



## ROBERT PROUD, PENNSYLVANIA'S FIRST HISTORIAN

BY J. H. POWELL  
The Free Library of Philadelphia

THE plans maturing in this Association for a new history of Pennsylvania should induce us to study with some care the works of previous writers, even though they afford little encouragement or elevation. This commonwealth has no such long and enthusiastic historical tradition or *corpus* of writings as New England—nor has it ever had. One hundred years ago when the German Americanist Hermann E. Ludewig published his repertory, *The Literature of American Local History; A Bibliographical Essay*, he was able to devote thirty-six pages to works on Massachusetts history, but could fill only eight pages with those relating to Pennsylvania. A similar comparison today would show a similar situation, if an adequate bibliography of *Pennsylvania* existed from which a comparison could be made. Such a bibliography does not exist, by the way; plans for its preparation might properly furnish the committees of this body with a project of enduring value, that would be helpful to the compilers of an authentic history.

Even more important is the question of motives and purposes. Local history is barren if it is locally conceived; it is significant only when it connects a region or an episode with the general streams of movement in time that comprehend the collective experience and destiny of men. New England's historiography has had such greatness in it; Pennsylvania's has not. Part of the extensive influence of New England writers was due to their universal spirit. For a couple of generations American historiography as a whole was a curious projection of the New England

mind. Even the keenest scholars showed a quaint provincialism. The erudition of Justin Winsor was not always proof against the background of the Harvard library over which he presided: in 1889 he dismissed the extensive collections of The Library Company of Philadelphia and The Historical Society of Pennsylvania with the remark that they were "hardly of distinctive value, except in regard to the history of that State," though had he examined the holdings of both institutions in the 1880's as fully as he did the libraries of New York and Boston, and had he thought of Pennsylvania as part of American history, he would have found reason to alter his judgment.

The point, of course, is not that Winsor failed to exploit Pennsylvania resources; it is rather that Pennsylvanians themselves had failed to do so. This is the first observation that occurs to one on reading Proud's *History*. There was much material available which he chose not to consult, and much that he did use was of a highly partisan nature. Proud's work, indeed, is a perfect example in both conception and execution of what this Association ought not to do in preparing a new history of the state.

Robert Proud's career is fully narrated in his own papers, for the preservation of which he made some provision. In The Historical Society of Pennsylvania are forty-three volumes and four manuscript boxes of documents and letters, acquired by The Society in May, 1903, at auction. A characteristically fine catalogue published in that year by Stan V. Henkels describes the collection in detail. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* contains some publications from this material, as follows: XIII, No. 4, 1889, 430 ff., "Autobiography of Robert Proud, the Historian;" XXIX, No. 2, 1905, 229-31, a letter of 1778; and XXXIV, No. 1, 1910, 62-73, several letters of 1777 and 1778. The first volume of the *Memoirs* of The Historical Society contains a sketch by C. W. Thomson (417-435) and two poems (486-492). The account in the *DAB* by Mrs. Lingelbach gives a useful bibliography.

A smaller but especially valuable collection, consisting of three hundred letters and documents, is at The Library Company of Philadelphia. It apparently came in at the same time that all of Proud's books were given to The Library Company, a short time after his death. This collection has recently been calendared, and is the basis for the present paper. A review of all this *Proudiana*

and a survey of the papers of other Quakers of his group suggests the need, not so much of a biography of Proud, as an account of the moderate and conservative Quakers during the Revolution. Though much has been written around this subject, no adequate treatment of the non-participants and what they represented in American thought has appeared. Proud need not be considered typical, for these extreme individualists conformed to no type. But he was one of the most expressive of the group, and through his writing exercised an important influence on the others.

Robert Proud came to Philadelphia in 1759; he lived there for fifty-four years until he died in 1813. For America, these were great years of war, revolution, upheaval and rebirth; for Proud they were quite otherwise. His personal chronicle recorded such unhappiness, resentment, pettishness, and continual discontent as the venerable city has seldom harboured.

The fault, he considered, was not his, but America's. No callow youth, he was a mature scholar of 31 when he emigrated, with a dream of the ideal commonwealth in his mind, the Holy Experiment of Peace and Prosperity, where the natural orderliness of society was expressed in "the wisest government of men." He must have been naïve, for any Pennsylvania Quaker could have told him things were not going too well in 1759. But pedantic, dogmatic, pious and confident Robert Proud expected to live on a high plane of the spirit in Penn's Republic. How Pennsylvania let him down!

A pacifist seeking peace, he came during one war, lived through a second, and died in the midst of a third. Contemplating Pennsylvania's rich lands and bountiful harvests, the city's great merchant houses and extensive commerce, he dwelt in poverty on the meager salary of a school master, a failure in every business venture. By temperament a conservative, wedded to the accustomed order of things and convinced of the natural inequality of men, he was an uneasy spectator of the great social changes of the Revolutionary movement, watched "upstarts" seize the government, and sat by appalled as new philosophies of social systems swept his principles and his world into the discard. Robert Proud and the Philadelphia of his years were totally out of adjustment with one another.

Now Proud was unhappy, and he certainly was a man of small bore; but he was not without real gifts. His story is arresting,

because it shows at so many places fine promise unfulfilled. Born the son of a prosperous Yorkshire farmer in the Tees river valley, he spent his early years on a leasehold near the North-Riding market-town of Thirsk, where there was "a large and pleasant mansion house and gardens." A studious youth, at the age of eighteen he departed, "with no small difficulty, from my connections," he tells us, to enter the school kept at Skipton some fifty miles to the west by the Quaker theologian, David Hall. Older than most of the scholars, Proud received especial attention from Hall, and the two became fast friends, corresponding with each other (in correct Latin) as long as Hall lived.

Exercises in poetry, English as well as Latin, were part of the fare David Hall served up; at least one translation from Horace (II, 20) of the year 1748 has come down to us. The young student went beyond the curricular requirements, however, to essays of his own, one of which he must have been considerable pleased with, for he copied it out fifty years later.<sup>1</sup> A superior schoolboy in the age of Pope was bound to have his poetic talents developed. Proud versified in the mystical vein of the gentle Hall; he was happy at Skipton, happier than he was ever to be again, but it must be acknowledged that however well David Hall grounded him in Latin, Greek, and theology, he scarcely equipped him to meet the seething world of the eighteenth century. Formal education seems always to live in the past, but Robert Proud's schooling must have been particularly effête. It gave him neither the facility to live greatly among ideas, nor the tough core of moral conviction to live with composure among men. What it gave him was knowledge, and dogmatism without purpose.

