

BENJAMIN RUSH AND AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

BY PAUL F. LAMBERT*

DR. BENJAMIN RUSH of Philadelphia desired American Independence as fervently as any Colonial. Even his signing the Declaration of Independence did not adequately illustrate his patriotic zeal, for Rush was a key man in a Philadelphia revolutionary faction feverishly working for Independence,¹ and he eagerly collaborated with Thomas Paine to create *Common Sense*. The prominent physician sought separation from Great Britain not as an end in itself, but as a means to establish an ideal society. Strongly influenced by religion and by republicanism, Rush came to view Independence as necessary to prevent English corruption from destroying American virtue, and as essential to the creation of a republican utopia in the New World.

Rush's early religious training was an important factor in the evolution of his attitude toward the Mother Country. His initial guidance came from his pious, Presbyterian mother who played an important role in inculcating upon the young Benjamin an intense devotion to moral and religious principles.² Rush's mother also sent him to his uncle Samuel Findley's academy for his first taste of formal education.

A noted Presbyterian minister, the devout Findley had a considerable impact on the future doctor's religious development. In his autobiography, Rush ascribed to Findley his "not having at any time of my life ever entertained a doubt of the divine origin of the Bible."³ It was also Findley who dissuaded him

* The author is a Ph.D. candidate and graduate teaching assistant in the History Department of Oklahoma State University.

¹ David Hawke, *In the Midst of a Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1961), 102.

² Nathan G. Goodman, *Benjamin Rush: Physician and Citizen* (Philadelphia, 1934), 4.

³ George W. Corner, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush: His "Travels Through Life" Together with His Commonplace Book for 1789-1813* (Princeton, 1948), 31.

from practicing law and suggested that he become a physician.⁴ Rush in turn was strongly influenced by his next Presbyterian schoolmaster, Samuel Davies of the College of New Jersey at Princeton.⁵

By 1765 Rush had become intensely concerned with religion. He was exposed at this time to the preaching of George Whitefield; and like many other Americans, he was much impressed with the English evangelist, filling entire pages of his correspondence with enthusiastic descriptions of Whitefield's preaching.⁶ Indeed, he had once expressed the wish to engage in the "sublime study of divinity," declaring that "every pursuit of life must dwindle into nought when Divinity appears."⁷ Although Rush eventually made medicine rather than the ministry his career, he was always deeply religious having early discovered "how full of comfort are the Holy Scriptures to those reconciled to God!"⁸ Given Rush's intense Calvinistic persuasion, it was natural for him to have been vitally concerned about colonial vices during the years immediately preceding the American Revolution.

In fact, as early as 1761, Rush noted that the Quaker City of Philadelphia was a "seat of corruption, and happy are those who escape its evils and come off conquerors."⁹ Three years later, he again reported that "vice and profanity openly prevail in our city. . . . Our young men in general (who should be the prop of sinking religion) are wholly devoted to pleasure and sensuality. . . ." ¹⁰ When he journeyed to Edinburgh in 1766 to study medicine, Rush's friends there were "chiefly those who are governed by the principles of virtue and religion."¹¹

Rush apparently entertained no serious reservations about monarchy prior to this trip across the Atlantic, but his sojourn

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵ Rush to John Witherspoon, March 25, 1767, Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *The Letters of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton, 1951), I, 34.

⁶ Harry C. Good, *Benjamin Rush and His Services to American Education* (Berne, Indiana, 1918), 14.

⁷ Rush to Enoch Green, 1761, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 3. Goodman has asserted that Rush's desire to preach was satisfied in later years by his numerous reform campaigns, Goodman, *Benjamin Rush*, 10.

⁸ Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, November 18, 1765, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 20.

⁹ Rush to Enoch Green, 1761, *ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, August 2, 1764, *ibid.*, 7.

