchisement. The policies which such men pursued, the tactics they employed, and the very fact of their political activity tended to alienate many a colonial notable who was not accustomed to seeing political power exercised by the "mob." Quite apart from all questions of personal benefit or loss, or of the merits of the major issues, such members of the class once accustomed to political leadership found them-

² I have not attempted to distinguish groups of Loyalists in terms of their national or racial origins. Such an effort does not, in my opinion, lead to very conclusive results. It should be admitted that many Scots, especially those who came to America after the Rebellion of 1745, retained their allegiance to the House of Hanover during the Revolution. The German sectaries as Loyalists are included along with the Quakers among the conscientious pacifists. As to the Scots-Irish, while certain local groups remained loyal, in the colonies at large there was too little agreement among them on the political issue to warrant generalization.

selves opposing the revolutionary movement because they disapproved of its leaders.³

The group of officeholding Loyalists was by no means limited to members of the colonial councils; a large proportion of those who held lesser offices under the crown or proprietors took the British side. Their action is easily understandable. Many were British-born and lived in America only because their jobs were here. Practically all stood to lose their salaries if the government that paid them should be ejected from the colonies. And upon entering on their positions all had taken definite oaths of allegiance, and to many these oaths were more than empty words. William Eddis, royal surveyor of the customs and proprietary commissioner of the loan office in Maryland, well expressed the attitude of the best class of officeholder when he wrote a few weeks after the Declaration of Independence:

I wish well to America.—It is my duty—my inclination so to do—but I cannot—I will not—consent to act in direct opposition to my oath of allegiance, and my deliberate opinion. Rather than submit to a conduct so base, so inconsistent with my principles, I will give up all—embrace ruin!—and trust to the protecting care of Providence for the future disposition of me and mine.⁴

The Anglican clergy, like the political office holders, were in a difficult position during the Revolutionary crisis. They too had a special connection with British authority, many of them likewise were born in the British Isles, all of them had been ordained there; those who were missionaries of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel received all or part of their incomes from England; and all of them, like

³ An attempt has been made to discover what proportion of the members of royal and proprietary councils at the outbreak of the Revolution should ultimately be classed as Loyalists, either moderate or extreme. Accurate information proved not to be sufficiently available to permit an exact or statistical statement. But it appears from the available evidence that between one-half and two-thirds of the councillors either openly espoused the British cause or were placed by the Whigs under parole as disaffected persons.

⁴ William Eddis, *Letters from America, Historical and Descriptive, 1769-77* (London, 1792), p. 217.

the officials of government, were bound by special oaths to allegiance and obedience to their king. It is not to be wondered at that a large proportion of them remained either actively or passively loyal to the mother country in the struggle. To their steadfastness one of their number, Jonathan Boucher, later paid tribute by applying to them these lines from *Paradise Lost*:

Among the faithless, faithful chiefly they—
 Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
 Unshaken, uneduc'd, unterrified,
 Their *loyalty* they kept, their love, their zeal:
 Nor number, nor example, with them wrought,
 To swerve from truth, or change their constant mind.⁵

When word of the passage of the Stamp Act reached the colonies, many of the Anglicans, clergymen as well as laymen, were frank to declare their doubts of the wisdom of the legislation. Yet almost without exception the ministers of the Church of England expressed strong disapproval of the measures taken by the colonists to prevent enforcement of the act. A group of five missionaries of the S.P.G. in Connecticut, "accidentally convened" in September 1765, took the occasion to report their satisfaction that the Anglicans of the colony in general and the members of their own churches in particular were "of a contrary temper and conduct" to the populace at large. Their people esteemed it "nothing short of rebellion to speak evil of dignities and to avow opposition to this last act of Parliament." The ministers were warning their hearers "of the unreasonableness and wickedness of their taking the least part in any tumult or opposition to His Majesty's acts" and they had every reason to believe that their congregations would behave "as true and faithful

⁵ *Paradise Lost*, Book V, lines 897-902. Boucher changed the pronouns from singular to plural and added the italics. Quoted in Jonathan Boucher, *A View of the Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution in Thirteen Discourses* (London, 1797), p. xlix, n.

subjects to His Majesty's person and government and as obedient sons of the Church of England.⁶ A missionary at Braintree, Massachusetts, reported the next January that he believed none in his church had taken any part in the disturbances, and he added: "I would hope they have been restrained by the influence of the principles of their profession, and that a proper regard to established government and good order will always distinguish the members of the Church of England in this country, as it does the excellent constitution of the church."⁷ This emphasis upon submission to authority as a cardinal principle of the Church was characteristic of the preaching of Anglican ministers throughout the period of conflict.

When the Stamp Act was repealed most of the Anglican clergy were pleased, if for no other reasons, because it put an end to acts of violence and because their congregations were no longer tempted to join in the general resistance. But one minister, at least, was willing to express regret at the leniency of the home government. Writing in 1770 after further controversies had arisen, Reverend Joshua Wingate Weeks of Marblehead told the secretary of the S.P.G. flatly: "You may depend on it as a certain fact that all our confusions have arisen from the sudden repeal of the Stamp Act." Half the country had been ready to submit to it and the most that "the wisest and best men among us expected was a repeal of the obnoxious parts only." But when the whole act was withdrawn in consequence of the opposition to it, "the enemies of Great Britain triumphed" and "the friends to the common good of the empire were depressed."

⁶ F. L. Hawks and W. S. Perry, eds., *Documentary History of the Protestant Episcopal Church . . . containing . . . documents concerning the Church in Connecticut* (New York, 1863-64), vol. 2, p. 81 (hereafter cited as Hawks and Perry, *Documentary History, Conn.*).

⁷ Rev. Edward Winslow of Braintree, Mass., to secretary of S.P.G., Jan. 8, 1766, W. S. Perry, *Historical Collections relating to the American Colonial Church (1870-78)*, vol. 3, p. 521 (hereafter cited as Perry, *Historical Collections*).

The principle of resistance had been encouraged and Parliament had failed to "maintain its own rights and authority."⁸ Thereby it had cut the ground from under the supporters of sound government in America. As Weeks might have prophesied, the duty of obedience had to be taught all over again under still more trying circumstances.

As the conflict progressed and the cleavage between the mother country and the colonies became more and more marked, the Anglican clergy redoubled their efforts to preach submission to the State and to make the Church a bond of union and an effective force for the maintenance of royal authority. As Jonathan Boucher later remarked, with particular reference to Maryland, circumstances and the politicians "had cunningly contrived to place our order in the front of the battle."⁹ Thus many of the clergy everywhere viewed their position and their consequent obligation. The Anglican ministers of New York and New Jersey declared in 1771 that "the members of the National Church are from principle and inclination firmly attached to the Constitution. From them it must ever derive its surest support";¹⁰ and their colleagues in all the colonies worked zealously to make good the boast. Again and again, they sought "both in public and private, to inculcate the great duty of obedience and subjection to the government in being, and steadfast adherence to that well tempered frame of polity upon which this Protestant Church of ours is built, a constitution happily balanced between tyranny and anarchy."¹¹ They

⁸ Rev. Joshua Wingate Weeks of Marblehead, Mass., to secretary of S.P.G., April 2, 1770, Perry, *Historical Collections*, vol. 3, pp. 549-50.

⁹ Jonathan Boucher, *Reminiscences of an American Loyalist, 1738-1789* (Boston and New York, 1925), p. 69.

¹⁰ Address of a Committee of the Clergy of the Church of England in New York and New Jersey to Hillsborough, October 12, 1771, *New Jersey Archives*, vol. 10, pp. 309-13, quoted in Arthur L. Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies* (New York, 1902), p. 255.