At twenty-two, he left home and school to go to London, equipped with numerous letters of introduction from Hall. The journey, across Yorkshire and thence by sea from Scarborough to Greenwich, took most of a month, some of which was spent waiting at Scarborough for winds to moderate and a ship to sail. It was "the Spaw Season;" the resort town was "much crowded with Gentry, from many dist[ant] Parts of the Nation." Proud

<sup>1</sup> Envelopes 5 and 14, *Proud Papers*, LCP. The collection is at this time temporarily arranged in 16 manuscript envelopes corresponding to the bundles as tied with pink ribbons and endorsed by Proud. The envelope number is a sufficient location for the papers. Biographical details follow the "Autobiography" (*PMH&B*, XIII, 430 ff.).

sat in the bay window of George Winn's house, gazing out over the giant breakwater of hewn stone at the great vessels from all parts of the world that had put in for refuge from the storm. The musical name of the little city appealed to his poetic senses:<sup>2</sup>

Reluctant while at *Scarborough* I abode,  
 I look'd from *Scarborough* into *Scarborough* Road,  
 From a fair window, in the crowded Town,  
 Fronting the glorious Rising of the Sun;  
 My Prospect on the *German* Ocean lay,  
 Where Ships to *London* cut the liquid Way;  
 While Waves, like Mountains, to the shore advance,  
 And Ships, like Castles, on the Billows dance.  
 Now, mounting high, these on the Surface stood,  
 Now, sinking down, seem swallow'd in the Flood:  
 Such Sport the Winds, & growling Waters made,  
 And with the Lives of wretched mortals play'd!  
 Swiftly on tow'ring Waves sometimes they went,  
 Then sunk beneath the fluid Element!  
 While rising Surges, on the tumbling Sea,  
 Swift to my Quarters hasten on their Way;  
 And e'er they reach the hoarse resounding Shore,  
 They fall, they break, & loud as Thunder roar.  
 As angry then, they dash the Rocks below,  
 But soon recoil, & give a fiercer Blow,  
 Then rising high, their lofty Summits rear,  
 And, with vast Violence, rush o'er the *Pier*.  
 Of this no End, while Winds & Tempests blow,  
 While Motion lasts, the Waters ebb & flow,  
 And row[el]ling Waves for ever come & go.  
 Hence seem the active Minds of Men to have  
 No small Resemblance to the foaming Wave:  
 And while upon this troubl'd Scene I gaze,  
 I view an Emblem of my future Days;  
 Trials to come succeed to Troubles past,  
 Till we obtain the peaceful Port, at last.

Not great poetry, certainly; that "fluid Element" is really unfortunate. But Proud had learned his classics well, and he could paint a lively picture with words.

In London, Proud remained eight years. He lived first with a relative, Joseph Taylor, and apparently spent some time as a commercial clerk, for a power of attorney executed by his father ("I William Proud of Wildon-Grange in the County of York Yeoman") refers to "Robert Proud of the City of London Book-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Many years later (1806) Proud made this note: "Other Verses abt. the same Time were also written by R. P. partly on his passage & both in Lat. & Eng. to his Master Dav. Hall, & his former School Mate St. Smith &c." Env. 14.

keeper."<sup>3</sup> But such an occupation could not possibly have absorbed his energies very long, or appealed to his talents. Soon the influence of another relative, Dr. John Fothergill, also a native Yorkshireman, made itself felt on the young scholar.

Benjamin Franklin once wrote of Fothergill, "I can hardly conceive that a better man has ever existed." In 1750 the learned physician was thirty-eight years old, just beginning to enjoy his great reputation and extensive practice. His *Account of the Sore Throat* (the first recognition of diphtheria) had appeared in 1748; during the 1750's he was composing his *Essays on the Weather and Diseases of London*. Leading Quaker philanthropist and humanitarian, Fothergill was the kind of man who liked to solve other people's problems; naturally, he expanded his interests to include the career of his promising country cousin. With the eminent doctor's encouragement Proud began to improve himself in "some parts of learning and science," particularly botany and the pharmacopoeia—be it noted that Fothergill's own first studies had been the chemistry of drugs, his first job that of the apothecary, and his first essays, *De Emeticorum usu* and *The Origin of Amber*, on pharmacological subjects. Pharmacy was by no means the least reasonable way to approach a medical education. Proud worked hard, having in view "the practice of Physic," and he tells us that he "made such proficiency as to attract considerable notice and respect from many."

That the lad might better pursue his studies, Fothergill got him a position as tutor with the families of Sylvanus and Timothy Bevan, leading chemists among the Quakers, and "much noted in the medical line." For several years he lived at Hackney, near London, where he had the run of Bevan's extensive library, and supervised the education of the two young boys of the family. Thirty-two essays in English and Latin, translations from Horace, Cicero, or the New Testament, and little "themes" in morality which the pupils wrote Proud preserved throughout his life.<sup>4</sup> He had a fine home, plenty of time for his own studies, and a small income. Among the great Quaker families, "generally persons of much note and eminency in different respects," he made many

<sup>3</sup> And authorizes him to collect a debt of £94 from a butterfactor formerly of Thirsk. Env. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Env. 2.

friends, and developed such important connections that his success seemed assured.

Botany, chemistry, medicine, tutoring and praying did not prevent him from suffering a Yorkshireman's nostalgia, however, nor did his many activities cause him to neglect his muse. Almost as soon as he reached London, he addressed a poetic epistle in Latin to Stephen Smith, "quondam condiscipulum Skiptoniae tum in Schola D. Hall versantem;" and he did a number of periphrastic translations of bits from his Latin authors. In 1752 he composed an "elogium" to Catherine Payton ("postea Philips"), apparently a comely, youthful Quaker preacher and reformer. It is an inconsequential poem, even by Proud's standards; but we note it because it is the only occasion on which we can positively link his name with a close female acquaintance. Proud was born to be a bachelor; this part of his destiny, at least, he fulfilled.

His most ambitious effort at Hackney (of those that survive<sup>5</sup>) and the most revealing, was "An Imitation, or Parody, of the preceding Ode [Hor. II, 6. To Septimius], in English; By R. P. near London, about the year 1754;—when he first had thoughts of visiting *America*. . . ." Now this was five years before he actually did migrate; it suggests that Proud's boyish restlessness was much with him in his twenties, his mind yet uncommitted to any of his several activities. His ultimate hope, he writes, is to spend his declining years in his native Yorkshire, but if a relentless destiny will not permit him to return to the rural valley of the Ouse, then at least he will flee far from contentious London, "where Luxury and Av'rice reign,"

Beyond the vast *Atlantic* Sea  
To *Pennsylvania's* distant Ground;  
Where Peace & Plenty smile around;  
Where now exists, commenc'd by *Penn*,  
The wisest Government of Men.  
That happy Land appears to be  
The fairest in the World, to me . . .

Then follows an inventory of Pennsylvania's attractions. Summer is warm and fruitful there, winter is "healthy, cool & clear" (credulous youth!), the western mountains are rich with hidden minerals,

<sup>5</sup> He said in his "Autobiography" that the whole amount of his poetry had he saved it would have filled several large octavo volumes.

the soil is wondrously fertile, grapes are thick as brambles, peaches hang like apples.