¹¹ Rush to Jonathan B. Swift, April 30, 1767, *ibid.*, 30-40.

at Edinburgh was a key factor in the development of the staunch republicanism which he exhibited after 1773. He was only twenty-one years old when he embarked for Edinburgh; until then he had been occupied with his religious and educational experiences and with his apprenticeship to Doctor John Redman of Philadelphia. Consequently, Rush could write from Liverpool, England, that he was now in a country "long celebrated for Liberty—Commerce—and the Learning of her Sons."¹²

Rush later recorded in his autobiography that he was first introduced to republican principles in Edinburgh by one John Bostock:¹³ "Never before had I heard the authority of Kings called into question. . . . I now exercised my reason upon the subject of Government."¹⁴ The young Philadelphian certainly was exposed to an extreme form of British republicanism, for Bostock was a radical and a "rapturous admirer of Algernon Sidney." Rush was also influenced by the English historian Catherine Macaulay. Considered by many of her contemporaries to be one of the most radical republicans in England, she disdained hereditary monarchy and titles, advocated annual parliaments, proposed equal electoral districts, and espoused manhood suffrage.¹⁵ By January, 1769, Rush held an "exalted opinion" of her "character and principles."¹⁶

Upon leaving Edinburgh, Rush passed some time in England and France. In London, he was deemed worthy to dine, "in company with several gentlemen from America and others from

¹² Rush to Thomas Bradford, October 25, 1766, Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., "Further Letters of Benjamin Rush," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXVIII (January, 1954), 28.

¹³ Bostock was also a student at Edinburgh. He received his M.D. degree in 1769, and practiced medicine in Liverpool, England, until his untimely death in 1774. Corner, ed., *Autobiography*, 45n. Rush's close relationship with Bostock must have been recognized by some of their contemporaries in Edinburgh. In fact, some thirty-five years after Rush met Bostock, he received a letter from Bostock's son asking for information about the elder Bostock, who had died during his son's childhood. Good, *Rush and Education*, 18n. It is also likely that Rush met others in Scotland who reinforced Bostock's influence. David P. Heatley has noted that many young Americans who had studied in Edinburgh later actively favored Independence. Indeed, Heatley postulated that the influence of these Edinburgh trained men "could have been decisive," in favor of Independence. David P. Heatley, *Studies in British History and Politics* (London, 1913), XV, 40-41.

¹⁴ Corner, ed., *Autobiography*, 46.

¹⁵ Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, 1959), 358-360.

¹⁶ Rush to Catherine Macaulay, January 18, 1769, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 69.

. . . England," with John Wilkes in the King's Bench Prison. Rush was fascinated with Wilkes, noting that the Englishman proclaimed titles to be the "bane of an infant country."¹⁷ Touring France, Rush found much to admire in the French people, but he was quite unimpressed with Louis XV. Furthermore, he found the Dauphin (the future Louis XVI) to be rather unattractive and exceedingly ill-mannered.¹⁸

By the time he returned to Philadelphia, Rush's educational and religious experiences had instilled in him an essential ingredient in the growth of his antipathy toward Great Britain—a keen regard for American liberty and for the rights of property. In 1769 he declared that "the love of liberty . . . was among the first passions that warmed my breast." He hastened to add that the "representative assembly should have the exclusive right of taxing their country themselves. They represent the greatest part of the people" and from their large number were most likely to possess "more property in the state. . . ."¹⁹

Indeed, Rush had vigorously condemned the Stamp Act in 1765, informing Ebenezer Hazard of New York that "an effigy of our stamp officers has been exposed to public view affixed to a gallows. My next letter I hope will contain a full history of something more spirited."²⁰ In the same letter, he exuberantly chastised both the Quakers and Benjamin Franklin for their moderate stance concerning acceptance of the new tax: "O Franklin, Franklin, thou curse to Pennsylvania and America, may their accumulated vengeance burst speedily on thy guilty head."

Rush was immensely gratified with the eventual repeal of the Stamp Act. Upon hearing a rumor that the tax had been revoked, he exclaimed with youthful enthusiasm: "Blow ye winds," and conspire ye water, and swiftly roll into our waiting trembling ports the welcome barge that shall confirm the joyful tidings!"²¹ It has been asserted that Rush's antagonism toward the British Crown never disappeared after the passage of the Stamp Act.²²

¹⁷ Rush to _____, January 19, 1769, *ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸ Benjamin Rush, "On Manners," in Dagobert D. Runes, ed., *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush* (New York, 1947), 389-390.

¹⁹ Rush to Catherine Macaulay, January 18, 1769, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 71.

²⁰ Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, November 8, 1765, *ibid.*, 18.

²¹ Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, March 29, 1766, *ibid.*, 23.

²² Goodman, *Benjamin Rush*, 13.

