

## THOMAS CROWLEY'S PROPOSAL TO SEAT AMERICANS IN PARLIAMENT, 1765-1775

**I**mperial crises spawned proposals for imperial reform. Not surprisingly, the disputes triggered by George Grenville's Stamp Act in 1765, which led, ultimately, to the American revolt ten years later, brought with them numerous plans to restructure and thereby save the empire. One of the more ambitious and consequently more notable came from Thomas Crowley, a wealthy London merchant and unorthodox Quaker.<sup>1</sup> Only by seating colonists in both the House of Commons and House of Lords, Crowley contended, could the American right to representation be coupled with the American duty to pay taxes in support of the empire. Others had suggested that Americans be represented in Parliament but Crowley was possibly the most insistent, most persistent of them all, so persistent that Benjamin Franklin ultimately dismissed him as "a little cracked upon the subject."<sup>2</sup>

If Franklin found Crowley trying, Crowley's Quaker brethren had even more cause for exasperation. Crowley showed the same tenacity, even pugnacity, when debating theological and ecclesiastical points as he did in pressing for imperial reform. Indeed, his zest for the one probably fed his vigour in the other. In both instances, whatever merits his arguments may have had were overshadowed by his difficult personality. And yet, even if he had been less emphatic and more accommodating, he had little hope of changing Quaker ways or reshaping the empire.

Crowley turned his attention to the empire in the mid-1760s, at the same moment that he became strident in his opposition to various Quaker practices, especially the disowning of Society members who paid tithes to the Church of England. According to a minute passed by the London Yearly Meeting in 1706, those who continued the practice, even after being counselled to desist, should be considered "unworthy to be admitted to the Meetings for Business among Friends, or to be received to join in the Collections, made by Friends, for the Service of the Church of Christ."<sup>3</sup> Tithes, these Quakers felt, were unjustified throwbacks to a Mosaic code that had been superseded by Christ's higher law. To pay them violated the Saviour's creed and insulted the memory of early Quakers who died as martyrs in God's name.

Crowley disagreed and tried to convert others to his cause. He launched a letter-writing campaign that began privately but soon enough became public, as Crowley took his case to the press and laid out his position in newspaper pieces and pamphlets. Hoping to demonstrate his prowess as a scripturist, he sometimes turned to the Old Testament, sometimes to the New—particularly the Pauline epistles. It was not just an issue of tithes or the question of taxes in general; it was, he emphasized, a matter of civic duty, of whether Quakers were good subjects of their king. Crowley, who completed his apprenticeship to a linen draper in the 1730s and went on to make a sizable fortune, had paid taxes gladly and proudly ever since. He did not mince words:

My Doctrine is this, “neither Government, nor Society, have any Right over my Conscience in Religion,” but the supreme Legislature of every Nation hath a just Right to assess the Property of the Subject in all Cases which they judge for the Public Good, and the same is very clearly held forth in the Doctrine of Christ, and the Apostle Paul and Peter.<sup>4</sup>

In March 1771 Crowley finally elicited a formal reaction. A minute from Meeting for Sufferings was brought to London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting, advising local Quakers that the dissident merchant's writings “contain Opinions inconsistent with Christian testimony.” Still, Society members were urged to treat Crowley kindly even if his ideas were erroneous and behaviour disruptive. “Much tenderness hath been exercised towards the author on various considerations, and the same considerations may perhaps induce Friends still to use all possible Lenity & forbearance” in dealing with him.<sup>5</sup> All of that came to an end in February 1774 when the Devonshire House Monthly Meeting, which Crowley had attended for many years, agreed to disown him because of “His inflexible Continuance in Opposition, and refractory Behaviour.” Despite every effort to deter him he insisted on his right to pay tithes and he admonished other Quakers to do the same. Crowley had only to repent to be welcomed back into fellowship. “We sincerely desire, both for his own Sake, and that of his Family,” the members entreated, “That he may come to see his Errors in the Light of Truth, and thro' unfeigned Repentance, be restored into membership again.”<sup>6</sup>

Crowley would have none of that. He refused to confess error where he believed none existed. He appealed for reinstatement and lost.<sup>7</sup> Once, in frustration, he forced his way into the Devonshire

House Monthly Meeting with two constables in tow to assert his right to attend, but that changed nothing.<sup>8</sup> His wife Mary continued her affiliation with the Monthly Meeting there, her husband never did have his membership restored. He dismissed his opponents as modern-day Pharisees and came to characterize himself defiantly as "a rational Christian."<sup>9</sup> That his sixteen-year-old daughter Ann, the second-youngest of eight children, died of a lingering illness in the midst of all this probably added to Crowley's sense of alienation. He nonetheless made it clear that his dispute was with Quaker leaders, not their God. He and his wife Mary gathered together their daughter's musings as she lay dying and had them published- as a message of hope, not despair. Parents and child believed that death brought deliverance through Christ's redemption and that they needed to lead Godly lives in preparation for that day.<sup>10</sup>