There plac'd beneath some shady Tree,  
Oh! how should I delight to be!  
And sit,—till *Phebus* downward haste,  
And meditate on Troubles past,  
With sweet Reflection!—then I'd give  
A thought on them that distant live!  
*Shamokin* I'd to *York* prefer,  
And *Burlington* to *Westminster*;  
The *Ouse* to *Susq.* should not compare,  
Nor wealthy *Thames* to *Delaware*.

Supreme attraction of Pennsylvania (far outshining her fabulous grapes, her vicarious Burlington or her surprising "Susq.") was the liberty of her inhabitants and the love they had for one another. Proud was writing just before the Quaker oligarchy was to be ousted from the Assembly; a London Friend not too well informed might believe in 1754 that in Pennsylvania,

Supremely favour'd from above,  
All live in sweet *fraternal Love*;  
Hence *Philadelphia's* matchless Frame  
Derives its' Glory, & its' Name;  
Which dreads no Force of hostile Pow'rs,  
Nor envy's *London's* golden Tow'rs . . .

The "Sweets of Liberty" were Pennsylvania's birthright, for

No armed Force obtain'd the Ground;  
But Love & Justice wall it round;  
Hence Innocence will safely dwell,  
Wherever Truth & Right prevail

*Destructive War* has never been  
Within these beauteous Borders seen.

These happy habitations called him, Proud wrote, and he signed the piece with the most inappropriate pseudonym possible: *Probus!*<sup>6</sup>

Of course, to any London Quaker, Pennsylvania was a live subject. Greatest achievement of the Friends, most aspiring social enterprise of the century, the very thought of it quickened the Quaker mind. Yet why Proud should abruptly give up his studies,

<sup>6</sup> These poems of London years are in Env. 5; a Latin poem of Christmas Day, 1754, in Env. 14. Since he copied his poems several times, other versions appear throughout the collection.



forsake his valuable connections and migrate just when he might have attained success, remains a mystery. Perhaps he was as badly adjusted to the London community as he was to be to his new home. At any rate, he gave up medicine, with a wrenching of his spirit took leave of his friends, and embarked late in 1758 on a winter passage to America armed with letters of introduction to various Philadelphians and a certificate from the London Monthly Meeting to Friends in the colony.

Proud had not found himself in London; in Philadelphia he was to be no more settled. In his first twenty years he lived in fourteen different Quaker homes, dependent upon Friends for his bed and board, while he undertook the education of boys in Latin and Greek. A lonely bachelor, he developed some eccentricities that made him a quaint figure in the town, around whom legends grew. He was, of course, said to have been disappointed in love in England; to this, and his business failures in Philadelphia, his "demurs to the commonly received affections to life" were ascribed. His tall, slender form, his "nose of the Roman order, . . . overhung with most impending brows," his old-fashioned bush wig, curled and gray, a "half-cocked, patriarchal-looking hat," and long ivory-headed cane became familiar objects of respectful jest. In cold weather he wore a drab cloak, "which gave to his personal appearance the similitude of one of West's Indian treaty pictures."<sup>7</sup>

Nine months after his arrival, Proud began to take pupils, at the house of "William Brown, Walnut Street, then kept by Mary Newport." Meanwhile Israel Pemberton informed the Overseers of the Public School of a letter he had received from J. Fothergill of London recommending the young man as "a person well qualified to instruct our youth in divers branches of learning." A committee of the Board after visiting Proud unanimously agreed to employ him to be master of "The Latin and Greek Grammar School" in the Penn Charter School (as it was familiarly called) in September, 1761, a position which he held for nine years.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout these years of teaching, Proud corresponded with Robert Horsfield, bookseller, of London, from whom he purchased a library of texts for his teaching. How he did it, on a

<sup>7</sup> Watson, *Annals*, I, 564-566; Thomson, in *Memoirs*, I, HSP, 428.

<sup>8</sup> Woody, Thomas, *Early Quaker Education in Pennsylvania*, 59, n.

salary never higher than £250 Pennsylvania money, is hard to say. Horsfield found him the best editions, translations and bindings, and tried to send "the books most useful for Schools." He also shipped various mathematical instruments and scientific apparatus, Nairne's chest microscope, gloves, compasses and such things. Among the pages of booklists are noted travel books, sermons, geographies, surveyor's handbooks, elementary books of science, Anderson's and Postlethwayt's accounts of commerce (the latter, according to Horsfield, "a Work of Character"), texts in logic, rhetoric, and grammar; lexicons, various editions of Greek writers; standard Latin authors like Vergil, Horace, Cicero, Caesar, Livy, Pliny, Ovid, Sallust, Juvenal, Martial ("Marshall") and Terence, and many ancient and modern writers not so well known in the colonies, such as Nepos' history, Phaedrus' fables, Clarke's editions of Justin, Corderius, and Erasmus; New Testaments of Beza and Benzelius; Boethius' *Consolation*, a life of Belisarius; Valerius Maximus, Aulus Gellius, Polymetis; Fénelon's *Télémaque*, and other works in French.<sup>9</sup> In spite of these intellectual riches, Proud was finding Pennsylvania less than he had dreamed. The climate was "not very favourable to [his] Constitution," and, though it seems strange, so much do we think of him as the typical dominie, he was in truth unhappy in his work. He wrote his brother William of his disappointment at having to continue in America his former occupation, yet he had no prospects of changing. Teaching was a despised profession in the new world, he confessed sadly, deserted by those most suitable to it, and depressingly unprofitable. Dignity was hard to maintain without financial security. Proud urged his brother William to come over and join him in a partnership in some business adventure, but William declined, suggesting instead that Robert return to England. That thought must have appealed to Robert as the Indian uprisings and the frontier wars broke out in Pennsylvania, the Quakers bearing the onus of refusing to arm the settlers against the savages. Peace, America's greatest blessing, was departed from the province, and prosperity, its ornament, was destroyed by the agitation over the new imperial taxes.

In a turbulent year of non-importation, John Proud, one of the younger brothers of the schoolmaster, arrived in Philadelphia

<sup>9</sup> Eleven letters, 1763-1768. Env. 5, 6.

with no certain plans of doing anything particular, except gaining his fortune. John had failed in a soap-making enterprise in England, through poor management, and showed little promise of doing better in America, but William wrote that the family expected Robert to take care of him. He brought no money with him, having lost his all in soap, and he was not entirely free of deviation from Quaker principles.<sup>10</sup> But Robert was willing to overlook such minor matters, for John was available as the partner he had sought for several years, with whose help he could leave teaching for the more lucrative pursuits of commerce.