This is misleading, however, for Rush seems to have placed most of the blame for British "tyranny" on Parliament rather than the King in the years immediately following 1765. Upon visiting the chamber of the British House of Commons in 1766, Rush thought:

This . . . is the place where the infernal scheme for enslaving America was first broached. Here the usurping Commons first endeavored to rob the King of his supremacy over the Colonies and divide it among themselves. O! cursed haunt of venality, bribery and corruption!²³

Closely related to Rush's concern for the rights of liberty and property during these early years was his bitterness toward British mercantilistic manipulation of American manufactures and commerce. These imperial restrictions also aroused the young Philadelphian's budding sense of nationalism. Hence, he felt that the development of manufacturing in the colonies would reduce their dependence on England and would help thwart the Ministry's revenue schemes. As early as 1768, Rush was speaking of promoting American enterprises and had declared that "we will be revenged of the mother country. For my part, I am resolved to devote my head, my heart, and my pen entirely to the service of America. . . ."²⁴ Indeed, he believed that "there is scarce a necessary article or even a luxury of life but what might be raised and brought to perfection in some of our provinces."²⁵ Thus he was "fully convinced of the possibility of setting up a china factory in Philadelphia" and he also was interested in the possibility of silk production in Pennsylvania.²⁶ Moreover, Rush became the President of the United Company of Philadelphia for Promoting American Manufactures upon its formation in 1775.²⁷

Returning to Philadelphia in 1769, Rush began associating with men whose conversation "daily nourished" those republican

²³ Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, October 22, 1768, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 68.

²⁴ Rush to Thomas Bradford, April 15, 1768, *ibid.*, 54.

²⁵ Rush to _____, January 26, 1769, *ibid.*, 74.

²⁶ Rush to Thomas Bradford, June 3, 1768, *ibid.*, 60-61. Rush to _____, January 26, 1769, *ibid.*, 74.

²⁷ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York, 1955), 268.

principles to which he had been exposed in Edinburgh. This group included the Philadelphians David Rittenhouse and Owen Biddle, and, after 1773, John and Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Pennsylvanian insurrectionists such as James Cannon and Timothy Matlack.²⁸ Hence the doctor became a staunch republican. His antipathy toward monarchy and aristocratic trappings remained throughout his life.

In addition to Rush's contacts with republican-minded men, he was subjected at this time to another important influence. In the years preceding the Revolution, the Calvinist ministers constructed an explanation of the British oppression as a divine punishment for such American vices as vanity, intemperance, infidelity, pursuit of luxury, etc. Consequently, the clergy called for a regeneration of American society. The virtues of religion and republicanism would characterize the new order, which would be, in the words of Samuel Adams, a "Christian Sparta!"²⁹ Considering Rush's Calvinistic religious background and his burgeoning republicanism, he was almost certain to embrace these concepts.

When the first Continental Congress convened at Philadelphia, Rush "mixed freely with particularly the two Adamses and other members from New England who had anticipated and even cherished the idea of Independence."³⁰ Indeed, Rush reported that "John and Samuel Adams domesticated themselves in my family. Their conversation was at all times animating and decidedly in favor of liberty and republicanism."³¹ Both of these men were certain to reinforce Rush's predisposition to accept the Calvinistic ministers' arguments; thus he accepted Samuel Adams' assertion that America must become a Christian Sparta.

Notwithstanding his continuing concern for liberty and property, Rush's intense fear of British corruption became the most

²⁸ Corner, ed., *Autobiography*, 115. See also Rush to Mrs. Rush, July 23, 1776, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 106. Rush to John Adams, December 26, 1811, *ibid.*, II, 1114. Hawke, *Midst of a Revolution*, 129.

²⁹ Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), 117-118. Bernard Bailyn has also noted that the New England Puritan influence fostered the notion that "the colonization of British America had been an event designed by the hand of God to satisfy his ultimate aims." *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967), 31.