All along Crowley had contended that he should have been able to pay tithes without interference from the Quaker brethren. He was, he stressed, entitled to the rights of "liberty of conscience" that every true Christian should respect. "No Man or Society has any Right to usurp Authority over the Consciences of sincere Men, it being the Prerogative of Heaven only" to set such limits.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as a loyal Briton it was his duty to pay those tithes, it was even his duty to pay taxes that could be used to fund the militia. Quakers enjoyed religious toleration through law, thus, he reasoned, it was only proper that they reciprocate by supporting the government that protected them. He signed one of his pieces "Amor Patriae"- a lover of his country-to drive the point home.<sup>12</sup>

He adopted that non de plume even when he wrote as an advocate of imperial reform-for him a variation on the problem of rights and responsibilities that he encountered in his religious disputes. George Grenville's controversial Stamp Act precipitated his entry into the rhetorical fray. He fought on two fronts: in the press, most frequently in the *Public Ledger*, and in letters to leaders of government. On occasion he carried over his practice of scripture-quoting to make a point, from the familiar admonition in Matthew about a house divided against itself not standing to a more obscure passage in Ecclesiastes sent to the religiously devout earl of Dartmouth that advised "Wisdom is better than Weapons of War, but one Sinner destroyeth much Good."<sup>13</sup>

Initially Crowley did not push for a major structural change in the empire. He began more modestly, suggesting that the colonists be allowed to tax themselves for imperial purposes through their local legislatures. He even calculated what he considered an equitable tax

schedule and had it published in February 1766, in the midst of Parliamentary debates over repealing the Stamp Act. He settled on a proportionate rate of one pound for every thirty inhabitants, distributed as follows:

	Inhabitants	Proportion £
Canada and its Dependencies	90,000	3,000
Nova-Scotia and its Dependencies, being young for the present	15,000	500
New Hampshire	60,000	2,000
Massachusetts Bay	240,000	8,000
Connecticut	150,000	5,000
Rhode Island	45,000	1,500
New York	150,000	5,000
Jerseys	90,000	3,000
Pennsylvania	210,000	7,000
Lower Counties	and 45,000	255,000
Maryland	120,000	4,000
Virginia	180,000	6,000
North Carolina	45,000	1,500
South Carolina	105,000	3,500
Georgia, East and West Florida		
Ba[hama] and Bermuda	30,000	1,000
Jamaica	150,000	5,000
Barbadoes	75,000	2,500
Antigua	45,000	1,500
St. Christophers, Nevis, and Montserrat, Dominica, Tobago and St. Vincent	45,000	1,500
<hr/>		
Total	1,890,000	£63,000 <sup>14</sup>

Crowley's figures were proportionate on yet another level. He understood that Americans had a relative sense of equity - that they cared about their own tax rates, not those figures compared with tax levels in Britain. They could not be expected to be assessed at the same rate as residents of the mother country, whose levels were markedly higher. If his figures were used as the basis for a new tax system the colonists would pay, on average, eight pence apiece each

to help cover imperial expenses. By contrast residents of the British Isles would be called on to pay twelve shillings annually - eighteen times more than the colonists. Their assessment would go toward paying the interest on the national debt, a debt, Crowley emphasized, "almost wholly borrowed to carry on several Wars, and near Half of it on Account of the *last, begun in America.*"<sup>15</sup>

His stress on the colonists being the primary beneficiaries of the last war showed that he had something in common with Grenville after all. True, he disagreed with Grenville over the wisdom of the Stamp Act and it is no coincidence that he made £63,000 his target figure, which was just a few thousand pounds above what Grenville had at one point estimated the Stamp Act would generate in colonial revenue. He would even accuse Grenville's ministry of acting unconstitutionally in taxing Americans directly and depriving them of the rights of Englishmen. Nonetheless, he agreed with the failed minister that the colonists needed to carry a bigger share of the imperial tax burden and he believed, like Grenville, that the colonists were ingrates who needed to be brought into line before they became uncontrollable and sought independence.