Proud resigned his place at the school in September, 1770, and the two bachelor brothers entered trade together. John lasted only a few years and then returned to England, but Robert was tossed about in the processes of getting and spending for a full decade, a complete and utter failure as a business man. One transaction, relating to 2,200 acres of land on Wyalusing creek in Luzerne county, involved a debt of £600 which took Proud twenty-four years to settle. Others brought him credits which he could not collect.<sup>11</sup> Of course, everything was against him. Neither he nor his brother was temperamentally equipped for business; neither had the slightest wordly experience to build upon, neither could understand the great movements of the Revolutionary years. An example of Proud's innocence was his accumulation of vast amounts of the inflated paper currency of the mid-1770's, under the impression not only that the British would win the war, but that the money would be redeemed by the crown.

Stimulated by his new employments, he began to assert himself in public improvement. In 1771 he presented Hall & Sellers some vigorous essays protesting the spending of hundreds of pounds by the corporation of the city on a dinner to the new governor (Richard Penn), when there were "many absolutely necessitous Cases & Circumstances continually before our Eyes in the City, that with the greatest Propriety most loudly demand the Public Notice & Assistance of said Money, & yet receive no immediate Advantage from it." Proud had not failed to absorb a portion of the reforming zeal of his temporary landlord, Anthony Benezet. He praised the Sons of Liberty for adhering to the non-importation

<sup>10</sup> Six letters, William Proud to Robert Proud, 1762-1769. Envelopes 5, 6, 7. William was living in the West-Riding village of Settle during these years.

<sup>11</sup> Env. 15.

agreements, and inveighed against squandering, displays, and unnecessarily ornate celebrations. He also protested the erection of a market in High street, in an essay introduced by quotations from Pliny.<sup>12</sup>

Though he preserved the neutrality in action characteristic of Quakers during the war, Proud was ardently Loyalist in his sympathies, resentful of those responsible for the "confusion and iniquity" that caused him such great losses and shocked him, he said, in body and mind. When the British entered the city in 1777, after the "Rebel Party that were in Arms as well as those that held offices under the Usurpation" had fled (taking with them much Quaker property), Proud was happy. "We have not had so much good order and Tranquility these several years, as we have had since the British Forces came hither," he wrote.<sup>13</sup> In 1778, when the fortunes of war went against the British, he removed to Jersey, where he spent a year in the Quaker home of Benjamin Morgan.

Many influences in Proud's life made him a Loyalist; his strong personal ties with England, his Quaker pacifism, his detestation of civil broils, his pietistic aloofness from politics, his financial losses which embittered him against the mercantile groups of Philadelphia who conducted the early stages of the Revolution, and his innate conservatism, his longing for wealth and security, his intellectual fastidiousness, all of which prevented him from understanding or sympathizing with the mechanic-artisan classes for whom Tom Paine and others were speaking after 1776. During what he termed the "general cessation . . . from the former usual and useful employments among the people, who were then strangely disposed for revolution, rebellion and destruction, under the name and pretence of Liberty," he turned from the "afflictive and disagreeable" objects about him to writing in prose and verse, partly on the historical materials he had been collecting, partly on poetics in Latin and English. In these writings, he developed the rudiments of a political philosophy that would serve a Loyalist Quaker.

Basic to this philosophy was Proud's acceptance of an inward, aloof religion that repudiated worldliness, that expended itself in

<sup>12</sup> Letters and essays, late 1771. Env. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *PMH&B*, XXXIV, 72-3.

contemplation rather than in social action. Benezet's thrilling mission of goodness led him into the lives of the poor, the oppressed, the forsaken, the enslaved of body and of spirit; Proud's vocation was not to share, but to attain; not to act, but to reflect; not to participate, but to withdraw. In his world inequity was an ineffable fact, comprehended in the mind of God, to be borne but not removed. True wisdom, he wrote in a poem of 1777,<sup>14</sup> would give all that life could hold:

All Science is at her Command,  
All Wealth & Honor in her Hand;  
The Pleasures, which from *Wisdom* flow,  
It is eternal Life to know;  
Immortal Glory she doth give  
To all, who chuse with her to live.

Wisdom, "Above all Empires to the Mind," and above social action was the goal of his striving. Such dedication, of course, had much of value in it; but when a learned gentleman of parts withdraws from the real world to accumulate a wisdom he does not seem to care to use, even if he could, then unless he manifests some exceptional insights or effective piety, he begins to look like a rather foolish escapist. Confusion in the body politic caused an inward confusion that paralyzed Proud's already somewhat disorganized personality. Do not all collisions in society reveal persons whose will is unequal to their intellect? Such people are chronic conservatives. In the 1770's they made a mass of neutrals or Loyalist sympathizers who could not rise to resist or to follow the great winds of purpose.

Another ode "To Divine Wisdom" Proud had written in 1776, "in Consequence of the Revolutionary Conduct, & Prospect of the Times then in Pennsa &c," in which he announced his desire to dwell with spiritual Wisdom, delighting in her smiles, peaceful while others raged and fought.<sup>15</sup> Withdrawal, aloofness, result

<sup>14</sup> Env. 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* This ode was a translation of a Latin Ode of 1620 by Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski. Where Proud encountered it, I do not know. It was fairly familiar to 18th century Catholics and dissenting mystics on the continent, where Sarbiewski's Horatian odes continued to be read even a century after his death; but it was scarcely heard of in England, though the partition of Poland in Proud's time gave a brief prominence to the prolific if essentially derived poetic genius of this Jesuit theologian. An English translation of Sarbiewski's Odes was published in 1646. Proud used the Latin, which he could have had in many Polish, German, French, or Italian imprints,

from a cause. Neutrality is produced by decision, not by lethargy. Proud's decision was the result of his characteristic inwardness. An epigram he rendered in 1776 expressed this inwardness as a simple proposition. Under the title, "God rules all Things, &c" (though what that "&c" means would be hard to say) he wrote:<sup>16</sup>

Take but a distant View of human-kind,  
Their Manners, & the Byas of their Mind,  
Then all terrestrial Things o'er rul'd appear  
By Force & Fraud, by Artifice & Fear:

If to a nearer View we next advance,  
The Governor of all the World is Chance;  
Something we see, but know not what to call,  
Directs the Course of Things, & governs all:

But if we take an introspective View,  
In Reason's Light, & thoroughly pursue  
The rise & End, the well-connected Line,  
Then all is govern'd by a Hand divine.

In withdrawal, some men find serenity and poise; Proud found frustration. He attacked the Revolution in a development of a theme from Sabinus, "Contrast," which, he notes "was refused a Place in the News Paper, prior to taking Arms in Pennsylvania, anno 1775—The Printer then not daring to insert it in his Paper."<sup>17</sup>

No greater Bliss doth God on Men bestow,  
Than *sacred Peace*; from which all Blessings flow.  
In Peace the City reaps the Merchants' Gains;  
In Peace flows Plenty from the rural Plains;  
In Peace thro foreign Lands, the Stranger may,  
Fearless & safely travel on his Way.

No greater Curse invades the World below,  
Than *Civil WAR*; the Source of ev'ry Woe.  
In War, the City wastes in dire Distress;  
In War, the rural Plain's a Wilderness;  
In War, the Road, the City, & the Plain  
Are Scenes of Woes, of Blood, & dying Men!

