BOOK REVIEWS


John Cartwright, Granville Sharp, James Burgh, Catherine Macaulay, and Richard Price are not names prominent in much of the literature concerning American-British relations on the eve of the American Revolution. Thanks to this able volume written by an associate professor in the University of Kentucky Community College System, they have received the attention they deserve.

The objective of this book, according to the author, "is to present a synthesis of these British Radicals' ideas about the American crisis and to show that America did not possess a monopoly on men with innovative, enlightened concepts of liberty and empire" (p. x).

Following a brief sketch of the climate of opinion about America in England during the 1770s, and the meaning and force of Radicalism in the England of this period, Toohey introduces his readers to these five persons who spoke so eloquently to the American question in the years between the Boston Tea Party and the Declaration of Independence.

The central portion of this volume highlights the thinking, work, and influence of each of these significant individuals. Major John Cartwright — fighter for parliamentary reform over a period of half a century — proposed a notable scheme of imperial reformation, which included the building of an Anglo-American commonwealth. His ideas were a foreshadow of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Granville Sharp — humanitarian, social reformer, defender of the oppressed, father of the antislavery movement — forcibly argued that subjects in America, as well as in Ireland, should have a more equitable legislative representation. Principles of home rule and responsible government were to evolve from his polemic. James Burgh — son of the manse, erudite headmaster, sermonizer — published a three-volume "classic statement of British Radical opinion and a masterly argument for parliamentary reform" (p. 26), a work which "became a major catechism of English Radicalism" (p. 160).
Catherine Macaulay — feminist and historian, gifted propagandist — vigorously defended notions of liberty and revolution, notions rooted in her study of the classical republics of Greece and Rome. The force of her arguments struck a responsive chord in those colonists on the brink of open rebellion. Dr. Richard Price — Dissenter clergyman, theologian, moral philosopher, and actuarial statistician — dramatically stated and analyzed the central principle underlying the crisis between England and the colonies — the principle of human freedom. His political position was rooted in his religious and moral beliefs.

Although the ideas and convictions of these five figures initially did not receive a wide acceptance in their own country, they did contribute much to the emergence of late eighteenth-century Radicalism in England. This is not to say that British Radicalism was of one mind in coming to grips with some of the basic causes of the declining state of affairs between the mother country and the colonies. Nor did the Whig Opposition overwhelmingly support the Radical suggestions for reform. Men like Chatham, Shelburne, Lord Rockingham, Edmund Burke, and Charles James Fox made quite clear their opposition to many of the Radical concerns.

Still, the position of these British Radicals found a sympathetic hearing with many of the prominent figures of this side of the Atlantic, notably Franklin, Jefferson, and John Adams. The Radicals represented a strong ideological connection with the leadership of the American Revolution. Their influence on the Founding Fathers of the American Republic was significant. While the short-run effect of their influence left much to be desired, in the long run their ideas represented some of the finest principles which came to undergird the establishment of the new American nation.

Mr. Toohey has written an informative, thought-provoking book. In this third century of our nation's history, he has served to remind us of the debt we owe to some of these innovative, courageous men and women in England, whose insight and support during the critical years from 1774-1776 helped transform the American problem into the American solution.

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