Furthermore, like Grenville he suspected that Americans would do little if they were left to raise new taxes through their own legislatures. But unlike Grenville, who was only lukewarm to the subject of seating Americans in Parliament, Crowley came to see that change as a panacea, as in fact the *only* solution to perpetual, otherwise insoluble, imperial problems.<sup>16</sup> Virtual representation did not, could not, work for the Americans, pure and simple. "The late Taxation of America therefore appears absolutely unconstitutional," running "contrary to the constitutional Maxims of Government" which "every true-born Englishman is bound in Honour to support."<sup>17</sup> Though he read and admired James Otis's early tracts on colonial rights and came to concur with Otis that Americans needed to be represented at Westminster, he devised his plan independently of Otis and in a detail that Otis never achieved.<sup>18</sup>

Once he began pondering structural reform he did not stop with the colonies, he turned to Ireland and included that "kingdom" in his proposal. Under his plan in its final incarnation the Irish would join colonial Americans at Westminster. Ireland would keep its Parliament to handle local, internal affairs, just as the colonies would retain their existing legislatures for like purposes. As Irish and American members of the expanded imperial Parliament learned to trust their British colleagues, all would ideally act in concert to bolster the navigation system, make the empire economically solvent and politically stable, and protect colonial rights in the process. "A

wise-established Representation of all considerable Parts of the British Dominions in Europe and America, in one central Parliament, to be the common Center and Spring of all Grants for Money, for national Purposes," he declared, "would give Stability, Unity and Concord, and consequently greater Strength to the Whole."<sup>19</sup> Crowley had his basic outline roughed in by the end of 1765 and fully developed five years later.

To those whom it most immediately concerns, in regard of their several Stations, in the LEGISLATURE and ADMINISTRATION.

*Memorial and Plan of Union,  
Presented to his Majesty, Ministers, and the Privy-Council.*

SUFFER it to take Place and remain on your Minds, as an important Truth, that the jarring Interests, and want of Unity, between Great Britain and her Colonies, is the grand Foundation, wheron the Enemies of these once happy Dominions, build their Prospect, and Confidence of Success against us, and that nothing more strongly or more happily tend, to remove such threatening Prospect and Confidence; and in lieu thereof to substitute, on the Part of our Enemies, a permanent Dread, or Fear of offending in future, than a happy and durable Union, between the Mother Country and her Colonies, including Ireland therewith. To proceed then, if this be granted, as in general doth evidently appear to be the Case, it will follow of Course, that the proper and essential Business of Government, doth much consist in planning and drawing into Practice, the wisest, safest, and most permanent Mode of conciliating the many internal Difficulties, now subsisting, by essentially removing the Grounds thereof, so far as appears to the Intelligent and Candid, and many such there are, on both Sides, who very clearly perceive that the Mode and Proportion of AMERICAN TAXATION, has never yet been wisely modelled, nor made constitutional, so as to be of a Piece with the Principles of the British Constitution, in general, respecting Representation and consequent Taxation; nor by any other Means made safe, or honourable, for the Colonies, by Act of Assembly, to adopt; and every arbitrary, or unconstitutional Mode, or Manner, of drawing Supplies from them, which they cannot safely and honourably adopt, will increase the Danger of Quarrel and Ruin, on both Sides. It is therefore of much Importance to both, mutually, that a Mode of Union and Taxation, as well as

regulating their Trade, should be enacted and practised, which would prove safe and honourable to the Whole, so laying the true and rational Foundation of Peace and Concord, throughout these Dominions.

To make it constitutional and honourable, the Colonies should have proper Members of their own, to represent them in Parliament, so that they may, in future thereby co-operate in making the Laws of Taxation and Legislation, which must necessarily bind them; but then to make it also safe for the Colonies to accept the Honour of Representation, it evidently appears, some barrier must be enacted to bound the Right of Parliamentary Taxation over the Colonies, else would they be liable by being, on every Occasion, outnumbered, to be taxed too high, beyond their reasonable Abilities, after the Right once admitted; so that taking in the Consideration of future Consequences, and the Temper and Benevolence of future Kings, and future Ministers, &c. as may be found to arise in the Course of Time, it is but reasonable, on Behalf of the Colonies, that this Right of Taxation should be so happily bounded, as that it may not be in the Power of Parliament, in succeeding Times, to tax America, or Ireland, APART, or separately from Great Britain, to raise a Revenue, or for Protection; nor without, at the same Time, in the same Acts, and in the same Mode, taxing the British Subjects also; without such Barrier, or some other adequate Method, so as to effectually prevent the Americans and Irish, from being TAXED APART from the British, or to prevent the Taxes laid, or to be laid, on America and Ireland, from exceeding certain limited Proportions, to be previously agreed on, they will never think themselves safe, in accepting a Representation, nor yet will they be content to be taxed by Parliament without it; and as it is evidently just and reasonable, they should somehow LEGALLY CONTRIBUTE their proportionate Quota of Supplies, towards general Protection and Defence, a wise Union, by Representation, evidently appears the proper Means; and the Duties apart, necessarily arising, by regulating their Trade, to be applied to their own particular Provincial Concerns, for the Support of Civil Government, &c. And I do presume, no general Taxation to be made common to the British, American, and Irish Subjects, in one and the same Act, can be devised so proper, as that heretofore pointed out by the Author of these Lines, viz. A Pound Rate on their real and Personal Estates, a proper Mode of Proof, being first adopted, *i.e.* Every Parish[i]oner, who hath served the Office of Church-Warden or Overseer of the Poor, in

