

REALLY O'ER THE WATER: AMERICAN COLONISTS' REACTION TO THE FORTY-FIVE

By

Benjamin Lewis Price

In the late fall of 1745, American colonists began to receive news from Britain, or as they so often put it, news from home, that worried them. A rebellion had begun in Scotland, led by the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart. Colonial writers and preachers feared that this time the rebellion might be successful, and if so, that it would mean the end of the Protestant succession, their charters, and their civil and religious liberties. Through sermons and newspapers articles colonists damned the Young Pretender and his Stuart father as tyrants from a long line of tyrants, and praised George II and his line as model Protestant monarchs.

Historians of the American Revolution have not shown much interest in the colonial reaction to the Forty-Five. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, colonists continued to view the Pretender as a danger to the Protestant succession of Britain and therefore to the colonies long after the actual threat had passed. As late as 1763, John Adams parodied the anxiety of his countrymen over the Stuart Pretender in his "Ploughjogger Letters," and in 1765, after the Stamp Act was repealed, Jonathan Mayhew, the pastor of the Old West Church in Boston, blamed the Pretender and his ally, the king of France for the initial passage of the Act.¹ Second, the Forty-Five should be important to scholars of American colonial history because many of the themes that appeared in the colonial press during the Rebellion and after, reappeared in the colonial crises that led up to the American Revolution. The rhetorical outpouring in America over the Forty-Five was in some ways a dress rehearsal for the rhetorical sparring that preceded the American Revolution.

But, what was the Forty-Five? What were the distant events that so troubled colonists in the last two months of 1745 and the first half of 1746? On July 25, 1745, Charles Edward Stuart, the grandson of James II, landed in Scotland, determined to reestablish his father, James, the Old Pretender, upon the throne of Scotland, and finally, England. His support came primarily from among

disaffected Highland Clans. Within two weeks of landing in Scotland he entered Perth unopposed and his small army began to swell with recruits. On September 17, he entered Edinburgh, where he took up residence at the Stuart ancestral home, Holyrood. There he proclaimed his father King James VIII of Scotland.

The British government at first merely issued a reward for the capture of the "Bonnie Prince," but did little else. Parliament was forced to respond to the Scottish threat, however, when the Highlanders defeated British regulars at Prestonpans on September 20, leaving only local militia companies and a few units of cavalry between the Young Pretender and London. In response, Parliament recalled a large body of troops under the Duke of Cumberland from Flanders to meet the Scottish threat.

From October to early December, Charles and his Highlanders pressed south, taking Carlisle, Manchester and Derby serious opposition. Their successful advance was costly, however. Many Highlanders who were willing to fight to put a Stuart on an independent Scottish throne, had little enthusiasm for restoring him to an English one. As the weather began to turn cool, many Scots left the rebel army to return to the Highlands. Charles was forced to follow them and withdrew to winter in Scotland.

In the Spring of 1746, the Young Pretender's force defeated the English in a series of skirmishes and in a pitched battle at Falkirk on January 17. But Charles' army, poorly supplied and poorly disciplined, continued to shrink. The issue was settled when the dwindling Scottish army was crushed by a superior force under the command of the Duke of Cumberland on the moor at Culloden on April 16, 1746. The Scottish Rebellion and any real hopes of a Stuart restoration ended at Culloden. The Young Pretender escaped from the battle field, and wandered Scotland, a hunted man, until he was rescued by the French five months later.

The news of these events traveled three thousand miles across the Atlantic to His Majesty's colonies in North America. It came in the form of articles from English and Scottish newspapers, letters from British residents to friends in America, and reports and rumors from individuals who had recently arrived from Britain. American colonists watched the rebellion unfold with apprehension.² As the young Pretender and his Highland army moved with

apparent ease from victory to victory, Americans' anxiety increased. They gave evidence of their fears in their newspapers, from their pulpits, and in their assemblies.