¹¹ Rev. Ebenezer Diblee of Stamford, Conn., to secretary of S.P.G., Oct. 28, 1765, Hawks and Perry, *Documentary History, Conn.*, vol. 2, p. 85.

constantly put their people "in remembrance of the religious obligations and important motives of dutiful respect and submission to the established authority, together with proper confidence in the great wisdom of the government of our parent country, our relation to which ought to be, and I trust generally really is, esteemed among the first of blessings."¹²

The Tory doctrine of non-resistance to authority received exposition from many an Anglican pulpit throughout the colonies. One of the best examples of such preaching was the sermon delivered in 1768 by the Rev. Dr. George Micklejohn in the presence of Governor Tryon to the North Carolina battalions called out to march against the Regulators. The discourse, later printed, was entitled "On the important Duty of Subjection to the Civil Powers," and took for its text St. Paul's admonition to the Romans:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.¹³

The minister began by declaring that "subjection to lawful authority is one plain and principal doctrine of Christianity." Those who refuse subjection to the authority ordained by God merit the damnation pronounced upon them because they "show the highest contempt of His positive command" and do their utmost "to obstruct the gracious designs of His providence for the good and welfare of mankind." Resistance to the lawful authority God has set over us "can never possibly be productive of anything but the wildest uproar and most universal confusion," and in the end must

¹² Rev. Edward Winslow of Braintree, Mass., to secretary of S.P.G., Jan. 2, 1769, Perry, *Historical Collections*, vol. 3, p. 543.

¹³ Romans 13: 1, 2.

be "attended with the most shocking and dismal effects." Applying this doctrine to the immediate situation, Micklejohn observed "that for an Englishman to oppose the laws of his country is an instance of the highest folly and contradiction we can conceive"; for under the British constitution "we ourselves have been partly concerned" in making these laws through the operation of the representative system. Resistance was senseless and it was also fundamentally sinful because, as the Apostle pointed out, it was, in the last analysis, resistance not only to a human law but to "the ordinance of God." Consequently, the minister warned, "every such wicked and desperate attempt is not only treason against an earthly sovereign, but rebellion against the most high God."¹⁴ After hearing this sermon no one could be in doubt of his Christian duty in times of civil disturbance, as that duty was expounded by the Anglican divine.

By such preaching throughout the years of agitation the Anglican clergy justified their contention that they were the great bulwark of authority, that "the advancement of the Church of England in America should become a national concern," and, contrariwise, that "the more the Church of England in the Colonies is neglected the less hold will the parent kingdom have of them."¹⁵ In a sermon advocating a colonial episcopate, Jonathan Boucher pointed out that every country does well "in making its ecclesiastical polity conformable to its civil government." In arbitrary governments, he said, "the Church has a corresponding domina-

¹⁴ "On the important Duty of Subjection to the Civil Powers. A Sermon Preached before his Excellency William Tryon, Esquire, . . . and the Troops raised to quell the late Insurrection, at Hillsborough, In Orange County, On Sunday, September 25, 1768. By Geo. Micklejohn, S.T.D. Newbern: Printed by James Davis, M,DCC,LXVIII." Reprinted in William Boyd, ed., *Some Eighteenth Century Tracts Concerning North Carolina (Publications of the No. Car. Hist. Commission. Raleigh, 1927)*, pp. 399-412. For some other striking expressions of the same ideas see various sermons in Boucher, *View of the Causes and Consequences*.

¹⁵ Rev. Thomas Barton of Lancaster, Penn., to secretary of S.P.G., Dec. 17, 1770, Perry, *Historical Collections*, vol. 2, p. 450.

tion; whilst, in democracies, ecclesiastics are in general wholly dependent on the people. Ours is a mixed government partaking equally of monarchial and popular authority and consequently the government of the Church is also mixed." Church and State were fitted to each other and supported by each other, "and an injury cannot be done to the one without the other's feeling it."¹⁶ Over and over again both clergymen and zealous laymen urged the civil and ecclesiastical authorities at home to strengthen the Church in the colonies as a "very great national service." As Godfrey Malbone, a layman of Rhode Island, told the Bishop of Bangor, it was "a matter of much more consequence to government than to you, at first blush, may appear."¹⁷

When the controversy between the colonies and Great Britain passed from the stage of agitation to that of formal warfare and then to a struggle for independence, the Anglican clergy were in a difficult position. They had failed in the task of winning the colonists to orderly submission to authority, even though many of their own parishioners, especially in the North, had heeded their admonitions. Now under pressure from censorious revolutionary committees of safety, the ministers of the Church of England were no longer able to voice publicly their opinions on the Christian duty of non-resistance or to urge the retention of the British connection as "among the first of blessings." Except in the few centers of British military control, they were faced with a hard choice. They might throw in their lot with the forces of revolution among the people with whom they lived, and in so doing ignore the teachings of their

¹⁶ Boucher, *View of the Causes and Consequences*, pp. 101-2. (Page 101 is erroneously numbered III.)

¹⁷ Malbone to Bishop of Bangor, Feb. 8, 1770, Hawks and Perry, *Documentary History, Conn.*, vol. 2, p. 152.

Church, forget the connection with the mother country on which their ecclesiastical polity was based, and repudiate the vows they had personally taken. They might retreat precipitantly from the scene of their former labors, abandon their churches, and seek safety with the British army or in England. Or they might stay quietly where they were, cease publicly to preach submission, even give up temporarily, if need be, the conduct of public worship, and bide their time in the hope that British arms might restore that order and tranquility under authority in which they so sincerely believed.

Relatively few of the Anglican ministers chose the first course. In Virginia, where loyalism among the clergy proved weakest, a little less than half took an active part in the revolutionary movement or otherwise showed their support of the colony against the crown. The rest either joined definitely with the British or remained so quiet that they have left no record of their final attitude.¹⁸ Elsewhere the Anglican clergy in overwhelming proportions refused to support the revolutionary cause. Some fled in haste to join the royal forces or returned to England when they recognized that they could remain in America only at the expense of personal liberty or life itself. Such a one was Jonathan Boucher, who had preached non-resistance so vigorously that at the end he had felt constrained to appear in the pulpit with loaded pistols conveniently placed beside his sermon notes.¹⁹ Others remained in their parishes hoping the storm would blow over. Some of them went on with their spiritual work, adjusting themselves as much as necessary to the changed conditions. Others, more conscious of their obligations to the king as supreme head of their Church, curtailed or even abandoned public services and restricted their

¹⁸ Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia*, pp. 63-5.

¹⁹ Boucher, *Reminiscences of an American Loyalist*, p. 113.

activities to the pastoral care of the still faithful members of their congregations.

The clergymen who remained were confronted with certain difficult problems of ethics. The canons of the Church, to which each minister vowed obedience at his ordination, forbade a number of things which the new conditions seemed to require. In particular no minister was allowed to alter the public service at his own discretion or to leave out parts to serve particular purposes. After the war began, and especially after the Declaration of Independence, local authorities sometimes ordered the clergy to omit from the Order of Common Prayer the prayers for the king and royal family. Some ministers obeyed under threats or compulsion, but others preferred to give up church services entirely rather than assume a power to edit the Prayer Book. Again, after the Declaration of Independence, the various states required residents, particularly suspected Tories, to take an oath abjuring the king of Great Britain and affirming allegiance to the new government of the state. Many of the clergy were told they might no longer hold church services if they refused this oath. But every priest of the Church of England had been required at his ordination to swear personal allegiance to the king. Now they must forswear themselves or abandon the performance of their priestly office.²⁰ Thus by its very position as the Established Church of England, closely identified in ritual and in polity with the British crown, the Anglican communion in America found itself reduced in many places to a state of suspended anima-

²⁰ The ordination oath of allegiance placed the Anglicans in a particularly difficult position, but they were not the only ministers who boggled at the new oaths. When, for example, the parishioners of the Congregationalist minister, Benjamin Woodbridge of Amity, Connecticut, suspecting his revolutionary zeal, tendered him an oath of fidelity in 1779, he wrote a long letter defending his refusal. He had, he said, no conscientious scruples against "submission to the Independent States of America when it is so ordered by Providence in the Issue of the war," and would take such an oath when that time came. Meanwhile he would await the divine issue of events. In consequence of his stand he was gently eased out of his parish. New Haven East Association Papers, Yale University Library.

tion.²¹ It was many years before it recovered from the effects of this experience.

