THOMAS POWNALL

Portrait painted about 1763 by Francis Cotes (1725-1770), engraved about 1777 by Richard Earlom (1743-1822)
AN ACTIVE AND INTELLIGENT ANTIQUARY, GOVERNOR THOMAS POWNALL

BY CAROLINE ROBBINS*

Prefatory Note—Students of Pennsylvania history will find in Thomas Pownall's *Topographical Description* much that illuminates the appearance and character of this province during the mid-eighteenth century. Pownall's friendship with Franklin and their association not only at Albany but in London during the controversies of George III's reign are famous. In this article, however, Professor Caroline Robbins has concerned herself chiefly with an analysis of the ideas of this many-sided man and his contribution to eighteenth-century thought.

In his own day, if not now, Thomas Pownall was well known on both sides of the Atlantic—as administrator, member of Parliament, fellow of learned societies, amateur artist, and author of a score or more of publications upon a variety of topics. He travelled widely in America, in the British Isles and on the continent. He enjoyed country life, archaeological investigation, and the company of his friends. A Pennsylvanian, Richard Peters, described him as an affectionate friend. He certainly formed a large acquaintance during the early days of his American travels. The association then begun with Benjamin Franklin, as well as connections formed in New England, lasted up to and beyond the American Revolution. In his old age Pownall met Miranda, promoter of Spanish-American liberty, and attempted to interest the ministry of William Pitt in that cause. He had, indeed, foreseen as early as 1780, and before he met Miranda, the emancipation from European control of the whole of the western hemisphere.

Everywhere in his works may be found evidence of extensive learning, a capacity for acute observation and many original meditations upon the solution of contemporary economic and political problems. Some of his suggestions, like the federal union or family compact of the Atlantic marine communities, are better known than others. All deserve study. He endorsed the freedom of trade.

*Professor Robbins is Chairman of the Department of History at Bryn Mawr College. Last spring she served as Alice Freeman Palmer Professor at the University of Michigan.*
and labor advocated by Adam Smith. His criticism of the doctrine of the original contract is less familiar, and his philosophy of history has been ignored. Pownall's failure to influence ministerial policy and his inability to attract the reading public must be attributed to personal idiosyncrasies as well as to the temper of the age. Contemporaries were annoyed by his vanity and conscious rectitude. A repellent style and a chaotic presentation of his admittedly extensive information and sagacious reflections rendered his books unreadable to any but the most determined.

English historians have neglected Pownall. John Nichols, it is true, wrote one of his longest footnotes about "this active and intelligent Antiquary."\(^1\) Family piety prompted a biography early in this century.\(^2\) During his lifetime his greatest success was with Americans and it is to Americans that he chiefly owes such posthumous recognition as he has enjoyed. As early as 1755 Lewis Evans dedicated his famous map to him. Somewhat later, John Adams declared that he was the most constitutional and rational governor who ever represented the crown in Massachusetts.\(^3\) Benjamin Franklin, James Bowdoin, and Samuel Cooper respected him and continued their friendship long after he left America. At least two place names recall his achievements, and state historical societies of the eastern seaboard have piously collected his memorabilia. Over a century ago a Canadian argued that only the talents of a Pownall could have produced the letters of Junius, though a more critical appraisal of the Governor's style should have convinced him of the improbability of this identification.\(^4\) A Boston Courier in 1852 carried lively reports of debates about Pownall's proposals to the new United States seventy years earlier. Recent American works have exhaustively examined his connection with Miranda and his activities on behalf of American liberties.\(^5\)


\(^2\) Chas. A. W. Pownall, *Thomas Pownall* (London, 1908); see also *D.N.B.* article by W. P. Courtney with good bibliography.


\(^4\) Frederick Griffin, *Junius Discovered* (Boston, 1854). This prints Pownall's letters to the Rev. Sam Cooper in Boston; for Cooper's letters to Pownall see *American Historical Review*, VIII, 302-330.

What is in some ways the most interesting aspect of Pownall's life, his intellectual contribution to the achievement of Georgian England, has however been overlooked. In his books may be found ample testimony to his debt to the favored authorities of the day—the classical writers, the great English philosophers, Bacon, Harrington, Cumberland, Newton, Locke, and Shaftesbury; contemporaries like Hume and Smith, Montesquieu and Necker. Nevertheless, his conclusions were independent and seldom commonplace. In forwarding his own career during the reign of George III, he showed a lack of common sense, but in using his experience and his observations of the world around him to correct or extend commonly held theories about history and politics, he often displayed extraordinary judgment. He did not acknowledge having read the works of Vico, but his proposals for a reformed study of antiquity were hardly less striking.