Americans' response to the rebellion and its consequences illuminate aspects of their political ideology and their understanding of the nature of kingship. Colonists stressed two themes in their discussion of the Rebellion. First, they focused on the relationship between Roman Catholicism and tyranny—to use their words, popery and slavery—that had been interrelated with Whig anti-Stuart political rhetoric since the reign of Charles II. Secondly, they compared the potential results of a Stuart restoration with the status quo. They showed their enthusiastic support for George II, and for the continuation of the royal succession in the Hanover family. They portrayed George as a model English Protestant king, tolerant in his religion, constrained in his political authority, and solicitous of the liberty of his subjects. The Rebellion was thus portrayed in the colonial press and from colonial pulpits as a struggle between good and evil, between English Protestantism and foreign popery, between liberty and slavery, and between a monarch who was restrained by the laws of God and man, and an arbitrary popish usurper, bent on destroying the liberty and religion of Englishmen everywhere. The Rebellion of 1745 represented a straightforward opportunity for Americans to illustrate their ideal of English Protestant kingship and their loyalty to, and enthusiasm for, their Hanover ruler and the religious and political settlement of the Glorious Revolution.

Colonists especially stressed the Pretender's Catholicism, and the evils that would, they believed, inevitably accompany a popish prince should he rise to the throne of Great Britain. The young Stuart prince was portrayed as a friend of Rome, bent on converting Britain and its possessions to Catholicism. In a *Virginia Gazette* article Prince Charles was alleged to believe that "no Man can be a good Subject to his Father, that does not believe in the Queen of Heaven...no person shall ever be of his Councils that is not of his Communion."³ His father, James, was branded "a Papist," who felt that he had a sacred duty to wipe out Protestantism in Britain and the colonies.⁴ Ministers of all denominations throughout the colonies rekindled the flames of Queen Mary's Tudor's persecutions of the mid 1500s in the minds of their congregations.⁵ American

pastors contended that a restored Stuart Pretender with his allies, Rome, France and Spain, would introduce the Inquisition to Britain and her colonies.⁶

Colonists also worried about the Pretender's political relationship to France and Spain. Rumors spread in the colonial newspapers in early 1746 that the Highland uprising was only a prelude to a combined French and Spanish invasion of Britain. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported that the French Court was raising 12,000 troops to reinforce the Young Pretender, and that the Spanish were planning to embark on a British invasion later in the Spring.⁷ If the Pretender and his Catholic allies were successful, colonists believed that Great Britain would become little more than a colony herself, ruled by a puppet king whose strings were held firmly in the hands of Catholic despots.

Colonists, like the majority of their English cousins, equated tyrannical government with Catholic monarchs in general and with the Stuarts in particular. Colonial ministers and editorialists asked what could be more terrifying than a Stuart prince, suckled on the Whore of Babylon, and educated on absolutist principles by his father, at the court of a French monarch? New England divines used the reign of James II and the administration of his servants in the Dominion of New England to illustrate the outcome should a Stuart monarch return to the throne. Charles Chauncy wrote, "Our Fathers groaned under the oppressive Burden of a *popish* and tyrannical Power...[when] the then Governor of Massachusetts, Sir Edmond Andros, unhappily copied after the Measures of his Royal Master."⁸ So might new governors reduce a new generation of Anglo-Americans to oppression and slavery under a Stuart Restoration. William Dawson of William and Mary College agreed that "should it prevail (which Heaven avert) Life, Liberty, and Fortune would be Precarious."⁹ A New Yorker expanded on the theme, stating that should the Pretender succeed, "our Lives, Laws, Liberties, Properties, Wives, Children, and Religion must be sacrificed."¹⁰ Thomas Craddock, an Anglican minister from Annapolis, summed up Americans expectations of their lives under a Stuart restoration thus: "how miserable had we been! better by far not to have lived...we should have been governed with a Rod of Iron."¹¹

Convinced that a Stuart Restoration would mean the loss of their liberty and religion, colonists rallied in support of George II, whom they regarded as their

rightful and natural ruler. Colonists argued that the Hanovers had arrived at the throne, not through any hereditary succession based on divine right, but at the express wish of the people of Great Britain (including the colonies), through the agency of Parliament. They often compared this process to the succession of the crown of biblical Israel, when, according to Jonathan Mayhew, “the crown, instead of descending uniformly ... was sometimes transferred to another family; and sometimes even into another tribe – and this not without divine approbation.”¹² The legitimacy of the Hanover succession was also firmly rooted in the Lockean concept of civil government. The people exercised their right to replace a tyrant with a new ruler in 1688, and had then insured a Protestant succession by establishing the Hanover line in 1714.¹³ Colonists believed that George II perfectly fulfilled the ideals of the Glorious Revolution. They portrayed him as the preserver of their liberty and property, and the champion of English Protestant religion.¹⁴