each Parish, separately; together with the Assessors, and Collectors of the Land-Tax, for the preceeding Year, in the District, to be commissioned to assess, and properly empowered to ballot, taking the medium Valuation; but with this Proviso, if any one should appear to be immoderately excessive, his Vote to be rejected, by the Majority of the Rest; and after such Decision, if any Parish[i]oner should find himself aggrieved, in being overvalued, beyond his real Abilities, he should be indulged with the Liberty of swearing off, and in Consequence, to a rational alleviation, to be decided by the same Assessors. And as it is always sound good Policy, to make every new Measure of Importance, as moderate and equitable, as the Nature of the Case, for the Time being, will, with Prudence, admit, I do presume, that such a general Tax, of only ONE SHILLING in the Pound, equitably and justly assessed, according to the original Intention of the present disproportionate Assessment, commonly called the Land-Tax in England, would bring in a larger Revenue, than Three Shillings in the Pound doth, in the hitherto practised, partial, unequitable Mode, in this Country.

I therefore humbly recommend the following Plan of Union and Representation to be seriously considered.

AMOR PATRIAE.

*Gracechurch-Street*  
*Dec. 10, 1770*

A PLAN OF UNION, BY ADMITTING REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE AMERICAN COLONIES, AND FROM IRELAND, INTO THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT.

<p>AMERICA</p>	<p>Lords, for the principal Provinces and Islands, as soon as found Convenient to be created by the Royal Prerogative</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>Massachusetts Bay Pensylvania Virginia South Carolina Jamaica</p>	<p>each 4- - -20</p>	



New York				
Maryland		each 3- - -9		
Canada				
			IRELAND	
			Each Province four Members	16
			Dublin	2
Connecticut		each 2- - -4		
E, and W. Jersey			Cork	
			Kinsale	
New Hampshire			Waterford	
Nova Scotia			Limerick	each 1- - -7
Rhode Island			Kilkenny	
Lower Counties			Wicklow	
of Pennsylvania		each 1- - -8	Wexford	
Georgia				
East Florida			Dundalk	
West Florida			Drogheda	2
North Carolina			Yougall	
Barbadoes			Galway	
Antigua			Belfast	each.1- - -3
St. Christopher's		ditto- - -4	Londonderry	
Bahama				
				30
Bermuda				
Montserrat	to choose in	1	And a proportionate Number	
Nevis	Rotation		of Lords, to be elected by the	10
			Irish from among themselves	
Grenada's		2		
Newfoundland and St. John's		1	American Commons	50
Dominica, St. Vincent's			Lords	10
and Tobago, to choose		1	Irish Commons	30
in Rotation			Lords	10
		50		100
Commons				

### CONDITIONS PROPOSED

1. THESE Representatives may be elected, by each Assembly, from among themselves, and also by the Parliament, of Ireland, from among themselves, if to them more eligible than the particular local Elections, proposed in the Plan.

2d. It may be needful to exempt them from the same Qualifications, which are the Condition of British Members, enjoying a Seat in Parliament, respecting the value of their real Estates.

3d. It may be needful to insert a Clause, in the proposed Act of Union, that on the dissolving any Parliament, the same member, which represented America, in such dissolved Parliament, should continue to represent them in the next ensuing, until others are returned from their respective Constituents, in lieu thereof.

4th. It may be needful that special Distance of Time be allowed in the new Writs, for American Members, beyond the usual Time in Great Britain, perhaps six Months.

5th. The Residence (in or near London) of ever[y] American Merchant, may be required, to be constantly left, in Writing, with the Speaker of the House of Commons, for the Time being.

6th. In order to prevent the evil Effect of any Mistrust of the Colonies, being liable to be over burthened with Taxes, beyond their reasonable Abilities, after Representation takes Place; it would be wise and concilating to enact, in the proposed *Act*, granting the Honour of Representation, that neither America, nor Ireland, shall be afterwards liable to be taxed separately, or a Part, from the British, towards raising a Revenue, or for general Protection or Defence; this, it is humbly conceived, would be much wiser than to fix any limited Sums, on account of the probable growing Population and Abilities of America, in future; and altho' it might appear an Indignity to the supreme legislative Power, to be limited by her own Subjects; it nevertheless would be a Manifestation of Wisdom, Justice, and Prudence, for the said supreme Power to so limit its own Operations, for the Peace, Safety, and Satisfaction of the Public, and of every part of these Dominions, inasmuch as it would strongly, and happily tend to make the proposed Union eligible [sic], and durable, to *general Content mutually*, which happy Cement, would be the very best Security to the Whole.