Throughout his writings Pownall insisted that "scite and circumstance," as he phrased it, were all-important in any consideration of human activity. His family enjoyed a small property in East Anglia and he was born in Lincoln in 1722 to William and Sara Pownall. The elder Pownall had had some military experience; his wife's family was connected with the East India Company. Thomas was educated at the local grammar school and went in 1740 to Trinity College, Cambridge, of which university both his headmaster, John Goodall, and his father were alumni. Before he graduated in 1743, Trinity's famous master, the classical scholar Richard Bentley, had been succeeded by Robert Smith, cousin of the Newtonian mathematician, Robert Cotes, and himself an astronomer, experimental philosopher, and author of books on optics and on musical sounds. Pownall dedicated his Principles of Polity, an enlarged version of his earlier Treatise on Government, to his alma mater on its appearance in 1752.

After serving some years at the Board of Trade, where his younger brother John (1724-1795) made his lifelong career, Pownall was appointed secretary to Sir Danvers Osborne, brother-

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6 John A. Schurtz, Thomas Pownall, British Defender of American Liberty (Glendale, Calif., 1951) contains a bibliography. All biographical details are from this book unless otherwise noted.

7 The British Museum shelf mark for A Treatise is 8005 e 47. The Principles (catalogued under Pownall's name) is more than twice as long. It incorporates most of A Treatise in Dialogue I.
in-law of his chief, the second earl of Halifax, and set out with him for America in 1753. Osborne committed suicide almost immediately after their arrival. Pownall decided to explore the country until he received further instructions. In the spring of 1754 he was in Philadelphia, and became friendly with the anti-proprietary group—Franklin, already mentioned, Isaac Norris, Israel Pemberton, and Lewis Evans. During the summer he took part in the Albany Congress called to consider problems of defense and relations between the colonists and the Indians. After a winter in Boston, Pownall returned to New York and later visited Virginia. He was appointed lieutenant governor of New Jersey in 1755. In March, 1756, he returned to England, was appointed secretary to Lord Loudoun and returned with him to America in the same year.

In the autumn he again crossed the Atlantic, attended to family business, met the Duke of Cumberland and "fell in love" with William Pitt. He obtained the post of governor of Massachusetts and landed at Boston in August, 1757. His major task was to reconcile the demands of London for maximum assistance in the war against France with the independence of the colonial assembly. He continued his travels north to Penobscot Bay and south to New Jersey. Though he was nominally transferred to the governorship of South Carolina in 1759, he in fact continued service in New England until his return to England in 1760. A year later he received the rank of colonel and the job of investigating the handling of supplies in Hanover. Though his work was criticized he eventually received credit for his accomplishment, and his charges of mismanagement were upheld. Back in England he met and subsequently married Lady Fawkener, a widow with four children.

The next phase of his career was as member of Parliament, first for Tregony and then for Minehead, the latter under the patronage of Lord North. A conspicuous friend of the Americans, he spoke frequently on their behalf during the years 1767-1780. Copies of his speeches found their way across the Atlantic. In

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his letters he urged moderation on his friends. In the Commons he endeavored to explain American sentiments. As violence developed he was torn between his passionate desire to maintain the "grand marine dominion" of the Atlantic, if necessary by an English victory and a wise new system of imperial union, and his growing realization that victory was unlikely and that the old ties between the colonies and England were so much weakened that the chances of continued association were remote. As early as December, 1777, he announced that since success was impossible, peace between mother country and former colonies should be sought whilst it was still possible and before the entry of other participants changed the character of domestic conflict. After 1780 he retired from the House and devoted himself to writing his Memorials to the King, to the Sovereigns of Europe, of Great Britain and of North America, urging his solutions and recommendations through the written rather than the spoken word.10

Pownall occasionally took part in other debates. With Burke he pushed through the Corn Law of 1774 which is usually known by his name and which permitted moderate importation in times of scarcity. He opposed bounties on manufactured linen and spoke on the seizure of the Falkland Islands. He acted at first with Barré and the pro-American Chathamite group, but, never a party man, he at one point supported North's plan for conciliation. Finally he severed himself from all factions. His correspondence with Samuel Cooper in Boston becoming known, any chance of the office he so much wished for, vanished.12

Lady Fawkener died in 1777. It had been a happy marriage

10 The Memorials appeared in French and in a shortened English version. After The Administration of the Colonies it was Pownall's best selling work. He refers to it in a letter to James Bowdoin in 1783 (Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Boston, 1907, 7th ser., VI, 25-26; also ibid., Boston, 1897, 6th ser., IX, 196). The edition of the Memorials used here is that of 1784 which bound together the Memorials to the King, to the Sovereigns of Great Britain, of Europe and of America, and Added Prefatory Material. The pagination runs separately for each memorial. My colleague, Professor Felix Gilbert, plans a study of Pownall's internationalism.

