

Elder John Leland, Jeffersonian Itinerant

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INTRODUCTORY

NO STUDY, I believe, has ever been made of one of the most revealing of American folkways—that of ritual gifts to our chief executives. Whether the records and museum objects preserved at the National Archives and in the storerooms at Hyde Park and other presidential shrines would enable one to tell this story adequately, I do not know. If they did, and if the story *were* written, it would tell a good deal about the evolution of American manners and taste. It would even throw interesting sidelights on our economic history: in our agrarian age Presidents Jefferson and Jackson were given cheeses; in the age of industry and salesmanship President Truman is given sports togs and hand-painted neckties.

Elder John Leland is not often mentioned in histories of the United States, even the comprehensive ones. When he is, it is invariably in connection with the gift of an enormous cheese to President Jefferson on New Year's Day in 1802. This was not the first great cheese presented to an American hero, for as early as 1786 the whalers of Nantucket sent a 500-pound cheese to Lafayette in gratitude for his efforts to reduce French duties on American whale oil.¹ Nor was it the last or even the largest. The cheese presented to President Jackson in 1837 by admirers of his in New York State outweighed Leland's cheese by about 165 pounds,

¹ Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette between the American and the French Revolution*, Chicago, 1950, p. 254.

and for some reason it is much better known to history.² This vying of successive generations to produce the biggest cheese was a manifestation of the American spirit quite in line with our efforts to produce the biggest building, the biggest trust, and the biggest aircraft carrier. The meaning of Niagara Falls, the Mississippi River, and the Grand Canyon was early evident to Americans and has never been disregarded. They mean, as Oliver Wendell Holmes ruefully said in 1860, that Americans can *of course* "out-sail, out-run, out-fight, and checkmate all creation"; and so we have been addicted to superlatives in our language, to colossal folk heroes, and, for a time at least, to superhuman dosages in our medical practice. Dr. Benjamin Rush persuaded a couple of generations of American physicians that the physiology of our people was somehow on a grander scale than others', so that we should be purged, bled, and medicated in gargantuan amounts. The American urge toward the gigantic in art is well shown in John Banvard's panorama of the Mississippi in the 1840's. This celebrated painting, which exhibited "a View of Country over 3000 Miles in Length . . . from the Mouth of the Yellow Stone to the City of New Orleans," took up three miles of canvas specially woven at Lowell, Massachusetts, doubtless on the largest clothmaking machine in the world.

But if John Leland is best known for an exploit typical of our engaging and probably harmless desire to break records, he deserves to be remembered for a better reason. He played a substantial part in molding another American tradition that is full of meaning to all of us today—the separation of church and state in the United States. In 1774, when Leland was converted to the Baptist faith, the

² Benjamin Perley Poore, *Reminiscences of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis*, Philadelphia, etc., I, 186-7, with illustration of "The Great Cheese Levee" on Washington's Birthday, 1837.

Baptists were generally regarded as a set of ignorant enthusiasts, without social standing, without legal sanction for their religious services or for marriages performed by their ministers. In Virginia Baptist preachers were being regularly thrown into prison as strollers and vagabonds; mob actions breaking up their services went unpunished by the magistrates; their petitions to the legislature for relief from these oppressions were largely disregarded. In Massachusetts and Connecticut Baptists were fined and their property was distrained for taxes to pay Congregational ministers whose teachings were repugnant to them, and to build and repair meeting houses they would not attend. Much of Leland's sixty-seven year career as a Baptist evangelist was expended in fighting to remove these disabilities—not only for Baptists but for persons of all faiths, Christian and non-Christian, and even for those who held no recognized religious faith. When he died the battle for complete religious freedom in the United States had been very largely won, though this was not a battle in which there could ever be a final victory. As a reading of Canon Stokes' recent and monumental study of *Church and State in the United States* shows, new problems in the relations of civil and religious institutions continually arise, especially in the field of public education.³ Elder Leland's speeches and tracts do not bear directly on the current issues, but the spirit of his thinking does, for he was as courageous and resourceful a champion of the rights of conscience as America has produced.

In the long fight he waged Leland showed great tenacity of purpose and real intellectual breadth. He had still other commendable qualities, among them a gift of humor which endeared his audiences to him and which distinguishes his

³ Anson Phelps Stokes, *Church and State in the United States*, New York, 1950. See especially Volume III.

published writings from the great mass of religious and political oratory of the time. He "seldom held a congregation long without exciting a smile," a contemporary remarked;⁴ and like a gifted speaker of our own day, he was criticized by the unhumorous for treating serious matters lightly. Believing that "While you think with the wise, you will often find it expedient to speak with the vulgar,"⁵ he spoke and wrote in a plain style that is still readable. Holding throughout life to a primitively simple religious faith, he declared that metaphysical reasonings on theology always made him want to reach for his nightcap.⁶ To a friend who asked him to set down his creed, Leland replied that when he was twenty-four he could have replied "with great assurance; but now at 34 I am more doubtful; perhaps at 44, should I live so long, I may know less about it still, if less can be."⁷ In short, he declined the request; and it is noteworthy that his only theological discourse of any length was not published until after his death.⁸ He so disliked controversies over doctrine that when contentions arose in his own church—as they frequently did in those contentious days—he avoided them by moving to another town until they died "of old age."⁹

Questions [he wrote in his own old age] generally have two sides to them: and something can be said on both sides; indeed, some, like a cube, have six sides; yet there are many disputers who will never allow that the arguments of others have any weight in them: of course, *they* are always right, in their own view, and always triumph. Like a gander, if you

⁴ *The Writings of John Leland, including Some Events in His Life, Written by Himself*, edited by L. F. Greene, New York, 1845, p. 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 571.

⁷ To Robert Carter, 12 Feb. 1788 (MS, Carter Papers, Library of Congress; photostat in Virginia Baptist Historical Society, Richmond).

⁸ "The First Rise of Sin," *Writings*, pp. 125-70.

⁹ *Writings*, p. 586.

chase them ever so far, with the club of solid reason, they will turn and crow as if victorious.¹⁰

Leland's equable habit of mind sprang from a genuine diffidence of spirit. Unlike other men of his calling, he did not believe that either he or his denomination held a monopoly on religious truth. With Jefferson and Madison, who were his friends and political mentors, he held that there is positive good in a variety of beliefs. Uniformity is the dangerous thing, because it makes possible coercion of the few by the many. Free competition in matters of opinion and faith means security for all.¹¹

These rational principles were not acceptable to all of his colleagues. Though gentle and conciliatory by nature, Leland was too independent to run well in the lines of the Baptist church organization as it developed during his later years. In the early apostolic days he who had heard the call to preach, preached; there was no marked distinction between a preaching elder and his fellow members in a church society. Moreover each society was autonomous in respect to creed and discipline. Loose associations of churches were formed in the early days, but their function was not to govern the churches that composed them—only to spread information and to aid in the struggle for religious equality. All this was changed with the growth of the denomination and of its resources after 1800. Like other religious bodies, the Baptists began to put increasing stress on organization, on committees, and—to use a favorite phrase—on “associated Christian effort” as means of spreading the gospel tidings and doing good on a mass scale. These methods did not suit Leland's individualistic temperament. He either stood quietly aside or, on developments he felt he had to protest (such as the agitation against Sunday mails and the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 724.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 580.

foreign-mission crusade), he bucked the machine. A lone and self-reliant saver of souls, he found that the times were passing him by. Yet who now remembers any among the crowd of his bustling critics and adversaries?

EARLY LIFE AND CONVERSION; STATUS OF THE BAPTISTS ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

John Leland, fifth in descent from Henry Leland, who joined the church at Dorchester in 1653, probably soon after coming out to America, was born at Grafton in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 14 May 1754.¹² The family genealogy shows that the descendants of Henry were mostly farmers, occasionally cobblers, coopers, teachers, and soldiers. They were prolific and by 1800 were spread widely through New England. Some had by this time moved into the lands opened up after the Revolution in western New York, as John's own brother and father, both named James, did.

John's childhood and schooling appear to have been as typical of the times as his family was. He had bookish inclinations but little to gratify them with beyond the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, the three books his father owned.¹³ In 1772, when he was eighteen, he underwent some kind of religious experience, for, as he later wrote, "When I was returning from my frolics or evening diversions, the following words would sound from the skies, 'You are not about the work which you have got to do.'"¹⁴ Soon afterwards Elhanan Winchester, later a noted Universalist evangelist but at this time a Baptist, came to Grafton and "preached

¹² All genealogical facts are drawn from *The Leland Magazine, or a Genealogical Record of Henry Leland, and His Descendants . . . from 1653 to 1850*, Boston, 1850.

¹³ George N. Brigg's recollections of Leland, printed in William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, VI, New York, 1860, p. 178.

¹⁴ *Writings*, p. 10.

and prayed to the astonishment of the people." Concentrating now on religious studies, Leland began to discover talents of his own as a preacher which were encouraged by his fellow-townsmen. In June, 1774, he was baptized by Elder Noah Alden of nearby Bellingham, and commenced soon afterwards "a volunteer for Christ."¹⁵

The distinguishing feature of Leland's conversion was its lack of morbid symptoms. "Without any great horror of conscience or fear of hell, the wealth and pleasures of this world all died in my esteem." His conviction, he afterwards declared, "was rather more rational than alarming"; the whole affair had been happy rather than upsetting.¹⁶

Leland continued to preach locally and in the spring of 1775 was formally licensed for preaching by the Bellingham church. The winter and spring of 1775-1776 he spent on a long itineration to and from Virginia. In September 1776 he married Miss Sally Devine of Hopkinton "and immediately started with her to Virginia."¹⁷ Here in the Virginia Piedmont he was to have his home and headquarters for nearly fifteen years; and here he was to become, as an authoritative early Baptist historian wrote, "probably the most popular [preacher] of any who ever resided in this State."¹⁸

The years of John Leland's youth were years of religious unrest in New England and indeed throughout the American colonies. If the main impact of the Great Awakening had spent its force, the results were not yet by any means all in. Inroads on the Congregational monopoly in Massachusetts and Connecticut continued up to and during the Revolution,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-8.

¹⁶ Letter to John Taylor, 26 Jan. 1832 (*Baptist Chronicle*, III [1832], 44).

¹⁷ *Writings*, p. 19.

¹⁸ Robert B. Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia*, edited by G. W. Beale, Richmond, 1894, pp. 206-7. Semple's *History* was first published in 1810, and the author probably knew Leland personally.

and the evangelical Baptist faith accounted for many who separated from the churches of the "standing order" because of the dry and formal fare provided in those churches. The early preaching success of young Leland and of others who recorded similar experiences shows how hungry the dwellers in isolated New England villages were for spiritual nourishment.¹⁹ Filled with zeal, itinerant evangelists struck out in all directions. In the year of Leland's birth Shubal Stearns, a "Separate Baptist," left Tolland, Connecticut, for Virginia, conducted revivals in Berkeley and Hampshire Counties, and in 1755 organized a Baptist Church in Guilford County, North Carolina. Stearns and his associates, says Semple, kindled "a fire which soon began to burn brightly indeed, spreading in a few years over Virginia, North and South Carolina and Georgia."²⁰ Leland was to join in the work when it was reaching a crest of success in Virginia, and was to help carry it to a still higher crest.

The distinctive principle of Baptist doctrine was (and is) baptism upon a declaration of faith as a condition of church fellowship. Baptism, despite its emotional accompaniments in Baptist practice, merely *symbolizes* regeneration; it does not "bestow or condition" it. Regeneration is and very properly should be, according to Baptists, a conscious experience, voluntarily and responsibly accepted.

¹⁹ Isaac Backus' experience in breaking away from a Congregationalist church in Connecticut, spending a decade in the status of a Separatist or New Light preacher, and finally accepting the Baptist creed and establishing the first Baptist church in Middleborough, Massachusetts (1756), is very fully recorded in Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of the Rev. Isaac Backus*, Boston, 1859, chs. II-IX, and reveals much of the religious temper of the time. So does the very different case of William Plumer (later United States senator and governor of New Hampshire), who at the age of twenty joined one of the earliest Baptist societies in New Hampshire, at Epping, in 1779. "From a convert he became first an exhorter, and then a preacher, though never regularly ordained." He itinerated around the state and "was eminently successful wherever he went." But within a year he was seized with spiritual doubts which "terminated in deism" (William Plumer, Junior, *Life of William Plumer*, Boston, 1856, ch. II).

²⁰ *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, p. 14. See Wesley M. Gewehr, *The Great Awakening in Virginia*, Durham, N. C., 1930, ch. V, "The Baptist Revival." On Stearns see *DAB*.

Children are of course incapable of such an experience. Infant baptism is therefore spiritually meaningless and nothing more or less than an act of coercion on the part of the parents. How preposterous that the symbol should antedate by years the thing symbolized or that the rite should be performed "without any assurance that the thing symbolized would ever occur!"²¹ The name "Anabaptists" ("re-baptizers") commonly attached to members of this faith in the early laws of Massachusetts and Virginia shows how poorly the lawmakers understood Baptist belief. The Baptists themselves disliked this inaccurate term exceedingly, preferring the longer but accurate name "Antipedobaptists."

This much theology is required to understand the steady and uncompromising stand of the Baptists against all ties between church and state. Infant baptism had always been practiced by established religions—by the Roman Church in the Middle Ages, by the Anglicans in England and Virginia, by the Congregationalists in Massachusetts and Connecticut. It is a device that makes church affiliation co-extensive with the population. There can be no dissent except under penalties that vary in weight according to the spirit of the time and place. "Believers' baptism," on the other hand, implies that the church comprises only those who *do* believe and have come forward as volunteers to declare that fact, having settled the matter between themselves and their God without civil or even parental compulsion.

No national church [wrote Leland in 1790], can in its organization, be the Gospel Church. A national church takes in the whole nation, and no more; whereas, the Gospel Church, takes in no nation, but those who fear God, and work righteousness in every nation. The notion of a Christian commonwealth, should be exploded forever. . . . If all the souls in a government, were saints of God, should they be formed into a

²¹ A. H. Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States* (American Church History Series, II), 4th edn., New York, 1902, p. 2.

society by law, that society could [would?] not be a Gospel Church, but a creature of state.²²

Thus arose the historic connection between the Baptist faith and the struggle for religious freedom in America—a connection often mentioned but seldom adequately explained. In 1611 John Smyth, the leader of a group of exiled English Baptists in Amsterdam, summed up the Baptist view of the relations of church and state with memorable clarity and force:

That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine, but to leave Christian religion free to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xiii), injuries, and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the king and lawgiver of the church and conscience (James iv. 12).²³

All that Roger Williams, John Clarke, Isaac Backus, and John Leland said on this subject during the next two centuries is foreshadowed in Smyth's masterly statement of principle.

No principle could of course more flatly contradict the assumptions upon which the Puritan theocracy in Massachusetts rested. There the civil and ecclesiastical authorities were regarded as branches of the same tree of righteousness, and a separation of them was hardly conceivable to Cotton or Winthrop. Professor Miller observes that after Williams and Cotton had "debated the question of 'persecution' through several hundred pages . . . it is very doubtful whether Cotton had even begun to see his adversary's point."²⁴ Williams (who was banished) and Clarke (who was imprisoned when on a visit from Rhode Island to Massachusetts) may have made little impression on the theoc-

²² *Writings*, p. 107.

²³ Newman, *Hist. of the Baptist Churches*, p. 44.

²⁴ *The Puritans*, ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, New York, etc., 1938, p. 186.

racy, but time, political events in England, and the abatement of religious fervor in New England did. After 1680 there were no more whippings and banishments, and in 1718 the Mathers themselves officiated at the installation of a minister in the First Baptist Church of Boston. Cotton Mather's sermon was a plea for unity, brotherly love, and the toleration of differences respecting doctrine!²⁵

Though in 1691 the second charter of Massachusetts granted liberty of conscience to all Protestants, dissenters were still taxed for the support of Congregational ministers and the building and repair of Congregational meeting houses. A statute of 1728 exempted Baptists and Quakers from these taxes under certain conditions, the most vexatious of which was that those exempted must live within five miles of their regular place of religious meeting.²⁶ This act was renewed and modified from time to time before the Revolution. However altered, it always required certification of the religious sincerity and faithfulness of those exempted, and their names had to be "exhibited" annually to the town authorities.²⁷ This humble obeisance to the civil power was of course unsatisfactory to Baptists of tender conscience; many of them refused to comply and were imprisoned, fined, and otherwise coerced into compliance. The second volume of Isaac Backus' *History* is largely devoted to their sufferings.²⁸

Meanwhile the Baptists had grown greatly in numbers, had founded a college at Providence, and had organized an

²⁵ Isaac Backus, *An Abridgment of the Church History of New-England from 1602 to 1804*, Boston, 1804, p. 146; Newman, *Hist. of the Baptist Churches*, p. 196.

²⁶ Backus, *Abridgment*, pp. 150-1.

²⁷ For the Act of 1757, which remained in force until 1770, see Henry S. Burrage, *A History of the Baptists in New England*, Philadelphia, 1894, pp. 107-8.

²⁸ Isaac Backus, *A History of New England, with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, Boston, 1777-96. Volume II was published in 1784 and covers the years 1690-1784.

association of their churches, the immediate object of which was to remove the disabilities they labored under.²⁹ The skill and pertinacity of the Baptists in fighting for equal rights are revealed in an incident of 1774, the year of Leland's conversion. In September and October of that year the first Continental Congress sat in Philadelphia to concert measures of resistance to the oppressive acts of the British Parliament. The Warren Association resolved to send agents to point out to the Congress the oppressions of the Baptists under certain acts of the Massachusetts legislature. The agents chosen were Isaac Backus and James Manning, president of Rhode Island College. On the advice of friends in Philadelphia, a conference was arranged between the Baptist emissaries and the Massachusetts delegates to Congress—the two Adamses, Thomas Cushing, and Robert Treat Paine. Accompanying Backus and Manning were Israel Pemberton and (according to the highly irritated John Adams) “a great number of Quakers . . . with their broad-brimmed beavers on their heads.” Manning read a remarkable memorial in which “the great Mr. Locke” was quoted on the nature of the civil compact, and since its logic was irrefutable and current cases of religious persecution could be cited, the Massachusetts delegates could only splutter about bringing Quakers of doubtful patriotism into the case. Paine at first asserted, “There was nothing of conscience in the matter; it was only a contending about paying a little money.” But the other delegates—all of them good Congregationalists—felt a little shamefaced. After a four-hour session, Backus reported, they promised “to do what they could for our relief.” How little they thought could be done is revealed in John Adams' observa-

²⁹ Rhode Island College (now Brown University) was chartered in 1764 and began instruction in the following year. The Warren (R. I.) Baptist Association, which included churches in Massachusetts, was organized in 1768.

tion that "we might as well expect a change in the solar system, as to expect" Massachusetts to give up its ecclesiastical establishment. Afterwards Paine spread reports that the Baptists were lukewarm or secretly hostile to the patriotic cause. After talking with Paine, the Congregational minister Ezra Stiles accepted this view. But even Stiles felt the Baptists had a true grievance in the affair of the Ashfield church. At Ashfield, where the Baptists already had a meeting house, their lands had been seized and sold in an "insulting, unchristian & . . . offensive manner" when they refused to pay taxes for building a Congregational meeting house.³⁰

The plight of the Ashfield Baptists and the futile efforts of Backus to obtain relief from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and the next General Court were undoubtedly well known to Leland soon after entering on his preaching career. These things spread quickly among the faithful. Though Leland was about to transfer his activities to Virginia, he went forth prepared not only to carry gospel tidings to sinners but to battle for complete religious freedom and equality.

