
Origins of the American Revolution can be heartily commended. Written with verve, even with a certain raciness, this delightful book not only holds the interest of the reader from beginning to end but is enlightening. Since it is based on a wide survey of contemporary opinion in England and in the colonies as to the grave issues that arose between the years 1763 and 1775, one gets a most vivid impression of the march of events and of the way that men, individually and in groups, felt and acted. Almost every page of the twenty-one chapters reflects Professor Miller's diligent perusal of contemporary newspapers, pamphlets, and other source materials. In fact, the volume provides on the one hand so rich a feast of appraisal of the series of pre-Revolutionary War crises by the men of the eighteenth century, many of whom were leaders, and on the other so little intrusion, it would appear, of the author's views and interpretations that take issue with these—as one might expect in a book published in 1943—that it could very appropriately have been entitled "Contemporary Views of the Origins of the American Revolution."

In current works on the Civil War there is little of the acrimony such as was expressed by earlier writers who were contemporaries; harsh expressions are seldom used. A sense of intellectual detachment has taken the place of partisanship. Books are now better balanced (if perhaps less readable) than previous ones. Except in the case of a very few writers the same tendency is evident in treatises on the American Revolution. Most students no longer envision a conflict between an oppressive, tyrannical British government and outraged, oppressed American colonials. Instead they see and weigh the issues but do not ascribe sinister motives to either side in the controversy that ended in an appeal to arms. But Professor Miller returns to the phraseology of Brancroft. We are told of "the impasse in which Americans were to find no alternative but to submit to the despotic control of Parliament or deny its jurisdiction altogether" (p. 252); we are reminded that when "confronted by British tyranny, it was inevitable that Americans should again resort to a boycott of British goods" (p. 268); and we are assured that the Pennsylvania Quakers "were more concerned in putting down radicalism at home than resisting tyranny from abroad" (p. 379). The writer of this volume will doubtless agree with the reviewer that the period from 1763 to 1775 is unique in American colonial history. During these years many Americans openly called "despotic" and "tyrannical" certain actions and policies of the government
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of the mother country that a decade earlier, in so far as can be determined by accessible letters and diaries, had never been even privately denominated as such. In other words, before the Seven Years' War colonials by and large apparently felt that their government was the most benevolent in the world; after that war many of them spread the impression that it was the most malignant. Professor Miller would have done well to emphasize more fully than he has this change in outlook and the factors that contributed to it.

Those who go to Origins of the American Revolution with the expectation of finding a critical analysis and a weighing of the more important studies relating to this period that have been produced since Justin Winsor made his distinguished evaluation in his Narrative and Critical History of America are doomed to disappointment. Significant pioneering works in the fields of institutional, legal and constitutional, economic and geographical, and social history as well as studies in biography written during the past half century are either ignored or passed over very casually by mere footnote references. To the reviewer, however, Professor Miller was in no cavalier frame of mind, brushing aside all this immensely valuable material as valueless. It is clear that he could overlook it because it was irrelevant to his specific purpose: the presentation of the ideas and actions of the men of the eighteenth century, irrespective of what later generations may have thought of them and how they may have weighed them. Had his objective been less modest, he would have produced an even more scholarly but doubtless much less readable book in which the now smoothly flowing pages would have been obstructed by cataracts and shoals of critical footnotes concerned with the importance or lack of importance of the conclusions contained in the specialized works of some hundred or more scholars, each endeavoring to throw light on the background of the Revolution. But such a book, we may be sure, was far from his intention. The more restricted purpose has been brilliantly achieved; the very limitations of the book make possible some of its excellence.

One feature that adds not a little to the enjoyment of Origins of the American Revolution is the decorative drawings in which are to be found likenesses of many of the leading figures in eighteenth-century England and America. The format is excellent. It is pleasant to realize that the author is now busy providing a sequel to this book that will cover the Revolutionary War and doubtless the Peace of 1783. It will be eagerly awaited.

Lehigh University

Lawrence Henry Gipson


A "Philadelphia lawyer" of the 1790's, Alexander James Dallas lived and argued among a great company who stimulated the British West Indian to the highest development of his considerable native talents. These were not limited to the field of his beloved profession, for the services to
state and nation rendered by the public-spirited but politically unambitious lawyer ranged from editing a monthly miscellany to rescuing the federal treasury from bankruptcy during the precarious closing months of the War of 1812.

After seven “lean” years of law practice, hack writing, editing of court reports, and lesser occupations Dallas accepted the then anomalous position as secretary of the commonwealth under Governor Mifflin. The latter’s deficiencies were Dallas’ opportunities, and the young lawyer made the most of them, not only to become the most powerful official in the state next to the governor but also to assume a leading role in the rising anti-Federalist movement.

The democratic fervor aroused by the appearance in Philadelphia of Citizen Genet to represent the new French Republic was translated into a politically potent form by the organization of the Democratic Society of Philadelphia. Dallas’ tireless efforts as a member of the correspondence committee were a notable factor in the spread of Democratic-Republicanism both in Pennsylvania and in the nation. Attacked by the Federalists and denounced by President Washington as fomenters of the Whiskey Rebellion, the local society and its daughter groups elsewhere in the state quietly disappeared in late 1795. But Dallas at once saw and took advantage of the political possibilities in the general disfavor with which the Jay treaty was greeted in America. His work against it contributed materially to the Democratic-Republican victory of 1796 in Pennsylvania. Confining himself chiefly to the work of organization in the state and thus complementing the labors of his great friend Albert Gallatin in the national arena, Dallas richly deserved the reward of the federal district attorneyship for eastern Pennsylvania to which he was appointed by Jefferson in 1800.

During the thirteen years of his tenure Dallas exhibited a growing conservatism and a pronounced distaste for the program sponsored by the radical minded within the state organization. He was distressed by the bickering over patronage and by the democratic distrust of courts, judges, and lawyers. He set himself against the radical tide and had considerable success in thwarting the designs of his enemies within the state party and in blocking the Jeffersonian attack on the federal judiciary.

For two years Dallas served as Secretary of the Treasury in the war cabinet of President Madison. His accomplishments in the face of much opposition were almost Hamiltonian in scope and execution.

Mr. Walters achieves admirably the purpose of the series of biographical studies of which this is one volume. He presents a scholarly portrait of an able and active Pennsylvanian whose achievements have hitherto received only that measure of acclaim determined by the greater stature of some of his contemporaries.

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