12 Nichols says that Pownall and Burke did not agree about politics. Burke's angry notes up to p. 75 of the Administration—perhaps he did not read further—are to be found in the British Museum, C 60, i. 9; for an encounter in the Commons, see William Cobbett, Parliamentary History (London, 1813), XVIII, 894-895.

14 Ibid., XVII, 475, 512, 553, 698 f., 1146. Arthur Young, Political Arithmetic to which is added a Memorial on the Corn Trade by Gov. Pownall (London, 1774), 303-311. Pownall's parliamentary career needs detailed study.
though she had not shared her husband's wish to visit America. Her son, the Captain, a fervent admirer of Paoli, had longed to go. After the peace of 1783 Pownall intended to return, but was deflected in part by his own sensibility—by fears that he might not now be welcome—and certainly largely by his marriage to another widow, Hannah Astell. She was wealthy and with her he travelled for a year in Europe before settling down to live on their properties in Bedfordshire and elsewhere, in London and in Bath, where he died at a ripe old age in 1805. He had had no children and his possessions passed to the family of his brother John.

In appearance Pownall though handsome was short. He loved fine clothes and highly spiced foods and his taste in both attracted not always favorable attention, both in Boston and later in his life. Though a note of modesty as to his own erudition occasionally creeps into his treatises, in conversation he was apt to lay down the law, especially about America. His letters are lively and amusing and explain much about his energetic and forceful personality.

Pownall's exceptional talent lay in his capacity for analytical observation. Early during his American travels he met Lewis Evans in Philadelphia, as already noticed, and delved eagerly into the material the cartographer was gathering for his map of British America. The habit of keeping his own journals and making sketches as he went about was also formed. Some of his drawings were subsequently engraved by a fellow East Anglian, Paul Sandby, and published as *Six Remarkable Views* in 1761. *A Topographical Description* was published in London in 1776 with the idea of benefiting Evans' family. This reproduced the map, together with Pownall's own materials about the country. Until the end of his life he continued to amass Americana with the intention of en-

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14 Sawtelle, *op. cit.*, reproduces a portrait from a mezzotint by Francis Cotes. See also Schurtz, *op. cit.*, 154-155, on Pownall's height. Jos. Cradock (*Lit. & Misc. Memoirs* [London, 1828], II, 178-179, 188, 190, 192-193) presents glimpses of Pownall in France in 1784-1785 laying down the law. Manuscript letters may be found in Hist. Soc. of Pa. and the Rosenbach Foundation in Philadelphia, in the New York Public Library, and the Morgan Library; also in the British Museum and the Public Record Office as well as in other collections. Besides the Cooper letters in Griffin's book, perhaps the most interesting printed letters are in the *Collections of the Mass. Hist. Soc.* (Boston, 1897), 6th ser., IX, in the Bowdoin and Temple papers, but many others are scattered in other volumes of this and other societies.
larging the *Topographical Description*, but a revised version did not appear until 1949. The map remains invaluable. The accompanying letter-press is useful. Absolutely nothing favorable can be said for Pownall's method, or absence of method, in the process of compilation; he followed no order, he repeated himself, he incorporated extraneous matter into accounts of scenery and natural resources. Yet a patient reading is rewarding both for an impression of the new world and for the revelation of Pownall's character and ability.13

The delightful views reveal Pownall's appreciation of natural scenery. America made a vivid impression on him and he wrote of the face of the countryside "like a large rolling sea."16 The woods between the mountains constantly recalled the "vast ocean" to him. From a height he noticed the repeated succession of blue and purple parallel waving lines. He was quick to observe gaps, perpendicular bluffs, points, and knobs which marked the way both for Indians and for surveyors. He liked to measure and chart for himself. At Passaic Falls he leapt across a chasm better to scrutinize the steep cliff and obtain accurate data for his notebook, even whilst he was filled with dread at the thought of the return jump. But his nervousness did not prevent his sketching the scene and this was to form one of the engravings made later by Sandby.17

Atmosphere, style, and custom were equally appreciated by Pownall. As he first travelled towards the city of New York he was agreeably struck by the smell of burning cedar, caused as he discovered by the cedar chips used by the inhabitants in their fireplaces. The local boatmen seemed no more aware of the pleasant odor than Londoners were of the suffocating stench of their coal.

