THE JOURNAL OF SAMUEL CURWEN, LOYALIST

This new edition of Samuel Curwen's London journals is a noteworthy event on at least two counts.[1] Curwen's illustrious journals have long been recognized as an indispensable guide to the shifting, insubstantial world of those American Loyalists who lived in exile in London during the American Revolution. In precise, candid notations, Curwen records not only the day-by-day activities of these refugees but, more significantly, the full range of Loyalist responses to the war, to British politics, to their former homes and neighbors, to the tedium of exile, and finally, to the peace. Enriching this political log are Curwen's accounts of his frequent journeys of exploration throughout the English and Welsh countryside. Curwen's insatiable curiosity equalled that of any modern-day tourist, and he used his notebook as later generations would use their cameras to record with astonishing precision his impressions of English factories and architectural monuments, politics and pageantry, dramatic stars and political personae, parliamentary debates and religious discourse, royalty as well as "filles du joy" — in short the full panoply of life in eighteenth-century England. All are described with a copiousness of detail and a richness of critical comment that will captivate both historical specialist and general reader alike.

For the past century these journals have been known to us only through the highly abridged and often unreliable volume edited by George Atkinson Ward in 1864. Ward saw fit not merely to curtail and sometimes misplace Curwen's comments, but he often toned them up to make them palatable to the highly nationalistic and prudish tastes of his Victorian generation. Now at last we have Curwen's journal with "warts and all", thanks to the painstaking labors of editor Andrew Oliver and the sponsorship of the Essex Institute. This new edition is a model to read and to behold, from both a scholarly and an aesthetic point of view. The type is bold, well spaced, with wide margins on either side. Each page helpfully notes the month, year and place of entry. The portraits are well chosen and beautifully reproduced (although I did regret the omission of Jonathan Sewall), and the two cartoons and maps are both pertinent and highly amusing. Andrew Oliver must be particularly commended for his sparse, very thoughtful mode of annotation. Only significant persons are identified in the notes, and explanatory excerpts from Curwen's voluminous correspondence are limited to the most essential and revealing passages. Equal care has been lavished on the text where the original eighteenth-century ciphers and terminology are presented intact wherever possible.

Over and above the significance which these volumes possess on their intrinsic merits, the publication of the Curwen journals also heralds the

1 Andrew Oliver, ed., *The Journal of Samuel Curwen, Loyalist* (2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1972).

formal beginning of the series of edited manuscripts which the Programme for Loyalist Studies and Publication plans to issue over the next decade. When completed, this series is to consist of approximately twenty volumes of selected Loyalist papers drawn from collections in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Although Curwen's journals are the first to bear the imprint of this series, they are in truth a bit of a hybrid, since their publication was planned before the series was launched and they were simply grafted on by mutual consent. The scope of the Curwen journals is somewhat different, moreover, from that of subsequent volumes projected for the series. In this new edition, Curwen's journals are reprinted *en toto* for the stated time period, whereas future volumes will present selections from the entire corpus of a given manuscript collection. In both subject matter and editorial technique, however, this edition of the Curwen journals corresponds entirely with the spirit of the series. Thus the journals command our attention both for themselves and as a harbinger of things to come.

In the past decade a group of prodigiously hardworking scholars have rescued the Loyalists from the political scrap heap where they have spent most of their historical lives and restored them to a respectable pedestal in the Pantheon of Principal Participants in the American Revolutionary War. Beginning with the appearance of *The American Tory* (Oxford, 1961) by W.H. Nelson, myriad aspects of Loyalist life and thought have been subjected to scholarly scrutiny. Their evolving ideological position before and during the revolution, their practical response to the sudden politicalization of American society, their efforts to assist in Britain's military pacification of the colonies, their diverse reactions to the difficulties of exile have all been described with a richness and a depth that has never before been accorded to the Loyalists. Taken together, these studies have produced a wholly new appreciation of the broad range of activities, proclivities, and perceptions which characterized the Loyalist experience in America. Indeed, the most recent of these studies, R.M. Calhoon's *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760-1783* (New York, 1973), presents no less than twenty-three exquisitely wrought portraits of individual Loyalists in order to depict the subtlety and variety of opinion within the Loyalist camp.

A reservation must, however, be entered about these recent histories of the Loyalists. With two somewhat specialized exceptions, all of these studies deal exclusively with the Loyalists in terms of the American revolution. When that war concludes in 1783, Nelson, Calhoon, Paul Smith's *Loyalists and Redcoats* (Chapel Hill, 1964) and Wallace Brown's *The Good Americans* (New York, 1969), all bid the Loyalists a sympathetic adieu. Even Mary Beth Norton's exceedingly fine study, *The British Americans: the Loyalist Exiles in London, 1774-1789* (Boston, 1972), although it does go up to 1789, deals with the London Loyalists in essentially retrospective terms. Their political activities and ideological speculations are noted primarily by Norton to illu-

minate the causes and course of the Revolution, rather than to illuminate the Loyalists themselves. The two exceptions to this current trend offer an instructive contrast. I refer to W.S. MacNutt's twin volumes on the Maritime provinces, *New Brunswick, A History: 1784-1867* (Toronto, 1963) and *The Atlantic Provinces: the Emergence of a Colonial Society* (Toronto, 1965), and L.F.S. Upton's *The Loyal Whig: William Smith of New York and Quebec* (Toronto, 1969). Although highly specialized in their subject matter, these works treat the Loyalists within a time frame that comprehends their entire political life span. In the two MacNutt volumes, the American antecedents of the Maritime Loyalists are linked to their pioneering work in framing most of that region's political institutions, and recognition is given to the continuing influence of the Loyalists upon the course of Canadian history. In similar fashion, Upton traces the evolution of Smith's seminal ideas on imperial administration and the transference of English political institutions to the colonies from the era of the Stamp Act to the formation of Upper and Lower Canada. The broader focus which these two works bring to Loyalist history, particularly their emphasis upon post-revolutionary war achievements, provides a very fruitful model for further research.