IN VIRGINIA (1776-1791): ITINERANT AND LOBBYIST

The Lelands arrived at Mountpony in Culpeper County early in 1777. In August Leland "was ordained by the choice of the church, without the imposition of the hands of a Presbytery."³¹ During the following winter he itinerated

³⁰ Hovey, *Backus*, ch. XV; John Adams, *Works*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, Boston, 1850-56, II, 397-400; Ezra Stiles, *Literary Diary*, ed. Franklin B. Dexter, New York, 1901, I, 472-5.

³¹ *Writings*, p. 19. Nine years later he was ordained by laying-on of hands (certificate dated 24 June 1786 at Orange, Virginia, signed by Nathaniel Saunders, John Waller, and John Price; this MS is among the Records of the First Baptist Church of Cheshire, Mass., in the custody of its secretary, Miss Mildred E. Dunn). A legendary version of this second ordination has often been related. In it Leland as the candidate renders the "three staunch Calvinists" who examine him ridiculous by a pyrotechnical display of wit and blunt common sense. I have not seen it in print earlier than Ellen M. Raynor and Emma L. Peticlere's *History of the Town of Cheshire, Berkshire County, Mass.*, Holyoke and New York, 1885, pp. 184-6; but it is there said to be taken from "the *Baptist Weekly*."

southward to the Peedee River in South Carolina, and after returning he moved to Orange County, which remained his home from 1778 to 1791. Actually he could have passed relatively little time at home, for according to records collected by Semple, he seems to have served from time to time half a dozen churches in Orange, Louisa, Culpeper, and Spotsylvania Counties, some of which he founded. He says himself that he frequently preached twelve or fourteen times a week, and a favorite practice was to appoint "a string of meetings," such as the one he formed in 1779 from Orange to York, 120 miles from end to end.³² His trips were ordinarily performed on horseback, but he was a stout walker too. In a letter of reminiscence written when he was seventy-six, he said: "I cannot walk as I once could. On the 10th day of June, 1779, I walked on foot from Orange into Culpeper, 20 miles, and preached a funeral sermon of a man who fell from a fence and broke his neck, and walked back again the same day: but I could not do the like now, if every man in Culpeper was to break his neck."³³

His popularity and repute as a preacher grew steadily during these years. "The world is full of anecdotes of him," said one of his younger contemporaries,³⁴ and many that have been preserved relate to his resourcefulness in the practice of his calling. A characteristic one tells how he outdid an Episcopal clergyman in Virginia who argued in favor of state support for ministers because they have to spend so much time preparing sermons. Leland answered that he could expound the Scriptures without special preparation, and the Episcopalian challenged him to preach on a text to be provided just before beginning his sermon. Leland went into the pulpit and was handed a text which proved to

³² *Writings*, p. 19.

³³ To Uriel B. Chambers, 25 June 1830 (*Religious Herald*, 1 Oct. 1830, p. 1).

³⁴ T. B. Welch, in Sprague, *Annals*, VI, 185.

be Numbers 22: 21, "And Balaam saddled his ass." "Mr. Leland first commented on the account from which the text was taken, and then said he should divide his subject into three parts: 1st, Balaam, as a false prophet, represents a hireling clergy. 2d, the saddle represents their enormous salaries, and 3d, the dumb ass represents the people who will bear such a load." This was a theme he could develop with no difficulty whatever.³⁵

Leland's simple but graphic language, his avoidance of doctrinal refinements, his humor, and his sincerity that stopped well short of the firebreathing zeal of some of his associates, made him highly acceptable to backcountry audiences in northern and eastern Virginia. But like many of his associates he occasionally encountered threats and obstructions from those who feared or disliked evangelists of any sort. Leland tells, for example, of baptizing a woman while her husband was on the river bank threatening to shoot him, and of another occasion when Mrs. Leland's quick thinking prevented a meeting from being shot up by an enraged son of the family in whose home it was being held.³⁶

These incidents are typical of the religious climate of the time. There were no Baptists in Virginia before 1714, and they were negligible in numbers until mid-century. Thus they did not suffer under the harsh early Virginia laws enforcing conformity to the Anglican establishment, for by the terms of the English Toleration Act of 1689 dissenting ministers in Virginia could obtain licenses qualifying them to preach in specified places. The Presbyterians were quick to take advantage of this, and by about 1750, notably as a

³⁵ This story seems to have been first recorded in Josiah G. Holland, *History of Western Massachusetts*, Springfield, 1855, II, 477. It is told elsewhere with a New England setting, Leland's adversary being a Congregational clergyman who will not permit his meeting house to be used by Baptists unless Leland successfully meets the challenge. See Welch's reminiscences of Leland cited in the preceding note.

³⁶ *Writings*, p. 27.

result of Samuel Davies' efforts, they were strongly entrenched in Hanover and adjacent counties between the upper James and the upper Rappahannock.³⁷ By the time Davies left Virginia (1759) the Baptists were moving into the same area and around it and became, as Gewehr says, "the revivers of the revival." The Presbyterians insisted on trained ministers who taught an elaborate doctrine, but anyone who had had a "call" could start up as a Baptist evangelizer, just as Leland had. This gave the Baptists a great advantage in competing for converts among an unlettered population. "These people needed a distinctive symbol and a comparatively formless faith; they found the one in adult baptism by immersion, and the other in the wide compass of Bible teaching, wherein the devout and emotional soul finds what it seeks." Baptist revivalism "supplied the demands of their thought and their emotion, and on a plane congenial to their habit of speech and of life."³⁸ In his sketch of the early history of the Baptists in Virginia, Leland says that "the work among them was very noisy," and he describes in detail the behavior of crowds at revivals swept by mass hysteria. On these occasions "Such a heavenly confusion among the preachers, and such a celestial discord among the people, destroy all articulation, so that the understanding is not edified; but the awful echo, sounding in the ears, and the objects in great distress, and great raptures before the eyes, raise great emotion in the heart. Some of the ministers rather oppose this work, others call it a little in question, and some fan it with all their might."³⁹ Leland's tolerant yet cautious attitude seems to place him in the middle category.

³⁷ See Gewehr, *Great Awakening in Va.*, ch. IV, with map facing p. 106.

³⁸ William T. Thom, *The Struggle for Religious Freedom in Virginia: The Baptists*, Baltimore, 1900, pp. 32-3.

³⁹ "The Virginia Chronicle" (first published at Fredericksburg and also at Norfolk, 1790); *Writings*, pp. 105, 115.

The success of the Baptist revivalists was phenomenal in the years just before the Revolution.⁴⁰ The complacency and negligence of the clergy of the established order contributed to it. From plentiful evidence it appears that Leland's account of the condition of Virginia Anglicanism is not exaggerated. "The preachers of that order, in Virginia, for the most part," he wrote in 1790, explaining that his remarks applied to the period before the Revolution, "not only plead for theatrical amusements, and what they call civil mirth, but their preaching is dry and barren, containing little else but morality. The great doctrines of universal depravity, redemption by the blood of Christ, regeneration, faith, repentance and self-denial, are but seldom preached by them, and, when they meddle with them, it is in such a superficial manner, as if they were nothing but things of course."⁴¹

For a time it was possible for the Anglicans to pretend that the activities of the revivalists were merely bothersome and not important. Jonathan Boucher said in a sermon preached in Caroline County in 1771 that the "swarms of separatists who have sprung up among us within the last seven years, under the name of anabaptists and new-lights" are like gnats: they make a disagreeable noise and neither give pleasure nor do good, but "they do not want either the disposition or the ability of those little insignificant animals to tease, to sting, and to torment."⁴² Others took a more serious view and resorted to direct action. When in this same year John Waller (one of those who participated later in Leland's ordination) came to preach the new message of Baptist regeneration in Caroline County, the Reverend

⁴⁰ For figures on the increase of churches and membership, see Gewehr, *Great Awakening*, p. 117.

⁴¹ *Writings*, pp. 108-9.

⁴² *A View of the Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution; in Thirteen Discourses*, London, 1797, p. 100.

Andrew Moreton, rector of Drysdale Parish, broke up Waller's meeting with the aid of the sheriff and a couple of others, the rector himself running a switch into Waller's mouth while the other men flogged him.⁴³ The Baptists must have been deeply gratified when, three years later, Edmund Pendleton and the other vestrymen of Drysdale Parish petitioned the Virginia Council of State to unfrock the brutal Moreton because of his "divers Immoralities."⁴⁴

By this time the civil authorities could no longer overlook the goings-on along the back roads and the river banks of the colony. The revivalists not only broke up families and conducted night meetings among the slaves,⁴⁵ but they systematically flouted the laws. Unlike the Presbyterians, the Baptist itinerants refused to apply for licenses qualifying them to preach in given places. To accept licenses from the civil power to preach God's word was to practice what they held to be "a species of idolatry."⁴⁶ They therefore sought persecution, and though some of the more enlightened justices (for example, Edmund Pendleton of Caroline) realized that fact, they had to do something about these zealots who, in the eyes of the law, were simply vagabonds and disturbers of the peace. So they jailed and fined them; the preachers continued to preach through the prison bars and

⁴³ This account is from Morgan Edwards' "Materials towards a History of the Baptists in the Province of Virginia," as quoted in David J. Mays, *Edmund Pendleton, 1721-1803: A Biography*, Cambridge, 1952, I, 263.

⁴⁴ Mays, *Pendleton*, I, 263.

⁴⁵ An advertisement in Purdie's *Virginia Gazette*, 1 May 1778, speaks volumes on the topic of Baptist evangelizing among the slaves. It reads as follows: "Run away from the subscriber, living in *Brunswick* county, two negro fellows formerly the property of the Rev. *John Dixon*, viz. JACK, a large likely fellow about five feet eleven inches high, dressed in a *Virginia* cloth jacket and breeches, with a furred cap. NAT, about five feet ten inches high, with thin lips, pretends to be very religious, and is a *Baptist teacher*. They got away last night at *Capahosick* ferry, ironed together. I will give FIFTY DOLLARS reward for each to any person that will secure them in *Williamsburg* jail. TURNER BYNAM. N.B. I expect they will be lurking about Mr. *John Dixon's* quarters in *Gloucester*."

⁴⁶ Leland, *Writings*, p. 106, note.

after they were released; and the way was prepared for the overthrow of a system which prevented men from teaching religious truth as they understood it.⁴⁷

The Baptists had resorted to political action in their own behalf soon after they gained enough strength to become organized. Their petitions to the legislature over the past several years had led to the drafting of a new toleration bill in 1772. But since the bill prohibited religious meetings at night and had other objectionable features, it was not satisfactory to any party and did not pass.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the political drift of the times greatly favored the dissenters. Important leaders of the Revolutionary movement in Virginia—Mason, Jefferson, and Madison among them—were not only aware of the inconsistency between the natural rights philosophy and the penalties attached to religious dissent, but, unlike the New England leaders, were determined to do something about it. The first stride forward was made in the Declaration of Rights prefixed to the Virginia Constitution of 1776. The final (16th) article of that great state paper as drafted by George Mason provided that since “religion, or the duty we owe to our Creator, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence . . . all men should enjoy the fullest toleration in the exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience.” For Mason’s wording “should enjoy the fullest toleration,” young James Madison succeeded in substituting the words “are entitled to the full and free exercise.”⁴⁹ Madison’s alteration was of great

⁴⁷ The sufferings of the Baptists in Virginia are described and recorded by Leland in his “Virginia Chronicle,” by Gewehr, by Charles F. James in his *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia*, Lynchburg, 1900, and most extensively by Lewis Peyton Little in his *Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia*, Lynchburg, 1938.

⁴⁸ James, *Documentary History*, pp. 34-5; H. J. Eckenrode, *Separation of Church and State in Virginia*, Richmond, 1910, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁹ William C. Rives, *History of the Life and Times of James Madison*, Boston, 1859-68, I, 140-3.

and immediate significance, for while toleration implies a favor granted, equality recognizes an inalienable right. The Baptists were keenly aware of the distinction and quickly took their position on this rock. A flood of petitions deluged the legislature when it convened the next fall: they "earnestly" requested and expected, to borrow the wording of one of them, "that this House will go on to complete what is so nobly begun," by abolishing "all church establishments" in Virginia.⁵⁰ These petitions, said Jefferson, who was assigned to draft the legislation requested, "brought on the severest contests in which I have ever been engaged."⁵¹ The result was that the act as passed in December accomplished by no means all that the petitioners or Jefferson desired. Though it exempted dissenters from religious taxes, it left the regulation of the established church in the hands of the government and expressly reserved the question "Whether a general assessment should not be established by law, on every one, to the support of the pastor of his choice; or whether all should be left to voluntary contributions."⁵² The Baptists promptly made their sentiments on this point known. At a meeting that must have been called expressly for the purpose, since it was held on Christmas Day, "an Association of Ministers and Delegates" of the Baptist churches, convened at Dover in Goochland, drew up a memorial approving the new law as far as it went. But on the question of a general assessment, "We believe that Preachers should be supported only by *voluntary Contributions* from the People." The memorialists then quoted the fourth article of the Declaration of Rights, pointing out that it was inconsistent with *any* system of religious taxation:

⁵⁰ Petition from Prince Edward county, quoted in James, *Documentary History*, p. 69.

⁵¹ Jefferson, "Autobiography," *Writings*, ed. A. E. Bergh, Washington, 1907, I, 57. For an account of these "contests" see *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, Princeton, 1950-, I, 525-9, with accompanying documents.

⁵² Jefferson, "Autobiography," *Writings*, ed. Bergh, I, 58.

"No Man or set of Men are entituled to exclusive or seperate Emoluments or Priveleges from the Community but in consideration of public Services." If, therefore, the State provides a Support for Preachers of the Gospel, and they receive it in Consideration of their Services, they must certainly when they Preach act as Officers of the State, and ought to be Accountable thereto for their Conduct. . . . The Consequence of this is, that those whom the State employs in its Service, it has a right to *regulate* and *dictate to*; it may judge and determine *who* shall preach; *when* and *where* they shall preach; and *what* they must preach. The *mutal obligations* between Preachers and the Societies they belong to . . . must be evidently weakened—Yea, farewell to the last Article of the Bill of Rights! Farewel to "the free exercise of Religion."⁵³

This able memorial was sent on to Jefferson, among whose papers it remains. It was fully in accord with his own views, and he may have been responsible for its publication in the *Virginia Gazette* as the earliest Baptist declaration of principles to find a place in a Virginia newspaper.⁵⁴ It may also have been the occasion for the first direct contact between Jefferson and the Baptists, who remained his zealous supporters from 1776 to the end of his political career.

This was the state of affairs when Leland took up his work in Virginia. The popular debate on the question of full or limited religious freedom was to go on for nine years, with now one party in the ascendant and now the other. In June, 1779, Jefferson submitted a bill for religious freedom as part of the famous Revisal of the Laws. The Baptists promptly and heartily endorsed it,⁵⁵ but attempts to make

⁵³ *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, I, 660-1.

⁵⁴ Dixon and Hunter's *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), 28 March 1777.

⁵⁵ Semple, *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, p. 89 (Minutes of Association meeting, Oct. 1779). For a claim that an official Baptist committee suggested to Jefferson and Madison the form of a bill for religious freedom as early as 1777, see Robert B. C. Howell, *The Early Baptists of Virginia*, Philadelphia [1864?], pp. 167-8. There is some plausibility in the claim (Jefferson himself having stated that he drafted the bills in 1777), but no documentary evidence for it. The proceedings of the annual Association meeting in Apr., 1777, were not available even to Semple in 1810.

it law in this and the following session failed, and it was not until after the question of general assessment was finally settled in 1785 that the celebrated Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was adopted.⁵⁶ In November, 1779, George Mason presented a bill, which was passed a month later, abolishing tithes for good, though it left the Established Church in possession of extensive public lands.⁵⁷ Since the agitation for a general assessment continued, this law was not too meaningful.

After Jefferson's retirement from Virginia politics in 1781, Madison came forward to fight and finally to crush conservative efforts to restore a financial connection between the state government and the churches. From his training under Witherspoon at Princeton and from his early and painful observation of religious persecution in Virginia, it was to be expected that Madison would sympathize with the dissenters.⁵⁸ His first contribution to their relief, as we have seen, was his rephrasing of the religious freedom article in the Declaration of Rights. Just as important, and much more laborious, was his long legislative duel with Patrick Henry over the scheme of a general assessment for the support of teachers of religion. In this fight, which reached a climax late in 1784 that was sustained until early 1786, the Baptists were at first Madison's only allies. Later the Presbyterians joined them, and the avalanche of petitions following the circulation of Madison's great *Memorial and Remonstrance* "suffocated" (as Mr. Brant says) Henry's bill late in 1785. Seizing this favorable opportunity, Madison introduced Jefferson's bill for religious freedom.

⁵⁶ See *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, II, 545-53.

⁵⁷ Eckenrode, *Separation of Church and State*, pp. 61-4.

⁵⁸ See Madison's remarkable letter to William Bradford of Philadelphia, 24 Jan. 1774, especially the paragraph beginning "I want again to breathe your free air" (Rives, *Madison*, I, 44). See also "James Madison's Autobiography," ed. Douglass Adair, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., II (1945), 198-9.

It was passed in January, 1786, and Madison wrote to its author, then the American minister in Paris, that its provisions "have in this country extinguished forever the ambitious hope of making laws for the human mind."⁵⁹

It is difficult to say just what part John Leland had in this campaign in which philosopher-statesmen and Baptist evangelists collaborated. About his sentiments there can be no question, and there is little doubt that he normally attended and participated in the deliberations of the General Association and its successor (after 1783), the General Committee. Unfortunately the minutes of these bodies are not extant before the printed series began in 1790. Though Semple quotes and paraphrases the earlier manuscript minutes, it is clear that he gives nothing like a complete record. And since Leland himself says nothing of his share in the work, we do not know just when and how he became active. In the fragmentary records furnished by Semple, Leland first appears as a legislative agent in 1786, associated with the veteran Reuben Ford in an effort to obtain repeal of the act incorporating the Episcopal Church.⁶⁰ That act had been passed in December, 1784, in a quick strategic move by friends of the Church to preserve for it the extensive property it held under the old establishment. With the threat of a general assessment ended, the Baptists now moved against the privileged position conferred on the Episcopal Church by the Incorporation Act. Ford and Leland carried with them to the legislature in the fall of 1786 a petition which has the ring of Leland's style and

⁵⁹ Madison to Jefferson, 22 Jan. 1786 (Madison, *Writings*, ed. Gaillard Hunt, New York, 1900-10, II, 214-26). The struggle over general assessment and its final defeat have been described by all of Madison's biographers; a brief and authoritative account is that by Irving Brant in "Madison: On the Separation of Church and State," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., VIII (1948), 7-11. See also Eckenrode, *Separation of Church and State*, ch. V; James, *Documentary History*, chs. X-XI.

