

BOOK REVIEWS

An Introduction to the History of the Revolt of the American Colonies.

By GEORGE CHALMERS. 2 Vols. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971. Pp. xxxiv, 413, 376. \$35.00.)

Historians of the American Revolution have recently shown increasing interest in the Loyalists, which makes this an excellent time to reprint George Chalmers's classic contemporary interpretation of the Loyalist side of the rebellion. The Da Capo Press has faithfully reproduced this important work, with nothing dropped or added. Actually, the addition of a brief new introduction providing perspective on the author and his work would have made it even more valuable, both for the casual reader and the serious student of the Revolution.

Chalmers, born into a well-to-do Scottish family, was educated at Aberdeen and studied law at Edinburgh before he went off to the colonies in 1763 at the age of twenty-one. For the next twelve years he conducted a profitable legal practice in Maryland, aligned himself with "the establishment," and worked quietly with British officials in the Loyalist cause as the colonial rebellion took shape. With the outbreak of hostilities in 1775, he withdrew to London, bitterly anti-rebel and determined to present his point of view; this two-volume study was the result, and its documentation is impressive. As a clerk to the Board of Trade, Chalmers was allowed unrestricted access to state papers relating to the colonies, which included journals of the Board of Trade, correspondence of the colonial governors and crown officials, acts of the colonial assemblies, and other state documents. The work was therefore clearly one-sided, but that was one of its virtues, for it illustrated the kind of information available to English ministers in their determination of colonial policy.

If Chalmers hoped to influence contemporary English policy toward the colonies, he was disappointed. Although he had completed his anti-American study by 1782, its publication was suppressed in England, evidently because the British were then negotiating terms at Paris that would concede American independence. Publication of Chalmers's work could serve only to stir up more opposition to an already unpopular peace treaty; and the book did not appear in print until 1845.

Chalmers's interpretation of the causes of the Revolution can be reduced to two essential themes: first, the colonists were united from the beginning in a desire for independence and maneuvered consciously and constantly to achieve that end; secondly, the British imperial government was tragically negligent in allowing the Americans to use

their provincial assemblies to increase local authority until they ultimately worked their design for independence. Using history as a lawyer would to build a legal case, Chalmers laid out diverse complaints from British officials suggesting that the colonials were deliberately conspiring to achieve independence. Yet Chalmers presented no evidence that the Americans themselves were ever aware of any such design, and most scholars today would agree that his first thesis fails. But after reviewing the evidence for Chalmers's second "case" — that the British neglected close administration of the colonies while the assemblies usurped authority—the reader is likely to murmur "guilty." As Jack P. Greene and others have illustrated, the British colonists did work diligently, if not consciously, in a successful "quest for power" in their local assemblies to undermine the imperial administration and to become virtually self-governing. Chalmers was among the first historians to note this, and it is understandable that such a partisan would see in it a latent desire for American independence.

Chalmers's study had yet additional value. In taking a strict partisan approach, he challenged Americans to rewrite their own history. And for years, ironically, pro-American writers leaned heavily on Chalmers's history because it was such a rich storehouse of facts and details, particularly from the official British side. Thus, such supernationalists as Jared Sparks and Chief Justice John Marshall exploited its evidence, with Marshall virtually plagiarizing whole sections for his five-volume biography of Washington. Indeed, Chalmers was a better historian than most of the chauvinistic, ardent nationalists of the Parson Weems variety who replaced him in the generation following his departure for England. His work is well worth reprinting — and rereading.

San Diego State College
San Diego, California

ROBERT DETWEILER

The Greenback-Labor Movement in Pennsylvania. By RALPH R. RICKER. (Bellefonte, Pa.: Pennsylvania Heritage, Inc., 1966. Pp. viii, 141. Bibliography, appendices. \$5.00.)

The major contribution of this 1955 doctoral dissertation is its demonstration of the importance of the Pennsylvania branch of the Greenback-Labor party, especially in 1877 and 1878 before the agricul-