13 *Six Remarkable Views* (London, 1761). I am much indebted for use of this to the Rosenbach Foundation. It contains the Sandby engraving of views of the Catskills, the Hudson, the Moravian settlements at Bethlehem, the Passaic Falls, the Mohawks, and an American Farm—at the beginning and completed. Schurtz reproduces, *inter alia*, a sketch of Boston. See also L. H. Gipson, *Lewis Evans*, to which is added Evans' *Brief Account* . . . (Philadelphia, 1939), and Lois Mulkearn, ed., *A Topographical Description*, being an enlarged and revised edition of Pownall’s publication in 1776 (Pittsburgh, 1949). Evans' map is reproduced in both volumes and much useful commentary besides.


The delicious climate of New York as well as its sociable and hospitable inhabitants appealed to him greatly. He remarked the old Dutch style in building and the gradual encroachments of a newer Italianate mode. At Worcester he described a “beautiful, clear, new and young town” in a broad valley, settled only some twenty-three years when he visited there.\(^8\)

Evidence of the clearing of the wilderness fascinated him as much as the vastness and beauty of the country. “While the eye,” he wrote, “is thus catching new pleasure from the landscape, with what overflowing joy does the heart melt while he views the banks where rising farms, new fields, or flowering orchards begin to illuminate this face of nature.” One of his sketches shows an American farm in the building and when completed. Gardens “busked up with every convenience that property and plenty could give to peace and liberty” delighted him. The people, the community farming, the mills, the choirs, and the younger folk that he saw in the Moravian settlements of Pennsylvania were enjoyed. He sketched Bethlehem, whilst he reflected upon the platonic rather than Christian nature of this settlement.\(^9\)

In Philadelphia he spent an evening with Chief Justice William Allen and his old mother. They discussed the uncommon event of such a town as theirs arising amidst a wilderness in so short a time and becoming so fine and populous a city. The old lady told Pownall that she, who now lived to see the town with near thirty thousand inhabitants in it enjoying every comfort and elegance, had seen the beginning of it when she lived in New Jersey with her parents, and had heard that the Quakers planned to make a new establishment near the Swedes’ upper settlements. Such things suggested to Pownall “curious disquisitions” about the powers of man and the operations of natural society when established on true principles and conducted in the spirit of peace and the vigor of liberty.\(^20\)

A romantic note as well as these natural law theories of the Age of Reason creeps into the *Topographical Description*. One evening during a journey in Pennsylvania, Pownall and his companions were riding a mere track through the woods late in the evening and seemed likely to be benighted. Suddenly they heard a trio of

\(^{19}\) *Ibid.*, 31, 96, 103.
French horns playing a "pleasing melancholy tune." They followed the sound to some dwellings near the mines. As they approached, he says, "we found our concert was performed by an old German and his two sons sitting at the door of their cottage after their day's labor." What "pleasure," he thought, "must this old man, escaped from the sovereign tyranny of his European lords . . . feel in the contrast." A further speculation occurred to the traveller—"yet I thought the melancholy of the music had a retrospective regret of his native country. I asked him. He said no and yet I thought he felt yes: so we are formed."21

_The Administration of the Colonies_, first published in 1764 and extended and altered in new editions up to 1777, is Pownall's best known book. In it he records not only policies recommended at successive stages, but also his impressions of frontier problems, the Indians, the psychology of the colonists. He saw a crisis shaping as the French and Indian War ended. The situation had changed. Americans could no longer be treated paternally. The life they led in the great spaces of the new continent had already given them independence of spirit.22 In the later _Memorials_ he wrote that Americans were natural philosophers. Their movements were free. No single church enjoyed a monopoly. No feudal laws prevented their hunting. Opportunity for enterprise had encouraged a rapid growth of population.23

His personal experience of the temper of Massachusetts had convinced him that force was unlikely to succeed where persuasion had failed. The colonists had given valuable assistance against France in mid-century, but on their own terms. All his suggestions—for a secretary for the colonies, for a revised department to deal with their affairs, for representation in Parliament, for a federal status (not unlike later dominion status), for a revitalized colonial policy—were based on his respect for the new important western community he had studied. Geographically it formed a part of the "grand marine dominion" of the Atlantic; he hoped it might realize, although in a different way, an interest in this larger sphere.24

21 Ibid., 100.
22 _The Administration of the Colonies_ (London, 1764), 1-25, and 35, for a "grand commercial union"; editions appeared in 1764, 1765, 1766, 1768, 1774, and 1777, the last two being expanded to two volumes.
23 Memorial to Europe, 46 and 58, and _Memorial to America_, 22-26.
“I have been,” Pownall wrote to Admiral Holbourn in 1757, “in my studies much conversant with history and every example I recollect serves only to make me more and more melancholy.”