⁶⁰ Semple, *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, p. 98.

which is one of the most forceful expressions of principles that the long controversy in Virginia produced. After setting forth the intent of the last article of the Declaration of Rights and showing the inconsistency of the Act of Incorporation with that intent, the petition goes on to say that the Act appears to cast great contempt upon the divine Author of our Religion, whose Kingdom is not of this world, and Secondly, to give all the property of the State established church to one Society, not more virtuous, nor deserving than other Societies in the Commonwealth, appears contrary to justice, and the express words of the IV Art. of the Bill of Rights, which prohibits rewards or emoluments to any Man, or set of men, except for services rendered the State; and what services that Church has rendered the State, either by her Clergy or Laity, more than other Churches have done, we no [know] not.

If truth is great, and will prevail if left to itself (as declared in the Act Establishing Religious Freedom) we wish it may be so left, which is the only way to convince the gazing world, that Disciples do not follow Christ for Loaves, and that Preachers do not preach for Benefices.⁶¹

At the next meeting of the General Committee, in August, 1787, Ford and Leland were able to report that the principal provisions of the Act of Incorporation had been repealed.⁶² The repeal, however, left open the question of just what was to be done with the glebe lands of the Church. The Baptists wished these to be confiscated and sold and the income used for public purposes, but the legislature was not ready to go that far. A committee consisting of Leland, Waller, and Eli Clay was appointed by the General Committee in 1788 to wait on the Assembly to promote this aim, but not until 1799, after unrelenting pressure by the Baptists for more than a decade, was it accomplished and the stump of the venerable Establishment rooted out.⁶³

⁶¹ Eckenrode, *Separation of Church and State*, p. 119.

⁶² Semple, *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, p. 99; see Eckenrode, *Separation of Church and State*, ch. VI.

⁶³ Semple, *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, pp. 102-3. See Eckenrode, *Separation of Church and State*, ch. VII. There was prolonged litigation before the matter was closed.

The last record of Leland's activity as a lobbyist in Virginia is found in the printed *Minutes* of the General Committee meeting of 8 May 1790, when he was "allowed the sum of £4 0 0 for eight days service, in waiting on the Assembly with our petition" favoring the sale of the glebes. He had left Virginia before the next annual meeting, but not before he had received valuable lessons in political action from his fellow Baptists and in political philosophy from Jefferson and Madison. The Baptists in Virginia early learned effective techniques to gain their ends—techniques that may be characterized as either "democratic" or "high-pressure" according to one's point of view. At any rate they seem to the inquiring student startlingly modern.

The status of the Baptists in 1791 was wonderfully improved over what it had been when Leland had come there as a young exhorter in 1776. They had won much besides political and religious equality. Condemned as vagrants, despised as the dregs of society, and feared as outlandish creatures before 1776, they now counted among their supporters many substantial and respectable families. The conversion of Robert Carter of Nomini Hall to the Baptist faith in 1778 was symbolical of the change. Never doing things by halves, Carter took a very active part in Baptist work. He donated money to build meeting houses and to print tracts; he helped educate promising young men for the ministry.⁶⁴ With aid of this sort the Baptists began to overcome their own educational deficiencies, and their eagerness to do so is evinced by the appointment of a committee in 1788 to form plans for a Baptist "seminary of learning." John Leland and Robert Carter were both named to this committee.⁶⁵ At the same meeting Leland was one of a committee of six named to collect materials

⁶⁴ Louis Morton, *Robert Carter of Nomini Hall*, Williamsburg, 1945, ch. X.

⁶⁵ Semple, *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, p. 104.

for a history of the Baptists in Virginia. This project signified maturity and justifiable pride on the part of the denomination, and Leland, for one, threw himself into the task with enthusiasm.⁶⁶ The immediate result was the publication of his *Virginia Chronicle: With Judicious and Critical Remarks under XXIV Heads*, in 1790, a tract of forty-six pages which surveys in a lively manner the religious sects in Virginia and especially the progress of the Baptists there. But Leland collected other materials and evidently wrote them up, for the earliest history of the Baptists in Virginia, that by Semple, several times refers to "Mr. Leland's . . . manuscript collection" and "the Leland manuscript" as sources.⁶⁷ Unfortunately these are not now known to exist.

Upon concluding his account of the Baptist revival of 1785-1791, in which John Leland had played a formidable part,⁶⁸ Semple points out one exceedingly important result of the Baptists' increase in numbers and respectability. "Their preachers became much more correct in their manner of preaching. A great many odd tones, disgusting whoops and awkward gestures were disused. In their matter, also, they had more of sound sense and strong reasoning. Their zeal was less mixed with enthusiasm, and their piety became more rational."⁶⁹ Judging from the tone and content of Leland's published writings, it is proper to suppose that his influence from the beginning had been toward "rational piety" rather than wild-eyed "enthusiasm." Semple testifies that though Leland's "school learning" was not great, his vigor of mind, wide reading, and extraordinarily retentive memory overcame this deficiency. "It is probable that his

⁶⁶ Semple, *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, pp. 104, 106.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. ix, 444, 445.

⁶⁸ In his autobiographical sketch Leland says that he baptized "about 400" persons between Oct., 1787, and March, 1789, (*Writings*, p. 27).

⁶⁹ *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, p. 59.

knowledge derived from books at this day, taken in the aggregate, is surpassed by few. His preaching, though immethodical and eccentric, is generally warm, wise and evangelical. There are not many preachers who have so great a command of the attention and of the feelings of their auditory." Some observers, Semple continues, have thought Leland a little "theatrical," and his "free and jocund manners have excited the suspicions of some that he wanted serious piety. His intimate friends are confident that these are groundless suspicions. They believe that among his other singularities he is singularly pious."⁷⁰

The most numerous sect in Virginia by 1790, and firmly united in the long effort to pull down the Establishment, the Baptists were divided on two momentous issues of the day—Negro slavery and ratification of the Federal Constitution. Leland's position on the latter issue was of critical importance and is reserved for separate treatment. His attitude toward slavery may be briefly described here.

From the outset the Baptists had received slaves into the fold, not distinguishing them from their masters in spiritual affairs. "Liberty of conscience, in matters of religion," Leland asserted in his *Virginia Chronicle*, "is the right of slaves, beyond contradiction; and yet, many masters and overseers will whip and torture the poor creatures for going to meeting, even at night, when the labor of the day is over."⁷¹ Night meetings among slaves had of course been one of the principal objections of respectable Virginians to revivalist activity, and it was an objection not likely to be overcome soon. Leland's view of the slavery problem is, however, realistic as well as sympathetic. Admitting that "The whole scene of slavery is pregnant with enormous

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁷¹ *Writings*, p. 95.

evils" for all the parties involved, he sees no ready way to alter it. But after pointing out the appalling difficulties in the way of emancipation, he observes, "If we were slaves in Africa, how should we reprobate such reasoning as would rob us of our liberty. It is a question, whether men had not better lose all their property, than deprive an individual of his birth-right blessing—freedom. If a political system is such, that common justice cannot be administered without innovation, the sooner such a system is destroyed, the better for the people."⁷² In 1789 the Baptist General Committee took steps to formulate an official policy on slavery. But the *Minutes* of the 1790 meeting relate that "The Rev. Brethren appointed to form, and bring in a resolution, to the quere, respecting hereditary slavery, reported, that they could not agree in their opinions upon the subject . . . but agreed to lay the weight thereof, on the Reverend John Leeland, who brought in a resolution which was agreed to." Leland's resolution reads: "Resolved, That slavery, is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature, and is inconsistent with a republican government; and we therefore recommend it to our brethren to make use of every legal measure, to extirpate the horrid evil from the land, and pray Almighty God, that our honorable legislature may have it in their power, to proclaim the general jubilee, consistent with the principles of good policy."⁷³ This statement of policy did not stick, for several of the constituent Baptist associations advised the General Committee that it ought "not to interfere in" this delicate matter, and in 1793 the latter body resolved

⁷² *Writings*, pp. 96-7. Leland's discussion of slavery in *The Virginia Chronicle* (1790) may owe something to Jefferson's in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785). His observations on the Negroes' religious habits are interesting and important.

⁷³ The date of this celebrated and controversial resolution is usually given as 1789 because all later accounts follow Semple's narrative (*Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, p. 105). But Semple appears to have telescoped the General Committee's proceedings of 1789 and 1790 under the earlier year.

“that the subject be dismissed from this committee, as believing it belongs to the legislative body.”⁷⁴

LELAND AND MADISON: RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION AND THE BILL OF RIGHTS

In after-years John Leland spoke in terms of highest praise of the work done by those who framed the Federal Constitution. In 1794 he declared it “the best national machine that is now in existence”; and in 1826 he presumed “there never was a time when there was greater exertion made to harmonize the liberty of the citizen, with the energy of government” than in the Federal Convention and the ratifying conventions that followed.⁷⁵

This was not his opinion when the Constitution was submitted to the people for ratification and Virginia, a critical state by position, size, and prestige, stood delicately balanced between approval and disapproval. The text of the new instrument on which hung so many hopes and fears contained only one clause pertaining to religion. This was in Article VI, which prohibited religious tests as qualifications for federal offices. This naturally won the approval of Baptists, but they felt that additional safeguards were necessary. At a meeting of the Virginia Baptist General Committee, probably called especially for the purpose since it convened in the worst of all months for travel (March, 1788), the question was put: “Whether the new Federal Constitution . . . made sufficient provision for the secure

⁷⁴ Gewehr, *Great Awakening in Va.*, pp. 240-1. For Leland's views on the slavery problem when it grew acute in the 1830's, see his *Writings*, pp. 612-3, 672-3, 697-8. He favored emancipation, but condemned the abolitionists' efforts to bring it about by coercion. The government should “ransom” those slaves whose masters would not free them without compensation. Leland also disapproved the Liberian colonization scheme, holding that since most free Negroes would be pretty well Americanized, they should be offered the opportunity, with government aid, to establish communities in the unsettled parts of the United States.

⁷⁵ *Writings*, pp. 220, 519.

enjoyment of religious liberty; on which, it was agreed unanimously that, in the opinion of the General Committee, it did not."⁷⁶ How far their disapproval reflected the influence of Patrick Henry can only be guessed at. Henry, who had his own reasons for disliking the Constitution, had "found means," according to a Presbyterian friend of Madison's, "to make some of the best people here believe, that a religious establishment was in Contemplation under the new government."⁷⁷

In New York attending Congress and at work on the "Federalist" papers that winter, Madison watched the political weather in Virginia hoping against hope that he would not have to return to engage in the fight for ratification. He preferred to leave the decision on the Constitution to men who had not helped draft it. But in December and January the appeals from home grew more frequent and more urgent. On 30 January, James Madison, Sr., wrote his son that sentiment against ratification was decidedly rising in Orange County. "The Baptists are now generally opposed to it, as it is said; Col. [Thomas] Barbour has been down on Pamunkey amongst them, & on his return, I hear, publicly declared himself a candidate" for the convention. People who are undecided about the Constitution are anxious to have "an explanation" from Madison himself; those opposed to it hope he will not return to Virginia. On the verso of this letter is a brief message from William Moore, a half-uncle of the statesman, adjuring him to come on as soon as possible in order to circumvent "the Arts of some Men in this County."⁷⁸ On 17 February, James Gordon, Jr., who had announced himself as a candidate for the convention and in favor of ratification, told Madison

⁷⁶ Semple, *Hist. of the Baptists in Va.*, p. 102.

⁷⁷ John Blair Smith to Madison, 12 June 1788 (*Mays, Pendleton*, II, 222).

⁷⁸ Madison Papers, Library of Congress.

that the candidates opposing it (Thomas Barbour and Charles Porter) were very determined in their measures and were meeting with no little success. "The sentiments of the people of Orange are much divided the best men in my judgement are for the constitution but several of those who have much weight with the people are opposed, Parson [Aaron] Bledsoe & [John] Leeland with Colo. Z. Burnley. upon the whole I think it is incumbent on you without delay, to repair to this state, as the loss of the constitution in this state may involve consequences the most alarming to every citizen of America."⁷⁹

By this time Madison had concluded to stand for election to the convention and to return in time to be present when the poll was taken. He did not think it necessary to make a canvass himself and allowed no time to do so, lingering in Philadelphia a week and stopping overnight to discuss the prospects of ratification with the master of Mount Vernon.⁸⁰ But at Fredericksburg he was greeted with a letter that caused him to do some last-minute and very important canvassing.

The letter was from Captain Joseph Spencer, a Baptist who had suffered imprisonment during the persecutions that Madison himself had witnessed, and a Revolutionary officer.⁸¹ His letter gives so vivid a picture of the contest in Orange County that it should be read in full.

Orange County Febry. 28th 1788

Dear Sir

The Federal Constitution has it Enimyees in Orange as well as in other parts. Col. Thos. Barber offers as a Canditit for our March Election, he is as grate an Enimy to it as he posably can be, and if not as grate as any it has, as grate as his abilitys will allow him to be, which if

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Irving Brant, *James Madison, Father of the Constitution, 1787-1800*, Indianapolis and New York, 1950, p. 187.

⁸¹ See Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, pp. 380-3.

our County men admired his Politicks no more than I do, the Constitution would have but little to fear from that Quarter, but his [*illegible word*] Labours Riding his Circuit and the Instruments he makes use of to Obtain his election, misrepresents things in such Horrid [*illegible word*] that the weker alas of the people are much predigised against it, by which means he has many which as yet, appears grately in favour of him, amongs his friends appears, in a general way the Baptists. The Preachers of that Society are much alarm'd fearing Rilegious Liberty is not Sufficently secur'd. they pretend to other objections but that I think is the principle objection, could that be remov'd by sum one caperble of the Task, I think thay would become friends to it, that body of people has become very formible in point of Elections. As I can think of no Gentlman of my acquaintance so suitable to the Task as your Self, I have taken the liberty to Request it of you. Several of your Conections in Orange Joines me in oppinion, thinking it would Answer a Valuable purpose for I am Certain that people Relye much on your integrity and Candure. Mr. Leeland and Mr. Bledsoe and Sanders [Nathaniel Saunders] are the most publick men of the Society in Orange, therefore as Mr. Leeland Lyes in your way home from Fredricksburg to Orange would advise you'd call on him and Spend a few Howers in his Company. inClos'd youl find his objections, which was sent by me to, Barber, a cobby, I tooke, this copy, was first Design'd for Capt Walker, but as I hoped youl be in this State in a few days thought proper to send it to you, by which means youl be made acquainted with their objections & have time to Consider them should you think it an Object worthy of your Attention. My fears are that Except you and your friends do Exert your selves Very much youl not obtain your Election in Orange. Such are the predigeses of the people, for in short there is nothing so Vile but what the Constitution is Charg'd with. Hope to see you in Orange in a few days. I am with the greatest respect your most obedient Sarvent

Joseph Spencer⁸²

The enclosure is a copy of "objections" to the Constitution set down by John Leland at the request of Thomas Barbour, evidently for his use in electioneering as an anti-ratification candidate from Orange. The copy is undated and reads as follows:

⁸² Madison Papers, L.C.

Sir

According to your Request, I have sent you my objections to the *Fæderal Constitution*, which are as follows:

- 1st. There is no Bill of Rights, whenever a Number of men enter into a state of Society, a Number of individual Rights must be given up to Society, but there should be a memorial of those not surrendered, otherwise every natural & domestic Right becomes alianable, which raises Tyranny at once, and this is as necessary in one Form of Government as in another.
- 2nd. There is a Contradiction in the Constitution, we are first inform'd that all Legislative Powers therein granted shall be Vested in a Congress composed of *two houses*, and yet afterwards all the power that lies between a Majority and two thirds, which is one Sixth part, is taken from these *two Houses*, and given to one man, who is not only chosen two Removes from the people, but also the head of the executive Department.
- 3rd. The House of Representatives is the only free, direct Representation of the body of the people, and yet in Treaties which are to be some of the Supreme Laws of the Land, this House has no voice.
- 4th. The Time place and Manner of chusing the members of the Lower house is intirely at the Mercy of Congress, if they Appoint Pipin or Japan, or their ten Miles Square for the place, no man can help it. How can Congress guarantee to each State a Republican form of government, when every principle of Republicanism is sapped.
- 5th. The Senators are chosen for Six years, and when they are once Chosen, they are impeachable to nun but themselves, No Counterprize is left in the hands of the People, or even in Legislative Bodys to check them, Vote as they will, there they set, paying themselves at Pleasure.
- 6th. I utterly oppose any Division in a Legislative Body, the more Houses, the more parties, the more they are Divided, the more the Wisdom is Scattered, sometimes one house may prevent the Error of another and the same stands true of twenty Houses. But the question is, whether they do more good than harm, the Business is certainly thereby retarded and the Expencc inahanced.
- 7th. We are not informed whether Votes in all cases in the Lower house are to be by Members or by States,—I Question whether a man could find out the Riddle by plowing, with Sampsons Heifers, if each Member is not to have a Vote, why are they to be chosen according to Numbers

of Inhabitants, and why should Virginia be at ten times the Expense of Delaware for the same Powers, if the Votes are always to be by States, why is it not Expressed as in the choice of a President, in certain cases, If each Member is to have a Vote Why is it Expressed concerning Senators, and not concerning Representatives, this Blank appears to be designed, to encourage the Small States with hopes of Equality, and the Large States with hopes of Superiority.

8ly. We have no assurance that the Liberty of the press will be allowed under this Constitution.

9ly. We have always been taught that it was dangerous mixing the Legislative and Executive Powers together in the same body of People, but in this Constitution we are taught better, or worse.

10ly. What is clearest of all—Religious Liberty, is not sufficiently secured, No Religious test is Required as a qualification to fill any office under the United States, but if a Majority of Congress with the President favour one System more then another, they may oblige all others to pay to the support of their System as much as they please, and if Oppression does not ensue, it will be owing to the Mildness of Administration and not to any Constitutional defence, and if the Manners of People are so far Corrupted, that they cannot live by Republican principles, it is Very Dangerous leaving Religious Liberty at their Mercy.

Revd. John Leeland's Objections to the Federal Constitution Sent to Colo. Thos. Barber by his Request, a Copy taken by Jos. Spencer intended for the Consideration of Capt. Jas. Walker Culpeper.⁸³

This grass-roots exposition of the defects of the proposed frame of government covers a good deal of ground. Most of the objections can be attributed to Leland's fear that neither the legislature nor the executive will prove sufficiently responsive to the popular will, and to his conviction that "there should be a memorial" in the Constitution of those civil and religious rights that are not surrendered by the people to the government.