³⁰ Corner, ed., *Autobiography*, 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

important factor motivating his desire for Independence. He was convinced that the abominations of Americans were the result of British influence. As the English government continued its efforts to "enslave" the Colonies, Rush considered the British North American provinces (excluding Canada) to be the last bastions of liberty in the World.³² His obsession with the degeneration of Colonial society can be illustrated with an excerpt from one of his letters to Patrick Henry. Referring to the recently promulgated Declaration of Independence, Rush declared that:

Such inestimable blessings can not be too joyfully received nor purchased at too high a price. They would be cheaply bought at the loss of all the towns & of every fourth, or even third man in America. I tremble to think of the mischiefs that would have spread thro' this country had we continued our dependence on Gt Britain twenty years longer. The contest two years ago found us contaminated with British customs manners & ideas of government.³³

It was not difficult for Rush to perceive ramifications of British influence in Philadelphia. He easily could point to the rise of the mercantile elite of that city with their "conspicuous consumption" as damning evidence, and he undoubtedly viewed Philadelphia's generally unenthusiastic attitude toward Independence as a sign of the English corruption of that city's population.³⁴ Rush also believed that the evils and vices of British society already had begun to destroy the piety and virtue of Americans—thus separation from Britain was imperative.

Rush not only fervently desired colonial Independence, he also sought to achieve it. Not the least significant of Rush's contributions to the movement for separation from Britain was his skillful work as a propagandist. In his autobiography he claimed to have taken "an early but obscure part" in the struggle to sway public opinion in favor of Independence.³⁵ As early as

³² Benjamin Rush, "Influence of the American Revolution," (1789), Runes, ed., *Writings of Rush*, 325.

³³ Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., "Dr. Rush to Governor Henry on the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Constitution," American Philosophical Society, *Proceedings*, VC (no. 3, 1951), 251-252.

³⁴ Hawke, *Midst of a Revolution*, 44-57, provides a good discussion of Philadelphians' attitudes concerning Independence.

³⁵ Corner, ed., *Autobiography*, 109.

1773, Rush had written several pieces "in defense of Patriotism" that were published in Philadelphia newspapers under the signature of "Hamden."³⁶ Such topics as the various techniques of making saltpeter for gunpowder manufacture also claimed his attention.³⁷ Moreover, Rush knew how to magnify the impact of his writings for the revolutionary cause: "I wrote under a variety of signatures, by which means an impression of numbers in favor of liberty was made upon the minds of its friends and enemies."³⁸

In 1773 Rush opposed the tax on tea in the Philadelphia press, arguing passionately that the dutied tea must not enter the city: "Should it be landed . . . then farewell American liberty. . . . Let us with one heart and hand oppose the landing of it. The baneful chests contain in them . . . the seeds of slavery."³⁹ The doctor considered Parliamentary manipulations enabling taxed tea to be sold at a low price in the colonies as designed to dupe Americans into accepting British taxation, and his activities in opposition to the tea tax were not limited to the use of his pen.

In October, 1773, Rush informed William Gordon of Massachusetts that "we are preparing here to oppose the landing of the East India tea."⁴⁰ In later years Rush reported that he had been among a small group who had met at a Colonel William Bradford's house in October to plan resistance to the tea's disembarkment.⁴¹ This advance planning bore fruit in December when a committee of citizens informed Captain Samuel Ayres of the *Polly* that it would be unwise for him to attempt unloading his cargo. Ayres judiciously sailed for England—his ship still laden with tea.⁴²

The most significant of Rush's endeavors on behalf of Independence, however, was his role in the publication of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Rush first encountered Paine at a Phila-

³⁶ Rush to William Gordon, October 10, 1773, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 82.

³⁷ Carl Binger, *Revolutionary Doctor: Benjamin Rush, 1746-1813* (New York, 1966), 280.

³⁸ Corner, ed., *Autobiography*, 110.

³⁹ Benjamin Rush, "On Patriotism," *Pennsylvania Journal*, October 20, 1773, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 84.

⁴⁰ Rush to William Gordon, October 10, 1773, *ibid.*, 82.

⁴¹ Rush to John Adams, August 14, 1809, *ibid.*, II, 1014.

⁴² Benjamin Woods Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party* (New York, 1968 [1964]), 158-159.

delphia bookstore, was intrigued by his conversation, and became convinced that Paine's ideas concerning American Independence were similar to his own. Rush had been preparing an essay espousing Independence, but had hesitated, fearing the consequences of its "not being well received." He therefore proposed that Paine write such a pamphlet, and the Englishman readily assented to the idea. As he progressed in his work, Paine visited the doctor at his home and read each chapter to him. Upon completion of the essay, Rush suggested that the author show his work to Benjamin Franklin, David Rittenhouse (the noted astronomer), and Samuel Adams. He also suggested Paine change his proposed title, *Plain Truth*, to *Common Sense*; and in Robert Bell, Rush found a patriotic printer to publish the treasonous tract.⁴³