The mere fact of membership in the Anglican Church must have influenced the attitude of some of the laity. For the Church served as an important link with the mother country. From the very nature of its organization it could have no permanent existence apart from the hierarchy in Great Britain, a circumstance which served as a reminder to its adherents that it was part of a British institution. However much the members of a parish might cherish their autonomy in local church affairs, they could not escape some contact, direct or indirect, with episcopal authority if they would be served by any priest at all. However much the smaller congregations of the northern colonies preferred financial independence, all too often they found themselves unable to support their ministers without the help—and hence the oversight—of the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Whatever the provincialism of their outlook, their restlessness under British control, or their disagreement with British governmental policy, the members of the Anglican Church in America had a place, small though it might be, in the Established Church of England, one of the most important institutions of the mother country.

The special conditions affecting the attitude of the Anglican clergy did not apply, of course, to the laity of their church. And yet there is no question but that an Anglican church affiliation was in many cases a leading factor in the decision to support the British cause. This was not true in the South. In the tidewater areas of the plantation colonies, where the Church of England was either established by law or at least

²¹ Two excellent statements of the peculiar difficulties in which the Anglican clergy found themselves placed come from Pennsylvania: Rev. Philip Reading of Apoquinimink to the secretary of the S.P.G., Aug. 25, 1776, Perry, *Historical Collections*, vol. 2, pp. 484-5; Address of the Protestant Episcopal Missionaries of Pennsylvania to the General Assembly, signed May 20, 1778, on behalf of the rest by Thomas Barton, *ibid.*, pp. 491-2.

received the nominal support of a large proportion of the more prosperous inhabitants, men chose sides with little or no reference to their church relationships. But in the North the situation was different. In several of the larger towns and cities Anglicanism tended to be fashionable with many of the wealthier and more aristocratic folk, and to the extent to which these people became Loyalists their church affiliation may be set down as being at least a symptom, if not a true cause, of their loyalty.²² In parts of New England where Anglicans were in a small minority and suffered under various disabilities and discriminations, they showed the highest proportion of loyalism. In the towns of southwestern Connecticut, for example, their support of the British during the war was so marked as to cause real concern to the authorities of the state.²³ A further factor in the loyalty of Anglican laymen was the influence of their clergy upon them. The ministers, as we have seen, devoted sermon after sermon to inculcating "the great duty of obedience and subjection to the government in being," as the Reverend Ebenezer Dibblee of Stamford, Connecticut, put it.²⁴ The effectiveness of such preaching cannot, of course, be exactly measured, but it seems certain that many a parishioner was thereby strengthened in his sense of loyalty to the crown and that at least some waverers were persuaded that submission to British authority was a religious duty. For these reasons loyalism found many of its adherents among the members of the northern Anglican churches.

²² [Joseph Galloway], *Historical and Political Reflections on the Rise and Progress of the American Rebellion* (London, 1780), pp. 54-5. A. C. Flick, in discussing this matter (*Loyalism in New York*, p. 36 n.) points out that the whole congregation of Trinity Church, New York, went to Nova Scotia with their Loyalist pastor.

²³ See, for example, *Public Records of the State of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1894), vol. 1, p. 27. For a discussion of the relation between Anglicanism and loyalism in Connecticut, see Epaphioditus Peck, *The Loyalists of Connecticut* (*Conn. Tercentenary Pamphlets*, New Haven, 1934), pp. 3-8.

²⁴ Dibblee to the secretary of the S.P.G., Oct. 28, 1765. Hawks and Perry, *Documentary History, Conn.*, vol. 2, p. 85.

Others whose loyalism found a firm basis in religious belief were the Quakers and members of German religious sects which held pacifist convictions. In this summary of the situation during the period of conflict Joseph Galloway mentioned Quakers and Moravians among those who, like the members of the Church of England, "were in general averse to every measure which tended to violence."²⁵ While a substantial number of members of the Society of Friends and the German groups joined the movement of resistance to England and a few even took up arms in defense of the American cause,²⁶ the majority held firm to their belief in non-resistance and non-violence. It should be recognized in considering their stand that the Quaker leaders not only took the somewhat negative position of abstaining from acts of open resistance or violence, but also held to the more positive obligation of obedience and submission to constituted authority. This attitude appeared clearly in the period before open hostilities broke out. In 1774, for example, when a group of Philadelphians, who declared they included "members of all societies" in the city, published a plea for the closing of all business houses on the day the Boston Port Act went into effect, the Quaker leaders protested. For themselves and the various Friends' Meetings in the city they announced that any Quakers who might have countenanced or encouraged the proposed demonstration had "manifested great inattention to our religious principles and profession and acted contrary to the rules of Christian discipline established among us."²⁷ The belief in submission

²⁵ [Galloway], *Historical and Political Reflections*, pp. 54-5. Galloway's analysis cannot be taken too literally, for, with a deplorable display of ignorance of the bases of the denominations, he includes "Calvinists" among the pacifistic groups who opposed the radical and republican Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Independents. Yet his main point is valid, namely that religious opposition to violence was a factor in promoting loyalism among several sects.

²⁶ Notably Major General Nathaniel Greene, who was read out of the Friends' Meeting in 1773 for attending a military parade.

²⁷ Quoted from the *Philadelphia Gazette*, June 1, 1774, in Charles H. Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760-1776* (Philadelphia, 1901), p. 168.

to constituted authority became even more important in determining the Quaker position when independence became the central issue. Within ten days after Tom Paine's *Common Sense* appeared on the streets of Philadelphia, the Friends' convention issued an address "to the people in general." After dilating upon the benefits of the British connection, the address laid down the fundamental principle that "the setting up and putting down kings and governments is God's peculiar prerogative, for causes best known to Himself, and it is not our business to have any hand or contrivance therein."²⁸ With such expressions of belief coming from the leaders of the Quaker community, it is not surprising that a large proportion of the Friends found that, however much they might deplore the measures of the British government, they could not in conscience withdraw their loyalty and obedience to that government.

Among the groups we have so far examined, considerations of economic self-interest certainly played a part in the loyalty of numerous individuals. Many officeholders and Anglican clergymen, as has been said, had a financial stake in the British connection, which was undoubtedly a powerful factor in their minds. Many of the leading Philadelphia Quakers were also merchants with as much to gain by continued trade with England as any other mercantile groups. Probably some of them found the religious argument in favor of loyalty a convenient cloak to cover their more materialistic motives in siding with the mother country. But with the three groups we have so far discussed there were weighty considerations other than those of economic advantages which were important in keeping these men loyal. There was the matter of close personal connection with Great Britain, if not of actual British birth and rearing, which understandably influenced many officials and Anglican

²⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 238-9.

clergymen. There were the special oaths of allegiance to the House of Hanover which men of these groups had taken. There were religious attitudes and convictions which caused many Anglicans, Quakers, and German Pietists to hold aloof from acts of civil disobedience or of violence. Economic motives alone are quite inadequate to explain the stand of these classes of Loyalists.

Among the remaining recognizable groups of Americans which contributed proportionately the largest numbers to the loyalist ranks—the great landholders, the merchants, and the professional men—self-interest undoubtedly played a major role. There were the leading men of property in the colonies, with the most to lose from an upheaval in the orderly processes of society as it was constituted.²⁹ These were the classes of men, who over the years had tended to show the most consistent conservatism on other issues which had challenged their economic or political leadership. It is not surprising therefore that from these groups should emerge a large proportion of men who resisted the changes in society and the challenge to their leadership which the revolutionary movement threatened to produce.

Among such men, the position and attitude of the colonial merchants has received much scholarly attention.³⁰ In the

²⁹ It should be made clear that a sharp distinction cannot always be made between groups and the motives influencing each. Many men in the classes here referred to were influenced by one or more of the same factors discussed previously. There was overlapping between groups, not only between Quakers and Philadelphia merchants, as already mentioned, but between Anglicans and New York landholders and merchants. And many of the southern merchants were themselves English or Scottish with too short a residence here to make them into real colonials. All that is attempted here is a consideration of the factors which might have influenced an individual in his particular position as a man of property, regardless of the other aspects of his position or affiliation.