There followed a meeting between Madison and Leland that has become celebrated in local history and in Baptist annals, though there is nothing beyond circumstantial

⁸³ Madison Papers, L. C.

evidence to prove that it really happened, and much that has been written about it is pure folklore. Its celebrity is of course justified. If Madison did meet Leland and persuade him to support the candidates favoring ratification, then a claim can be made that Baptist support put Madison into the Virginia Convention, Madison's leadership in the Convention secured the narrow victory for the Constitution, that victory meant that the Constitution would be adopted by the nation, and finally that Madison's assurances to the Baptists on the question of civil rights under the new government brought about the first ten amendments. If all these events stemmed from the meeting of two men somewhere between Fredericksburg and Orange in March, 1788, then it was a momentous meeting indeed.

In its most extravagant form the story of the Madison-Leland encounter appears in the standard town history of Cheshire, Massachusetts, published in 1885.⁸⁴ According to this version, Madison "halted aghast one morning when told by a friend that John Leland was on the opposition side" on a question (not specified) of national importance.

"Then I am beaten," he gasped.

"Yes," replied his friend, "unless you can convince him. He will go up to the polls with his commanding form and mysterious power, and the rank and file of his counties will follow him in an unwavering line; no power will avail to win one of them. They will watch Leland, and the vote he casts will be the one that they will cast."

Seeing that "There was little time to lose," the statesman and future president mounted his "thoroughbred" and by good luck encountered Leland, less well mounted and "clad in his home-spun suit," on the road. Then began an intellectual combat like those between champions of great renown in the romances of chivalry. "Noon fell upon the scene. In their eagerness they dismounted, tethered their

⁸⁴ Raynor and Petielerc, *Hist. of Cheshire*, pp. 186-7.

ponies, sat down upon a grassy knoll beneath a shading tree, and talked on. The sun went down the western slopes—and still they talked.” As the sun set, Leland sprang to his feet, declared he had been convinced, and would vote for Madison. “‘Then,’ said Madison, shaking eagerly the proffered hand, ‘I’m elected.’”

This account seems to have been drawn largely, though with added details, from an article on “President Madison and the Baptist Preacher” by William Pope Dabney in *Harper’s Monthly* for August, 1881.⁸⁵ Dabney, a Virginia judge and a collateral descendant of Madison, here set down local traditions without bothering to cite sources, and though W. W. Scott, the historian of Orange County, declared the story perfectly preposterous, the traditions have persisted, and recently a monument to Leland has been erected at the supposed meeting place.⁸⁶

There can be no question that the monument memorializes an actual occurrence. Though neither of the principals left a first-hand account of it, the tradition concerning their meeting and its results was alive and vigorous at the time of Madison’s death. In pronouncing a eulogy at Culpeper Court House in July, 1836, John Strode Barbour discussed at some length the close alliance between Madison and the

⁸⁵ LXIII, 446-8.

⁸⁶ Scott, *A History of Orange County, Virginia*, Richmond, 1907, p. 188. A somewhat more circumstantial and plausible account of the incident was contributed by Maria Marshall to the *Green Bag*, XII (1900), 339-41. Miss Marshall says that she heard the anecdote from her father, an octogenarian, and his friends, and she locates the meeting place in an oak grove at Gum Spring, six miles from Orange on the road to Fredericksburg. A celebration marking the bicentennial of Orange County was held at this site in Sept., 1934, (see Samuel C. Mitchell, “James Madison and His Co-Worker, John Leland,” *Religious Herald*, 18 Oct. 1934), and the memorial marker was erected in 1946. An earlier account than any so far mentioned was printed in Sprague’s *Annals* (VI, 179-80) in Governor George Briggs’ reminiscences of Leland. Briggs’ narrative purports to come from Leland himself and much of it squares perfectly with what may be gleaned from Madison’s surviving correspondence, but it represents Leland as having been the candidate opposing Madison and going over with his followers to Madison only after the latter had made a brilliant two-hour appeal from “a hogshhead of tobacco, standing on one end,” at the hustings.

Baptists and said that his election to the Virginia ratifying convention in 1788 was owing to his changing the minds of two Baptist ministers on the eve of the election. "The celebrated John Leland was one of them. His mind was thrown open to the lights of reason and the power of argument. Consistency had neither pride nor trammel for his strong good sense; and I speak but the voice of faithful tradition in saying that these changes were decisive in the election."⁸⁷

An oblique ray of light on the incident is cast by the unpublished diary of a close friend and neighbor of the Madison family, Francis Taylor of Rosebud in Orange County.⁸⁸ A hopelessly matter-of-fact diarist, Taylor tells much more about crops and weather, "Squirrel Barbecues" and wolf-hunting than he does about politics. In the fall and winter of 1787, however, he records occasional reports of opposition to the Constitution (which he evidently favors as a supporter of Madison). On 26 February 1788 he reports "Much talk amongst the people about the Constitution, the Baptists and ignorant part of them against it." By 20 March everyone is expecting "Col Madison" from New York, and two days later "Major Moore (expecting that Col Madison would be at his house to day) had sent for H Taylor, Col Taylor & Major Minor, and we went with them and dined there, R Taylor and wife were there but Col Madison did not get there before we came away." On the 23d: "Hear that Col Madison got to Major Moores last night and proceeded to day to his fathers [at Montpelier]." It is certainly plausible to suppose that the reason Madison did not keep to his schedule and disappointed his friends on the 22d was his decision to go to Leland and remove the Baptist leader's doubts about the Constitution. The result is apparent in

⁸⁷ "Oration on the Life, Character, and Services of James Madison," Washington *National Intelligencer*, 2 Aug. 1836. Barbour derived information for his eulogy from Madison's brother William.

⁸⁸ His MS diary is in the Virginia State Library.

the vote at Orange on the 24th as recorded by Francis Taylor: Madison 202, Gordon 187, Barbour 56, Porter 34. Barbour's prolonged canvass had done him no good at all; Madison's brief canvass had been remarkably effective.⁸⁹

At the close of June, after a long, fierce contest, the Virginia Convention ratified the Constitution by 89 votes to 79. An authoritative scholar has said of this result that "Against their will, the people of Virginia had been brought into the new Federal Union."⁹⁰ James Madison was to carry the instrument of ratification to Congress, and from Richmond on 6 July as he was about to set out northwardly he wrote his father transmitting "2 copies of the Federalist, one for Mr. Leland, the other for Mr. Bledsoe."⁹¹ These men he now looked upon as his agents among the Baptists of Orange and adjacent counties, who were still split on this great public issue.

Defeated in the Convention, Patrick Henry now raised the question whether Madison sincerely supported the civil-rights amendments that the Convention majority had agreed to support in order to gain their main objective. Henry's move was part of his campaign to prevent Madison's winning a seat in the new Congress.⁹² Late in 1788, when elections for Congress were coming on, George Eve, minister of the Blue Run Baptist Church in Orange, went to Montpelier and asked if he could contradict reports that Madison was not only "opposed to any amendments to the new federal Constitution" but that he had "ceased to be a friend to the rights of conscience." The response was prompt and explicit. Madison wrote Eve on 2 January 1789 that since

⁸⁹ Of the election Taylor says, with (for him) unusual volubility: "Col Madison addressed himself in a Speech to the people in defence of the New Constitution, and there appeared much satisfaction after the Election was determined."

⁹⁰ Mays, *Pendleton*, II, 272.

⁹¹ Madison Papers, L.C.

⁹² See Brant, *Madison, Father of the Constitution*, pp. 236 ff.

he had "never seen in the Constitution as it now stands those serious dangers which have alarmed many respectable citizens," he had urged ratification without conditional amendments. But "Circumstances are now changed," and moderate amendments should be made in order to dissipate the doubts of honest opponents. Accordingly, "it is my sincere opinion that the Constitution ought to be revised, and that the first Congress . . . ought to prepare and recommend to the States for ratification, the most satisfactory provisions for all essential rights, particularly the rights of conscience in the fullest latitude, the freedom of the press, trials by jury, security against general warrants &c."⁹³ Eve made good use of this declaration two weeks later when two opponents of Madison tried to convert a service at the Blue Run Church into a political meeting.⁹⁴ Despite all these machinations, Madison trounced his able anti-Federalist opponent James Monroe handily when the election took place early in February.⁹⁵ Soon afterward Leland wrote cordially to the successful candidate:

Sir,

I congratulate you in your Appointment, as a Representative to *Congress*, and if my Undertaking in the Cause conducted Nothing else towards it, it certainly gave Mr. *Madison* one Vote. I expect that Congress will be very busy for some Years, in filling a continental Blank with a Code of General Laws; and I think it will be very Judicious to send those Laws very liberally into the States, that Eyes may always be open. No Danger of the Destruction of Liberty when the community is well informed. Ignorance always brings on, either Mutiny or Lethargy, which equally pave the way for Tyranny. If Mr. *Madison* can get Leisure enough in Congress, it would please my fancy to have a List of all the Names of the Members of Congress; in which State they reside, and which House they fill; and it would inform my mind to have an Account of all our National Debts; to what Powers they are due, and

⁹³ Madison Papers, L.C.

⁹⁴ Brant, *Madison, Father of the Constitution*, p. 240.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

at what per Cents and likewise of our internal debt. And it would give me further Satisfaction to know (after the Trial) whether the Duties arising from Commerce are sufficient (without a Direct Tax) for supporting the federal Government, and the payment of our Interest upon Debts. No doubt there will be printed Statements, at proper Times; but I am so little acquainted with the literary and political World, that without the aid of a particular Friend, I shall never see them. If I could see all the Laws I should be glad, altho' in Person, I have little Use for them.—One Thing I shall expect; that if religious Liberty is anywise threatened, that I shall receive the earliest Intelligence.

I take the Liberty of writing this to you, lest I sould not be at Home when you pass by on your way to Congress.⁹⁶

Firmly committed by his assurances to his Baptist constituents, Madison took an early opportunity to introduce into Congress a series of amendments which, as modified and finally ratified, are known as the Bill of Rights. The first of these begins: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This made the separation of church and state on the federal level perfectly explicit, and it wholly satisfied the Baptists, as they promptly assured Madison.⁹⁷ Small wonder that Leland is reported to have said in old age that "For candour, integrity, and intelligence, he placed Mr. Madison before any of our statesmen whom he had ever known."⁹⁸

The alteration of Baptist opinion on the Constitution between 1787 and 1789, effected in large part by the understanding between John Leland and James Madison, is strikingly shown in an action of the General Committee of the Virginia Baptist churches at its annual meeting in Richmond in 1789. The Committee ordered that an address to President Washington be prepared, and Elder Leland

⁹⁶ Undated; Madison Papers, L.C.

⁹⁷ Brant, *Madison, Father of the Constitution*, ch. XXI; see also Brant's article in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., VIII (1951), 17.

⁹⁸ G. N. Briggs' communication in Sprague, *Annals*, VI, 180.

was assigned to draft it. After tracing the career of Washington and his services to his country through the Revolution, Leland comes to the situation in 1787. He admits that the "want of efficacy in the confederation . . . called aloud for a new arrangement of our systems." However, When the Constitution first made its appearance in Virginia, we, as a society, had unusual strugglings of mind, fearing that the liberty of conscience, dearer to us than property or life, was not sufficiently secured. Perhaps our jealousies were heightened, by the usage we received in Virginia, under the regal government, when mobs, fines, bonds and prisons were our frequent repast.

Convinced, on the one hand, that without an effective National Government, the States would fall into disunion and all the consequent evils; and, on the other hand, fearing that we should be accessory to some religious oppression, should any one society in the Union preponderate over the rest; yet, amidst all these inquietudes of mind, our consolation arose from this consideration,—the plan must be good, for it has the signature of a tried, trusty friend, and if religious liberty is rather insecure in the Constitution, "the Administration will certainly prevent all oppression, for a WASHINGTON will preside."⁹⁹

Washington's reply could not have been more plain-spoken and reassuring, for he said:

If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension, that the constitution framed in the convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it; and, if I could now conceive that the general government might ever be so administered as to render the liberty of conscience insecure, I beg you will be persuaded, that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution. For you doubtless remember, that I have often expressed my sentiments, that every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Leland, *Writings*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁰ Washington, *Writings*, ed. Jared Sparks, New York, 1848-52, XII, 155. There is some question whether this exchange occurred in May or August, 1789.

The Virginia Baptists and the greatest Virginia statesmen saw eye to eye on the subject of religious freedom. It was to be long before such an accord would be reached in New England, where Leland was now to carry the fight.

SETTLEMENT IN CHESHIRE: CONTINUATION OF THE CRUSADE
FOR THE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE

In his autobiographical sketch Leland says nothing whatever about his motives for leaving Virginia and returning to his native state. There may have been family reasons, for in 1790 he had taken a four months' trip to New England, preaching both "coming and going," and had visited his father and other relatives in western Massachusetts. He may also have felt that there was now more work to do in the north than in the south. The victory for religious freedom had been won in Virginia. The Baptist faith was strong there, stronger than any other in the state, and it far outnumbered the Baptist population of any other state.¹⁰¹ The two churches Leland particularly served, one in Orange and one in Louisa County, had memberships of 300 and 200 respectively.¹⁰² It was success rather than the want of it that probably impelled Leland to seek other pastures. When he started out, he apparently had no idea where he would settle in New England, but this was no cause for worry to one of his roving temperament.

On the last day of March, 1791, he boarded a vessel at Fredericksburg, with his wife and eight children "and a small quantum of effects," fell down the Rappahannock

¹⁰¹ John Asplund, the eccentric Swede and Baptist enthusiast of Southampton County, Virginia, who traveled 7,000 miles, "chiefly by foot," in order to collect Baptist statistics, reported 204 Baptist churches with 20,443 members in Virginia in 1790 (*The Annual Register of the Baptist Denomination in North America*, n.p. [1792]). In Massachusetts there were 107 churches and 7,116 members.

¹⁰² Leland, *Writings*, p. 29.

River and Chesapeake Bay, and sailed for New London, which he reached after a stormy voyage of two weeks.¹⁰³ Invited to preach, he spent two months or more evangelizing in Connecticut. He had also arrived just in time to take part in the current agitation against the established (Congregational) church in that state. He joined in gladly and vigorously.

In Connecticut the Baptists came later than they had in Massachusetts, but their growth there followed a similar pattern, as did their treatment by the civil authorities. Nominal toleration for all Protestant dissenters from the state church as established by the Saybrook Platform of 1708 had been won before 1730. But so intimate was the alliance between the governing class and the Congregational "standing order" that all concessions to non-Congregationalists were grudging, petty persecutions continued until after the Revolution, and exemption from ecclesiastical taxes still required certificates that seemed degrading to all dissenters and were abhorrent to some.¹⁰⁴ The terms under which the certificates were to be filed and honored were shuffled from time to time by new legislation, but a modern reader trying to follow the variations soon concludes that the more the laws were changed the more they were the same thing. What the dissenters sought was not a change in the machinery but in fundamental policy—from toleration of dissent to full equality for all forms of faith.

This was what Leland struck for in the first of a long series of propagandist tracts that he produced after returning to New England. Probably written and published while he was preaching in Connecticut, this first tract is entitled *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable, and Therefore Religious*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ See M. Louise Greene, *The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut*, Boston and New York, 1905. An excellent summary account is in Stokes, *Church and State*, I, 408-18.

*Opinions Not Cognizable by Law: or, The High-Flying Churchman, Stript of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yahoo.*¹⁰⁵ Its substance is as forceful as its title. "There are four principles contended for," Leland begins, "as the foundation of civil power, viz., birth, property, grace, and compact." Monarchy is founded on birth, and aristocracy upon property.

The third principle is adopted by those kingdoms and states that require a religious test to qualify an officer of state, proscribing all non-conformists from civil and religious liberty. This was the error of Constantine's government, who first established the Christian religion by law, and then proscribed the Pagans, and banished the Arian heretics. This error also filled the heads of the Anabaptists, in Germany, who . . . supposed that none had a right to rule but gracious men. The same error prevails in the See of Rome, where . . . no Protestant heretic is allowed the liberty of a citizen. This principle is also pleaded for in the Ottoman empire, where it is death to call in question the divinity of Mahomet, or the authenticity of the Alcoran.

It will, in fact, be found present in any government where a single religion is established by law. Having by implication put the Anabaptists, Ottomans, and Connecticut Congregationalists in the same camp, Leland turns to the fourth principle—compact—which is the essentially American system. A brief exposition of it follows, drawn from Locke as interpreted by Jefferson. Now the question is: "Does a man, upon entering into social compact, surrender his conscience to that society, to be controlled by the laws thereof; or can he, in justice, assist in making laws to bind his children's consciences before they are born?" Leland's answer is no, and the heart of his supporting argument is in two sentences: "Every man must give an account of himself to God, and therefore every man ought to be at

¹⁰⁵ New London: T. Green & Son, 1791. A "Second Edition" was printed at Richmond by T. Nicolson for John Asplund in 1793. The text here quoted is that in Leland's *Writings*, pp. 177-92.

liberty to serve God in a way that he can best reconcile to his conscience. If government can answer for individuals at the day of judgment, let men be controlled by it in religious matters; otherwise, let men be free."

Leland proceeds to examine the evils of religious establishments. In pointing out the moral and intellectual effects of enforced conformity, he uses language that must have been already familiar to many of the clergy of the "standing order," for it is largely borrowed from Mr. Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*—a book well known but not highly esteemed in Connecticut:

Government [he wrote, echoing his mentor] has no more to do with the religious principles of men than it has with the principles of mathematics. Let every man speak freely without fear, maintain the principles that he believes, worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God, or twenty Gods: and let government protect him in so doing, i.e., see that he meets with no personal abuse, or loss of property, for his religious opinions. Instead of discouraging him with proscriptions, fines, confiscations, or death, let him be encouraged, as a free man, to bring forth his arguments and maintain his points with all boldness; then, if his doctrine is false, it will be confuted, and if it is true, (though ever so novel,) let others credit it. . . . It is error, and error alone, that needs human support; and whenever men fly to the law or sword to protect their system of religion, and force it upon others, it is evident that they have something in their system that will not bear the light, and stand upon the basis of truth.

On these grounds all certificate laws are absurd and unjust. The Connecticut church establishment merely reflects the egocentricity of a group of men who profit by it and who are enabled by it to claim infallibility—at least within an area that comprises about one two-hundredth of the American empire as a whole.