7th. It is not unlikely, that the Americans may want some Restrictions to be taken off their maritime and inland Trade, which may become a necessary Consideration, under due

Regard to the principal end of colonizing; but it should at all Events be stipulated, that the Act of Navigation should be maintained, in Favour of the Mother Country, in regard of the enormous Expence, she has already incurred, in settling, protecting and defending the Plantations, &c. As also on Account of Emigration, having without such Limitations, too strong a Tendency to weaken and impoverish the Parent Country, so running out from themselves, and otherwise setting up a separate Interest of opposite Principles.

8th. The Duties apart, necessarily arising in the Colonies, from Acts of Parliament, to regulate their Trade, may be applied to the particular uses of each Province apart, for the Purpose of defraying the Charges of civil Government, and other local, particular, provincial, evil [Editor: as printed in the *Memorial and Plan...* should it read 'provincial, civil'?] Concerns; so removing the Distrust of Dread; either to accept the Honour of Representation, or to adopt the Right of parliamentary Taxation without it, and without Limitation.

P.S. It may be proper to allow each Colony to send either the whole Number allowed of, or a smaller Number, at their Option, if any should choose to save Expence.<sup>20</sup>

Crowley pushed his proposal tirelessly, until events after the outbreak of fighting in April 1775 made it moot. Long connected with Quaker merchants in Philadelphia and London merchants concerned about trade in the empire, it was easy enough for him to arrange a meeting with Benjamin Franklin. The two men had their first long conversation outside the House of Commons in February 1766, just days before Franklin would be called on to testify and offer criticisms that Rockinghamites could draw on in their campaign against Grenville's programme. Crowley revealed to Franklin his identity as *Amor Patriae*. Franklin had read some of his pieces, notably one in the *Gazetteer* on the preceding New Year's Day where Crowley called for repeal of the Stamp Act and inclusion of Americans in Parliament. At that point Franklin professed not to be averse to the idea. Even so, he was quite certain that Americans would not make the request themselves. Although they might accept it if were offered to them, they would not do so unenthusiastically and the time was fast approaching when they would spurn it altogether.<sup>21</sup> That in subsequent pieces Crowley wrote as much about American responsibilities as American rights irritated

Franklin, particularly when the dissident Quaker seemed to be snide about American protests. "I am ever for *Moderation* as being the most likely means to produce *Reconciliation*," he told Franklin, but "allegations tenacious of Rigid Right" only alienated and divided people when the goal should be to unite them.<sup>22</sup>

When Crowley, using his own name, authored a newspaper piece in October 1768 that Franklin thought unfair to Americans, the Pennsylvanian responded immediately. Crowley had followed his usual call for American representation at Westminster with an observation that the "last extremely expensive War" had advanced colonial interests while burdening Britain with a horrendous debt. And even though France had been defeated the colonies still needed British protection if they were to continue prospering. "Without the Aid and Influence of the British Navy," he argued, the colonies "would be soon over-run by the maritime Powers of Europe, and divided among them." Moreover, he issued a warning to any Americans who might be tempted to seek independence: that same navy could be used against them. Therefore if they were not willing to carry their share of the imperial burden through new taxes passed by their own legislatures they should embrace his oft-repeated proposal "for a mutual[ly] beneficent Union."<sup>23</sup>

Franklin fired back his retort under the pseudonym "Francis Lynn." After commending Crowley for wanting "Peace and Harmony" he contended that Americans were perfectly willing to carry their share of the imperial burden and insisted that they sought reconciliation, not independence. He made it clear that he and Crowley had very different notions of who was to blame for the current crisis.

On the whole, as we are not presumptuous enough to ask an *Union* with Britain, such as England contracted with Scotland, we have no "Propositions" to make, but that she would leave us the Enjoyment of our native and dear-bought Privileges, and not attempt to alter or innovate our Constitutions, in the Exercise of which every thing went prosperously for both Countries, 'till the Idea of Taxing us by the Power of Parliament unfortunately enter'd the Heads of your Ministers, which has occasion'd a publick Discussion of Questions that had better never been started, and thrown all into Confusion.<sup>24</sup>

His irritation with Crowley notwithstanding, Franklin avoided a formal rift. He no doubt accepted the copies of Crowley's final plan,

presented to him at the end of 1770, politely, though he had long before abandoned any hope or desire of seeing Americans in Parliament.<sup>25</sup> Crowley, for his part, had continued to take his case to whomever would hear it, even by mail to Franklin's son, William, who informed his father that Crowley sent him several essays with a request that he have them inserted in the *New Jersey Gazette*- -though no such paper existed. The younger Franklin thought Crowley "crack'd;"<sup>26</sup> his father came to share his sentiments, noting, with a tinge of sadness, that Crowley "was much among the Ministers" of government, trying- -and failing- -to interest them in his plan.<sup>27</sup>

Crowley had indeed dispatched copies of his proposal, unsolicited, to various political leaders. Early in 1766 he sent William Pitt, soon to become Earl of Chatham, his recommendations on repealing the Stamp Act and setting tax rates that the colonial legislatures could meet. In 1770 he sent Chatham his full scheme for seating Americans and Irish at Westminster.<sup>28</sup> He made similar approaches to the Earl of Dartmouth and the Marquess of Rockingham, and even tried to get his ideas presented to the King during the North ministry.<sup>29</sup> It is doubtful that he had much of an impact on Chatham or Rockingham, on Dartmouth or the King- -or on anyone else, for that matter, charged with running the empire. No one took up his cause in Lords or Commons; his various drafts probably elicited only a glance here and a shrug there.