³⁰ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York, 1916), is indispensable as a study of the development of the merchant's position in the years leading to independence. My debt to it is obvious. Also important are Charles M. Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 19, *Transactions, 1916-1917* (Boston, 1918), pp. 159-259, and Virginia D. Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1935).

early stages of the dispute with Britain many of these men were active leaders in the opposition to the mother country. "Threatened with bankruptcy by the parliamentary legislation of 1764-1765, the merchants of the commercial province were the instigators of the first discontents in the colonies."³¹ It was the merchants themselves who brought about the first non-importation agreements. Several of them, later distinguished as Loyalists, were elected to the Stamp Act Congress. It took time for these men to see that they had started something they could not stop and finally could not even control. Only gradually did most of them see the implications for themselves inherent in the dispute with England. Rich merchants of Boston or New York might not mind greatly if the common people indulged in a somewhat vigorous demonstration against British acts. Perhaps the ranting of the populace helped some of the aristocrats themselves to blow off, vicariously, a little steam. Certainly the British ministers had earned the insults hurled at them across three thousand miles of ocean. But such demonstrations soon went too far. As Carl Becker has effectively put it, "a little rioting was well enough, so long as it was directed to the one end of bringing the English government to terms. But when the destruction of property began to be relished for its own sake by those who had no property, and the cry of liberty came loudest from those who were without political privilege, it was time to call a halt. These men might not cease their shouting when purely British restrictions were removed."³² Many a man who joined heartily in the first steps of organized protests came to regret his acts. Many an essentially conservative colonial discovered to his dismay that he had unwittingly cast himself in the role of Pandora.

³¹ Schelsinger, *Colonial Merchants*, p. 591.

³² Carl Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York* (Madison, Wisc., 1909), p. 31.

Others later had reason to congratulate themselves that they had been more cautious from the start. There were individuals who disapproved of the principle of parliamentary taxation as applied by Grenville and Townshend, but who feared that the results of protest or even of public discussion might be even worse. Such a man was John Watts, a wealthy New York merchant and councillor. He had gone on record as opposing the Stamp Act, but in November, 1765, wrote his friend, the former governor General Robert Monckton, that he believed no prudent man should meddle with the question of the power of parliament "but among friends as a mere matter of speculation. Rash conceited prigs and printers have done it, but are blamed by all men of reflection." "The less is said on the subject," he added, "the better on this side; 'tis too delicate if not presumptuous."³³ There were others who felt as Watts did and later could pride themselves on their consistent behavior.

Whether a merchant was an active instigator of non-importation agreements or one who refused to take any steps in the face of injurious British legislation, he was likely to find before long that the most obvious threat to his continued business activity and to the principle of property rights upon which his success was founded came not from the British parliament but from the colonial radicals. With the exception of those merchants who gained most of their profits through a smuggling trade, the mercantile classes depended for their business chiefly on the orderly conduct of overseas trade, especially with the mother country. Economic boycott might be effective in winning concessions from parliament but, like poison gas in modern warfare, it was an awkward and dangerous weapon, almost as likely to smother the attacker as the attacked and at best certain to

³³ Watts to Monckton, Nov. 9, 1765, *Letter Book of John Watts* (New York Hist. Soc. Coll. 1928), p. 400; also in *The Aspinwall Papers* (Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., 4th ser., vol. 10), p. 583.

curtail freedom of action and involve loss of efficiency. Experience led many merchants to regret their public-spirited adherence to the non-importation agreements.

What in many cases was quite as important as the immediate financial loss which the merchants suffered in the movement of resistance to Britain was the changed attitude of the lower classes. In this matter the other privileged groups, especially the landed gentry, joined the merchants. The "mob" was taking political leadership out of the hands of those accustomed to monopolizing it. The "vuglar" had found a new sport, the destruction of property. A man like John Watts might deplore the burning of Lieutenant Governor Colden's coach by the Stamp Act rioters, but he would not feel too badly about it, for he detested Colden personally. But when, nearly five years later, a midnight mob seized and burned some goods which the merchants' Committee of Inspection had sequestered for violation of the non-importation agreement, such merchants as Isaac Low, head of the committee, were outraged. He and his fellow committeemen denounced the act as "a high insult" to themselves and the city and branded the perpetrators as "lawless ruffians."³⁴ And when in 1773 the "Indians" of Boston dumped £15,000-worth of tea into the harbor, and the next year citizens of Maryland publicly burned the tea ship *Peggy Stewart*, owned by Annapolis merchants, it became perfectly clear to many men of wealth and standing that the sacred right of property was under serious attack and that "King Mob" was building himself a throne. Such a situation was a challenge to members of the propertied class, whether merchant or great landowner. Men of this class, including their friends and allies among the lawyers, doctors, and other professional and cultured groups, realized that it had been a mistake to sanction agitation against authority

³⁴ Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, p. 190.

in the first place. Now authority must be supported if their own property and political position were to be safeguarded. In such terms many men saw the issues of the times and, accordingly, chose to uphold the crown in their own self-interest.

So far we have considered only those special groups the members of which, as such, had particular reasons for loyalty to the crown and which for those reasons contributed proportionately the largest numbers to the Tory camp. But loyalism was by no means confined to particular groups in the American community; it was to be found in every section, every calling, and every class. A lowly tenant farmer of New York colony, or an insignificant shopkeeper of a North Carolina village could be just as faithful to the crown as the Reverent Jonathan Boucher of Maryland or His Excellency Governor Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts. Loyalism was not only a consequence of social or economic position; it was quite as much the result of an attitude of mind. Any attempt to analyze that attitude of mind which produced loyalism in men of such different background and station in life leads one quite obviously to their writings. The actions of these men attest their position on the issues of the day, but only in their recorded ideas may we hope to discover just why they were led to act as they did. Formal documents of public debate on constitutional issues may be useful in this connection but they usually give us less insight into the workings of the Tory mind than do less ostentatious writings. The letters to the papers of anonymous or obscure men, the diaries and correspondence of individual Loyalists, their reminiscences (when these are not overloaded with accounts of harsh experiences)—such are the sources which must be combed if we wish to understand what the Tory really thought.

Such material makes clear first of all a point which has

already been suggested with reference to the merchants, that a firmly loyalist position was often a matter of slow development. Just as a desire for complete independence came only gradually to all but a very few extremists on the other side, so a decision to side finally and fully with Great Britain was reached, in the case of most Loyalists, only after the struggle began to approach its climax.

There were some colonists, of course, who openly approved the British policy from the time of the Stamp Act or even earlier. Thus "Americanus," writing in the *Pennsylvania Journal* in 1765, asked if, since America had shown she would not contribute voluntarily to the imperial defense, "does it not then become the indispensable duty of a British parliament to interfere, and compel her to do what is so reasonable and necessary for her preservation?"³⁵ In all the colonies a few men would answer with a simple "Yes." Perhaps the most extreme statement of an early ultra-conservative view came from an anonymous writer in New Jersey, defending the assembly of that province for refusing to send delegates to the Stamp Act Congress. On the constitutional question of the right of parliament to tax the colonies he was as firm as Lord Grenville himself. "Does not all history inform us," he asked, "that colonies always were in absolute dependence on the mother state, and only receive her commands?" Did colonies, those of Britain or any other, ever dare claim more liberty than the home government saw fit to allow them? "Our claims therefore are *new and unprecedented*, and not those of parliament." The author flatly denied that the Americans' ancestors "carried over the Atlantic all the privileges of Englishmen," and he offered ingenious, if not convincing, arguments to the contrary. "We can prove that they did not bring liberty along with them," he declared, "for liberty and property always go

³⁵ *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, Aug. 29, 1765 (no. 1186).

together, so as never to be separated; but we know our ancestors were generally very poor and so brought little or no property with them; they could not then bring liberty along with them; and if our fathers had no liberty, how came we to have it? We do not pretend to claim more than they had." Furthermore, this extremist went on, the fact that their fathers were all born in Britain laid the colonists "under the strongest obligations to an absolute subjection. Is not the parliament the *wisest* assembly on earth? Do not they know best what we are able to pay?" In short, the colonists ought to prefer to be under parliamentary jurisdiction in these matters rather than to keep them in their own hands. There was no sense in relying on "a parcel of old musty papers called charters and concessions." These had been granted by the king in the infancy of the colonies without the concurrence of parliament and were now quite obsolete. "How then can the parliament be bound by them or have their hands tied up by what the crown did a hundred years ago?"³⁶ Thus did one man wallow, as ardently as any modern Nazi, in his surrender of liberty to authority. Though his surrender of individual liberty was made to a parliament rather than to a Fuhrer, it was quite as complete and unconditional.