Perhaps the sadness, even at this time of his life, was due to a certain fatalism in his interpretation of the natural laws which determine man's fate. His philosophy was suggested in *A Study of Antiquities* (1782). History was, he thought, too often a bare listing of facts, or an occasion for describing pomp and circumstance, or a recital of the "brutal" deeds of man. Historians should, by the use of analogy, the study of fable, examine the principles which lie behind the "coalescing into society." Analytical discussion of the progress, expansion, and decay of the civil community might explain the vicissitudes of nations. "Scite and circumstance," language and literature, must be explored.

The writing of all people, he maintained, "in their first efforts" has invariably been a picture representation of time. From these alphabets the several stages of the civilization of the community—the clearing and cultivation of the land, the development of instruments of the husbandry arts—may be discovered. Language is all metaphor at first and history mere allegory and fable. The interpretation of these by the "learned antiquary" may reveal the establishment of government, the progress of commerce, and the settlement of colonies. Actual persons in the drama may be dimly seen, but the early revolutions of human society will not be.

History may be compared to a great ship floating down the tides of time. Deep oblivion has overwhelmed it. Research has too often collected unrelated fragments out of their proper context. Man is finite. His natural wants as well as his powers, though proportionable to his needs, are limited. In all ages his circumstances have restricted his habits and ways of life. When he ceases to be a hunter or a herdsman he usually becomes a landworker or a warrior, and so on into the appearance of modern commercial states. Society will in similar conditions develop in similar ways. Even the personal adornments from various periods and regions resemble each other. The dramas of sylvan life repeat themselves.

26 *A Treatise on the Study of Antiquities* (London, 1782), 82.
Thus, even where history seems but fragmentary and the record all fable and myth, the progress of time may be deduced by analogy. Hesiod and Homer preserve relics of the story of small companies of wandering hunters and navigators. The original state “we insolently call savage” may be reconstructed from their pages. A just idea may give equally just conceptions of the formation of society. The fables tell of gods and heroes going forth as benefactors or as tyrants in the regions of the Mediterranean or the Euxine seas. Our knowledge of the Portuguese in Asia or the Spaniards in America may assist our understanding of the earlier periods. Analogy will enable us to interpret the tale of the Golden Fleece and the golden apples. The rivalries of Poseidon and Jupiter become clear, and we comprehend the importance of the site of Illium near the mouth of the Bosphorus commanding the exclusive navigation of the Euxine. Eastern Europe and Asia Minor were the America of ancient commerce, to which merchants brought manufactured goods and from which they carried away lumber, pelts, wool, and corn. In the traditions of beautiful women employing magic charms to entrap sailors, we may see the attempts of governments to guard their possessions and exclusive commercial rights, against interlopers and pirates. In fact the sirens were the coast guards of an early mercantilist system!

The antiquary must be the interpreter by whom history is rendered intelligible, and the agent through whom the reader may relive past times. The country must be described, the government of the community, the defects, diseases, and accidents which have given occasion to its illnesses must be examined so that every “spring and movement” will be equally known. Pownall wished to know why such and such possessions of lands, waters, and things became necessary; how certain liberties were preserved; how some despotisms lasted so long, in spite of safeguards like rotation in office or a citizens’ militia; how labor was divided, and its surplus products changed; how commerce had increased the power of the state. These studies did resolve some problems. For example, Troy held out for ten years without famine only because division of labor had not yet occurred and her citizens and her soldiers were one and the same. Causes and effects must be connected. History, “the principle of the reasoning part,” will be “experimental knowledge.”
Pownall stressed the vegetative system of the community, the internal and growing part, the roots of the tree, the surplus created by agriculture and manufactures which alone can support large numbers of people. The use of that surplus production was all important. The Egyptians made the mistake of employing their population and wealth in building pyramids, "monuments as they now are to the defective state of their economy." On the other hand, the Phoenicians "set down between the great trade of the east and that of the west and actuating the movements of this combined commerce soon acquired an ascendancy . . . of the then great world," as the Hansa towns were to do later in northern seas. Alexander perfectly understood the importance of commerce and of naval supremacy, and combined his conquest in a system with entrepots in Alexandria and in Tyre, and meditated acquiring another in Carthage which only death prevented his achieving.29