Leland was to stay closely in touch with the campaign for religious freedom in Connecticut for years to come. The Baptists and other dissenting faiths, including the Episcopalians, continued to increase in numbers; and all of them

found themselves aligned against the ruling Congregationalist-Federalist oligarchy whose policy can be summed up in one word—stand-pattism.¹⁰⁶ John Adams said of Connecticut in 1808 that “Half a dozen, or, at most, a dozen families, have controlled that country when a colony, as well as since it has been a state.”¹⁰⁷ But organized opposition from growing numbers of the discontented was bound sooner or later to accomplish its purpose. Baptist petitions embodying the same arguments that had been used against the Anglican establishment in Virginia, together with some new ones, were annually pressed upon the Connecticut legislature from 1802 to 1818. In conjunction with the earliest petitions a periodical was launched by Leland’s brethren at New London, which, though it apparently never got beyond the first number, contained a store of ammunition sufficient for a long campaign. Entitled *The Connecticut Dissenters’ Strong Box*,¹⁰⁸ it contained a reprint of Leland’s *Rights of Conscience Inalienable*, the form of a petition protesting the disabilities of dissenters, “Extracts from Connecticut Ecclesiastical Laws,” extracts from the United States Constitution and sixteen state and territorial constitutions in which freedom of conscience was guaranteed, and, finally, summaries of the church-state relationship in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, the only states where remnants of ecclesiastical establishments remained. No copy of the *Strong Box*, No. II, has been found. An advertisement on the last page of No. I stated that it

¹⁰⁶ The standard study of these developments is Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818*, Washington and London, 1918; see especially ch. II. Professor S. E. Morison has called my attention to a brilliant but little-known essay entitled “Connecticut Federalism, or Aristocratic Politics in a Social Democracy,” in James Clarke Welling’s *Addresses, Lectures and Other Papers*, Cambridge, privately printed, 1903, pp. 266-311. Welling provides a lively and penetrating account of Connecticut conservatism just before and after 1800.

¹⁰⁷ *Works*, VI, 530.

¹⁰⁸ “Compiled by a Dissenter. Printed by Charles Holt, New-London, 1802.”

would contain "The Beauties of Washington and Jefferson; or, Their Choicest Observations on Religion and Religious Toleration, and on various Moral, Political, and Miscellaneous Subjects: with a Biographical Sketch of the Lives and Characters of those two *Eminent Dissenters*." "Dissenters" of course they would have been in Connecticut, and Leland had not failed to point out in 1791 that if "that man, whose name need not be mentioned, but which fills every American heart with pleasure and awe," should move to Connecticut for his health or any other reason, he would, of course, be obliged to produce a certificate stating he was an Episcopalian in order to avoid paying Congregational tithes.¹⁰⁹

Leland's last direct contribution to the cause of religious equality in Connecticut was a pamphlet quaintly entitled *Van Tromp Lowering His Peak with a Broadside*.¹¹⁰ He argued that coercion of conscience promotes rather than discourages religious infidelity, and he pleaded for a new constitution to replace the charter which had served both colony and state since the reign of Charles II and which allowed Connecticut's ruling caste to "run without bridle or bit." Fourteen long years later this objective was achieved. The bill of rights embodied in the Connecticut Constitution of 1818 declared "that the exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination, shall forever be free to all persons in this State; provided that the right hereby declared and established shall not be construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness or to justify practices inconsistent with the peace and safety of the State."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ *Writings*, p. 191.

¹¹⁰ Danbury: S. Nichols, 1806. An "Explanation" of the title is prefixed to the text: "At a certain period, the English allowed the Dutch to ride the high seas, provided the Dutch would *lower their peaks* to English ships; which haughty demand so insensed the intrepid *Van Tromp*; that whenever the English gave him a signal to drop his peak, he would answer them with a *Broad-side*." Apparently through oversight, this pamphlet was not collected in Leland's *Writings*.

¹¹¹ Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, pp. 384-5.

The dissenters asked no more than this. Leland had been preaching for years the distinction between men's religious beliefs and their civil conduct, the second of which alone is the concern of magistrates. Yet it was to take fifteen more years for the distinction to be accepted in Massachusetts.

The Lelands left Connecticut in July, 1791, and resided for eight months at Conway, in present Franklin County, Massachusetts, where Leland's father lived. They had hardly reached Conway before receiving an invitation to serve a new Baptist society in neighboring Berkshire County, and at the end of February, 1792, the family moved westward to a tiny settlement that later became the present village of Cheshire.¹¹² Here, or nearby, they were to live for many years.

The village of Cheshire, lying on the Hoosick River between South Adams and Pittsfield, is centrally located in the town of Cheshire, which was erected in 1793 and has long been distinguished for having more angles in its boundary lines than any other township in the state. The belief is strongly held and has often been repeated in print, despite denials, that the boundaries were established "to suit the religious views of the inhabitants," all Congregationalists being left outside and all Baptist families being included in the town.¹¹³ The earliest settlers were Rhode Islanders who laid out farms on New Providence (now Stafford's) Hill, northeast of the present village, a few years before the Revolution. A major attraction of the New Providence settlement to Rhode Island families obviously

¹¹² Leland, *Writings*, p. 30. The MS records of the First Baptist Church of Cheshire have this entry under 26 Aug. 1791: "Chose a Comitty to Confer with Elder Lalond."

¹¹³ Josiah G. Holland, *History of Western Massachusetts*, Springfield, 1855, II, 475-6; J. M. Barker, "Early Settlements in Cheshire," Berkshire Historical and Scientific Society, *Papers*, 1889, p. 63. William B. Browne has pointed out that the angles resulted simply from running the boundaries along the summits of the hills that enclose the town ("Over the Pathways of the Past," typescript in the Berkshire Athenaeum of a series of articles by Mr. Browne printed in the *North Adams Transcript*, 1938).

was that it lay outside of any township or district and did not constitute one itself; the people were therefore not obliged to pay the usual ecclesiastical rates, and could adopt and support whatever form of public worship they desired. In 1769, as soon as they arrived, they organized a Baptist society, built a meeting house, and Elder Peter Werden, who had come with them, began conducting services.¹¹⁴

From the outset this was dairying country. "The center of the Town," says a nineteenth-century description, "is a rich and fertile valley. The Township is well adapted to grazing, to which the attention of the inhabitants is principally given. Large dairies are kept, and the Cheshire cheeses are widely and deservedly known."¹¹⁵ The population was never great, and it tended to decline gradually after 1800, being drawn off alike by nearby towns like Pittsfield and the Adamses where industries were developing, and by the cheap land to the west. The "Genesee fever" was at its height at the turn of the century, and the *Pittsfield Sun* reported in June, 1801, that "Settlements which cover whole townships in several counties in New York, are composed almost entirely of emigrants from Berkshire county."¹¹⁶ Some members of Leland's large family joined this migration to the Genesee country. Other emigrants went to Connecticut's Western Reserve and to Vermont. In the meantime the pioneer settlement on Stafford's Hill dwindled toward extinction, and the present village at "the Corners" or "Four Corners" grew from the half-dozen houses that the Lelands found when they came there to a busy country town.

¹¹⁴ Barker, "Early Settlements in Cheshire," pp. 64 ff., 90.

¹¹⁵ J. W. Barber, *Historical Collections . . . Relating to . . . Every Town in Massachusetts*, Worcester, 1839, p. 67.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in J[oseph] E. A. Smith, *The History of Pittsfield . . . from the Year 1800 to the Year 1876*, Springfield, 1876, p. 22.

The Baptist society that Elder Leland had come to minister to originated in a schism in an older "Six Principle" society. The first entry in the records of Leland's church (now the First Baptist Church of Cheshire), dated 30 May 1789, reads: "At a Confarance Meeting David Irish Moderator the Brethren and Sistors Whose Names are Hereunto Subscribed Agreed to Renew Covernant and take up there travil [travail] Under the title of the Second Baptist Church Lanesborough With this Diferance from the Old Church Holding the Laying on of hands not a Baar to Communion." The names are headed by that of Nathan Mason, who was called as an elder "to take the Pastoral Cair of them." By 1792 the church must have been in a fairly flourishing condition, for at a meeting on 28 January of that year it voted "to Raise one Hundred and Eighty Pounds for A Settlement for Elder Leland"—which was, so far as I have found, Leland's nearest approach to a salary from this or any other church. Funds were no doubt also being collected this early to erect a church building. On Christmas Day, 1794, the building was dedicated; it was just north of the Four Corners on the site of the present First Baptist Church, which succeeded it in 1849.¹¹⁷

The church records are disappointingly silent on many matters one would like to know about, but they do provide glimpses of life in Baptist Cheshire. Disciplinary cases made up the bulk of church business. In March, 1790, the church voted to "withdraw the hand of fellowship" from Joseph Martin "for gitting in drink and . . . for his ungospel way of trading and Horse Jocking to the great Greef of his Brethen." In May, 1791, Jonathan Mason suffered a like fate "for Abuse to his Wife" and family. Synda Perkins was

¹¹⁷ A. B. Whipple, "History of the Cheshire Baptist Church," in *Minutes of the Eighty-Second Anniversary of the Berkshire Baptist Association*, Pittsfield, 1910, p. 16. See Leland's poem for the dedication in 1794 (*Writings*, pp. 721-2).

excluded in September, 1800, for associating "with vain loose company." Soon afterwards there was a rash of misbehavior among the ladies of the congregation, for causes unknown. A committee reported early in 1802 that it had received no satisfactory explanation from Sally Bacon, who had "practiced frolicking"; in March, Anna Hathaway was denied fellowship because "She reported things Different at several times"; and similar cases crowd the record for some months.

The satisfaction of the good people of Cheshire in Leland's ministry is attested in the records in various ways. In December, 1795, there is a spontaneous outburst by the usually unemotional clerk: "Elder John Leland Appears to Stand in the Power and Demonstration of the Spirit of God, in the Administration of the Word and Ordernances of the Gospill." But the church had been born of a schism, and among those in Leland's flock who took the gospel ordinances with deadly seriousness were some who began to find fault with him. From hints in the records it seems likely that Leland's trip to Virginia in 1797-98 was the first of his periodic withdrawals in order to end a controversy. After his return he declined to serve as the regular minister, but since no other was obtainable and most of the congregation were deeply attached to him, he continued to preach more or less steadily anyway. The root of the difficulty appears in an entry dated 28 July 1798: "Elder Leland Manifested Some Havy trials in his mind that he could not Administer the Sacrement of the Lords Supper, which the Church Indevour'd to Remove but in Vain Which left a grate triel on the minds of the Brethren."

Leland made a very candid statement of his position some years later, when he wrote the congregation:

I lodge no complaint against communing with bread and wine, but for myself, for [from?] more than thirty years experiment, I have had no

evidence that the bread and wine ever assisted my faith to discern the Lord's body. I have never felt guilty for not communing, but often for doing it. I have known no instance that God evidently blessed the ordinance for the conversion of sinners, which often attends preaching, praying, singing and baptizing.¹¹⁸

Since they deeply loved and respected Leland as a man and as a religious teacher, the great majority of the church members were perfectly willing to bear with his scruples. A few were not, and the history of the church was troubled by "trials and . . . disagreeable Labours," as the records say, for many years. It is not quite clear on just what footing Leland did stand with the church during these years. The records show that he preached frequently except from 1804 to 1806, when a new contention broke out and he left Cheshire to live for a time in Dutchess County, New York. But the repeated appeals to him to return as a settled preacher indicate that he steadily refused such a connection though keeping his membership in good order.¹¹⁹

Leland preferred it this way. He was always willing to preach, pray, and baptize, but he was happier as an independent evangelist, free to go where the spirit directed, than as a settled pastor, however devoted his flock might be to him. There was something about entering into a contract to perform spiritual services that was repugnant to him, and his observation of the effects of state-paid salaries on pastoral conduct increased his natural aversion. "It is time enough to pay a man after his labor is over," he had remarked in 1791.¹²⁰ He felt no need for a salary because he and his wife always kept a farm that made a decent living for them. On the other hand, "though he never

¹¹⁸ Letter dated 22 Aug. 1811 (*Writings*, pp. 59-60).

¹¹⁹ For the subsequent history of the church during Leland's lifetime, see Miss Greene's "Further Sketches" in Leland's *Writings*, pp. 57-65; Raynor and Petitclerc, *Hist. of Cheshire*, pp. 71-3, 99-102, 117-8, 129-30.

¹²⁰ *Writings*, p. 189. See also his trenchant little parable on ministerial fees at pp. 335-6.

solicited, or made money a *condition* of preaching, he never refused what any chose to give him; and he received it, not as alms, but as a gospel debt."¹²¹

The impact on local politics of this admirer and former associate of Jefferson and Madison was not at first apparent. The virtual unanimity that later characterized Cheshire's vote and became part of its folklore did not develop until nearly 1800. The town records show that Cheshire's votes in gubernatorial elections in the 1790's favored Federalist candidates like William Cushing and Nathaniel Gorham as often as they did their opponents until the thumping victory of Elbridge Gerry over Moses Gill (by 79 votes to 1) in 1800. Possibly this election was the first in which Leland himself played an active part. But the Baptist sentiment of the town had been clearly shown in its 45-to-nothing vote in 1795 favoring revision of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. The Declaration of Rights embodied in that constitution had been bitterly opposed by the Baptists even before its adoption, for while Article II declared that "no subject shall be hurt, molested, or restrained, in his person, liberty, or estate, for worshipping God in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of his conscience," Article III immediately negated this seeming guarantee of religious liberty. It declared that since "the public worship of God" is essential to "the happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government," the legislature was to require the towns "to make suitable provision, at their own expense, for the institution of the public worship of God, and for the support and maintenance of public Protestant teachers of piety, religion, and morality."¹²² A later paragraph prescribing how this was to be done per-

¹²¹ Miss Greene's "Further Sketches" (Leland, *Writings*, p. 70).

¹²² *The Federal and State Constitutions*, ed. Francis N. Thorpe, Washington, 1909, III, 1889-90.

mitted the taxes paid by any dissenter, "if he require it," to be "applied to the support of the public teacher or teachers of his own religious sect or denomination, provided there be any on whose instructions he attends; otherwise it may be paid towards the support of the teacher or teachers of the parish or precinct in which the said moneys are raised."

This profession of a liberal principle linked with a continuation of the old compulsory system seemed a mere mockery to the Baptists. They fought Article III within the convention; they fought its ratification by the people; and their efforts would have been successful had not the committee computing the votes of the towns, as Professor Morison has shown, "adopted at the start such principles of counting that a two-thirds majority for every article was assured in advance."¹²³

Congregationalism remained on a quasi-established footing. "Unbelievers, non-church-goers, and dissenting minorities too small to maintain a minister, had to contribute to Congregational worship."¹²⁴ The hated certificate system was renewed, and so, within a year or so of the adoption of the Constitution, was the petty persecution that had slackened before the Revolution.¹²⁵ The system was of course fruitful in litigation, for church taxes had to be paid to the town treasurers even if earmarked for dissenting societies. Buck cites an instance when it required fourteen suits at law before a treasurer yielded the taxes to a dissenting church, and another when a hundred dollars and four years' time were

¹²³ S. E. Morison, "The Struggle over the Adoption of the Constitution of Massachusetts," *Mass. Hist. Soc., Proceedings*, L (1917), 397. For the Baptist influence on the vote on Article III, see the map (*ibid.*, facing p. 392) showing the location of Baptist churches in conjunction with town votes.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

¹²⁵ Jacob C. Meyer, *Church and State in Massachusetts from 1740 to 1833*, Cleveland, 1930, pp. 112 ff. Isaac Backus details many of the incidents of persecution in his *History of New England*, II.

expended in extracting from a town treasurer the sum of four dollars designated for a Baptist minister.¹²⁶ Because of varying judicial interpretations, the legislature spent a substantial part of its time altering the old laws and making new ones relating to church taxes—a process which finally left everyone at sea. How the system affected individual dissenters is well illustrated in a paper containing the result of an inquisition among those seeking exemption from church taxes in Pittsfield in 1789. Here are some extracts: “Charles Lamb,—a Churchman [Episcopalian]. Dyer Fitch,—rather a Baptist in sentiment. Uriah Betts,—a Baptist in sentiment, but can attend other meetings without injuring his conscience. . . . David Ashley,—thinks it not right to support Mr. Allen [the settled Congregationalist minister] by a tax. . . . John Phelps,—thinks the Baptists to be most right. . . . Israel Miner,—never heard Mr. Allen, and can teach Mr. Allen, and thinks he ought not to pay his rates to him, and is a Shaker as much as any thing.”¹²⁷

It was this preposterous situation that Baptist leaders were determined, if possible, to remedy, and Leland assumed a major role in the work. In 1794 he published, under a pseudonym, *The Yankee Spy, Calculated for the Religious Meridian of Massachusetts, But Will Answer for New-Hampshire, Connecticut and Vermont, without Material Alterations*.¹²⁸ This is mainly a critique of the Declaration of Rights of 1780, and particularly of its articles relating to religion. Leland agrees with the assertion in Article II that “it is the right and duty of all men publicly, and at stated seasons, to worship the Supreme Being,” but holds that it “would read much better in a catechism than in a state

¹²⁶ Edward Buck, *Massachusetts Ecclesiastical Law*, Boston, 1866, p. 43.

¹²⁷ J[oseph] E. A. Smith, *The History of Pittsfield . . . from the Year 1734 to the Year 1800*, Boston, 1869, p. 460.

¹²⁸ Boston: John Asplund, n.d. In Leland's *Writings*, pp. 213-29, where the date is provided by the editor. My quotations here are from the *Writings*.

constitution." As for Article III, which authorizes the legislature to compel the people to support "public Protestant teachers," it contradicts itself, for elsewhere it promises equal protection to "every denomination of Christians," and are not Catholics Christians? But why, Leland asks, are "Christians" alone thus privileged?

Should not government protect all kinds of people, of every species of religion, without showing the least partiality? Has not the world had enough proofs of the impolicy and cruelty of favoring a Jew more than a Pagan, Turk or Christian; or a Christian more than either of them? Why should a man be proscribed, or . . . disgraced, for being a Jew, a Turk, a Pagan, or a Christian of any denomination, when his talents and veracity as a civilian, entitle him to the confidence of the public?

The best feature among many good ones in the Constitution as a whole, Leland concludes, is that which provides for its revision fifteen years after its adoption; that is, in 1795. If the constitution should be revised, and anything about religion is said in it, the following paragraph is proposed:—

To prevent the evils that have heretofore been occasioned in the world by religious establishments, and to keep up the proper distinction between religion and politics, no religious test shall ever be requested as a qualification of any officer, in any department of this government; neither shall the legislature, under this constitution, ever establish any religion by law, give any one sect a preference to another, or force any man in the commonwealth to part with his property for the support of religious worship, or the maintenance of ministers of the gospel.

But in 1795 only a bare majority, not the required two-thirds, of the voters called for a revision of the Constitution. It is not conceivable that any proposal for total separation of church and state would have been accepted, even if a convention had been summoned. Federalist Massachusetts was far from ready for such a step.