Such men were few indeed in colonial America. Almost every colonist of English ancestry asserted proudly his claim to the rights and liberties of an Englishman, and nearly everyone, including most of those who later became known as the strictest Loyalists, believed that parliament had been far from wise in its legislation of 1764 and 1765. Thomas Hutchinson declared later that he had not approved the Stamp Act at the time, though as a servant of the crown he thought himself bound "to discountenance the violent

³⁶ *The General Advertiser for the New-York Thursday's Gazette*, Oct. 10, 1765, a postscript sheet to *The New-York Gazette or the Weekly Post-Boy* (no. 1188).

opposition made to the act, as it led to the denial of [parliament's] authority in all cases whatsoever."³⁷ Many thoroughgoing conservatives quite openly expressed their objections to the parliamentary measures, on grounds of both principle and expediency, and modified their position only when they decided that the public opposition was producing worse evils than would the acts themselves. Even staunch old Jonathan Boucher wrote an English friend in 1765 that the "poor Americans" were "truly to be pitied" since "their best and dearest rights" had been "mercilessly invaded by parliament." Granting that it had a right to tax the colonists internally, that body was as ignorant of the best means of doing so as it would be "to prescribe an assessment for the inhabitants of Kamschatka."³⁸ In 1769 Boucher was still able to declare, with some reservations, that "seriously, I do think the American opposition the most warrantable, generous, and manly that history can produce."³⁹ But before long he was writing and preaching very differently. In May, 1775, he wrote to Provost Smith in Philadelphia urging him to take up his pen against the extremists. "Surely," said the parson, "the Americans have most woefully mismanaged their cause; and as things are now carried on it is not easy to say to which side a real friend of liberty, order, and good government would incline. For my part, I equally dread a victory on either side."⁴⁰ Four months later he had fled to England.

Similar instances of a relatively slow acceptance of a completely loyalist position could be multiplied. Timothy Ruggles, chief justice of Worcester County, Massachusetts, was

³⁷ P. O. Hutchinson, *The Diary and Letters of His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Esq.*, vol. 2 (London, 1886), 57-8.

³⁸ Boucher to Rev. John James in England, Dec. 9, 1765, *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 7 (1912), 295.

³⁹ Boucher to James, July 25, 1769, *ibid.*, vol. 8 (1913), 44.

⁴⁰ Boucher to Smith, May 4, 1775, *ibid.*, vol. 8 (1913), 240.

a comparatively early convert. He was elected president of the Stamp Act Congress in 1765 but would not sign the petitions that body drew up and was later reported to have threatened to jail everyone who signed the non-importation agreement of 1774. Isaac Low, a New York merchant, was likewise a delegate to the Stamp Act Congress. In 1768, he headed the New York Committee of Inspection to enforce the non-importation agreement of that year, and in 1774 was a member of the First Continental Congress and signed the Association. But he was already swinging over to a moderate position and when the British occupied the city in 1776 he remained there, becoming president of the Chamber of Commerce under British auspices in 1779. When the royal troops evacuated the city at the end of the war he moved to England. Joseph Galloway, of Pennsylvania, as is well known, was a delegate to the First Continental Congress, chiefly interested in working out a compromise solution of the constitutional issue. He refused election to the Second Congress and later fled to Howe's army, becoming civil administrator of Philadelphia during the British occupation and later going to England where he became spokesman for the exiled Loyalists. Jacob Duché, native-born Anglican clergyman of Philadelphia, to give a final example, was such a zealot in the cause of "liberty" as to win for himself both the denunciations of his fellow minister Boucher and appointment by the Continental Congress as its chaplain. But the Declaration of Independence changed his views; he urged its recall and was in turn denounced as a traitor by the Americans. He left for England in 1777, where he became, almost symbolically in his lonely exile, chaplain of an orphan asylum.⁴¹

The slow crystalization of loyalism in the minds of many

⁴¹ There are useful sketches of all four of these men in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

individuals suggests another characteristic in the thinking of many men of that day. It is easy for us to set in contrast the extremists of both sides—Samuel Adams against Thomas Hutchinson, for example—as if all men who wrote or spoke in those days could be simply classified as “Patriots” or as “Tories.” But there were many who cannot easily be so listed and who, whether or not they finally maintained their loyalty to the king, should properly be classed as “Moderates.” A considerable proportion of those who earned the enmity of the American radicals did so in the first instance because they advocated moderation in the championing of American rights. With many who later became out-and-out Loyalists, a first and a preferred position was one of moderation and of protest against extremism of word or action.

A number of these men considered it their duty to admonish the public through letters in the newspapers, criticizing the language and behavior of the radicals, and urging a more deferential attitude toward British authority. An early illustration of this procedure is found in a letter by “Civis” in the *Connecticut Gazette* in August, 1765, taking to task a certain “Cato” for the tone of a letter of his against parliament and the Stamp Act. Without undertaking to debate the merits of the act or the question of parliament’s right to pass it, “Civis” proposed “freely and coolly” to ask “Cato” whether he thought that parliament, or even a colonial assembly, might “(with decency, at least) be called tyrants and oppressors, in newspapers.” Members of legislative bodies, he went on, allow great freedom of speech in their own debates, and courts allow their jurisdictions to be questioned, “but, at the same time, they expect to be treated with some decorum, and not to be called rogue and rascal for any mistakes they may be supposed to have made in judgment.” It would be quite as well, he concluded, for the

Connecticut assembly to decide for themselves and their constituents what should be done in the present crisis, "as for everyone, rashly, in so open a manner, to take upon them the arduous task, when perhaps they are far from being masters of the subject."⁴² Even this early in the controversy, "Civis" did not like the vigor of the public criticism of British authority and hoped to tone down the language of the radicals.

By the time the Stamp Act was repealed, passions had been so stirred that it was not easy to restore perfect calm in all the colonies. In this situation several of the moderates offered their services as peacemakers. Among the letters to the papers aimed at smoothing over ruffled feelings that of "Benevolus" of Georgia was typical. In an article in the *Georgia Gazette* in July, 1766, which he entitled "Bear and Forbear," he urged his fellow colonists to "bury in a friendly oblivion all that ill-blood and party heat" which the Stamp Act had occasioned among them. He thought Americans ought to "imitate and follow the healing and conciliatory temper and example of our mother country, which has, with a parental indulgence, overlooked some too violent and unjustifiable proceedings on our part." Remarking sententiously that "*humanum est errare*," he declared that local supporters of the Stamp Act had not acted from malevolent principles but probably only because they thought opposition would be futile. Let us now forget all our local bitterness, our animosities and differences, he begged, and produce once more "a general unity of hearts."⁴³ But this was not so

⁴² *Connecticut Gazette*, Aug. 16, 1765 (no. 477). In the *New-London Gazette*, Sept. 6, 1765 (no. 95), "Cato" replied, denying that he had implied that members of parliament were "tyrants and oppressors" or that he had called them "rogues and rascals." On the contrary, he revered parliament as "the most respectable if not the most powerful body of men on earth." But they were not infallible, and while paying great deference to their decisions, "no Englishman is bound to believe they are perfectly just." This reply was also printed in the *Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, Sept. 9, 1765 (no. 421).