The history of commerce Pownall suggests has yet to be written, especially as it concerns the ancient Indies. Only he who is master of the languages and perfectly acquainted with the face of these countries and with some practical experience as a merchant there can properly undertake the task. Pownall's insistence upon the role of commercial developments in history did not blind him to the danger of commercial empire. In The Right, Duty and Interest of the State, printed in 1773 and reprinted ten years later, he showed his awareness of the perils implicit in the activities of the East India Company since the victories of Clive. Merchants had become princes and had hired nabobs with their gains. The essential limits of the privileges granted to trading subjects should be made clear. The Crown should retain all magisterial and military power. Merchants could expect assistance and protection, but should never exercise dominion. Only disaster could follow the assumption by company personnel of governmental powers in India.30

In his earliest work, The Principles of Polity, Pownall had emphasized the importance of commerce and its influence upon imperial policies at all stages of human history. In the processes to which the necessary division of labor among men gave rise he

29 Ibid., 52-96, passim.
30 The Right, Interest and Duty of the State, as Concerned in the Affairs of the East Indies (London, 1773), passim; Antiquities, 96-98; Memorial to Europe, 101.
found the prime root of all social activity and human communion. It is not therefore surprising to find him hailing Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* as the *Principia* of the social sciences immediately after its publication in 1776. However, in *A Letter* to its author he noted not only his own anticipation of its remarks about division of labor but also some differences of opinion. He defended the record and the usefulness of the colonies with examples from his personal experience. He maintained that barter necessarily developed from inequalities in the wants and necessities of humans. He took issue on some matters of definition. He questioned the wisdom of allowing all at once complete freedom of trade; there was, he pointed out, a difficult period when prices had risen but when wages and rents had not caught up with the increase. "We shall," he wrote, "in the triumph of our general prosperity, be the constant oppressors of those who have the best title to a share in this"—that is, the landed gentry and the day laborers. Moreover, he advocated some limitation in favor of infant industries which might otherwise never become established.  

History demonstrated that natural laws dictated not only the union of certain areas but the courses which commerce and commercial states followed. Some areas of the world gravitated towards each other. An examination of this process in history should enable wise policies to implement future developments. Pownall urged on America that a free port and a common market should be established for the trade of nations. He advised a customs union of western Europe. He foresaw the eventual commercial supremacy of the western hemisphere. He hoped that the wisdom of statesmen, assisted by the research of historians and observers, could provide for Europe a share in the prosperity of the Atlantic area.  

The basis of Pownall's philosophy was to be found in the aphorism from his mentor James Harrington which he placed on the title page of his *Memorials* in 1784:

> To make principles or fundamentals, belongeth not to man, to nations, nor to human laws; to build upon such principles or fundamentals, as are apparently laid by

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1. *A Letter to Dr. Adam Smith* (London, 1776), 5.
2. *A Memorial . . . to America*, 46-47; *A Memorial to Europe*, 114-119.
God in the inevitable necessity or law of nations, is that which truly appertains to man, to nations, to human laws: to make any other fundamentals, and to build upon them, is to build castles in the air.33

When he sent his *Principles* to Harvard College in 1763, he enlarged on the same theme.34 The natural laws to which Pownall continually referred were derived from the authority of Harrington and of Newton. Pownall might be described as a sociological Newtonian. The forces of gravity in human society might be the attraction of men to each other, of certain areas of the world to each other, of the relation of property to power.

The three dialogues into which the *Principles of Polity* is divided take place in a country house adorned with arms and armor, “monitors of liberty,” memorials of England’s long struggle against tyranny. Lucius Crassus and Scaevola—Pownall himself—argue throughout about politics. The time is soon after the ’45. The order followed may serve as a guide, though as ever Pownall rambles as he writes. The first dialogue discusses the original contract; the second, the revolutions affected by the changing balance in property and power; and the third, the matter of allegiance, the duty owed by the citizen to his state.35

Pownall denies that the original contract could or should ever have been an alliance or treaty between two parties. It was or should be a union or a “concatenation” of a communion. This, the dependency of each upon every other, was what created or brought about government. Distinctions between rulers and ruled, court and country, landed and mercantile interests were dangerous. All were interdependent. All society was connected by a “golden chain.” No parts should be opposed to one another or expected to check each other. Polity was the care and right interpretation of the communion of mankind.