Some "Extempore Verses on the Source of Human Misery" were written in 1775, on "observing the Pursuits of the People,

but apparently in no British. His knowledge of Sarbiewski probably came through his study of Horace; however it came, it is like his love of Boethius an example of the extraordinary breadth of his knowledge. In literary bibliography, Proud must have been one of the most learned men of America.

<sup>16</sup> Signed "Philadelphus," dated October 1, 1776. Env. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Env. 9.

at that Time, in Pennsylvania, &c." Misery was caused, Proud discovered, by the striving of men for benefits to which they were not entitled—"forbidden fruits" that were the fatal yearnings of all men in all ages, including the American Revolutionists of his time:<sup>18</sup>

Forbidden Fruit's *New England's* Choice,  
She claims it as her Due;  
Forbidden Fruit, with Heart & Voice,  
The *Colonies* pursue.

Forbidden Fruit our Parents chose,  
Instead of Life & Peace;  
Forbidden Fruit to be the Choice  
Of Men will never cease.

While Howe and Washington were contending for New York harbor,<sup>19</sup> Proud wrote some lines suggested by Seneca's *Thyestes*, on the governing of passions, the rejection of ambition, and calmness of spirit amid civil tumult. Spurning fame, wealth, and contention, he asked only that he might enjoy peace of mind, and pass away his days in silent, blessed obscurity.

In the same month he wrote a blast against the rebels, "Violation of Civil Order, & established Govt—under Pretence of Revolutionary Advantage, &c."<sup>20</sup>

Of all the Plagues, that scourge the human  
Race  
None can be worse than *Upstarts*, when in Place;  
Their Pow'r to shew, no Action they forbear;  
They tyrannize o'er all, while all they fear;  
No savage Rage, no rav'nous Beast of Prey  
Exceeds the Cruelty of *Servile Sway*!

There was a natural order and system in the universe, an order established by God. To disturb this natural organization of inequality was to violate divine ordinances,

As if the Foot to be the Head inclin'd,  
Or Body should aspire to rule the Mind . . .

<sup>18</sup> Env. 5, 16.

<sup>19</sup> "R. P. 9 mo. 10th 1776 during the Civil War in America." Env. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Env. 16. Proud tinkered with this poem many times, and gave it various titles. In Env. 5 is a version labeled "On the Violation of Public Order, & that of the present Govt. in *Pennsylvania*, &c by Usurpers. Written by R. P. Phila<sup>a</sup>. 9 mo. 30th 1776. Being occasioned by beholding & reflecting upon the present State of the Times, in said Country." In *PMH&B*, XIII, 435, it is

The revolutionary upstarts therefore were offending against the laws of God as they rose above their class to positions of power.

Some men's duty was to obey. When they forsook this, and tried to govern, they became pernicious evils in society. Proud's God was a high-Tory God. In divine creation He had established grades, ranks, and orders for all living creatures, "some high, some low, but all in their Degree;" the flocks in the fields had their bell-wether, whom all the herd followed.

Much more in Men this *Order* ought to dwell,  
As they in Rank & Reason do excel;  
A State the nearest to the bless'd above,  
Where all Degrees in *beauteous Order* move;  
Which, as at first, who violate, become  
The worst of Beings, for infernal Doom.  
To cure degenerate Men's *Insanity*,  
Such Punishment's a final Remedy.<sup>21</sup>

No more explicit Tory philosophy can be found, than this notion of the righteousness of inequality, teleologically arranged, and the sinfulness of striving to rise above one's place.

Even so are Men, far worse than Beasts of Prey,  
When those usurp the Rule, who should obey:  
In *Self-Security*, weak Mortals find  
The *Will of God* is thus to scourge Mankind!

It was likewise during the crises of 1776 that Proud turned to Boethius, one of his favorite authors, and put into English verse some of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.<sup>22</sup> Boethius, himself of uncommon intellectual courage and daring, has been the inspiration of literate men in times of disaster for fifteen centuries. For Proud, he was the inspiration to resignation and despair, the occasion for a retreat into a mystical fatalism (which he understood Boethius to represent) in a time which called for greatness. Once

published in another version, called "On the Violation of Established and Lawful Order, Rule or Government—Applied to the Present Times in Penn<sup>a</sup>. In 1776. By R. Proud." Four lines from Claudianus precede the poem; in the published version one line (the third) is unaccountably missing.

<sup>21</sup> Later versions differ in this stanza. After "beauteous order move" one text reads

Which those, who violate, are sure to be  
The tools of woeful infelicity.

Footnotes explain that this is a reference to the fallen angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>22</sup> Env. 8. Proud added a biographical note on Boethius.



again the orderliness of nature was described as an ideal which those profaned who sought to alter the conditions of their birth.

Thou Maker of the Starry Sky,  
O, thou eternal Pow'r on high!  
Whose Will directs the rapid Sphere,  
In swiftest Motion round the Year;  
Thy Word to all the Host of Heav'n  
Has certain Law & Order giv'n . . .

In the best writing of all his poems (part of the excellence must be attributed to his original) he limned the balance of sun and moon, of evening and morning star, of summer and winter, of spring and fall; concluding,

Thy glorious Works their Ways confine  
To Law, to Order & Design;  
All to one certain Purpose tend,  
Have one Beginning, & one End;  
Thy heav'nly Will all Things obey,  
But Man;—He finds another Way!  
The Ways alone of human-kind  
Seem to no certain Point confin'd . . .

The perversity of men in defying God's ordinances caused unutterable suffering, individual and social:

The innocent & just sustain  
The Recompence of wicked Men;  
Base, impious Tyrants rule on high,  
While at their Feet the righteous lie;  
Neglected Virtue suffers here  
The Punishment, which Vice should bear;  
The Favours, which to Truth belong,  
Reward the perjur'd, lying Tongue . . .

In all creation there was no discord, but an eternal harmony, for God was

The King & Lord, the Source & Spring,  
The Cause, the Law of ev'ry Thing;  
The Arbiter of all that's Right,  
The Fountain of eternal Light.

The stable, inspiriting, activating principle of such orderliness was Love—the common affinity all entities in the universe shared with one another in their established places:

This is that universal Love,  
By which the wise & virtuous move:  
This mystic Chain makes all agree,  
In everlasting Harmony . . .

Men could if they would attain this spiritual affinity, this universal love, and in turn could understand the latent cause of the universe; but "stupefied with Grief profound" they cared only for their temporal welfare, and willfully plunged into a sea of civil misfortunes.