The tremendous impact of Paine's pamphlet was cited by contemporaries, and historians often have noted its crucial role in swaying public opinion in favor of Independence. In 1809 Rush pridefully observed that *Common Sense* had "burst from the press . . . with an effect that has rarely been produced by types and paper in any age or country."⁴⁴ The Philadelphian had played a prominent role in the movement for Independence because he anticipated that the United States, free from mercantilistic controls and British tyranny, would enter into an age in which there would be "no end" to its "commerce, freedom, and happiness."⁴⁵ But even more important than these pleasant prospects was Rush's hope for some fundamental changes in American society.

⁴³ Corner, ed., *Autobiography*, 113-114. See also Rush to James Cheetham, July 17, 1809, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, II, 1008. While it is possible that Rush, in writing some twenty-five years after the fact, could have magnified his role in the genesis of *Common Sense*, there is other evidence available to substantiate his story. In a letter to Rush, General Charles Lee referred to the pamphlet as "your Common Sense." See James T. Flexner, *Doctors on Horseback* (New York, 1937), 72. John Adams also noted in his autobiography that "Dr. Rush put him [Paine] upon writing on the subject, furnished him with the Arguments which had been urged in Congress an hundred times, and gave him his title of common Sense." Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (Cambridge, 1961-1962), III, 330. In later years, Rush became alienated from Paine chiefly because of his Deistic beliefs as expressed in his "absurd and impious Age of Reason." Rush to John Dickinson, February 16, 1796, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, II, 770.

⁴⁴ Rush to James Cheetham, July 17, 1809, *ibid.*, 1008.

⁴⁵ Rush would have added grandeur, "but grandeur belongs not in republics." Rush to Anthony Wayne, August 6, 1779, *ibid.*, I, 238.

As early as July 16, 1776, Rush joyfully declared that the people of the United States were "purified from some . . . british customs manners & ideas of government. . . . In particular we dare to speak freely & justly of royal and hereditary power." This was a cheerful sign as Rush anticipated that post-Revolutionary Americans would be wholly republican. He also hoped that they would "vie for wisdom" with the citizens of other nations: "but our virtue will I hope know no bounds."⁴⁶

Virtue was a major concern for Rush, and he felt that the Revolution would bring about a regeneration of American society—a return to a past age of purity and piety. He desired that the end of the war would find "among us the same temperance in pleasure, the same modesty in dress, the same justice in business, and the same veneration for the name of the Deity which distinguished our ancestors."⁴⁷

Rush soon realized, however, that the mere fact of separation from the Mother Country, while eliminating a source of corrupting influence, could not of itself bring about a regeneration of such great magnitude. Referring to the recently proclaimed Declaration of Independence, he observed that "the republican soil is broke up, but we have still many monarchical and aristocratic weeds to pluck from it. . . . We have knocked up the substance of royalty, but now and then we worship the shadow."⁴⁸

Rush expected the exigencies of the Revolution to stimulate a behavioral reformation among Americans. Consequently, in August, 1777, he confided to John Adams that "a peace at this time would be the greatest curse that could befall us," because it would take "one or two more campaigns to purge away the monarchical impurity we contracted by laying so long upon the lap of Great Britain."⁴⁹ In 1780, Rush was convinced that "nothing but a premature peace can ruin our country."⁵⁰ As late as April, 1782, he still feared that Independence at that time would "unnerve the resentments of Americans and introduce among us all the consequences of English habits and manners. . . . The

⁴⁶ Butterfield, ed., "Dr. Rush to Governor Henry," p. 252.

⁴⁷ Rush to John Adams, August 8, 1777, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 152.

⁴⁸ Rush to Dr. Walter Jones, July 30, 1776, *ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁹ Rush to John Adams, August 8, 1777, *ibid.*, 152. See also Rush to John Adams, January 22, 1778, *ibid.*, 190. Rush to Jonathan B. Smith, April 20, 1778, *ibid.*, 214.

⁵⁰ Rush to John Adams, August 25, 1780, *ibid.*, 255.

patriotism of too many is founded only in resentment."⁵¹ By the end of the War, Rush knew that the adversities of revolution had not been enough to bring about the extensive reformation that he had desired.