⁴³ *Georgia Gazette*, July 2, 1766 (no. 145).

easy to bring about, as the very next issue of the paper suggested. In that sheet appeared two letters; one addressed "To Mr. Benevolus," signed "Bear and Forbear," generally approved the sentiments already expressed, but the other headed "Be Angry and Sin Not," and signed "A Lover of Truth," belittled "Benevolus'" ideas and testily rejected his advice.⁴⁴ Hard feelings are not always so easily forgotten as moderate men could wish.

As time passed and other parliamentary measures evoked further forceful opposition in America, men of conservative temper again and again expressed their hope that measures would not be carried to extremes. In December, 1773, after the passage of the Tea Act, "A Farmer" put the case for moderation in a public letter to the inhabitants of the city and colony of New York. He began with the proposition, he said, which he hoped would be readily granted, that whoever wished well to the interests of Great Britain and America and really wanted to have the revenue act repealed, would favor the most lenient measures. "Violence in opposition to government," he affirmed, "should ever be kept aloof and held as the *dernier resort*," and whoever promoted violence, "save in the last extremity," should be suspected as an enemy of the cause he appeared to espouse. In the present case, parliament might in time be persuaded to repeal the act, "but they will never be braved into it."⁴⁵ From many points of view the "Farmer's" advice was good, as many men on both sides would agree; there is no question but that his prophesy about the attitude of parliament proved correct. Just two weeks after his letter appeared in New York a

⁴⁴ *Georgia Gazette*, July 9, 1766 (no. 146).

⁴⁵ *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer*, Dec. 2, 1773 (no. 33). In his introductory essay to Rev. Samuel Seabury's *Letters of a Westchester Farmer (1774-1775)* (*Publs. of the Westchester County Hist. Soc.*, vol. 7, White Plains, 1930), p. 19, Clarence H. Vance suggests the possibility that this letter was written by Seabury as the first of a series intended to appear in *Rivington's Gazetteer* but never continued.

group of extremists in Boston determined on a drastic measure regarding the tea which had reached that port. Certainly their action did not "brave" parliament into a repeal of the act; on the contrary, the retaliation which the Tea Party provoked from England brought closer than ever before those extremes of violence which the moderates had hoped so earnestly to prevent.

Even after the passage of the legislation of 1774, many conservatives still hoped they could prevail on their fellow colonists to avoid further extralegal action. It was such a hope that sent Joseph Galloway to the First Continental Congress with his plan of union.⁴⁶ It was such a hope that won for him there the support of men like James Duane, John Jay, and Edward Rutledge, even though they later refused to follow him into the ranks of the out-and-out Loyalists. It was of moderates who still harbored such a hope that William Eddis wrote, early in 1775:

Convinced of the propriety of their sentiments, and the integrity of their hearts, they conceive the cause of America may be *totally injured* by a precipitate and unnecessary defiance of the power of Great Britain: they firmly believe that a respectful behavior to their *sovereign* and their *mother country*—a dutiful and constitutional application to the *throne*—and a firm perseverance in *virtuous*, though *pacific principles* will, in the issue, be productive of the most felicitous consequences. Actuated by such considerations, they cannot be reconciled to those violent extremes which have been too rashly adopted by many; and which they are anxious to establish as the *only* feasible plan of terminating the present dissensions.⁴⁷

The time when men could still cling to such hopes of moderation was rapidly drawing to a close. Before long the extremists of both sides made the ultimate appeal to force and those who had sought a middle course were asked to

⁴⁶ For an able analysis of Galloway's position see Julian P. Boyd, *Anglo-American Union: Joseph Galloway's Plans to Preserve the British Empire, 1774-1778* (Philadelphia, 1941).

⁴⁷ Eddis, *Letters from America*, p. 193. The passage first appeared in the *Maryland Gazette* over the signature "A Friend to Amity" and was dated February 14, 1775. It was reproduced in Eddis's letter of March 13, 1775.

choose which side they would support. Some men like William Samuel Johnson of Connecticut or James Duane of New York finally sided with the revolting colonists; others like James Galloway went over to the British; still others tried to remain neutral.

In revolution there is little room for neutrality. Applying the theory that "those who are not for us are against us," most of the American revolutionaries tended to class the moderate conservatives who would not join them as Tories at heart. Many of these moderates were made to suffer, both then and later, as if they were avowedly in the hostile camp. To their public defense ultimately came Alexander Graydon of Philadelphia, himself a moderate, but one who had finally joined Washington's army. In writing of the war, many years later, he commented on his numerous fellow-citizens who "equally disclaimed the epithet of whig or tory." Against their attitude of indecision Graydon, who understood them well and perhaps in his heart of hearts was one of them, refused to permit a charge of guilt to be directed. "In civil commotions," he pointed out, "there is generally so much to disapprove on both sides, and the issue is so little answerable to the designs of the well-meaning men embarked in them, that neutrality, if it could be maintained, might often be the most eligible part. . . . There are certainly times in which inaction becomes virtue, notwithstanding that active ardor may be more congenial to upright intention." Doubtless "the noblest feelings of an honest heart are to be looked for" in the "glowing temperament of a Cato disdain- ing that 'his house should stand secure and flourish in a civil war.'" And yet it was this same Cato who counselled his son to "live retired and to content himself with being obscurely good."⁴⁸ Men of the temperament thus defended

⁴⁸ [Alexander Graydon], *Memoirs of a Life, chiefly passed in Pennsylvania within the Last Sixty Years* (Harrisburg, 1811), pp. 270-1.

by Graydon appear in every time of stress. Essentially they are conservatives, but conservatives cursed with an ability to see that there are two sides to an issue, and unable or unwilling to chose finally and irrevocably with which side they will cast their fortunes. No examination of the men who failed to join the American cause in the Revolution is adequate which fails to take into account the position of those moderates who preferred to remain neutral and who in many cases were driven into active loyalism only by the hostility of their uncomprehending and impatient fellow-colonists.

The writings of the colonial and Revolutionary periods make clear that many people were loyal because of a deep attachment to Great Britain and a sincere admiration for the British constitution. England was the mother country for a large proportion of the colonists, and, even if they were several generations removed from English birth, they still took pride in being Englishmen. Observers both North and South reported throughout the eighteenth century that people of means and culture reproduced as far as they could English manners, dress, and conversation, affecting in all things to be as much English as possible. They bought or copied English clothes, read English books, followed English politics, and looked across to England as the source and center of their cultural life.⁴⁹ Over and over, the records show that even colonists who had never been in Great Britain wrote and spoke of it as "home."⁵⁰

The acceptance of England as the center of American culture and as "home" was so complete that not even the

⁴⁹ This point is well brought out in Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (San Marino, Calif., 1940), especially pp. 132-3, and 267. See also Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness* (New York, 1938), p. 253.

⁵⁰ Hugh Jones, writing in 1724, made the interesting distinction that Virginians esteemed London as "home" but had formed poor opinions (by hearsay) of other parts of Great Britain. *The Present State of Virginia* (London, 1724) in Sabin's *Reprints*, no. 5 (New York, 1865), p. 43.

Declaration of Independence could kill it, as an inhabitant of Massachusetts testified in 1784. William Pynchon of Salem had heard that an exiled Loyalist friend in England, Samuel Curwen, hoped to be allowed to return to his native America. Pynchon wrote him optimistically of the restoration in Massachusetts of commercial and sentimental ties with England. "All who can cross the Atlantic," he said, "seem determined to go and procure their goods from England; not one discovers a disposition to receive them from France, notwithstanding their generosity towards us. Going to England is now as formerly called *going home*."⁵¹ With ties so close it is not surprising that most men hesitated long before agreeing to independence and that many refused to the end to accept that solution of the controversy.

This reluctance was reinforced by a positive belief in the real value and importance of the British connection and in the merits of the British constitution. Many men would agree with "Rusticus," who wrote early in 1775 that the "peace and security" the colonists had enjoyed before 1764 under the British connection "must make us look back with regret to those happy days whose loss we mourn and which every rational man must consider as the golden age of America."⁵² John Randolph of Virginia pointed out at about the same time that "a more pleasing and natural connection never subsisted between any different bodies of men" than had, until lately, existed between Great Britain and her colonies. The inhabitants of both were allied by blood and by their mutual trade and commerce. In manners, religion, language, and laws there were only the minor differences occasioned by local circumstances. "Whilst we remain tied

⁵¹ Pynchon to Curwen, March 2, 1784, George Atkinson Ward, ed., *Journal and Letters of the Late Samuel Curwen, Judge of Admiralty, etc., an American Refugee in England from 1775 to 1784* (New York, 1842), p. 401, Italics in the original.