Already on the margins of public life, Crowley further marginalized himself by his acerbic tendencies. Franklin kept his distance and did not involve Crowley in last ditch efforts on the eve of Lexington and Concord to head off an imperial break. Franklin joined with Quaker merchant David Barclay and Quaker physician John Fothergill- -both acquaintances of Crowley, but not with Crowley, who was monomaniacal in pushing his plan to the exclusion of all others.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately Crowley was reduced to taking his plan to the public at his own expense, paying the printing costs of a pamphlet that brought his various newspaper pieces together under one cover.

Does that mean Crowley's failed proposal should be left behind on the trash heap of forgotten failures? Not quite. His warnings were all too prescient. He advised Pitt in 1766 that if the mother country and her colonies failed to reconcile their differences, then Britain's "Glorious Empire" could be in a "tottering situation," susceptible to crumbling from within and relentless pressure from without. Unless something were done, and done soon, he predicted, "it[']s not unlikely that France in Europe and our Colonies in America may Phoenix[-]like Raise themselves as out of the Ashes of this Empire

and the latter become independent."<sup>31</sup> Although Franklin was not being disingenuous when he contended that, contrary to Crowley, the Patriots wanted reconciliation, not independence, it is equally true that the drift toward independence came because of the unresolved issues that Crowley had identified. Whether or not his plan, if implemented, would have helped solve problems or actually compound them is another matter.<sup>32</sup>

When Crowley warned that something had to be done to prevent the colonies from drifting further away from the mother country, "*toward a state of Independance, & the many dreadfull intervening scenes w[hi]ch in such Case must necessarily befall the Lives & Properties of both Britain & America,*" he said nothing new.<sup>33</sup> When he warned that Britain's enemies might intervene in the event of war, he, again, said nothing new. Crowley well understood the geopolitical context of colonial crisis; so did many British policymakers and so did many American Patriots, not just Franklin. Their general awareness is a useful reminder that miscalculation played a more important role than simple ignorance in the unravelling of imperial ties. Asking whether leaders on either side of the Atlantic could- -and should - -have seen more clearly only leads toward a causational mire.<sup>34</sup>

That Crowley could accept Patriot arguments about no taxation without representation, that he could see American liberties as grounded in the law of nature as well as the rights of Englishmen, are reminders that there were those in Britain who agreed with the Patriots on certain constitutional issues even if they did not care much for them or the way they comported themselves politically. Even so, British acceptance of fundamental American rights did not necessarily extend, as Patriots would have had it, to colonial charters. Crowley did not see them as sacred or inviolable; they could, with cause, be set aside by crown and parliament. In his eyes Patriot behaviour in Massachusetts verged on justifying that very course.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, given the Patriots' confidence that time was on their side- -that the colonies would grow ever larger, ever stronger, Crowley recommended that transatlantic emigration to them be curtailed until imperial problems were solved. When the Patriots finally turned to force, Crowley condemned them utterly. "If any Part of the Empire is aggrieved, they have a Right to petition for Relief, but in no Case whatever have a Right to rebel," he wrote in bitter disappointment.<sup>36</sup>

Crowley's inability to find disciples is also a reminder that the failure of imperial reform was only superficially constitutional and

political; on a deeper level it was primarily social. Crowley tried desperately to salvage an Atlantic community that existed more as an idealized notion than as a functional entity. He, like the politicians who ignored his proposal, believed in indivisible sovereignty, the supremacy of crown and parliament, and the magnificence of mixed government. That belief proved a stumbling block, not because it was impossible to work out in any form, but because it could not be adapted to the real world of the moment for *some* of the colonies in *part* of the empire.<sup>37</sup>