The Hanovers were viewed as the special friends of Dissenting Protestants. Colonial writers stressed George I’s reputation for tolerance even before he came to the throne.¹⁵ The king and his ministers looked favorably upon Dissenters, who, in their turn pledged their support and loyalty to the Crown.¹⁶ As the English Anglican evangelical, George Whitefield put it in a sermon that he preached in Philadelphia, George II was “a Nursing Father of the Church, [f]or not only the Church of England, as by law established, but Christians of every denomination whatsoever have enjoyed their religious as well as civil liberties.”¹⁷

As the protectors of Protestant religion, the Hanovers became, simultaneously, the protectors of English liberty. Protestantism and liberty went together in the minds of English political and religious thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic in the same way that they linked popery and slavery. Hanover rulers, thus acquired a reputation as protectors and defenders of the civil liberties of their subjects. In fact, they had a better reputation as rulers who were especially attentive to the liberty of their subjects in the colonies than they did in Britain. Colonial religious and political leaders characterized George II as an ideal English ruler – a benefactor to his subjects. If the Stuart Pretender was

stereotyped as a model tyrant, then George II was most often characterized as a “nursing father,” or as a the father of his country.¹⁸

Colonial writers frequently portrayed the king in patriarchal terms, but their characterization of the ruler as father of his people differed considerably from earlier notions of royal patriarchy. Robert Filmer had justified Stuart absolute kingship by equating it with the power a father exercised over his family under the divine protection of the Commandment to “honor thy father.” For Filmer, a tyrannical father, was a father nevertheless, and was answerable only to God, and not to his children for his actions. British Whig writers of the mid-eighteenth century stressed that only good rulers deserved the title of father. Political fatherhood was not the divine right of the ruler but an accolade from the people. As one colonial writer put it, “Properly speaking, men are made kings by *the grace of the people*, and they behave as worthy of such an office, by *the grace of God*.”¹⁹ Writers stressed the paternal love, benevolence and protection that a good father bestowed upon his family, rather than the authoritative power that a father wielded over his progeny. James, the presumptive heir of the rebellion, was portrayed as a despot; George II, as a benevolent father. According to Ebenezer Pemberton, a Presbyterian minister in New York, George II “may truly be stiled the indulgent FATHER of his people, under whose administration we may worship God according to the dictates of our conscience, and have none to terrify and disturb us, – may dwell under our vines and Figtrees, and have none to make us afraid.”²⁰

George II was, thus, portrayed as a benefactor, a nursing father to his people. Not so the Pretender, who was by definition a tyrant and oppressor. If the Rebellion succeeded, freeborn Britons, wherever they resided, would have to be content with slavery, or like their fathers, arise and deliver themselves from popery and oppression.²¹

Over the last three decades several historians have studied the rhetoric of the Revolutionary era (1763-1776) in order to determine the ideological origins of the American Revolution, but few have shown any real interest in the political rhetoric that preceded those years of crisis. Historians have investigated the language that colonists used in opposition to their own colonial administrations, and to what they considered parliamentary interference in their affairs at the

expense of their rights as Englishmen, and ultimately in opposition to George III. During the first half of the eighteenth century, however, the predominate language that colonists used to describe their relationship with the British Empire, and their link to it, the British monarch, was one of loyalty. My own research into the colonists' understanding of the British constitution, and their place in it, indicates that Americans employed the Whig rhetoric of the Glorious Revolution and the Hanover settlement of 1714 to show their loyalty to their mother country, and, especially, to the first two Hanover kings. Americans idealized Hanover rulers as fathers of their country, tender caring fathers who protected the liberties of their subjects.²² The Forty-Five presented them with an opportunity to compare the best of English kings with the worst. Colonists, anxious about the possibility of a Stuart restoration, were eager to make comparisons between King George II, whom they considered a model monarch, and the Stuart usurper. They created a sharp contrast between good and bad kingship, that they continued to dwell upon from the Rebellion of 1745 to the Declaration of 1776. Colonists' outpouring of support for George II during the crisis of 1745 came from all of the colonies, from all of the various denominations of Protestants in the colonies, and from all classes of American colonists.²³ Here, thus, was an event, like the American Revolution, in which thirteen clocks were made to strike at once, not in rebellion against the king, but in unconditional support of George II, the archetype of the English Protestant ruler.