⁵² *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet, or the General Advertiser*, Jan. 2, 1775 (no. 167).

together by one friendly and common band," said Randolph, "we can preserve our religion and property from violation and bid defiance to all the hostile powers on earth; but if this ligament be burst assunder, our strength will be weakened and our security at an end."⁵³

To one writer in New York, who signed his letters "Poplicola," the importance of loyalty to the British Empire and its broadest interests was so great that it became an argument in favor of the Tea Act of 1773. Could any one claim to be public spirited, he asked, who, while remaining a subject of Great Britain, "would teach you to dinstinguish between your own interests and hers? You love your country and this affection is your duty, your honor; but remember that not this or any other province is your country, but the *whole British empire*." The English East India Company, he went on, was the agent of British trade expansion in the Orient and was engaged in bitter rivalry with the companies of other nations. Under these circumstances could any British subjects "who profess the character of patriots, hesitate a moment in determining whether it is their duty to prefer the interest of the English company to that of its rivals? Does he not violate the obligations he is under to his country, who endeavors to traduce and injure so important and necessary an institution?" Whether to patronize the smuggling importers of Dutch tea or the legitimate agents of the British company, "on which the commercial interest of the state so greatly depends," ought not to be "a matter of doubt to a lover of his country, to an honest man."⁵⁴ No imperialist of the twentieth century ever more earnestly exhorted his readers to "Buy British."

⁵³ E. G. Swem, ed., *Considerations on the Present State of Virginia Attributed to John Randolph, Attorney General* (New York, 1919), p. 23.

⁵⁴ *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer*, Nov. 18, 1773 (no. 31). Italics in the original. For two other letters by the same writer on the same theme and emphasizing the necessity of supporting the English East India company in its "war" with the Dutch company, see *ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1773 (no. 33), and Dec. 23, 1773 (no. 36).

Some Tories, looking back at the course of events over several generations and seeing how rapidly America had been growing in population and strength, recognized that independence was bound to come sooner or later. The colonies were developing too fast to be kept indefinitely in a subordinate position. Even the writer who had referred yearningly to the earlier "golden age of America" spoke also of "that future independency which, in the course of human affairs, these colonies must arrive at."⁵⁵ In the eighth and last of a verbose series of letters attempting to reply to Paine's *Common Sense*, "Cato" ponderously declared that "when it shall clearly appear that we can no longer be *free*, nor secure in our *rights* and property in connection with Great Britain, or that we can be more secure in any other connection (and the time which will enable us to judge of this cannot be very remote) the author of these letters shall not then lisp a word against whatever measures the sense of the majority of this country, fairly taken, shall adopt for the common good; and will be ready to give his best assistance for carrying them into execution."⁵⁶

Like all true conservatives when confronted by the inevitability of change, these men wanted to put it off as long as possible. Separation from the mother country might ultimately be inevitable but the time had not yet come. There were still avenues of accommodation to be explored before plunging down the bloody path of civil war to total independence. Such was the burden of many a plea, especially in Philadelphia after the publication of *Common Sense*. Thus "Rationalis" urged that independence ought to be a last resort only. "Let us not yet lose sight," he begged, "of

⁵⁵ *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet, or the General Advertiser*, Jan. 2, 1775 (no. 167). He argued, however, that independence "cannot for our true interest be too long delayed."

⁵⁶ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Apr. 24, 1776 (no. 2470); *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet, or The General Advertiser*, April 29, 1776 (no. 236).

the primary object of the dispute, namely, a safe, honorable, and lasting reconciliation with Great Britain." Until this proved impossible no steps towards separation would be warranted.⁵⁷ "Moderator" declared that at first he had been much struck by Paine's arguments; but then had come sober second thought. In total separation he foresaw with horror "a tedious and expensive war; the blood of thousands bedewing the ground, and the whole wealth of the continent, the whole labor of a century vanished in air." That independence must ultimately come, he admitted. "That nature must, at last, have its course, and a total separation take place between the new and the old world, I have not a doubt remaining." But—and here he stressed his words—he could by no means assent to the proposition "*that the time is now come*, or as the author of *Common Sense* has emphatically expressed it, *that the time has found us*." There were two grand questions: "*Is a change necessary, and is this the time for it?*" To both these questions "Moderator" writing in the spring of 1776, would reply with a resounding negative.⁵⁸ Like many another conservative before and since, he could not accept the idea that the time for the inevitable change was now.

Another characteristically conservative reason for Tory opposition to independence was that it left the future so dark and so uncertain. Most people would like to know what the future holds in store, none more so than the conservative when he is confronted with a possibility of change. What, he asks, does this change presage? Will it bring such benefits and happiness as its advocates insist? Or will it bring unknown loss and suffering instead? Can it bring anything to compensate for the known advantages of what we have now?

⁵⁷ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, Feb. 28, 1776 (no. 2462).

⁵⁸ *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet, or The General Advertiser*, April 29, 1776 (no. 236 post-script.)

Looking into the future of an independent America, conservatives could read no satisfactory answers to these questions. Some thought they could guess what independence would bring and shuddered at the thought. Colonel Landon Carter, one of the last of the great Virginia planters to climb off the fence on the American side, could see only the rise of arbitrary power, oppression, and tyranny within America.⁵⁹ With this view the self-exiled New Englander, Samuel Curwen, fully agreed.⁶⁰ In Philadelphia "Civis" assured his readers that the advocates of independence were trying to hurry them "into a scene of anarchy." But the worst was that no one really knew what might follow independence. As "Civis" went on to point out, the radicals' "scheme of independence is visionary; they know not themselves what they mean by it." Separation was a "leap in the dark."⁶¹ In one of his earlier letters in answer to *Common Sense*. "Cato" pointed out that reconciliation would restore a known state of happiness. Trade, agriculture, and industry would flourish as before. "Pennsylvania has much to lose in this contest and much to hope from a proper settlement of it." The colony had long flourished under its charter government. "What may be the consequences of another form we cannot pronounce with certainty; but this we know, that it is a road we have not travelled, and may be worse than it is described."⁶² And so like the good conservatives they were, "Civis," "Cato" and the rest, coming to the parting of the ways turned aside from the dark and unknown path marked "Independence," and marched firmly down the familiar way of "Loyalty."

⁵⁹ "Dairy," March 29, May 23, May 29, June 14, 1776, *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 16 (April, 1908), p. 258; vol. 18 (July, 1909), pp. 38, 43, 44, 177.

⁶⁰ Ward, ed., *Journal and Letters of Samuel Curwen*, p. 89.

⁶¹ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 1, 1776 (no. 2471).

⁶² *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 27, 1776 (no. 2466); *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet, or the General Advertiser*, March 25, 1776 (no. 231).

Part of the uncertainty over the future of an independent America came directly out of the experience of the years which just preceded the outbreak of warfare. Those years did little to bring assurance that Americans would of their own volition reestablish a government of decency and order. Attention has already been given to the attitude of the men of great wealth to the radical's disregard of property rights.⁶⁸ Many others shared this feeling without apparent regard to the extent of their personal fortunes. And if to the actual destruction of merchant's ships and goods be added the lootings of houses like Thomas Hutchinson's, the tarrings and featherings, the intimidation of officials, the general rioting and mob rule, the setting up of extra-legal committees and associations, the "demagogery" of the radical leaders, and the enfranchisement of the propertyless common people, then the prospect that a government of law and wisdom could be established in America seemed remote indeed.