Crassus pointed out of the window of the room where they talked. He observed that the goodly farm which lay on rising ground before them appeared to be self-sufficient. Closer scrutiny of the landscape, however, revealed a mine which provided necessary material for tools, and a river by which produce could be

33 *A Memorial . . . to America*, title page.
34 Harvard shelf mark, 536 12 x 27 21.
35 The three dialogues on the *Principles* are paged: I, 1-33; II, 34-105; III, 106-142.
shipped to the distant city. Town and country, industry and agriculture were all related to each other. Men of different abilities worked at different tasks but all must combine together or they perished. Even in the earliest ages of history varied skills and needs emphasized the interdependence of man and the necessity of society.\textsuperscript{36}

Union was the basis of society. The type of government would depend upon the conditions of the area in which the society arose. Its extent might change. Families, villages, small kingdoms existed apart in early times. But, as in Saxon England, smaller divisions tended to dissolve into larger communities whose extent was determined by natural laws. A political and economic gravity drew together the British Isles. This was true in Spain, though Portugal was to be combined with Spain after her conquest of Brazil, when her situation in the Atlantic became imperial, with a different center of gravity. Trade and sentiment combined to bring about empire, efficient union. Pownall was at first impressed by the differences between the American colonies as he travelled and as he listened to the debates at the Albany Congress; later, he detected the gravity drawing them together. On the other hand, he thought some places like Italy seemed fated to be divided forever.\textsuperscript{37}

Checks and balances were more likely to cause trouble than to promote or secure liberty. All civil wars, all rivalries and strife, could be blamed upon this playing of one against another. The balance of power had caused many a European war. Internecine difficulties usually developed from the setting off of one part of the constitution against another. Montesquieu may have strengthened Pownall's concern with principles and with geography, but he certainly did not persuade him of the validity of some of his other theories.\textsuperscript{38}

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\item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{Principles}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{37} \textit{Memorial to Europe}, 22. \textit{Administration} (1766), 17-19 of Appendix, III, separately paged.
\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{Principles}, 102-103—one reference to \textit{l'Esprit des lois}. \textit{On party see Griffin, op. cit.}, letters V and VI.
\end{itemize}
parties. Parties became vortices out of whose collisions trouble developed. On the other hand, he saw a legitimate use in party, as vast and valid differences developed between the men of the new order and of the old. Conflict was then inevitable. Those taking part in it belonged to true parties divided by differences of wealth and status.

The second dialogue discusses natural society and the determining factors in its formation and adaptation to changing circumstances. The Harringtonian relation of property and power lies at the root of such change. Property is land. Commerce creates wealth which in turn may purchase land. Landownership changes and the power that goes with it is transferred to the new men. Society constantly alters; sometimes through external forces, sometimes through internal degeneration. Rulers like the Normans or the Stuarts may try to force alterations upon it. Classes may resist the succession of newcomers to power. On the whole, however, granted freedom from external interference or natural catastrophe, adaptation takes place. In general this is assisted by conscious adjustment to it.39

Revolution is thus accepted. Yet Pownall, unlike Sidney, could never have said, I think, that “any man may kill a tyrant.” So simple a solution would not have appealed to him. If the situation had changed fundamentally, a new order would develop, though momentary inconveniences might be suffered. Occasionally patriots acted misguidedly. The Stuarts’ tyrannical designs were frustrated, but neither the attempt to start de novo in the experiments of the Interregnum nor the wild enthusiasm of the Restoration was well conceived. Change must be related to conditions and to wealth. Sir Thomas More produced only a chimera in his Utopia; Harrington had attempted to guide his compatriots on true lines. A Lycurgus, familiar with natural laws, might occasionally achieve success, but in general change comes gradually. Moreover, if revolution were successful, once the roar was over the people would care little for general principles. Only a wise minister like Walpole could truly serve his country. Had Walpole succeeded in his excise scheme he would have made England’s resources equal to any contingency. As it was, his financial measures laid the foundation of his greatness. After his betrayal by those who

should have been his friends, he fell but was eventually vindicated, since his successors perforce lived on a fragment of the system they had labored to destroy.\textsuperscript{40}

Government, Pownall wrote a friend, was that actual power by which a people is directed to its action in relation to the interests of the whole community. Liberty without laws, as often stated, would be slavery. Laws reveal the purpose in government. Individuals in their relations to society are mixed persons. They have rights and needs, but they also have duties and obligations. Liberty could be preserved by the Roman and the Harringtonian devices of placing the military under popular or civil control, by rotation in office, by censorship of the magistrate, and the enforcement of law by conscience and public spirit rather than by oath and penalty. Liberty arising from the vigor of natural principles must animate government. Those natural principles always relate to the need of man for communion in society.\textsuperscript{41}

The third dialogue returns to the individual and the government under which he lives—the subject of allegiance. All persons are equally part of the state. Liberty and government, rights and duties are all part of the same order. Allegiance is lifelong. Scaevola brought up the matter of those Irish troops who had recently fought on the French side. They had renounced the realm; they had been permitted to leave it. Nevertheless, Pownall retorted (as Crassus), nothing could make proper their fighting against the country of their birth.