Crowley continued to offer advice on imperial affairs long after it should have been obvious that no one in government was listening, just as he continued to argue his case for liberty of conscience long after his former Quaker brethren had given him up for lost. Once the shooting started he urged government to amend the Declaratory Act and send a plenipotentiary over to discuss terms for reconciliation, preferably along the lines of his 1770 proposal.<sup>38</sup> He then fell silent on the empire. Not so on the question of his disownment. His adversaries among the Quakers, he charged, "appear more *zealous* of their own *human Traditions*" and had punished him "for acting conscientiously agreeable to our *Saviour's* and his *Apostles Doctrine*."<sup>39</sup> Unable to argue his way back into the Devonshire House Monthly Meeting, he threatened to build a new church at his own expense for himself and other "sober, rational Christians."<sup>40</sup> He died in 1787, unrepentant. Still a wealthy man, in his will he provided generously for his surviving children, now all grown.<sup>41</sup> Though never able to rejoin his wife in public worship, he did rejoin her in death: he was buried alongside her among the Quaker plots in Bunhill Fields, a concession to her, perhaps even a mark of forgiveness toward him.<sup>42</sup>

Neil L. York

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> To this point Crowley has been a footnote character in British imperial history. Alfred Leroy Burt, *Imperial Architects* (Oxford: B.H. Blackwell, 1913) saw the "Amor Patriae" proposals in the Earl of Chatham's papers. "Perhaps the details are not" Chatham's, "but of the idea there is no doubt at all," he concluded - -incorrectly (p.28). Charles Mullett, "English Imperial Thinking, 1764-1783" *Political Science Quarterly* 45 (1930): 548-579, noted Burt's mistake and correctly identified Crowley as the author, though "who Crowley was I have been unable to discover." (p.55, n. 6). See too Mullett's *Fundamental Law*

and *The American Revolution, 1760-1776* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), p.138. Brief allusions to Crowley as Amor Patriae can also be found in Fred Junkin Hinkhouse, *The Preliminaries of the American Revolution as seen in the English Press, 1763-1775* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), pp. 28, 122; Richard Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p.160; and Arthur J. Mekeel, *The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), passim, but Crowley had dropped out of the picture by the time of Jack P. Greene's *Peripheries and Center* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986). I wrote the sketch of Crowley that will appear in *The New Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Crowley was not included in the original *DNB*.

2 Benjamin Franklin to William Franklin, 1 September 1773, in Leonard Labaree, et al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 29 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press), 20: 387.

3 As cited from Crowley's compilation of his letters and essays in *Dissertations on Liberty of Conscience, Respecting the Payment of Tythes, and other Pecuniary and Legal Assessments. In Four Parts* (London: Dilly, Richardson and Urquhart, and Elizabeth Brooke, {1774}), p.210. Crowley pieces first published in *Reasons for Liberty of Conscience Respecting the Payment of Tythes, Or complying with other Pecuniary Laws Enacted by the Legislature* (London: n.p., 1771) and *Copies of Thomas Crowley's Letters and Dissertations on Society Concerns* (n.p., n.d.) were incorporated here.

4 *Ibid.*, pp.127-128, from a letter Crowley wrote to an unnamed "Esteemed Friend" on 1 January 1774.

5 Minute of 22 March 1771 of the London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting Minutes, vol. 7, 1764-1772, p.418. Friends House Library, London

6 The Minutes of the [London] Six Weeks Meeting, 1772-1778, vol. 14, pp.98-99, Friends House Library.

7 See the London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting Minutes, vol. 8, 1772-1777, which noted Crowley's appeal on 28 March 1774 (p.163) and the adverse report submitted on April 11th by the group appointed to hear the appeal (pp.166-167). Crowley brought together many of the documents connected to his disownment, including his protests that he was treated unfairly, in his *Dissertations on Liberty of Conscience*, pp.161-217.

8 Crowley alludes to this event, which took place in January 1776, in *Copies of Thomas Crowley's Letters to the Quakers, Not Printed before May 1, 1776; (Except a Few of the Latter) Together with some Essays in his Youth* (n.p., n.d.), pp.36-38. His request for reinstatement denied, Crowley became harsher in his criticism, as evidenced in many of the pieces included here. He questioned George Fox's knowledge of the scriptures (p.10, in a letter of 10 June 1774; two other examples on pp.15-17) and went so far as to draft a bill for Parliament's consideration that would have prevented the Society of Friends from punishing members for paying tithes (written by January 1776, on pp.38-40).

9 See, for example, the essays in *Dissertations on Liberty of Conscience*, pp.186-200. He was even more emphatic on the title page of his *Poetical Essays on Various Subjects* (London: n.p., 1784), stating "These by a Rational Christian, But no Quaker."