During the pre-revolutionary constitutional crisis and the war itself, the Loyalists were almost constantly cast in defensive roles and it is not surprising that much of their dialogue seems negative, strident, apologetic. But Loyalist history did not end in 1783, nor was Loyalist thought permanently paralyzed by the revolutionary shock. After 1783, when the Loyalists were finally released from their crippling bondage to a British policy over which they had no control, the more positive, imaginative qualities inherent in the Loyalist character come into the limelight and the Loyalists could bring into full play their highly developed political skills and their deeply considered reflections on the proper functioning of a well ordered state. Far from fading away in 1783, the Loyalists went on to play active, constructive roles in three different political communities. Some re-established themselves in the United States and through their participation in the Federalist party helped shape and strengthen the fragile institutions of the new state and national governments. Others went to live in England, where many of them entered the military or colonial services, which they impregnated with their distinctive views of the imperial connection. Most of them resettled in British North America where they proceeded to set up basic political institutions which embodied their philosophy of government and which would play a significant role in the evolution of Canada's Dominion Government. These latter day activities of the Loyalists, as well as the underlying philosophy which inspired their efforts, have never been delineated by historians in any general fashion. Yet they are essential, and highly significant, elements in the Loyalist story. Until these elements are clearly identified and integrated into present day writings on the Loyalists, our appreciation of their historical importance will be

necessarily truncated.

It is within this context that *The Journal of Samuel Curwen, Loyalist* excites our particular attention. Curwen was not a notable participant in the post-war activities of the Loyalists. Nonetheless, during the period covered by this edition of the journal, the critical war years from 1775 to 1783, Curwen lived in the very center of the London group of Loyalist exiles, and his journals minutely record their adjustment to the trauma of revolution and their evolving attitudes to the new political orders in both England and America. In essence, therefore, the journal offers a personal record of the transition of the Loyalists from colonial Americans to the multitude of political personalities they assumed after the war.

It is difficult to define who Curwen was in any neat, categorical fashion. In many respects, he was the archetypical New England Tory — a Harvard graduate, a wealthy Salem merchant, an appointed official in both the provincial government and the Vice Admiralty Court, a man of highly cultivated sensitivity and knowledge, who shared the eighteenth century's passionate interest in history and natural science. His most intimate friends in London were the three ruling patriarchs of the New England Tory elite: Thomas Hutchinson, Peter Oliver, and Jonathan Sewell. In other respects, Curwen was the antithesis of a staunch champion of royal authority and parliamentary supremacy. His political comments are often more reminiscent of a seventeenth-century commonwealthman than an eighteenth-century imperialist. Curwen's reasons for leaving America elucidate this distinction. At a superficial level, he fled from Massachusetts out of natural timidity, out of fear that his intimate connection with the Tory establishment would bring down upon his head "insults, reproaches, and perhaps a dress of tar and feathers . . ." (p. 295). At a more profound level, however, Curwen's writings reveal that he left America "in quest of civil liberty which the Author fondly imagined was to be enjoyed in higher perfection in England" (p. 449).

It may seem paradoxical that a man should leave America and oppose the Revolution in quest of liberty, since presumably the colonists sought independence in order to throw off British tyranny and regain their liberty. Yet this was the path Curwen chose, and his reasons are most illuminating. Curwen was throughout his life a very patriotic, indeed nationalistic American. He had follwed the debate on the British claim to legislative supremacy over the colonies closely, and he supported the Americans' assertion of their right to be exempt from British taxation. Yet, he declared firmly, he was "far removed from wishing its entire independence; for 'tis my firm belief, it would sooner bring on oppression and tyranny there than the former allowed in its full extent . . ." (p. 280).

Thus Curwen opposed the Revolution because he feared the logical consequences of the independence movement. He was a man who placed an extremely high value on the virtues of harmony, moderation, toleration, and

consensus in public life. He regarded the Revolution as an unnatural breach, fomented by partisan extremists in both England and America and he condemned them all roundly. Curwen was deeply read in English history and his admiration for her constitutional system, particularly the Bill of Rights, approached the point of reverence. He was thus appalled by the rapid politicalization of American society during his lifetime, by the rampant use of vigilante techniques to enforce political conformity, and by the growing disposition to let public issues be determined by "enthusiastic ardor" (p. 393). He described the Revolution as a "shocking tragedy" which could have no happy issue (p. 47). If Britain won, America would be reduced to a "howling wilderness" (p. 175). If the colonists won, mob rule and hence tyranny would inevitably ensue.

So Curwen retired to England in 1775 in "search of personal security of those rights, which by the laws of God and man I ought to have enjoyed undisturbed there [in Salem]" (p. 1). Each day in exile he prayed devoutly, though not very hopefully, for a peace of reconciliation. Despite his long residence in England, Curwen always considered himself an alien in that country and maintained his preference for his native land, to which he finally returned in 1794. During a particularly depressing moment of his exile, Curwen once defined his vision of heaven: he hoped it would be a place where "undue passions, selfish regards, and ungovernable appetites shall have no rule . . . and all shall be peace, harmony, mutual regards and no intemperate gratifications" (p. 818). There can be no doubt that this was also his prescription for a well ordered state. Curwen arrived at this conclusion after years of observation and reflection, but it was by no means a unique philosophical position. Hopefully, subsequent volumes in the Loyalist Studies series will further elaborate this stream of Loyalist thought, and document their practical attempts to implement this ideal after the war.

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