From the very start of the troubles there were men to denounce the resort to violence. The Stamp Act disturbances aroused protests from as far apart as South Carolina and New Hampshire. One of the most emphatic newspaper attacks upon the act itself and upon its British authors came from "Philo-Patriae" in the far South, but a good share of his criticism was diverted to the violent disorders in the northern colonies. Whether these disturbances had come from the "misguided zeal" of true patriots, he wrote, or from "the villanous cunning of those who took the opportunity of the public discontent to promote and increase the tumult" for criminal purposes, in either case "the true lovers of liberty and their country" heard the rioting "with concern and sorrow." Such behavior did injury to a just cause and might well alienate "men who have been accustomed to venerate

⁶⁸ See pp. 33-5.

and obey lawful authority and who delight in peace and order.”⁶⁴ In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a letter was published, reputedly signed “by the greater part of the inhabitants of this town,” which cautioned against the disposition among many people to a riotous, tumultuous behavior, the publishing advertisements against particular persons under color and pretense of rectifying abuse in trade, and a destruction of people’s property in the night.” Some people seemed to think that in the absence of stamped paper all legal processes were suspended and that they could perpetrate “the most atrocious wickedness” with impunity. Such subversive behavior must be stopped at once, since “the transition from bad to worse is insensible, easy and, like sliding down hill, swift in its motion.” Hence the signers of the letter not only signified their “abhorrence and detestation of all such riotous, menacing, malicious, and revengeful actions”; they declared it their duty and intention, whenever lawfully called upon, “readily and heartily to do our utmost in every way possible to us, to support the public peace and security of the society.”⁶⁵ A few days later another letter was printed in the same New Hampshire town over the signature of “Publius,” protesting against the tendency of extra-legal groups to take the law into their own hands. There was just reason, he said, to criticize the monopolizing and profiteering activities of some men in that time of crisis, but the idea “that public injuries should be redressed by any other authority than the legislative” in the province was “unjustifiable.” The official “guardians of our rights and liberties” were awake and able to cope with the situation, while the “setting-up any executive authority of our own is naturally weakening the constitution of that government in

⁶⁴ *The South-Carolina Gazette, and Country Journal*, Feb. 11, 1766 (no. 9).

⁶⁵ *The New-Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle*, Nov. 29, 1765 (no. 478).

which we place the basis of our political happiness and the sole defense of our civil rights.”⁶⁶

The same fear of the results of violent and extra-legal action was voiced by writers in all the colonies between the extreme North and the farther South. None perhaps put the issue on a higher plain than did “A Colonist” of New York. Writing in that same troubled autumn of 1765, he pointed out that “the late newspapers have been filled with accounts of mobs, riots, burning in effigy, and resignations of officers, which have been read with pleasure by too many.” The writer, on the other hand, was filled only with melancholy when he “looked forward and considered the consequences of such proceedings.” The inhabitants of America had the undoubted right to seek redress for the invasion of their rights, “but let us assert our liberties or demand the repeal of a law like honest freemen; let us not stain our characters by entering into riots we are ashamed of.” “Do not we blush,” he asked, “when we hear that under the pretence of asserting and maintaining the cause of liberty, robbery and the most atrocious crimes have been committed,” and men have joined in mobs, sometimes for personal revenge, sometimes out of avarice, and sometimes to serve their personal ambitions? No cool-thinking man could read with pleasure “that a fellow subject has had his house pulled down and been robbed of his furniture and money, because he has differed in opinion from us.” Freedom of speech, he went on, was an essential part of liberty, “but those destroy all freedom and become lawless tyrants, who take the liberty to ruin a fellow-citizen for speaking his mind and advising his countrymen.”⁶⁷ Thus in the opinion of this colonist, the

⁶⁶ *The Portsmouth Mercury and Weekly Advertiser*, Dec. 2, 1765 (no. 46).

⁶⁷ *The General Advertiser for the New-York Thursday's Gazette*, Oct. 10, 1765, a postscript sheet to *New-York Gazette or the Weekly Post-boy* (no. 1188).

resort to extra-legal action was a threat not only to the property of individual Americans but to one of their fundamental freedoms as well—freedom of speech. Men who understood such a threat as this might well draw back from associating themselves with the party that permitted it. As the period of agitation went on and the liberties of individuals were more and more invaded, not only by riotous mobs, but also by committees and tribunals unauthorized by law, such men as the writers whose protests have been quoted became more and more concerned for the future. New leaders, who had won their way to power by demagogery, by instigating riots, and by suppressing freedom of discussion, gave little promise of creating a government that “honest men” could respect. An independent America, conceived in violence and in disregard of all the public virtues, as many conservatives believed, was hardly likely to be a worthy heir to the sedate and decent Britannia they called their mother.

The writings of the men called Loyalists reveal that, in spite of individual and group differences, there were several features of their thinking which were general enough among these men to be safely called aspects of the common Tory mind. Apart from the special factors that influenced the loyalty of officeholders and members of certain religious bodies, and the economic and political considerations that affected the position of merchants, great landowners, and men of wealth generally, certain common attitudes of the Loyalists are clear. For many, if not for most, a position of out-and-out loyalty was something arrived at only slowly. They reached it after a long and unhappy course of events had led them from general agreement that the British policy of taxation was unwise to a belief that their duty bound them to support the mother country against her disobedient

colonial children. More than any other one thing it was the radical's resort to violence and extra-legal action that brought conservatives to this position. Many of these Loyalists were essentially moderates who preferred to take a neutral stand in the controversy and abandoned that only when compelled to do so by men or circumstances. Individually and as a group, the Loyalist were deeply attached to England and the crown. They were sincere admirers of the British constitution and of its system of government balanced between the monarchical, the aristocratic, and the popular elements. They were staunch believers in the value to America of the British connection. While many recognized that sometime the colonies would outgrow their dependent status, they were unwilling to believe that the inevitable day had come. Most of the Loyalists were men who could not look forward with any equanimity to a future of independence. The changes, both external and internal, which would come if the Revolutionists had their way, seemed, even at best, too uncertain to command the trust and confidence of conservatives. On the contrary, if the future could be gauged by the present and the immediate past, it offered a prospect of anarchy and disorder rather than of stability, since mobs and violence would probably hold sway and demagogues would lead into political power an uncultured and emotional rabble. Aside from all considerations of the constitutional rights of parliament and of America, such were the views that influenced the minds of most men who ultimately declared themselves as Loyalists.

Participation in revolution—except for those whose motives are most narrowly selfish—requires a special kind of imaginative courage, one compounded of a general bravery in the face of an uncertain future, faith in that future, a power to imagine vividly how it may be molded to a desired

end, and an optimistic disregard of the possibilities of loss or of failure to attain the hoped-for goal. All great revolutionaries have had that sort of courage, whether or not the movements they led have, in the long perspective of history, been successful, or have sought ends to the real interest of humanity. The conservatives who have opposed such revolutions—again apart from those whose motives have been primarily ones of self-interest—have seldom been endowed with this sort of courage. Again and again they have displayed a different group of virtues: a strong sense of the values in the contemporary order of society which are in danger of being lost, an imagination keen enough to see the possible harm as well as the good in the changes proposed, and a personal bravery in the face of suffering and persecution.

Thus it was with the sincere Loyalists of the American Revolution. They saw more clearly than did some of their opponents the values inherent in their colonial past, in the tradition of government by law which was theirs under the British constitution, and in the strength and external security afforded by the British connection. They recognized the dangers threatening a future state founded in violence and disorder by a group of leaders many of whom were quite inexperienced in the art of government. And when their turn came to suffer in their persons and in their property and even by banishment or death, many of the Loyalists made the required sacrifice with a dignity and fortitude worthy of the highest admiration. What they lacked, what made them Loyalists rather than Revolutionists, was the other sort of courage and imagination. They saw the dangers ahead rather than the noble possibilities. They did not have the daring needed to strike for a better future even at the risk of losing a present good. They

lacked—many of them—a sufficient faith in mankind, in common, American mankind, to believe that out of disorder and violence, out of an inexperienced leadership and an undisciplined following, could come a stable and intelligent body politic. They were Loyalists, in short, because they had both the weakness and the strength of all true conservatives.

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