Boethius' inspiring intellectual achievement conveyed only despair to Proud; it was a key to his disapproval of his times. "A Pastoral Elogium,"<sup>23</sup> likewise written in the autumn of 1776, was a different sort of rationalization. Divine Wisdom, the apotheosis of human virtue, his "dearest Anchoret," he saluted as his beautiful and gay companion, a solace to the mind, as comforting as rest to fainting mariners, or as a mistress to her lover. Following Cicero, he remarked that, could virtue be seen by men with their eyes, they would be ravished with the sight. "Divine Philosophy, Wisdom, or Virtue, in the Mind" had given him serenity in the face of troubles, and security in the presence of fears. Fell rebellion, banishing every kind and tender emotion from the human heart, could not engulf him or disturb his confidence in wisdom:

*My Anchoret is true Delight;  
Which seen would charm all human sight;  
A Form too glorious you to shew,  
Too fair for mortal Eyes to view;  
Yet from th' imperfect Sketch above,  
Some Fruits you have of this my Love.*

The Revolution produced all kinds of loyalists, just as it produced all kinds of rebels. Between Joseph Galloway, the learned constitutionalist, and Robert Proud, the mystic poet, there was as wide a gulf as there was between Proud and Tom Paine. The significant thing about Proud is that he did not, in opposing rebellion, develop as some Quakers did either an active philosophy of social improvement or a mature concept of pacifism. Neither did he reach such ecstasy in his withdrawal as to live greatly a significant devotional life. He certainly participated in many Quaker affairs; his collections of the Society's testimonies and broadsides on military exercises have survived, as have some manuscripts in his hand on abolition and the slave trade. Deeply offended by the banishment of the Quakers in 1777, he nevertheless took no overt move to oppose it. He was busy at the time

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

writing more tracts (signed "Civis") against the corporation of the city, preparing receipts for roasting coffee, and perfecting his poetry.<sup>24</sup> He did, however, set down on paper some "Observations" on the memorial Israel Pemberton and others had submitted to Congress, endorsing their plea to be released from imprisonment on grounds of humanity, justice, and policy. "The Opinion of our Friends," he wrote, "& the Animadversions of our Enemies, with Respect to the Spirit of our present Constitution, & the Degree of Liberty, which may be enjoyed under it, will, in a great Manner, be founded on the Determination of this solemn Appeal to the supreme Council of the States."<sup>25</sup> The sentiments, expressed in private, had only a private influence.

Meanwhile, as the troubles of the 1770's developed, Proud's business grew steadily worse. He borrowed money from his brother William at Hull, but the drafts he sent to discharge his debt were refused and protested, bringing Robert to the verge of bankruptcy. In 1775 things looked somewhat better for a while. Two bills of £100 were paid that year in England but the debt to William still remained above £75. Some foreboding news appeared in William's letter of April 1, 1775, asking payment: "Governmt here don't appear to relax notwithstanding every Effort of the minority against its measures respectg America—the Votes on the ministerial side of each Questn appear generally to about double those of the others— The Fleet & Forces are sail'd & the Bill for restraining the Provinces of New England in their Fishery & Trade is pass'd both Houses—also a 2nd similar one for restraining in like manner the other American Provinces appears likely to Pass—"<sup>26</sup>

For the next three years no letters were exchanged, because of what Robert termed "the Anarchy and Tyranny that has reigned here." He lived quietly, "even like a Person dead amidst the Confusions," and confessed to William that he stayed in America reluctantly, only in the hope that he might collect some of the money due him. Of this he had nearly despaired, for inflation and war had destroyed the routines of business.<sup>27</sup> William offered, if he would leave his business to an agent and come back

<sup>24</sup> Env. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Env. 11.

<sup>26</sup> William Proud to Robert Proud, four letters, 1772-1775. Env. 7

<sup>27</sup> Robert Proud to William Proud, three letters, 1777-1778, *PMH&B*, XXXIV, 62-73.

to England, to make the interest on his debt as easy on the debtor as he could through "a mutual unanimity," a phrase that must have shocked his learned brother.<sup>28</sup>

Ten years of the vexations of business in Revolutionary Philadelphia were enough for Proud. Poverty, distress of mind, conviction of failure, associated with his particularly sterile kind of loyalism and his distracted striving for a mystical communion with God, rendered his commercial situation untenable, his emotional life insupportably tense. Toward the end of the war, "under great & long Dejection & Distress of Mind," he distilled his unhappiness in a lugubrious poem, "A Plaintive Essay."<sup>29</sup> Once God had dwelt with him, he said, and he had enjoyed friendships, work, and the favors of mankind. Now, however—

But, Oh! why now this grievous Fall,  
                   Why am I left forlorn!  
 Oh! why am I bereft of all!  
                   Why was I ever born!

\* \* \* \* \*

The meanest bred, the vilest born,  
                   Insult & scoff me now;  
 They who have known me long, *with Scorn*,  
                   Say spiteful, *Who Art Thou?*

What hath his Love of Learning done,  
                   What Good for him they cry;  
 The Thing he most depended on,  
                   Is nothing but a Lye!

It was time for a retreat, time for Proud to extricate himself from a network of difficulties and devote his energies to employments more suited to his talents. At fifty-two, unless he experience the intense conversion of a saint, which Proud did not, a man cannot learn new ways of feeling and thinking. In spite of his unhappiness in America and his distaste for school work, the failure of his business left only one career open to him. In April, 1780, he went back to the Friend's School as master in Latin and Greek "and some branches of mathematics," at his old salary of £250 a year, this time with an usher to assist him. For the next ten

<sup>28</sup> William Proud to Robert Proud, 22 Jan., 1778. Env. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Env. 7. A version is printed in *Memoirs, HSP*, I, 489, ff.

years he was to be again the dominie, chained by the academic routine he had found so tiresome. He still disliked the work of teaching and association with boys, but at least he had a regular salary and a sure income.

His glum letters home were full of self-reproach. William assured him that he was willing to let the debt ride, and tried to persuade Robert not to blame himself for his business failure, which was really due to "the extraneous unknown events & convulsions of Kingdoms & States." Again he urged the schoolmaster to come home. The treaty of peace ending the Revolution in 1783 furnished a logical occasion for the return journey. Robert, though describing his many troubles, his decline in health and his misfortunes with paper money, refused to come. William's apprehensions were increased when a traveler told "Mother Proud" that her son in America looked considerably older than she.<sup>30</sup>

The death of his mother at a great age in 1789, his brother John's restlessness and troublesome habits, his brother Thomas' incarceration for debt, the inroads on family affection made by the passing of many years, and the complete adjustment to loneliness, all made return seem less attractive. Furthermore, Robert was developing some diseases and disorders of his own, which he enjoyed describing in careful detail, and he was too deeply involved with his creditors to discharge his obligations. "I think my old outstanding Debts here are in the worst State that can be imagined!" he wrote William. "Insolvency, & that which is worse is so common, &c. I expect to receive nothing for near £2000 Stg Value in Debts & old Paper Bills, &c. Only my daily painful Occupation brings me something to spare to pay my old Debts, in future Time, &c. I owe only one Debt besides thine; but it is large for one in my Circumstances."<sup>31</sup>