Hence for Rush, the Treaty of Paris in 1783 did not terminate the American Revolution: "On the contrary," he asserted in 1787, "nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed," for the formidable task of bringing "the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens"⁵² in line with republican institutions remained to be completed. Through public letters, many broadsides, and numerous pamphlets, the prominent Philadelphian propagandized for "proper" republican governments, for educational reforms and innovations,⁵³ and for numerous social reforms.⁵⁴ His activities after 1783 have been characterized aptly as a "one-man crusade to remake America."⁵⁵ Despite his deep disillusionment with American society during his twilight years, Rush never lost hope that eventually his ideal republic would be realized.

Indeed, while lamenting in 1781 that "it will require half a century to cure us of all our monarchical habits and prejudices," he could also be quite optimistic: "Our republican forms of government will in time beget republican opinions and manners. All will end well."⁵⁶ Rush's faith that all would "end well" with the American Revolution also was reinforced by his conviction that the Colonists basically were virtuous people. In the environment of the New World, Americans had remained hard-working, frugal, and pious—free from the vices of the Old World. Only in recent years had the impurities of Great Britain begun to spoil Colonial society. Hence Rush believed that Americans merely tainted rather than thoroughly corrupted.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Rush to Nathanael Greene, April 15, 1782, *ibid.*, 268-269.

⁵² Benjamin Rush, "Address to the People of the United States," *American Museum*, I (January, 1787), 9, in *ibid.*

⁵³ See Good, *Rush and Education*, and James A. Bonar, "Benjamin Rush and the Theory and Practice of Republican Education in Pennsylvania" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1965).

⁵⁴ As a social reformer, Rush taught the abolition of slavery, was the progenitor of the American temperance movement, campaigned against capital punishment, and advocated various penal reforms. Furthermore, he was both an educational theorist and was "the harbinger of American Psychiatry." Binger, *Revolutionary Doctor*, 280.

⁵⁵ Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, lxviii.

⁵⁶ Rush to Horatio Gates, September 5, 1781, *ibid.*, 265.

⁵⁷ Rush's faith in the virtue of Americans may also be illustrated by a scheme which he proposed to Richard Henry Lee in 1777. To maintain

In addition to his ideas about American virtue, Rush was bolstered in his confident forecast of the Revolution's result because he saw in it the "hand of heaven." As early as May, 1776, he exclaimed that the cause of Independence "prosperes in every county of the province. The hand of heaven is with us. Did I not think so, I would not have embarked in it."⁵⁸ During the course of the conflict, Rush continued to cite the role of divine intervention in favor of the Americans. He was encouraged by the signing of the French Alliance and by the evacuation of Philadelphia by General Howe in 1778, but these events were not due to wise leadership and to military strength; rather, "heaven seems resolved to have all the glory of deliverance to itself."⁵⁹ Referring to the blunders of the Congress and of the Generals, Rush further declared that "had not heaven defeated their councils in a thousand instances, we should be hewers of wood and drawers of water to the subjects of the King of Britain."⁶⁰ He finally became convinced that "divine providence has saved us in spite of all that we have done to ruin ourselves" and consequently "our independence is as secure as the everlasting mountains."⁶¹

It was not difficult for Rush to discover the hand of God working to forward the cause of Independence, considering his view of the Revolution's purpose. It was a "Holy Experiment" designed to fashion an ideal society for all the world to observe and to emulate. While looking toward a future of economic development and national prosperity, he also sought the return of a past age when Colonials were untainted with the corruptions of the Mother Country. For Benjamin Rush, the American Revolution was more than a mere colonial war for Independence—a perfect republic was to be created.

sufficient shirts for the army to afford cleanliness, Rush suggested that a request be made to "every man in America for one or two of his shirts for the benefit of the army. . . ." He was sure this plan would be successful. Rush to Richard Henry Lee, January 26, 1777, Butterfield, ed., "Further Letters," 16.

⁵⁸ Rush to Mrs. Rush, May 29, 1776, Butterfield, ed., *Letters*, I, 99.

⁵⁹ Rush to Abigail Adams, September 3, 1778, *ibid.*, 218.

⁶⁰ Rush to William Gordon, December 10, 1778, *ibid.*, 222.

⁶¹ Rush to John Adams, August 19, 1779, *ibid.*, 239. See also, Rush to John Adams, October 23, 1780, *ibid.*, 255.