Leland continued his propaganda against the religious laws of Massachusetts in speeches and tracts that evidently had wide circulation. For example, his *A Blow at the Root:*

Being a Fashionable Fast-Day Sermon, Delivered at Cheshire, Massachusetts, April 9, 1801, was printed in at least five different states from Vermont to Georgia, and six editions are recorded.¹²⁹ His special target here was a Massachusetts law of 1800 which fixed a schedule of fines upon towns failing to provide ministers. He suggested an appropriate opening discourse for all the ministers hired in order to avoid these penalties: My dear hearers, I come to address you in the name of the authority of Massachusetts: the presbytery has approbated me, and the laws of the state have declared me learned and orthodox:—I am not one of them who vainly imagine they are moved by the Holy Ghost to preach, but I have entered in at the door of lineal ordination, succeeded from the apostles, through all the whoredom and murders of Rome: I am not of that class who harangue the people extempore, without sense or grammar; but I have my sermon all written down, and shall read it distinctly. . . . And now, my hearers, as the law obliges you to have a teacher, I exhort you to be subject to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake.

He also proposed that the phrasing of the law itself be altered to bring it into conformity with the assumptions on which it rested. It should read: "Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, that the almighty God shall qualify and send forth a competency of teachers of morality, piety, and religion, to supply all the towns, parishes, precincts, religious societies, and bodies politic, within the commonwealth of Massachusetts, and on failure thereof he shall forfeit his moral government over the state." And he did not fail to point out the contrast between the noble language of the statesmen of Virginia on the church-state relationship and "the little pigmy *shall bes* and *shall not bes* of Massachusetts."

A Blow at the Root closes with congratulations to the United States on the recent election that has elevated to the presidency "the *Man of the People*, the defender of the rights

¹²⁹ New London, 1801; Suffield [Conn.], 1801; Bennington [Vt.], 1801; Lexington [Ky.], 1802; Edenton [No. Car.], 1803; Washington [Ga.], 1805. Reprinted in Leland's *Writings*, pp. 233-55, whence the quotations here are taken.

of man and the rights of conscience." Rising to his subject, Leland exclaimed:

Pardon me . . . if I am over-warm. I lived in Virginia fourteen years. The beneficent influence of my hero was too generally felt to leave me a stoic. What may we not expect under the auspices of heaven, while JEFFERSON presides, with *Madison* in state by his side. Now the greatest orbit in America is occupied by the brightest orb: but, sirs, expect to see religious bigots, like cashiered officers, and displaced statesmen, growl and gnaw their galling bands, and, like a yelping mastiff, bark at the moon, whose rising they cannot prevent.

In 1810 Chief Justice Theophilus Parsons handed down a decision that alarmed all Massachusetts dissenters, for it decreed that preachers to unincorporated religious societies were not "public teachers" within the meaning of Article III of the Declaration of Rights.¹³⁰ Few Baptist societies were incorporated, and thousands of that faith joined with thousands of adherents of other faiths in petitioning the legislature for a new law that would protect their forms of worship from extinction.¹³¹ In this emergency (May, 1811,) the town of Cheshire elected its best-known and most eloquent citizen to the General Court. The speech that Leland made in support of the petitioners has been preserved and is one of his best efforts. Its argument is based squarely on the guarantee in the Declaration of Rights that "no subordination of any one sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law." But surely the recent decision does precisely this, for it declares that

these non-incorporated societies are nobody—can do nothing, and are never to be known except in shearing time, when their money is wanted to support teachers that they never hear. And all this must be done for the *good of the state*. . . . The petitioners pray for the right of going to heaven in that way which they believe is the most direct, and shall this be denied them? . . . In Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylv-

¹³⁰ Buck, *Mass. Ecclesiastical Law*, pp. 42-3.

¹³¹ Burrage, *Hist. of Baptists in New England*, p. 124.

vania and Delaware, of the old colonies, and in Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio, the new states, there has never been any legal establishment of religion, nor any assessment to support Protestant Christianity, for the *good of the states*, and yet, sir, these states have stood and flourished as well as Massachusetts.¹³²

The efforts of Leland and his associates were in some degree successful, for the "Religious Freedom Act," passed in June, 1811, did give members of non-incorporated religious societies exemption from Congregational rates. This of course, was no more than the Baptists had supposed they had enjoyed before Parsons' decision had pulled the rug from under their feet. It allayed their worst fears but did not accomplish their main object, and so they continued the fight. High hopes were centered on the Constitutional Convention of 1820, and Leland again publicly put forward his ideal amendment.¹³³ But the Convention was dominated by conservatives and did nothing to impair the historic connection between Congregationalism and the state government.¹³⁴ Separation of church and state in Massachusetts,

¹³² *Writings*, pp. 354-5. Of his legislative service Leland wrote years later: "Thro' strong persuasion I was tucked into the Legislature two years; and learned from experience what I had surmised before; that my conscience was not long enough for a legislator. I gained no evidence that the legislature of Massachusetts had inspiration sufficient to legislate about souls, conscience or eternity" (Letter to S. M. Noel, 17 June 1831; *Baptist Chronicle*, II [1831], 110).

¹³³ See his "Short Essays on Government, and the Proposed Revision of the Constitution . . . of Massachusetts" (*Writings*, pp. 473-9), probably first published in a newspaper. He remarked here that the ambiguity and contradictions of Articles II and III of the Declaration of Rights reminded him of the man who "wrote a letter to his attorney, but after he had written he could not read it. He then handed it to his son, but his son could not. The man then folded up the letter and sent it to the attorney, saying, 'Never mind it, my son, the lawyer is a better scholar than we are.'"

¹³⁴ See the summary in S. E. Morison, *A History of the Constitution of Massachusetts*, Boston, 1917, pp. 32-3. The Convention proposed and the people adopted an amendment abolishing religious tests for office, but a very mild amendment substituting "Christian" for "Protestant" in Article III of the Declaration of Rights was voted down by the people. It was too strong for some voters, but too tame for probably many more. John Adams moved in the Convention that the words "all men of all religions" be substituted for "every denomination of Christians" in Article III, but the motion was defeated. See *Journal of Debates and Proceedings in the Convention . . . to Revise the Constitution of Massachusetts*, new edn., Boston, 1853, pp. 613-4, 633, 427.

when it was finally achieved, was less directly the result of the fifty- or sixty-year-long crusade by the dissenting sects than of a totally unpredictable set of circumstances. These were complex and are largely irrelevant here. It is enough to say that the division between Trinitarian and Unitarian Congregationalism in the 1820's suddenly placed the Trinitarians in the position where they had long and complacently seen other religious minorities. They promptly joined forces with them in urging a constitutional amendment withdrawing tax support from all the churches. The amendment was adopted in 1833 by a popular vote of nearly ten to one.¹³⁵ Thus passed the last church establishment in the United States, and there were few to lament it. One can only hope that John Leland read Governor Edward Everett's inaugural address in 1836, in which the Governor said: "Taught by the wisdom of ages the mischief of an alliance of church and state, we have incorporated it into our system, as an article of our political faith, that religion is a concernment between the conscience of man and his creator, and exists in its greatest purity, when it rests upon the public sentiment of an enlightened community."¹³⁶ If Leland did read this, he must have first rubbed his eyes and then cried out "Hosanna!"

THE MAMMOTH CHEESE:

"AN EBULITION OF THE PASSION OF DEMOCRACY"

In the local histories and the anniversary addresses John Leland is depicted as leading his Baptist flock to the polls to cast their votes as one man for all Democratic-Republican candidates. The story has been repeatedly told of how the

¹³⁵ Amendment XI (Thorpe, *Federal and State Constitutions*, III, 1914). See Buck, *Mass. Ecclesiastical Law*, ch. IV; Meyer, *Church and State in Mass.*, ch. VIII.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Stokes, *Church and State in the U.S.*, I, 427.

first lone Federalist ballot cast in Cheshire was thrown out unhesitatingly by the selectmen counting the votes because they were sure it was a mistake.¹³⁷ More plausible, but to the same effect, is the statement of Leland's granddaughter to a traveler whose account of a visit to Cheshire was printed in the *Pittsfield Sun* of 30 September 1869. There was just one voter in the town, according to the granddaughter, who persisted in casting an anti-Jeffersonian vote in spite of all Leland's sermons, speeches, and personal persuasion. She did not remember the name of this courageous nonconformist, but the editor of the *Sun*, as it happened, did. "The name of the individual who cast the *one vote* against the Democracy was *Samuel Whipple*. That vote was in the course of years increased to *three*, Mr. Whipple having two sons who also voted the Federal ticket when they attained their majority." Presumably the Whipples lived at the crossroads in the town long known as "Federal City."¹³⁸

Leland's political influence may have become legendary, but it was no legend. It can be verified from the town records in the Cheshire clerk's office. The following table shows Cheshire's votes for governor from 1800 through 1808.

| | | |
|------|----------------|-----|
| 1800 | Elbridge Gerry | 79 |
| | Moses Gill | 1 |
| 1801 | Gerry | 175 |
| | Caleb Strong | 0 |
| 1802 | Gerry | 162 |
| | Strong | 2 |
| 1803 | Gerry | 188 |
| | Strong | 1 |
| 1804 | James Sullivan | 204 |
| | Strong | 1 |

¹³⁷ E. C. Raynor, communication to the *Granite Monthly*, VIII (1885), 140. I have not found this anecdote in print earlier, but it has often been printed since.

¹³⁸ Raynor and Peticlec, *Hist. of Cheshire*, p. 95.

| | | |
|------|------------------|-----|
| 1805 | Sullivan | 211 |
| | Strong | 1 |
| 1806 | Sullivan | 191 |
| | Strong | 3 |
| 1807 | Sullivan | 223 |
| | Strong | 2 |
| 1808 | Sullivan | 195 |
| | Christopher Gore | 2 |

The votes of Cheshire for representative in Congress during these years show the same lopsided, Jeffersonian pattern. Unfortunately the vote for presidential electors is available for only one of the three national elections during the period. This is because in both 1800 and 1808 the General Court assumed the function of choosing the electors in order to make certain they would all be Federalists.¹³⁹ In 1804 the town cast 181 votes for the Democratic-Republican electors and none for the Federalists.

Thanks to Leland and some able co-workers nearby, Berkshire County steadily remained a Jeffersonian and later a Jacksonian stronghold, in sharp contrast with the Connecticut River counties just to the east, which were dominated by Federalist Dwights, Strongs, and Sedgwicks. In Pittsfield, a few miles south of Cheshire, flourished one of the most vigorous of Democratic-Republican journals in the United States—the *Sun*, founded by Phineas Allen in 1800. The first two issues of the *Sun* bore the motto:

*Here ALL may scribble with unbounded sway,
If they will do it in a DECENT way.*

But in the third issue the motto had disappeared and Allen settled down to strictly partisan journalism. In this task Leland was an active collaborator. Allen acknowledged this

¹³⁹ Caleb B. Tillinghast, "The Electoral College [of Massachusetts]," a series of articles contributed to the *Boston Journal*, 1888-89 (scrapbook in Librarian's Office, Mass. State Library).

debt in his obituary notice of Leland, saying: "When the Senior Editor of this journal commenced the publication of the Sun, *more than forty years since*, no one rendered him more efficient aid than did Mr. Leland. Thro' his kind exertions the circulation of the paper was increased, and his pen was always prompt to assist in the promotion and furtherance of the great and fundamental principles we have constantly and fearlessly aimed to maintain."¹⁴⁰

Many of Leland's essays and speeches were first printed in the *Sun*, and others were published separately by Allen for wider circulation. One or two of the latter may be mentioned as representative. Leland's *Oration, Delivered at Cheshire, July 5, 1802, on the Celebration of Independence*, reviews in Jeffersonian terms our national history to 1802 and contrasts the status of the people under Federalist and Republican administrations. "I would as soon give my vote to a wolf to be a shepherd," Leland remarks of Federalist political philosophy, "as to a man, who is always contending for the energy of government, to be a ruler."¹⁴¹ The two worst ills of the country, he finds, are personal slavery in the South and religious slavery in the North. He enumerates "seventeen [thoroughly Jeffersonian] wishes" to serve as toasts for the national anniversary, but his last word is a plea that nothing be done this day "that will disgrace the republican or the Christian."¹⁴²

Three years later Leland pronounced another Fourth of July oration at Cheshire, which was promptly printed by Phineas Allen under the title of *An Elective Judiciary*. It expounds one of the favorite ideas of the party which had

¹⁴⁰ *Pittsfield Sun*, 21 Jan. 1841.

¹⁴¹ *Writings*, p. 266.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 269-70. Among the volunteer toasts offered on the occasion, according to the report in the *Pittsfield Sun* (26 July 1802), was the following, in allusion to the rivalry of the *Sun* and the Federalist *Western Star* of Stockbridge: "May the splendour of the Republican SUN continue to eclipse the twinklings of the *Western Lightning Bug*."

recently come into power in two branches of the government only to find itself repeatedly frustrated by Federalists entrenched in the judiciary. There were all kinds of reasons why the Jeffersonians, from the President on down, wished to make judges more responsive to the popular will. Leland admits that the chances of making judicial offices elective—of converting them from a “monarchical” to a “representative” status—are probably slight. Then “let us make the best of it,” he suggests, “and have nothing to do with courts of judicature, that we can possibly avoid, but settle all our controversies by mutual arbitration, then the hosts of lawyers, who infest our land like the swarms of locusts in Egypt, and eat up every green thing, will have nothing to do but apply themselves to that happy vocation, which they now recommend to others, ‘plough, hoe, go to meeting, and learn good things.’”¹⁴³ As was his way in his frequent appearances as public orator, Leland does not confine himself to the topic announced in his title. He argues for a reduction of the requirements for suffrage, criticizes the employment of congressional chaplains on government funds,¹⁴⁴ urges upon his fellow-townsmen “a line of proper decorum on days of election and at all your town meetings,” and especially the encouragement of youthful talents in politics in “a laudable strife among the towns of Berkshire” to produce the best statesman. There is also a notable passage defending Mr. Jefferson against the personal attacks on him in Federalist newspapers.

His flight to Carter’s mountain, his attempt to cheat Mr. Jones, his intrigue with Mrs. Walker, and his sending from France for black Sall

¹⁴³ *Writings*, p. 292. For current feeling against judges and lawyers throughout the country, see John Bach McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States*, Philadelphia, 1883-1913, III, 153 ff.

¹⁴⁴ James Madison had similar doubts about the constitutionality of paying chaplains to Congress out of public funds; see his “Autobiography,” ed. Douglass Adair, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., II (1945), 204.

[Leland observes], are the four topics of censure. These crimes, it is said, were all committed between the years 1776 and 1790. I do not absolutely know but all the charges are true; but one thing I know to be true. I lived in Virginia, from December, 1776, until April, 1791, not far distant from Monticello; yet I never heard a syllable of either of those crimes, till I read them in these eastern newspapers; said to be extracts from Calender & Co. I shall, therefore, be an infidel in these reports, until I have better evidence.¹⁴⁵

The good people of Cheshire were bound to listen to anything said about Mr. Jefferson with particular interest. They were attached to him in a very special way. Not long before, they had presented him with a novel and substantial token of their affection and esteem.

The earliest public mention of the Great Cheshire Cheese that I have found is in a short-lived Jeffersonian paper published at Providence, Rhode Island, called the *Impartial Observer*. On 8 August 1801 that paper printed the following communication under the caption "The Cheshire Ladies' respect to President Jefferson":

In the town of Cheshire, state of Massachusetts, the ladies of the Rev. Mr. Leland's church and society agreed to make a cheese to present to his Excellency Thomas Jefferson as a mark of the exalted esteem they had of him as a man of virtue, benevolence, and a real sincere friend to all Christian denominations, and their full coincidence in his being placed in the Executive chair of the American nation, and their full assurance of his wielding the government at much less expence than his predecessor, and as well, and it is hoped much better. Accordingly, they requested Mr. Leland to procure a cheese vat at their expense six feet diameter, and twenty one inches thick, to press the cheese in; and on a certain day they were to assemble at Mr. Daniel Brown's with the curd to make the cheese. They all punctually attended and placed the vat in a cyder press and then filled it with curd. The vat held fourteen hundred weight of curd, and they had three hundred weight left. This cheese was made from the milk of 900 cows at one milking. When our informant left Cheshire, the cheese had not been turned, but would be in a few days, as the machinery for that purpose was nearly completed.

¹⁴⁵ *Writings*, p. 286.

If the ladies of Massachusetts begin to give their cheese out of respect to Mr. Jefferson, and if some of the high toned Adams men do not soon turn and become friendly to Jefferson and the ladies, it is thought they will lose their esteem and have to eat their bread without cheese. This cheese is to be sent on in the spring of 1802, to the seat of government, under the care of Mr. Lealand, who was formerly a neighbour to Mr. Jefferson fifteen years in the State of Virginia. The motto on this cheese is "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."

Ten days later the story was picked up by the *Hampshire Gazette*, a Federalist paper published at Northampton, Massachusetts, and reprinted, with some heavily sarcastic comments, under the title of "THE MAMMOTH CHEESE." The title is of more interest than the comments, for the epithet was a novel one and was to stick to Leland's cheese permanently.¹⁴⁶ A further account, purportedly by an eyewitness, appeared in the Stockbridge *Western Star* on the last day of August. Passing through Cheshire, said this writer, who appropriately signed himself "VIATOR," "my eyes were favored with a view of a ludicrous procession, in honor of a cheesen God . . . of the enormous weight of 1238 lbs. . . . What added to the ludicrousness of the scene was the sight of an Ambassador of God, running and puffing with a cased Flag to ornament and grace the idolatry."

Local histories add a good many details about the production of the Cheese that may or may not be accurate. It is said, for example, that no Federalist cows were allowed to contribute milk. It is certain that a cider press was used instead of a cheese press, and that the local blacksmith rein-

¹⁴⁶ According to the *New English Dictionary*, the noun *mammoth* (the name of the extinct Siberian elephant) was borrowed from Russian into English about 1700. It was used in America before the end of the century for the North American mastodon, or "the Great American Incognitum," as it was first called during the excitement over the excavation and reconstruction of a mastodon skeleton in Orange County, N. Y., by Charles Willson Peale (see Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, Philadelphia, 1947, II, 142-4). *The Dictionary of Americanisms* assigns the earliest *attributive* use of the word to 1802, in connection with the Mammoth Cheese.

forced both the press and the gigantic cheese hoop that was made to mold the cheese.¹⁴⁷

In the Boston *Mercury and New-England Palladium* for 8 September appeared a poetic narrative of the proceedings of the great day. Two or three stanzas of this "Epic-Lyrical Ballad," which was very widely reprinted, will suffice here.

Then Elder J. — with lifted eyes,
 In musing posture stood,
 Invoked a blessing from the skies,
 To save from vermin, mites and flies,
 And keep the bounty good. . . .

Then, sexton-like, the patriot troop,
 With naked arms and crown,
 Embraced, with hardy hands, the scoop,
 And filled the vast expanded hoop,
 While beetles smacked it down.

Next girding screws, the pondrous beam,
 With heft immense, drew down.
 The gushing whey, from every seam
 Flowed through the streets, a rapid stream,
And shad came up to town.

