

distinctiveness, the qualities that have kept his journal continuously in print and have placed him among the coterie of religious leaders who are revered across denominational lines despite the fact that he “was one of many prophets in his day . . . [and] not the only abolitionist, mystic, critic of capitalism, ascetic, pacifist, holy man, or spiritual purist” (8). Slaughter found the typology of the “saint” in William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) of some, but limited, use, perhaps—in the end—because saints cannot be typified. While aspects of Woolman’s beliefs and motivations remain elusive, Slaughter provides us, through prodigious research and stimulating insights, the basis for working toward our own appreciation of Woolman’s gifts.

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The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian and the Rural Enlightenment in Early America. By JOHN FEA. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. 272 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$39.95.)

John Fea has written an excellent cultural biography of Philip Vicker Fithian’s relatively short but interesting life. Fithian is best known to scholars for his insightful journal comments on his experiences as a tutor in plantation Virginia, but Fea offers a well-crafted study that makes good use of Fithian’s voluminous journals, diaries, and papers, beginning with his early agricultural journal in 1766 and ending with his premature death as an army chaplain in 1775. Fithian was born into a middling family in southwestern New Jersey, and we learn through his accounts about some of the key events of the third quarter of the eighteenth century: the state of prospering yeoman and the seasonal cycles of rural life, the state of Presbyterian religion and American Protestantism in the post–Great Awakening era, the evolving struggle from resistance to revolution in the colonial crisis with Great Britain, and the Enlightenment as experienced in local communities and by ordinary residents of British North America. Fea’s “study of this ordinary farmer” situates Fithian in the locale of Cohansey, even as he explains how the young minister achieved a cosmopolitan worldview through his education, his travels to backcountry Pennsylvania, his circle of friends, and, most of all, his reading and self-examination (7).

Fea argues that Fithian’s Enlightenment life was marked by a “way of improvement,” a drive for education and ambition. It is best understood as a cosmopolitan experience rooted in a local experience, or as the author’s subtitle emphasizes, a “rural Enlightenment.” Fithian’s version of Enlightenment, Fea observes, occupied a middle ground between cosmopolitan ideals and local attachments (5). Ideas and institutions help root Fithian in his native locale while

also allowing him to become a “citizen of the world” and gain access to an Atlantic world. In one interesting example, Fithian, after returning from Princeton, perceived Cohansey as a place that fit the pastoral ideal. We have a particularly rich account of his courtship of Elizabeth Beatty, his eventual bride, which illuminates the larger conflict of passion and reason within Fithian; he was hemmed in by his neighbor’s criticisms and his own self-reflection. Fea emphasizes how Fithian repeatedly balanced those centripetal forces of friends and family while attempting to achieve reason and universality. In this quest, he was aided by his circle of rural philosophes, the Bridge-Town Admonishing Society.

Fea explains how he came to his conceptualization of Fithian’s rural Enlightenment after teaching the Enlightenment to undergraduates. His focus is locating ideas about a better self through the writing of a biography in a contextual manner. He is successful in that effort. The author also does an excellent job of demonstrating how Fithian’s synthesis of Christianity and Enlightenment was achieved, how the two were adapted in this global movement, and how Fithian was being cosmopolitan by being local; he does not see that duality as a contradiction.

The Way of Improvement is a richly documented and imaginative biography. While, at times, a reader might wonder if Fithian’s intellectual balancing act and the author’s biographical story are as seamless as they appear, *The Way of Improvement* successfully mixes the particular with the universal, just like the story of Philip Vickers Fithian.

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The Drillmaster of Valley Forge: The Baron de Steuben and the Making of the American Army. By PAUL LOCKHART. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008. 377 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$27.95.)

A new look at Baron Friedrich von Steuben is long overdue. The last serious biography appeared in 1937. In Paul Lockhart, the Baron has found an ideal chronicler. Lockhart’s background in European history—a subject he teaches at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio—enables him to sketch Steuben’s German years and dismiss several myths. Steuben did not “invent” his noble birth or his title; he was eminently entitled to a “von” or “de” before his name. “Baron” was a legitimate term for those elevated to the Order of Fidelity, a version of knighthood which enabled Steuben to wear a spectacular eight-pointed star on his dress uniform.

But Steuben came to America professing to have been a lieutenant general in