NOTES

¹ *Papers of John Adams*, Vol. I, Robert J. Taylor, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977-), p. 62; Jonathan Mayhew, *The Snare Broken...*, (Boston: R. & S. Draper, 1766), in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, Ellis Sandoz, ed., (Indianapolis: The Liberty Press, 1991), p.243.

² Ironically the colonists, about three months behind the events in terms of communications, were most apprehensive of the dangers of the Rebellion at a time when the danger had passed by the Spring of 1746.

³ "A Genuine Intercepted Letter, from Father Patrick Graham, Almoner and Confessor to the Pretender's Son...to Father Benedict Yorke, Titular Bishop of St. David's at Bath," *Virginia Gazette*, Jan. 23, 1746.

⁴ Id.

- ⁵ Charles Chauncy, *The Council of Two Confederate Kings to Set the Son of Tabeal on the Throne Represented as Evil...A Sermon Occasion'd by the Present Rebellion in Favour of the Pretender*. (Boston: D. Gookin, 1746), p. 22; John Gordon, *A Sermon on the Late Unnatural Rebellion*, (Annapolis, J. Green, 1746), p. 12-17; Thomas Craddock, *Two Sermons... Preached on the Occasion of the Suppression of the Scotch Rebellion*, (Annapolis, J. Green, 1747). Newspapers also carried similar items: "The Question, Whether England can be Otherwise than Miserable Under a POPISH KING Considered. An ADDRESS to the People of England," *American Magazine*, Vol. III, Jan. 1746, (Boston: Rogers and Fowler), p. 12-13; "The Goods and Effects Which Were Taken from the Battle of Culloden, Belonging to the Pretender..." *South Carolina Gazette*, December 15, 1746; "Copy of a Treaty Between the Pretender and the King of France. From a Reader of the South Carolina Gazette," *South Carolina Gazette*, February 9, 1747; "Address of the Representatives of the Freeholders of the Province of Pennsylvania, Presented to His Majesty...June 23, 1746," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 4, 1747.
- ⁶ "Twelve Good Reasons for Rejecting the Pretender, Which Ought to be Kept in the Study of Every Protestant," *New York Weekly Journal*, March 27, 1746.
- ⁷ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Feb. 4, 1746.
- ⁸ Chauncy, Charles. *The Council of Two Confederate Kings...A Sermon Occasion'd by the Present Rebellion in Favour of the Pretender.. February 6th, 1745[/6]*, (Boston: D. Gookin, 1746), p. 28.
- ⁹ "Open Letter to the Clergy of Virginia from William Dawson of William and Mary College," *Virginia Gazette*, Jan. 16, 1746.
- ¹⁰ "Twelve Good Reasons..." *New York Weekly Journal*, Feb. 17, 1746.
- ¹¹ Thomas Craddock, *Two Sermons...*, p. 9. Under Mary Tudor, Protestants were burned at the stake at Smithfield, which became an English symbol for Protestant martyrdom.
- ¹² Jonathan Mayhew. *An Election Sermon. May 24th, 1754*. From A.W. Plumstead. *The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons, 1670-1775*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), p. 292. See also A Protestant, "Observations," *Virginia Gazette*, July 3, 1746.
- ¹³ John Gordon. *A Sermon on the Suppression of the Late Unnatural Rebellion...*, (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1746), p. 18; Charles Chauncy. *Civil Rulers Must be Just, Ruling in the Fear of God...*, (Boston: 1747), p. 34; John Bernard. *The Presence of God in the Assembly of Rulers...*, (Boston: 1746), p. 21; "Answer to the Pretender's Claim," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 11, 1746; "Americano-Britaneus," *Maryland Gazette*, June 4, 1748.
- ¹⁴ A few example of this reoccurring theme include: John Bernard, *The Presence of the Great God in the Assembly of Political Rulers...*,(Boston, J. Draper, 1746), p. 21; Charles Chauncy, *The Council of Two Confederate Kings...*, pp. 31,43; John Gordon, *A Sermon...*, p. 30; Ebenezer Pemberton, *A Sermon Delivered at the Presbyterian Church in New York...for the Late Victory Obtained by His Majesty's Arms, Under the Conduct of His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, Over the Rebels in North Britain...*, (New York: James Parker, 1746), pp. 20-22; "Humble Address of the Pastors of Massachusetts Bay in New England...May28, 1746," *New York Weekly Journal*, February 2, 1747; "Philadelphia – Public Day of Thanksgiving for the Victory Over the Pretender," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 17, 1746; "Address from the Reverend Presbyteries of New Brunswick and New-Castle, to the Governor of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Journal*, May 31, 1744; "From an English Print," *Maryland Gazette*, December 31, 1746; "Open Letter to the Clergy of Virginia from William Dawson of William and Mary College," *Virginia Gazette*, January 16, 1746; "Humble Address of the House of Delegates to His Excellency, Thomas Blader, esq; Governor of Maryland," *Virginia Gazette*, April 3, 1746.