This seems to leave no loophole for the colonists Pownall was later to defend. In fact he regarded their position as different. Their charters though admitting certain reserved powers for the Crown, had given them the chance to leave England taking with them all the rights of Englishmen. They never forswore their allegiance nor their natural rights. In the new world their independence increased. In England, reaction to their demands brought an increased emphasis on sovereign rights. The colonists, to use Dr. Johnson’s word, “ebulliated” into freedom. Old ties were cut; old sentiments forgotten. A new community with new centers of attraction could be recognized. This would in time draw into itself the old separate communities of the eastern seaboard. It

\textsuperscript{40} Coxe as above. See also \textit{Principles}, 29, where More and Harrington are compared to the advantage of the latter.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, 68 and 97-98.
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would also act as a magnet for the workingmen of Wolverhampton, Birmingham, and elsewhere in Europe who longed for the freedom and prosperity enjoyed by its inhabitants. The population thus increased by voluntary emigration would increase its vigor.

Liberty is little stressed in the *Principles*, though, as already noticed, Pownall accepted as the most effective guarantees of freedom the Harringtonian formulae. Somewhat later he wrote to Cooper in Boston that the first and essential principle of political liberty was that the civil government is the action of the whole body acting on itself. A man or society may govern another man or another society and still leave liberty intact—that is to say, the government may act by their own powers and by communication, and intercourse will remain free in spite of obedience and subordination. Laborers are so subject but are not thereby enslaved. Colonies are subordinate. If power be assumed exterior to the power of free agency, if communication be forbidden, then the relationship changes. The mother country becomes exterior, her rule one of force. Freedom resides in the legislature. That the lawful power of making laws to command the society belongs properly to the society was Hooker’s dictum. But the colonies have no place in the legislature. Their liberty has lain in their powers of self-taxation and in their local government. In places like Pennsylvania the Crown had in fact granted the proprietor rights nowhere enjoyed by itself—the Penns being both landlord and sovereign.

Pownall tried to persuade his colonial friends not to cross a very faint and subtle line of demarcation. As violence developed and his counsels were ignored by both sides, he recognized the working of natural forces and the appearance of a new order. When force is used on either side to settle matters, then government is null. Unless the government be the will of the whole community or the effective part of it, its power is not effective and it is no longer government. A strong administration might avert troubles. In England lack of it lost any chance of keeping the colonies. Pownall implored his American friends now that they were free of monarchical powers to strengthen the executive

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power of their new state. He warned that Section Five of Article Eight in the Articles of Confederation, providing for a kind of "lords of the articles," as in sixteenth-century Scotland, for the American Congress might be fatal. Freedom and efficient government should be combined. 43

Pownall's contribution was both visual and philosophical. When he sketched the American scene, he caught its essential character. When he studied contemporary society he related it to its physical circumstances. Its growth must be related by the historian or antiquarian to those great men who from time to time appeared, and to its whole environment. Politics was a matter of adjustment to conditions and the balancing of duties and privileges. All parts of the state were united by a golden chain of union: every section was dependent upon every other. During times of changing habits, governments must ease adjustment to new situations. Governments should also endeavor to move communities to form proper compacts and agreements with each other when favorable conditions allowed. A strong administration would be flexible in its capacity for adaptation to changing patterns of living.

History properly studied could enable men to understand more about the growth of societies, since states of the same kind, in general, resembled each other and followed the same lines of development. Commercial needs must be accepted by agricultural interests. Industrial advances must be interwoven into the body politic. The true union of the whole must embrace every part thereof. In a somewhat complicated simile, Pownall depicts the "truly philosophical Antiquary" achieving a fruitful vision of the past. Analogy, comparison, examination of man in other ages, all enable the scholar to see in his "scientific mirror" the relationship of one thing to another. The only end of real and actual history was the illumination of the purposes of useful experience. 44

Griffin, op. cit., Letter XX, London, 14 July, 1770, 277-286. For criticism of the Articles of Confederation see Memorial to America, 82. On the Penn proprietary right see The Administration of the Colonies (London, 1774), II, 56, and elsewhere.

43 Study of Antiquities, 73.