Robert's methods for recouping his fortunes were more than ineffectual; they were foolish. He lost half of his remaining funds by trusting a scoundrel; his attempts to recover this involved him in land speculations; land speculations meant throwing good money after bad. Legal fees mounted, court costs had to be paid.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, he was working conscientiously at his "daily

<sup>30</sup> William Proud & Robert Proud, eight letters, 1783-1789. Env. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Proud to William Proud, October, 1789. Env. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Correspondence with Richard Bassett of Dover, Env. 10, Henry Chapman, Env. 11, and 76 items of business correspondence, Env. 15.

painful Occupation," and taking part in movements to improve the teaching done at the Penn Charter school. He discussed with the board the books read in his department, particularly emphasizing his care to use no books that would "prepossess the youthful minds with sentiments unfavorable to the Christian faith and the true spirit of the gospel."<sup>33</sup> In a vigorous address to the board in 1787 he defended his practice of accepting entrance-fee gratuities from the students. His was, he insisted, the most arduous Branch of the school, his labors were injuring his health and shortening his life, the value of his salary in real goods was much less than it had been in 1760 when he first undertook the department.<sup>34</sup> Whether the board acted favorably on his petition for accepting gratuities does not appear.

The years were not without their pleasures, vexatious as life had become. The hot summer of Proud's sixtieth year was the summer of the Federal Convention in Philadelphia. On Saturday, August 18, while the Convention behind its closed doors was considering (among other things) the recommendation that the new government establish a university and by other means encourage the advancement of useful knowledge and discoveries, Proud left his study in his quarters on Fifth Street and took a walk. He visited places he had not been for many years—the Hamilton Mansion north of Vine Street, the region of Springetsbury and Bush Hill, thence on north and east where naked desolation like a common wilderness was the legacy of the Revolution; back eastward to James Pemberton's old house, changed beyond recognition in fifteen years; the brick kilns, Peg's Run, and so on to his Fifth-Street home via David Rittenhouse's dwelling, "where I heard music playing."<sup>35</sup> It was such an unusual experience for Proud that he immediately wrote down a description of his walk.

In 1787 also the tedious record of complaints and miseries was relieved by a curious little poem called "Reflections on Human Nature, compared with that of a Fly: Occasioned by a busy Fly disturbing me on a certain hot Summer's Day, and hindering

<sup>33</sup> Woody, *op. cit.*, 71.

<sup>34</sup> "To the Overseers," 2 June, 1787, draught. Env. 11.

<sup>35</sup> "A short Acc<sup>t</sup>. of one Hour & a half's Travels, or a solitary Walk . . . in the Vicinity of Philadelphia." Env. 11.

me from taking Rest." It is a pleasant fantasy of melancholia, reminiscent of the early verses:<sup>36</sup>

Vital Spark of heavn'ly Birth,  
Intellectual Piece of Earth!  
Anxious to thy self to join  
Excellence, which is not thine;  
One in Nature with this Fly,  
Buzzing round as thou dost lie;  
Nearly thus art thou all'd  
To the smallest Insect Tribe!  
The Materials of your Frame  
Life & Maker are the same!

\* \* \* \* \*

As thou wast born was this Fly;  
As it dieth thou shalt die:  
As a Candle's Snuff, we see,  
Is extinguish'd, thou shalt be;  
Leave the World, as it was found,  
And rejoin thy native Ground;  
Knowing thence thy State no more,  
Than thy Being heretofore.

There can be no question that Proud was a misfit in the Friend's School, or that his unhappy state of mind and dislike of his work affected his abilities as a teacher. The only place the School had in his life was to furnish him an income. And so, in his sixty-second year, 1790, he gave it up, never to return. Apparently he did so voluntarily, but it is hard to understand why he should have given up his security. The managers were probably not sorry to lose so tiresome a master, even though his abilities were considerable. Ostensibly, the reason for his resignation was to publish his great book. For throughout his years of distress and struggle, Proud had been engaged on the project that has kept his name alive among students ever since. This was his *History of Pennsylvania*.

The major part of the *History* was composed, it appears, between 1776 and 1780. These were the years when Proud was an unsuccessful Loyalist Quaker merchant, oppressed with financial worries, angrily partisan in his political thinking and longing for the life of the spirit. It was revised and enlarged in the eighties, when he was a discontented schoolmaster, still heavily in debt. Finally, it was polished and published in the nineties, while Proud lived on meager earnings, the bounty of friends, and the ex-

<sup>36</sup> Dated "7 mo. 20th 1782." Env. 11.

pectation of large returns. The title pages bear the dates 1797 and 1798. Now this means that twenty years' work went into the book, and even if we grant that the author was harried by financial difficulties and for ten years occupied in teaching, we must still judge it to be a very thin showing for two decades of study. Compared with the work of other historians of the close of the eighteenth century, among them some Americans, it appears dull in style, unimaginative in conception, and inadequate in research.

This is not the place to attempt a critical analysis of Proud's *History*, but its weaknesses were those inseparable from his character and his political opinions. His whole life determined the kind of work he would produce. In dull prose he embalmed the most stirring events; he used sources indiscriminately, quoting at tedious length, and dwelling as fully on trivial issues as on great. Though he spent enough time on his studies to do a thorough job, he permitted the book to come out in a state which he himself described as "imperfect and deficient." This he blamed on the inadequacy of his materials and the state of his health. The two volumes cover only the years 1681 to 1742, with an additional chapter on the period 1760 to 1770. Of course, the materials were defective, and the greatest service Proud rendered was to call attention to their existence. But he did not use all the sources he might have, nor did he lend to the work the philosophic insights that his training and reading should have given him.

Proud's purpose in writing the *History* was quite clearly to make money. Perhaps that is why it so signally failed to match the standard of contemporary American historical works. There was another reason, however. The other productions of the 1780's and 1790's were principally inspired by the patriotic fervor that succeeded the Revolution. Mercy Otis Warren (to choose one author out of many) had a story to tell in which her own family had acted brave parts, and the outcome of which had given her the keenest gratification. The Philadelphia schoolmaster, by contrast, had nothing but contempt for the Revolution. He wrote his *History* in antagonism to his age. His "Preface Dedicatory" is filled with allusions to the superiority of the past of Pennsylvania over the present, to the constant decay in human affairs,



to the lack of virtue in the new leaders who deserted proven ways of happiness for "boasting of mere theory, and anticipation," and to the designs of "forward, selfish and less qualified" men. He warned of ambition, and pled for unity of spirit among men, with a "due submission, in civil society." All the timidity, the conservatism, the Toryism of Proud's nature was expressed in this preface. Men like Jefferson, Adams, and Dickinson were on the list of subscribers, but Proud was writing as if the creative achievements of the previous quarter-century had been nothing more than a local insurrection of misguided and vain demagogues. With this, he was trying to appeal to an American audience.<sup>37</sup>

Naturally, the book was a financial failure. It could not have been otherwise. Yet Proud professed himself unable to understand why it did not attract a wide and enthusiastic following. He insisted it was unbiased, by which he meant that its bias was not the currently popular one; his description of it in a letter to his brother John in 1800 reveals how blind to his own prejudices he was. He declared his work, with all its imperfections, to be "the most authentic, complete & best Acct of W<sup>m</sup> Penn & of the Prov. of Pennsa that has ever yet appeared, tho so little adapted, both in it's Nature & Manner to the common Taste & Reading of the present Times."<sup>38</sup>

The rewards of a minor prophet must alway be slender. Proud's disappointment at the failure of his book was very keen. He wrote an accusing memorial to the Quakers charging them with backing out of their engagements to promote its circulation and asking them to buy the whole issue and distribute twelve copies to each Monthly Meeting, thus relieving him of the more than £1,000 financial burden he had borne. Only in this way, he added, could their "disgraceful neglect" be expiated.<sup>39</sup> The Friends had no such intentions; the debt became another millstone around the author's neck.