Journalistic comment, playful and indignant, was general during the following weeks. The Pittsfield *Sun* observed on 16 November:

One of the principal subjects of *Federal* Complaint against President JEFFERSON seems to be the "*Mammoth Cheese*" (as the *Opposition* writers have generally called it) made by a number of the Ladies of Cheshire, to be presented to the President, as a mark of respect, and for

¹⁴⁷ When the cider press was dismantled after long use, the great wooden screw was cut up and the sections distributed as relics of the great occasion. One of these is in the possession of the author of this paper. The fullest account of the making of the cheese is by C. A. Browne, "Elder John Leland and the Mammoth Cheshire Cheese," *Agricultural History*, XVIII (1944), 145-53. This well-documented account draws alike on historical and traditional materials.

the encouragement of the stable production of that grazing town. This intended PRESENT, and the appointment of ABRAHAM BISHOP's Father, Collector of New-Haven, in the place of Mr. Goodrich, have probably drawn forth more *federal* objections against the New Administration, than any other two measures. The Cheshire Cheese has not yet been seriously represented to be in itself a violation of the Constitution, but presenting it to the President is thought to be inconsistent with the monopoly of a *federal* market, and consequently a crime nearly allied to that of taking "*their daily bread away* from meritorious federal officers." . . . It is shrewdly suspected that ALBERT GALLATIN, the Genevan instigator of Whiskey Insurrections, instigated the good women of Cheshire to enter into the *Cheese-Plot*, the particulars of which may be expected in the *Appendix* of Dr. MORSE's next *Thanksgiving Sermon*.

The word itself was becoming a fad, greatly stimulated of course by Peale's publicity for his Mammoth skeleton. The New York *Commercial Advertiser* for 4 December published a contribution from Stoningtonport asking, "*What are the Mammoth squashes, pumpkins, peaches, &c. to the MAMMOTH RADISH!* Was raised during the last season in the garden of Mr. Z. Hancock, *in this Borough*, a Scarlet Radish, which weighed 20 lbs. measured *three feet in circumference, and six feet in length!*" A little later a Philadelphia baker advertised "*Mammoth bread*" for sale, prompting the violently anti-Jeffersonian *Port Folio* to comment: "We suppose that his gigantic loaves were baked at a *Salt Lick*, and perhaps may form a great rock bridge, or *natural arch* between the mouth and maw of a voracious republican."¹⁴⁸

Late in November, John Leland and Darius Brown had started with the 1235-pound cheese on a sleigh or wagon from Cheshire for the Hudson River. At or near the city of Hudson they transferred it to a sloop, which brought it to New York, where it arrived on 6 December and could be viewed by the curious "at the Albany Bason."¹⁴⁹ From

¹⁴⁸ *Port Folio*, II, 31 (Jan. 1802).

¹⁴⁹ N. Y. *Commercial Advertiser*, 7 Dec. 1801.

there it proceeded to Baltimore. "This handsome compliment from the republican ladies of Cheshire . . . arrived in this city yesterday," the Baltimore *Federal Gazette* reported on 21 December, "in good order, in the sloop *Astrea*, captain Rogers, from New-York, and now lays at Smith's wharf. In the course of a day or two it will be sent on in a waggon to the City of Washington, to the President." The British traveler John Davis, a very untrustworthy witness to be sure, related in his book on the United States that "The curiosity of the inhabitants of *Baltimore* was universally excited; men, women, and children flocked to see the Mammoth Cheese. The taverns were deserted; the gravy soup cooled on the table, and the cats unrebuked revelled on the custards and cream. Even grey-bearded shopkeepers neglected their counters, and participated in the Mammoth infatuation." He added that the four "richly caparisoned" horses that drew the Cheese to Washington were furnished by Baltimore Republicans. They must have been furnished by someone, for the Cheese arrived in the capital on 29 December.¹⁵⁰

Jefferson was duly notified of this event, for early on New Year's morning he wrote his son-in-law, Thomas Mann Randolph: "The Mammoth cheese is arrived here and is to be presented this day. It is 4.f. 4½ I. diameter, 15. I. thick, and weighed in August 1230. lb. They were offered 1000. D. in New York for the use of it 12. days as a shew. It is an ebullition of the passion of republicanism in a state where it has been under heavy persecution."¹⁵¹ The newspaper accounts say that the President stood in his door to receive the extraordinary gift later that forenoon. Leland read the

¹⁵⁰ Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America*, London, 1803, pp. 329-30. *Washington National Intelligencer*, 30 Dec.; *Washington Federalist*, 31 Dec. 1801.

¹⁵¹ Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

following address of presentation, signed by five citizens of Cheshire but undoubtedly composed by their revered Baptist elder:

Sir:

Notwithstanding we live remote from the seat of our national government, in an extreme part of our own state, yet we humbly claim the right of judging for ourselves.

Our attachment to the National Constitution is indissoluble. We consider it is a discription of those powers which the people have delegated to their Magistrates, to be exercised for definite purposes; and not as a charter of favors granted by a sovereign to his subjects.

Among its beautiful features,—The right of free suffrage, to correct abuses—the prohibition of religious tests, to prevent all hierarchy—and the means of amendment which it contains within itself, to remove defects as fast as they are discovered, appear the most prominent.

Such being the sentiments which we entertain, our joy must have been exquisite on your appointment to the first office in the nation.

The trust is great. The task arduous. But we believe the supreme Ruler of the Universe, who raises up men to achieve great events, has raised up a JEFFERSON at this critical day, to defend *Republicanism*, and to baffle the arts of *Aristocracy*.

We wish to prove the love we bear to our President not by words alone, but in *deed and in truth*. With this address we send you a Chees by the hands of Messrs John Leland and Darius Brown, as a token of the esteem we bear to our chief Magistrate and of the sense we entertain of the singular blessings that have been derived from the numerous services you have rendered to mankind in general, and more especially to this favored nation over which you preside. It is not the last stone of the Bastile; nor is it an article of great pecuniary worth; but as a freewill offering, we hope it will be favorably received.

The Chees was produced by the personal labor of *Freeborn Farmers*, with the voluntary and cheerful aid of their wives and daughters, without the assistance of a single slave. It was originally intended for an elective President of a free people, and with a principal view of casting a mite into the even scale of *Federal Democracy*. We hope it will safely arrive at it's destined place, and that it's quality will prove to be such as may not disappoint the wishes of those who mad[e] it.

To that Infinite Being who governs the Universe we ardently pray, that your life and health may long be preserved—that your usefulness

may be still continued—that your Administration may be no less pleasant to yourself than it is grateful to us and to the nation at large, and that the blessing of generations yet unborn may come upon you.

In behalf of ourselves and our fellow citizens of Cheshire, we send you the tribute of profound respect.

N.B. The chees above mentioned was made July 20, 1801, and on the 20th. of August it weighed 1235 lb.¹⁵²

To this the President replied:

To Messrs. Daniel Brown, Hezekiah Mason, Jonathan Richardson, John Waterman and John Wells junr. a committee of the town of Cheshire in Massachusetts.

Gentlemen

I concur with you in the sentiments expressed in your kind address on behalf of the inhabitants of the town of Cheshire, that the constitution of the United States is a Charter of authorities and duties, not a Charter of rights to it's officers; and that among it's most precious provisions are the right of suffrage, the prohibition of religious tests, and it's means of peaceable amendment. Nothing ensures the duration of this fair fabric of government so effectually as the due sense entertained, by the body of our citizens, of the value of these principles, and their care to preserve them.

I receive, with particular pleasure, the testimony of good will with which your citizens have been pleased to charge you. It presents an extraordinary proof of the skill with which those domestic arts which contribute so much to our daily comfort, are practised by them, and particularly by that portion of them most interesting to the affections, the cares and the happiness of man.

To myself this mark of esteem from freeborn farmers, employed personally in the useful labors of life, is peculiarly grateful. Having no wish to but preserve to them the fruits of their labour, their sense of this truth will be my highest reward.

I pray you, gentlemen, to make my thanks for their favor acceptable to them & to be assured yourselves of my high respect and esteem.

TH: JEFFERSON

On the same day, before or after the presentation of the Cheese, Jefferson replied to an address from the Danbury, Connecticut, Baptist Association. The reply pointed out

¹⁵² The originals of both the address and the reply are in the possession of Mr. William B. Browne, North Adams, Massachusetts, and are printed with his kind permission.

that the First Amendment of the Constitution had built "a wall of separation between Church and State," and thus gave us a metaphor that remains meaningful and useful no matter how hackneyed by repetition.¹⁵³

Amusing as the tribute of cheese might appear to most people, there were some it did not amuse. Manasseh Cutler, representative in Congress from the Essex District in Massachusetts, had two good reasons for disapproving the whole affair. He was a Federalist, and he was a Congregational clergyman. In a letter to Dr. Joseph Torrey of 4 January 1802, he expressed with some asperity his feelings about the Cheese, Leland, and Mr. Jefferson.

On New Year's day [he wrote], a number of the Federalists were determined to keep up the old custom, though contrary to what was intended [since Jefferson had abandoned all ceremonial forms], of waiting on the President, with the compliments of the season. We went at eleven, were tolerably received, and treated with cake and wine. We had, likewise, the honor of viewing the mammoth cheese. It had, a little before, been presented with all the parade of Democratic etiquette. The President invited us to "Go into the mammoth room to see the mammoth cheese." Last Sunday [3 January], Leland, the cheesemonger, a poor ignorant, illiterate, clownish creature (who was the conductor of this monument of human weakness and folly to the place of its destination), was introduced as the preacher to both Houses of Congress, and a great number of gentlemen and ladies from I know not where. The President, contrary to all former practice, made one of his audience. Such a performance I never heard before, and I hope never shall again. The text was, "And behold a greater than Solomon is here." The design of the preacher was principally to apply the allusion, not to the person intended in the text, but to *him* who was then present. Such a farrago, bawled with stunning voice, horrid tone, frightful grimaces, and extravagant gestures, I believe, was never heard by any decent auditory before. Shame or laughter appeared in every countenance. Such an outrage upon religion, the Sabbath, and common decency, was extremely painful to every sober, thinking person present. But it answered the

¹⁵³ Jefferson, *Works*, ed. Bergh, XVI, 281-2.

much-wished for purpose of the Democrats, to see religion exhibited in the most ridiculous manner.¹⁵⁴

From Mount Vernon Nelly Custis Lewis wrote her friend Mrs. C. C. Pinckney at the same time that the Federalists who had seen the Cheese "say the crust is painted red and think the new representatives room looks like an *oven* intended for the *apple pye* which was supposed would be offered with the cheese."¹⁵⁵

Leland evidently paid his parting respects to the President on the day after preaching to Congress. For Jefferson's manuscript Account Book under the date of 4 January contains this entry: "gave revd mr. Leland bearer of the cheese of 1235 lb. weight 200.D."¹⁵⁶ Nothing could be more characteristic of their recorder than these precise data, but they reveal no motive for the gift. A painstaking historian, John B. McMaster, long ago pointed out that Jefferson paid Leland at the rate of sixteen cents per pound, "which, by the 'Prices Current,' was five cents a pound more than cheese was worth."¹⁵⁷ But if we are to enter upon such considerations, what about Leland's traveling expenses? The only possible explanation of the transaction is that Jefferson as a public servant insisted on declining gifts that would obligate him to the givers. Since he highly approved Leland's political views, he paid him generously, knowing he would make good use of the money. It is very surprising, however, that no mention at all is made in either the town or the church records at Cheshire of the \$200 or, indeed, of

¹⁵⁴ W. P. and J. P. Cutler, *Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler*, Cincinnati, 1888, II, 66-7.

¹⁵⁵ Undated letter quoted in Charles Moore, *The Family Life of George Washington*, Boston and New York, 1926, p. 167.

¹⁵⁶ Jefferson's Account Book for 1801-1803 is in the New York Public Library; a photostatic copy is in the Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

¹⁵⁷ *Hist. of the People of the U.S.*, II, 604, note. The entry from Jefferson's Account Book first appeared in print in an article by John Bigelow on "Jefferson's Financial Diary," *Harper's Monthly*, March, 1885 (LXX, 542).

any report made by Leland upon his return. The local records are, in fact, wholly silent upon the subject of the Great Cheese from beginning to end.

The later history of the Cheese is also obscure. It was unquestionably around for a long time. The Reverend Dr. Cutler, a man of boundless curiosity, felt impelled to view it again when he called on the President on New Year's Day, 1803, and he learned that "sixty pounds had been taken out of the middle, in consequence of the puffing up and symptoms of decay."¹⁵⁸ An allusion by Benjamin H. Latrobe early in 1804 implies that the Cheese had been recently disposed of. Latrobe was superintendent of public buildings, in charge of work on both the Capitol and the President's Mansion. On 28 March 1804 he wrote indignantly to John Lenthall, his master builder on the job, about a threatened cut in the appropriation for work on the mansion:

If . . . the House of Representatives should agree to the Amendment, then the President being left to shift for himself we must set our wits to stuff the House of Representatives into the Room formerly inhabited by the Mammoth Cheese: and I think the preparation for that Maggot-breeding Assembly, has been very properly made, by fixing the Cheese for two Years where the Speaker may sit for one.¹⁵⁹

There are various accounts of the final disposition of the Cheese. The last of it is said to have been served with hot punch at a presidential reception in 1805; it is also said to have been dumped into the Potomac at a date not known.

¹⁵⁸ Cutler, *Manasseh Cutler*, II, 116.

¹⁵⁹ Library of Congress, Latrobe-Lenthall Correspondence. At almost the same time Latrobe wrote, the baker of the Navy produced a "Mammoth Loaf" to be eaten at the Capitol when Congress adjourned. The Senate had not finished its business when the feast began in a nearby room, and Senator Plumer of New Hampshire reported the affair, in which Jefferson participated, with great indignation. One detail reported by Plumer is incredible—namely, that the President "compared this drunken frolic to the sacrament of the Lords supper" (*William Plumer's Memorandum of Proceedings in the United States Senate, 1803-1807*, ed. Everett S. Brown, New York, 1923, p. 179). Jefferson's extreme caution in his public references to everything relating to religion makes such conduct entirely out of character for him.

The annals of the Mammoth Cheese end in complete obscurity. But the town that produced it has not let its memory fade. In 1940 a huge concrete replica of the press and the Cheese was erected in the village of Cheshire to commemorate alike the most celebrated event in its history and the civic and religious labors of Elder John Leland.¹⁶⁰

JEFFERSONIAN PATRIARCH

Returning to Cheshire, Leland settled down to his routine of supplying the pulpits in that village and others nearby. He also continued his itinerating. In 1800 he had traveled to the New York frontier and swung back through Connecticut and Rhode Island. For two years or more (1804-06) he lived in Dutchess County, New York, until the troubles in the Cheshire church over his views on communion subsided. His autobiographical sketch mentions evangelizing trips to Vermont in 1808; to Philadelphia and Virginia in 1813-14; and to the Genesee country, where he visited his children and doubtless saw many former Berkshire County neighbors, in 1815.¹⁶¹ He contemplated moving to western New York for good, but a broken leg resulting from a fall from his horse changed his plans, and he moved instead to the little settlement of New Ashford northwest of Cheshire. Here he lived for sixteen years, returning in 1831 to spend his final years in Cheshire.¹⁶² In 1820 he estimated that he had traveled a distance equivalent to three times round the earth and had preached "not far from eight thousand" sermons.¹⁶³ "Faint yet pursuing," as he described himself, he still had over twenty years of active life ahead of him.

¹⁶⁰ An account of the ceremonies dedicating the monument is in the *Springfield Republican*, 2 Sept. 1940.

¹⁶¹ *Writings*, pp. 32-4.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 38.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Politically he remained active and articulate throughout his later years. On the great issue of neutral rights that troubled Jefferson's second term and brought on war under Madison, Leland and his fellow-townsmen stood squarely behind the government. On 22 August, 1808, the town "Voted unanimously that we disapprove of the doings of the Town [of] Boston Relative to their Petitioning the President of United States to suspend the Embargo," and Leland was named first on a committee appointed to answer the Boston selectmen's circular letter.¹⁶⁴ When war was declared in June, 1812, Governor Caleb Strong proclaimed a day of atonement for our hostile conduct toward "the nation from which we are descended"; but a Cheshire town meeting on 11 July resolved that "the declaration of war . . . was dignified and just, and the only measure left for a Nation to resort to that dec[r]ees they will be free" and therefore resolute in resisting the "faithless piratical and Savage conduct" of Great Britain. Another resolution adopted at the same time declared that the Washington Benevolent Society was "formed of unauspicious plants" and that if its conduct showed it was acting "in the Support of a foreign Government," then "the Insignia of the Father of his Country Shall be wrested by the eagle of America from such unworthy protection." For this and other purposes a Committee of Safety and Vigilance was formed. It was instructed to use forbearance but at the same time to treat firmly any who needed to be taught "that as free Men we mean to live and as free Men we mean to die."

According to a contemporary estimate, there were 2,300 members of the Washington Benevolent Society in Berkshire County in 1813.¹⁶⁵ This was a local branch of a national

¹⁶⁴ See the proceedings of a special town meeting of 9 Aug., 1808, in *Boston Town Records, 1796 to 1813*, Boston, 1905, pp. 237-9. The answer from Cheshire is not on record.

¹⁶⁵ Smith, *Hist. of Pittsfield, 1800-1876*, p. 232.

political organization, more or less secret in character, to which all good Federalists belonged and which all Republicans viewed as unpatriotic and conspiratorial.¹⁶⁶ Certainly its members were opposed to the war, and some of the speeches and toasts uttered at its mass meetings verged on disloyalty. At Pittsfield, where a good many British prisoners were brought from the Lakes and Canada in 1813-14, every successful escape was attributed by supporters of the war to secret aid from the Washington Benevolent Society. A tradition preserved by local historians of Cheshire is that captive British officers were paroled in Cheshire rather than in Pittsfield because there were too many "friends of King George" among the citizens of the larger town.¹⁶⁷ However, by July, 1814, the villagers were tired of their fashionable company, for they petitioned for the removal of the paroled officers, reciting among other charges against them that "they have recently indulged themselves in the amusement of firing, with bullets, lengthwise of the street, at a mark, and a few days since fired two balls through the meeting-house, neither have we any reason to believe it accidental."¹⁶⁸

But Cheshire was by no means ready at this unhappy period of the war to give up fighting, nor was it infected by the pessimism and quasi-disloyalty that led to the Hartford Convention. On 24 September, 1814, at the lowest moment of American military fortunes, a town meeting voted to raise the wages of all Cheshire draftees above the pittance paid them by the Federal government, and to "provide

¹⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 232-8; Harlan H. Ballard, "A Forgotten Fraternity," *Berkshire Hist. and Sci. Soc., Collections*, III, No. 4 (1913); and S. E. Morison, *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*, Boston and New York, 1913, I, 300-3. Mr. Morison shows that the Societies were simply part of the Federalist political machine in Massachusetts, much like the Democratic clubs (so detested by Washington himself) in the Democratic-Republican state machines in the 1790's.