- ¹⁵ Cotton Mather. *The Glorious Throne...*, (Boston: B. Green: 1714), p.35.
- ¹⁶ Mark Goldie, "The Nonjurors, Episcopacy, and the Origins of the Convocation Controversy," *Ideology and Conspiracy: Aspects of Jacobitism, 1786-1759*, Eveline Cruickshanks, ed. (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1982), pp. 17-18; T.F. Kendrick, "Sir Robert Walpole, the Old Whigs and the Bishops, 1733-1756: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Parliamentary Politics," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 1968, pp. 429-445.
- ¹⁷ George Whitefield, *Britain's Mercies, Britain's Duties...Represented in a Sermon Preach'd at the New Building in Philadelphia...Occasioned by the Suppression of the Late Unnatural Rebellion*, (Boston: S. Kneeland & J. Green, 1746). Ellis Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, (Indianapolis: The Liberty Press, 1991), p. 125.
- ¹⁸ Samuel Checkley, *The Duty of a People to Lay to Heart and Lament the Death of a Good King...*, (Boston: Benjamin Gray, 1727), p. 14; Ebenezer Gay, *The Duty of a People to Pray for and Praise Their Rulers...*, (Boston, 1730), p. 16; Nathaniel Eells, *The Wise Ruler...*, (Hartford: 1748), p. 14; Daniel Lewes, *Good Rulers, the Fathers of Their People...*, (Boston: J. Draper, 1748), p. 13; "To the Honourable George Thomas, esq.; Lft. Governor of Pennsylvania, Address of the Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia, May 27, 1747," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 4, 1747.
- ¹⁹ [Peter Annet?], *A Discourse on Government and Religion, Calculated for the Meridian of the Thirteenth of January, By an Independent...* (Boston, 1750) [6484] p. 16.
- ²⁰ Ebenezer Pemberton, *A Sermon Delivered at the Presbyterian Church in New York...*, (New York: James Parker, 1746), p. 20.
- ²¹ Charles Chauncy, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Present Rebellion...*, p.28; John Gordon, *A Sermon...*, p. 3; Thomas Cradock, *Two Sermons...*, p. 9.
- ²² William D. Liddle, "A Patriot King, or None": Lord Bolingbroke and the American Renunciation of George III," *Journal of American History*, Vol. LXV, No. 4, March, 1979, pp. 951-953.
- ²³ As always, it is difficult to find a large body of written proof for the latter claims, but newspaper items tend to support the assertion that the "commonality" supported the king over the Pretender. There are a number of news items that show that all classes celebrated the Duke of Cumberland's victory over the Scottish rebels. For examples see *Virginia Gazette*, July 16 and August 28, 1746; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 31, 1746; and *Maryland Gazette*, September 2, September 21, 1746. After 1746, apparently some November 5th (Guye Ffawlkes) parades included effigies of the Pretender along with the more traditional effigies, "From New-York," *Maryland Gazette*, December 4, 1755.