<sup>37</sup> Notes for his *History*, and the original manuscript, are in The Historical Society. In the Library Company's papers are many letters concerning it, and some parts of the data. Most revealing are Proud's letters to his Quaker sponsors, and letters from William and John Proud concerning their attempts to sell it in England.

<sup>38</sup> "5 mo 6th 1800." Env. 13.

<sup>39</sup> To James Pemberton, Nicholas Waln, and William Savery. Env. 14.

The last two decades of Proud's life followed the same pattern of poverty, debt, and study. Occasionally he visited friends in the country—Abel James at Frankford, Joseph Smith and Benjamin Morgan in Jersey. He corresponded with his brothers William and John in England, who sent him letters describing the new inventions that were changing British production, the conditions of commerce, the slave-trade reforms, and English opinion of the French Revolution. Robert in turn described American affairs, the Indian wars, the neutrality policy, the great yellow-fever plague, his own business transactions, his work with a few pupils, and the usual details of his health.<sup>40</sup> He saw no need to accept the Revolution merely because it had been successful. In 1793 he wrote of President Washington and the neutrality question, reporting the tale that the French minister was fomenting Americans to rebel against "our king"—Washington—and his government. He predicted that Washington's death would be followed by a further great overturn and civil war; it would be the inevitable result of having elevated the "meanest of the People" into favor. Through the French crisis he continued to be pro-British, anti-French, and anti-American, especially as the cost of living rose, his *History* failed to sell, and frontier troubles increased.

But Proud was not idle. His sharp mind and intellectual curiosity which had sustained him in his darkest days continued to keep him busy in old age. A few pupils, privately taught, took a little time though nowhere near the effort that the school had required, so he was able to view academic problems from a new vantage; he opposed the bill for free education of the poor, in language expressing his old fondness for the successful and substantial elements of society. He wrote a description of his *History*, renewing his attack on the Friends who had not backed it or aided its sales.<sup>41</sup> He read widely, and made extracts from his reading, filing away notes on Arthur Young, on Dr. Moore's European travels, on the exports of Pennsylvania and commerce of the United States generally, on calendar reform, on population, and on Quakerism in Pennsylvania. He described an earthquake in Philadelphia in 1801, made an elaborate proposal for

<sup>40</sup> Twenty-four letters, 1790-1802. Env. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Env. 14.

re-drawing state boundaries of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in order to provide a more efficient commerce, wrote a note on corporation law, translated a good deal of Latin and some French, composed many pages of religious verse, compiled statistics on land sales and drew up his own accounts, studied the national debt, and listed the names of the winds.<sup>42</sup> Always unpredictable, he sent to the *Gazette* an essay defending the theater as an institution proper to a free nation.<sup>43</sup> He wrote at least one letter in Latin to a younger member of the Bevan family, and he saved the essays his students handed in.

His experience as a merchant had given him a deep interest in economic affairs. When Abel James died, he praised his "learning in the mercantile way;" in his *History* he had amassed a considerable body of data on the commercial and financial life of Pennsylvania between 1760 and 1770; he continued to collect materials on American commerce in his retirement. In 1795 he wrote an extended criticism of what he deemed the "Exaggerations & Misrepresentations" of Tench Coxe's *View of the United States*, in which he displayed both learning and skill, even though his major point was the highly dubious one that the Revolution had been the underlying cause of America's commercial and economic decay. He shrewdly urged, in this essay, that the future prosperity of America would depend upon developing internal rather than foreign trade, and recommended that attempts to establish commerce with India and China be abandoned.<sup>44</sup> In 1797 he wrote a long though not too intelligent account of the Connecticut Lands question in Pennsylvania, which was never published, but which must have represented weeks of labor on the documents of that tortuous question.

Time was running out for Robert Proud. He passed his eightieth birthday in 1808, having outlived two of his younger brothers and a sister. He was frail, poor and alone, still estranged from most of the Friends who had received his *History* with indifference, and still unreconciled even after three decades to the new government in America. Too weak and sick to follow the vicissitudes of his beloved England during the Napoleonic

<sup>42</sup> Twenty-three items, Env. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Env. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Env. 14.

wars, or to make what would have been acidulous comments on Jeffersonian republicanism in Pennsylvania, he lingered only a few years longer, a strange anachronism in the age that had overtaken him. A new war broke out, but Proud was beyond caring. In 1813, in his eighty-sixth year, an obscure figure in the busy city, he slipped quietly away. The newspapers published more kindly notices than he had ever received in life.

What a scholar of Proud's abilities in poetry, chemistry, medicine, botany, Latin, Greek, and history might have achieved in other times or other places, it is impossible to guess. Perhaps his was the kind of maladjustment that external circumstances could not have remedied, just as his mysticism was too intense for the world but too fragile for supreme dedication. But the value of the full record he left of his life and thought is not in its psychological revelations; it is in the sustained and pointed criticism he made of the scenes about him. The dissenting spirit, even one rooted in nothing more profound than weakness of character, always applies the check-rein to historians. The reasons of Proud's despair have ceased to interest us, though we may wish one of such gifts had employed them more profitably; but it will continue to be an enrichment to the literature of our Revolutionary history that we have at hand the opinions of an intransigent Yorkshireman in Pennsylvania, a learned and pious scholar, who, whatever the popular view on public questions at any time happened to be, insisted on thinking otherwise, and defended his opinions in pen and ink, filing away his papers for later teachers, historians, and scholars to ponder.

The *History* has now been relegated to the obscurity which its bias and contentiousness deserve. Conceived in the large dimensions of higher morality, it was executed in despair, the muddled product of a muddled man, at war with the very society whose past he was describing. Yet for thirty-two years, until Gordon's poor rehash of the *Annual Register* was published, it stood alone. Two whole generations of Pennsylvanians learned what they knew of their history from a writer who, for all his gifts, neither understood nor liked the very things that made them glad to be Pennsylvanians.