¹⁶⁷ Raynor and Peticlerc, *Hist. of Cheshire*, p. 106.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

every necessary munition of war not only for our Townsmen subject to military duty but also for the exempts able to bear arms." These measures were accompanied by resolutions declaring that

While the enemy by their devastation and cruelties are disregarding all established usages of war and Law of Nations, pouring forth upon the defenceless Inhabitants of our frontiers their red allies, whose Tomahawks drink only the blood of the innocent and the unoffending; betraying to the same merciless slaughter those whom the fortune of war has thrown into their hands, wantonly destroying undefended Towns; and monuments of art and taste as well as the repositories of Scientific knowledge share the same undistinguished ruin from the vandalism of modern Britain. . . .

At such a crisis He is undeserving the name of American whose hand shall withhold the requisite means to place the energies of our Country in a complete preparatory State to chastise our insolent foe in whatever point danger may appear.

The battle of New Orleans gave the nation a new hero, and Leland became an unwavering admirer and supporter of Andrew Jackson from this time forth. He found nothing to please him in the Clay-Adams program of internal improvements, observing in a Fourth of July speech in 1824 that "When the [national] debt shall all be paid, and the taxes lightened, then let railroads, tunnels, and castles in the air be the order of the day, if nothing better appears."¹⁶⁹ In his frequent New Orleans anniversary speeches, Leland defended Old Hickory on every count—even as a writer of state papers—against the "heterogeneous mob . . . of Nullifiers, Hartford Convention men, Bankites, and . . . would-be-ins" who opposed and ridiculed the President.¹⁷⁰

With a profound faith in "the world found by Columbus, delivered by Washington, and taught by Jefferson,"¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ *Writings*, p. 577.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 657.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 573.

Leland looked with pleasure on the rapid settlement of the West and welcomed the immigrants who were pouring toward the frontier.

Their attachment to our free government [he remarked] has become proverbial. This circumstance will tend to keep the now existing western states, and those which shall arise hereafter, upon the plain ground of representative democracy, to the joy of republicans, and the grief of aristocrats in the Atlantic States. This appears to be the course that events will take, and all opposition to it, is like a shad's head against a steam-boat.¹⁷²

Accepting, as usual, the results of his own logic, he roundly denounced nativist prejudices, declaring in 1836 that "no man who has the soul of an American, and the heart of affection for our democratic institutions, will either fear or wish to injure the papists." If they violate the laws, "punish them; but let them have free scope to publish their religion." If they become the majority, we are still bound to accept the principle of majority rule. "The men of *this* generation have neither power nor right to say what laws a *future* generation shall be governed by."¹⁷³

The propagation of opinions like these did not endear Leland to his Baptist associates or to Protestant leaders generally. On two other religious issues that became important during his later years—Sabbatarianism and foreign missions—Leland took the unpopular and unorthodox position that his conscience dictated. These developments were alike in being highly organized campaigns by the Protestant denominations, and it was their *organized* character that earned Leland's disapproval. In the light of the simple faith that he had held and labored for over the years, there was little spirituality and a visible taint of commercialism in these mass activities of the churches. The growth in numbers and wealth of the Protestant sects, so conspicuous in the early decades of the nineteenth century

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 577.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 671-2.

and so gratifying to worldly-minded clergymen, signified to Leland "*outward* prosperity and *inward* depression."¹⁷⁴

Religion [he wrote in 1826] is become the most fashionable thing among us. Moral societies, Sunday schools—tract societies—Bible societies—missionary societies, and funds to educate and make preachers, are now in the full tide of operation. Formerly it was thought not impossible to "discern between those who feared God, and those who did not"; but these many societies, including all classes and characters of men, uniting in the same effort, carry all before them, and leave no dividing line. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin unite with Zerubbabel, in this building, and he who contributes the most, is the most extolled, and his biographer canonizes him for it after he is dead. In barbarous times, when men were in the dark, it was believed that the success of the gospel was according to the outpourings of the Holy Spirit, but in this age of light and improvement, it is estimated according to the pourings out of the purse. Once, a man could not follow the blessed Jesus without bearing his cross, and being hated of all men; but a profession of Christianity is now so honorable, that without it men are despised and calumniated.¹⁷⁵

Whatever the merits of Leland's position, the times were against him. The foreign missions movement was born with the century. Within a decade or two it had captured the imagination of America and especially of the Baptists after the exploits of the Judsons in Burma.¹⁷⁶ In an incredibly short time "Female Mite Societies," "Cent Societies," and similar groups spread from North to South and from East to West; missionary magazines were founded by all the Protestant denominations; seminaries sprang up to train recruits for the great work; and state and national missionary organizations were formed. In one of the earliest of the innumerable new magazines a contributor declared that "The Missionary Spirit, which now pervades and animates the church, is superior in its object to that of the reformation: the views of the one were bounded by the

¹⁷⁴ *Writings*, p. 555.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 523-4.

¹⁷⁶ See Newman, *Hist. of the Baptist Churches in the U. S.*, p. 389 ff. See also Burrage, *Hist. of the Baptists in New England*, ch. VII: "Organized Missionary Operations."

limits of Christendom, the views of the other know no limits but those of the habitable world."¹⁷⁷

Leland stood conspicuously aside from all this activity. As one who had in a real sense been a missionary all his life, but without special training and without help from "associated Christian effort," he was dubious about seminaries and campaigns for funds. Not opposed to secular education, he stuck to the primitive Baptist principle that the power to evangelize is bestowed by divine rather than human means. And the popular cry that "every cent may save a soul" revolted him.¹⁷⁸ Yet on this issue he was not aggressive, for he characteristically conceded that he might be mistaken. In 1832 he told a friend in a letter that was promptly published:

The gospel was introduced and spread by a missionary spirit and practice; but *missionary societies* and *missionary funds* have arisen since that era. When I read of the apostles and their labors, I form an idea what spirit they had, and in what manner they labored for the salvation of souls; and if I could see one shade of likeness between the apostolic mission and the modern, it would ease my mind; but this I have not yet discovered: I therefore stand aloof from every *link* of the *chain*, including Sunday-schools—Theological Seminaries—Tract, Bible and Missionary Societies, &c. How many good men and good motives are listed in the cause I cannot tell; but, to me, the *natural tendency* of the whole, is to reduce the gospel to school divinity, and represent the work of the Holy Unction in the heart, to be no more than what men can perform for themselves and for others; and also to fill the ministerial ranks with pharasaical hypocrites. And if the modern scheme does not in its progress, call in the civil arm to enforce its dogmas and punish non-conformists, it will be better than my fears. In these things, however, I may be wrong; for I claim neither infallibility nor the spirit of prophecy.—May I, may you, may every one pray and search for himself, and believe, and act, and follow the clearest light.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *The General Assembly's Missionary Magazine; or Evangelical Intelligencer*, I, 62 (Feb. 1805).

¹⁷⁸ *Writings*, p. 602.

¹⁷⁹ To S. Trott, 7 Sept. 1832; published in *Signs of the Times*, an "Old School" or Anti-Mission Baptist periodical, I, 17-8 (18 Dec. 1832). For Leland's views on the seminaries, see also his *Writings*, pp. 494, 525-6, 554.

The reference to the "civil arm" reveals another of Leland's objections to organized religious movements. Organization in order to win religious equality he had approved and encouraged. But organized efforts to obtain special privileges for any religious body or faith violated his deepest principles and threatened to undo all the labors of those who had broken the ties between church and state. In this light he viewed the agitation to prohibit Sunday mails—a phase of the Sabbath observance crusade which rose and fell in strength at intervals throughout the century. As early as 1790 Leland had publicly declared his agreement with Jefferson and Madison that "it does not belong to [the civil power] to establish fixed holy days for divine worship." To do so would be to continue or to revive the tyrannical methods of religious establishments. Among other things, it would be unfair to Jews and others whose holy day is not that of the majority of Americans. Furthermore, "As the appointment of such days is no part of human legislation, so the breach of the Sabbath (so called) is no part of civil jurisdiction."¹⁸⁰ But as the churches grew in wealth and influence, and as local missionary, tract, and Bible societies were formed, an opportunity presented itself to Protestant leaders to stiffen the old Sunday observance laws in the states and even to enlist the national government in their godly crusade.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ *Writings*, p. 119; see also pp. 224, 240.

¹⁸¹ The situation that confronted Leland in Berkshire County is shown by the large number of "religious and moral societies" organized there between 1798 and 1828 as reported in [David Dudley Field] *History of the County of Berkshire, Massachusetts*, Pittsfield, 1829, pp. 148 ff. These include "the Auxiliary Union of Berkshire County for promoting the observance of the Christian Sabbath," founded in 1828. Field, who was a Congregational clergyman, outlined the aims and work of this group in terms that must have made Leland shudder (pp. 157-8). The journalist Anne Royall, who had violently anti-Calvinist views, visited Pittsfield in 1827. She declared that "The very air is tainted with the rankest bigotry" and felt that she was lucky to escape with her life (*The Black Book; or a Continuation of Travels in the United States*, Washington, 1828, II, 53).

The agitation against Sunday mails began after an Act of Congress of April, 1810, required all post offices to be kept open for at least an hour on each day mail was received.¹⁸² This had long been the practice in cities, but the new law affected smaller towns, and petitions protesting it poured in. They continued to do so, at intervals, during the following years, but the successive postmasters-general stood firm, and Congress supported them. In 1828-29 some 430 petitions, containing 25,000 names and reflecting efficient work by the newly formed Sabbath observance societies, inundated Congress. On 19 January, 1829, Richard Mentor Johnson of Kentucky submitted a report for the Senate committee on post offices and post roads that was intended to put an end to the question. "The proper object of government," said the Report, "is to protect all persons in their religious as well as civil rights, and not to determine for any whether they shall esteem one day above another." The petitioners overlook the fact that some religious bodies in the United States hold another day than Sunday sacred, and they "assume a position better suited to an ecclesiastical than to a civil institution." The Constitution has wisely withheld from the government "the power of defining the divine law." Before concluding, Johnson sharply condemned the petitioners' methods: "Extensive religious combinations to effect a political object are . . . always dangerous. . . . All religious despotism commences by combination and influence; and when that influence begins to operate

¹⁸² The fullest account of the Sunday mails controversy is in the early chapters of Frederic L. Bronner, "The Observance of the Sabbath in the United States, 1800-1865," an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1937. Stokes, *Church and State in the U.S.*, II, 12-20, provides an excellent summary; see also Leland W. Meyer, *The Life and Times of Colonel Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky*, New York, 1932, pp. 256-63, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson*, Boston, 1945, pp. 138-40. R. M. Johnson's Reports of 1829 and 1830, with some of the petitions, counter-petitions, and related documents, are in *American State Papers, Class VII, Post Office Department*, Washington, 1834, pp. 44-7, 211-5, 229-41, 261-5, 357-9.

upon the political institutions of a country, the civil power soon bends under it; and the catastrophe of other nations furnishes an awful warning of the consequence."

On 4 March, 1830, Johnson prepared a second Report, this time for the House of Representatives (of which he was now a member). Though better known than his earlier Report and couched in even stronger language, it covered precisely the same ground and reached the same conclusion—that Congress was constitutionally incapable of legislating upon this essentially religious issue. Both Reports were accepted by Congress, and the non-religious press of the country applauded their eloquence and decisiveness.

Few, perhaps none, of Johnson's arguments had not been stated before in Leland's writings on Sunday laws and related subjects.¹⁸³ But whether Leland directly influenced the Reports that set forth the government's position and put an end to the Sunday mail agitation, is a question that cannot be answered. It is generally believed that the Reverend Obadiah B. Brown, chief clerk of the Post Office Department on weekdays and a Baptist preacher on Sundays, drafted or collaborated in the Reports.¹⁸⁴ Brown was a correspondent of Leland's and between the Reports of 1829 and 1830 Leland was in direct touch with Johnson.¹⁸⁵ Whatever the truth of the matter may be, Leland's neighbors in Cheshire and round about believed he had had an impor-

¹⁸³ See his *Remarks on Holy Time*, Pittsfield, 1815 (partly reprinted in *Writings*, pp. 440-6); also his "Catechism," of about the same date and probably first published in a newspaper (*Writings*, pp. 450-3); and a long essay "On the Sabbath" originally printed in *Pittsfield Sun*, 3 July, 1828, (partly reprinted in *Writings*, pp. 535-40).

¹⁸⁴ See the discussion in Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, p. 139, note. (Meyer, *R. M. Johnson*, p. 262, however, does not agree.) On Obadiah Brown (1779-1852), see William Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, Philadelphia, 1881, pp. 147-8.

¹⁸⁵ See a letter from Leland to Johnson, 8 Jan., 1830, (*Writings*, pp. 561-3). What the petitioners ask, said Leland in this letter, is a small thing, but it will be used "as a stirrup . . . to mount the steed and ride down the people."

tant part in formulating the government's policy. One of them wrote two years after Leland's death: "It is a well-known truth, that while Mr. Leland resided on the side of the mountain in New Ashford, he was requested by the Chairman of a Committee in Congress to give his opinion on a subject that divided the whole country. That opinion was written out, and read to Mr. L's neighbors, weeks before it appeared, nearly unaltered, in the form of a Report from an important committee of Congress."¹⁸⁶

Leland's identification with the secular side of the question produced lying rumors, printed in the newspapers, that he had given up his faith and become an "infidel."¹⁸⁷ These lies merely illustrated the bigotry that he and Richard M. Johnson courageously opposed. Probably nothing said in the whole controversy offended the pious leaders of the other party so much as Leland's masterly exposition of their own moral confusion. "Conscience," he wrote in 1830, "is a court of judicature, erected in every breast, to take cognizance of every action in the home department, but has nothing to do with another man's conduct. My best judgment tells me that my neighbor does wrong, but my conscience has nothing to say of it. Were I to do as he does, my conscience would arrest and condemn me, but guilt is not transferable. Every one must give an account of himself."¹⁸⁸

These observations are as penetrating as any that Leland ever wrote, and they cut the ground from under the feet of the moral vigilantes who organized the Sabbath observance crusade. They are as valid now as they were then, and are well worth repeating whenever and wherever moral vigilantism raises its head.

¹⁸⁶ "P.H.," writing in the *Pittsfield Sun*, 2 March, 1843.

¹⁸⁷ See Leland's *Writings*, pp. 38, 608-10; and Phineas Allen's denial of the rumors and defense of Leland in *Pittsfield Sun*, 16 Dec., 1830.

¹⁸⁸ "Transportation of the Mail," (*Writings*, p. 565; see also pp. 568, 580).

John Leland was a man of seventy-five when the Sunday mails controversy was at its height. He was still ready to fight for causes he believed just, but his spirit was serene. His long and strenuous career had been marked with singularly little bitterness, and now he lived quietly and simply, an unassuming but revered village patriarch. "Every child has left me," he wrote a friend in Kentucky in 1830; "myself and wife keep house alone. We have neither Cuffee nor Phillis to help or plague us. My wife is seventy-seven years old, and has this season done the housework, and from six cows has made eighteen hundred pounds of cheese, and two hundred and fifty pounds of butter."¹⁸⁹ There were a few late itinerant missions, but in his last years Leland for the most part stayed near home. One reason was that his efforts to unify the warring factions among the Cheshire Baptists had finally met with success in 1834.¹⁹⁰ Three years later his domestic companion of sixty years died. Mrs. Leland was briefly but eloquently eulogized by one who knew her well as "*always busy, and always quiet.*"¹⁹¹

Leland had for some time supposed his work was nearly done, and the only thought that troubled him was that he had not done more. "For more than half a century," he had written in 1831, "I have been trying to do a little for Him who has done so much for me; but now the time is gone and nothing has been done as I hoped. I die a debtor; let me then die a beggar."¹⁹² Death came to him while he was still actively preaching at the age of nearly eighty-seven. He died at North Adams, Massachusetts, 14 January 1841, a few days after preaching a sermon there. In an obituary in the *Pittsfield Sun* his old friend Phinehas Allen paid equal

¹⁸⁹ To Rev. John Taylor, 10 Dec., 1830, (*Writings*, p. 602). The Lelands had ten children.

¹⁹⁰ See Miss Greene's "Further Sketches," in Leland's *Writings*, pp. 63-4.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁹² Letter to Rev. S. M. Noel, 17 June, 1831, (*Baptist Chronicle*, II [1831], 111).

tribute to Leland's republican principles and his "Herculean" labors in his holy calling.¹⁹³ He called also for a biography and a collected edition of Leland's widely scattered publications, a task performed with unusual proficiency by Miss L. F. Greene, of nearby Lanesborough, in the stout volume of Leland's *Writings* issued in 1845. Finally, Allen printed the text of the brief but eminently satisfactory epitaph that Leland had written for himself: "Here lies the body of John Leland, who labored [sixty-seven] years to promote piety, and vindicate the civil and religious rights of all men." The visitor to Cheshire today may read this inscription on the plain obelisk that marks Leland's grave below Mount Greylock to the northwest and above the village and the river to the east.

In his very individualism Leland was a representative American of his time. Self-reliant to the point of eccentricity and a tireless fighter for principle, he was without arrogance, and the reminiscences of those who knew him speak most often of his humor, his gentleness, and his humility. Inner strength and a warm benevolence are the two traits most immediately evident in the only portrait of Leland known to have been painted.¹⁹⁴ His printed tracts and addresses are marked by a vernacular freshness in happy contrast with most productions of their time and kind, for Leland never learned or aped the rhetoric of the schools. It is easy enough to see why his homely language offended the Yale-bred scholar and clergyman Manasseh Cutler and no doubt many others. In combination with Leland's evangelical theology and his Democratic-Republican politics, it must have sounded novel and perhaps even grotesque

¹⁹³ *Sun*, 21 Jan. 1841.

¹⁹⁴ The portrait was painted in 1827 or 1828 by A. B. Moore; an engraving of it by T. Doney is reproduced as frontispiece in Leland's *Writings*. See *ibid.*, p. 527, for Leland's comments on the portrait.

from a pulpit. But this was a combination perfectly suited to Leland's ordinary hearers. Just here lies John Leland's real significance in our history: he effectively transmitted certain fundamental tenets of Jeffersonian political thought to an inarticulate and growing mass of voters. The Baptists who hung on his words and revered his judgment had always been regarded and treated as second-class citizens. From before the Revolution they had been looked down upon alike by New England Congregationalists and Virginia Anglicans because they were poor, ignorant, and "enthusiastic." But they were not too ignorant to understand Jeffersonian democracy as John Leland interpreted it, and he thus succeeded in linking the political philosophy of the American enlightenment with the camp-meeting spirit. If this is a strange and unlikely conjunction of things, it had palpable effects on American politics and society as they evolved in the nineteenth century. John Leland therefore has a place in our history as well as in our folklore.

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