10 [Thomas and Mary Crowley] *Some Expressions of Ann Crowley* (London: Mary



- Hinde, 1774). This pamphlet carried Psalms 90: 12 as an epigraph: "So teach us to number our Days that we may apply our Hearts unto Wisdom." It was apparently much in demand on the American side of the Atlantic, where it went through at least four editions in two years.
- 11 Crowley, *Dissertations on Liberty of Conscience*, p.79, from a piece dated 31 March 1767.
  - 12 In *Ibid.*, pp.120-121, from a letter of 16 November 1773.
  - 13 Crowley, signing himself Amor Patriae, to Dartmouth, 8 January 1774, in Dartmouth Papers, D (W) 1778/II/87, Staffordshire Record Office.
  - 14 Crowley sent these figures to Dartmouth in a letter of February 1766, found in *ibid.* D (W) 1778/II/158, because Dartmouth was then head of the Board of Trade. The printed version was in turn reprinted in [Thomas Crowley] *Letters and Dissertations on Various Subjects, By the Author of the Letter Analysis A.P. On the Disputes between Great Britain and America* (London: Dilly, Richardson and Urquhart, and Eliz. Brooke, [1776]), pp.19-20. In this instance, as in the *Dissertations on Liberty of Conscience*, the title page noted "Printed for the AUTHOR" - -meaning that Crowley subsidized the costs. Crowley included in his *Letters and Dissertations* the four pieces that had been gathered earlier as *Dissertations on the Grand Dispute between Great-Britain and America* [London,1774].
  - 15 Crowley, *Letters and Dissertations*, p.20. Crowley's figures were not necessarily accurate, however. His population estimates were probably low, as was his twelve shillings estimate. Grenville gave various amounts for expected stamp tax revenue, anywhere from £40,000 to £100,000. See John Bullion, *A Great and Necessary Measure* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982). See too Crowley's "letters" to Grenville on pp.4-7, and the characterizations of who won the war and who should carry the postwar burden in a published piece from the *Gazetteer*, dated 1 January 1766 (in *Letters and Dissertations*, pp.7-9), that prompted Benjamin Franklin to draft a retort dated five days later, printed in Labaree, et al., eds., *Papers of Franklin*, 13-24. Franklin and Crowley never did see eye-to-eye on the question of imperial rights and responsibilities.
  - 16 [William Knox] *Extra Official State Papers*, 2 vols. (London: J. Debrett, 1789) included in the appendix to volume 1 (on p.14) a letter that Grenville wrote to him on 4 September 1768, which read in part "Whether it would not be just and reasonable to grant to the Colonies Members of Parliament upon their petition to Parliament, for that purpose, in like manner as was done in the cases of Chester and Durham, is another question which, whenever such an application shall be properly made, will I hope be considered with every favourable disposition which their situation requires or admits of." Knox used the letter in an attempt to prove that Grenville supported his suggestion- -dating from the same period as Crowley's first thoughts on the subject, incidentally- -that Americans be seated in the House of Commons.
  - 17 From Crowley's "Observations and Propositions for an Accommodation between Great Britain and her Colonies," 10 October 1768, in *Letters and Disquisitions*, p.79. There is a printed copy at the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University. As noted in Thomas R. Adams, ed., *The American Controversy*, 2 vols. (Providence: Brown University Press,1980), it had been sent to Governor Samuel Ward, who received it in January 1769. There is no

way of knowing how many copies Crowley paid to have printed or to whom they were sent. Crowley certainly had the financial wherewithal to pay for what he wanted, both in his imperial reform efforts and in his struggles with other Quakers.

- 18 For Otis see William Tudor's adulatory *The Life of James Otis of Massachusetts* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1823); Ellen Elizabeth Brennan's critical "James Otis: Recreant and Patriot" *New England Quarterly* 12 (1939): 691-725; and Bernard Bailyn's more balanced *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: the Belknap Press, 1967), pp.176-181. which allows for Otis's personal peculiarities but also warned of the "confusion and difficulties inherent" if historians emphasize "principles above institutions" (p.176) in their quest to reconstruct Patriot notions about rights in the empire. Neither Grenville nor Otis thought much of Thomas Pownall's plans for imperial reform. Pownall was never concise, especially when compared with Crowley. In the first edition of *The Administration of the Colonies* (London: J. Wilkie, 1764) Pownall observed, vaguely, that the relationship between the mother country and the colonies "ought to be settled some way or the other." (p.38) He was only slightly clearer in 1774, though by then in his fifth edition. "No other line of pacification remains, than either that the Colonies be admitted into the Parliament of Great Britain by a general *British Union*; or that they have a *Parliament of their own under an American Union*." From *The Administration of the British Colonies* (London: J. Walter, 1774), p.82. Neither option was acceptable to enough politicians on either side of the Atlantic to work. For Pownall's gyrations see G.H. Guttridge, "Thomas Pownall's *The Administration of the Colonies: the Six Editions*" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series 26 (1969): 31-46.
- 19 Crowley, "Observations and Propositions," *Letters and Dissertations*, p.79.
- 20 As taken from the *Letters and Dissertations*, pp.137-144, See below for handwritten copies that ended up in the Chatham and Franklin papers. There is also a printed version, without the introductory "Memorial" but also dated 10 December 1770, preserved in the Library Company of Philadelphia collections.
- 21 See Franklin's draft letter of 6 January 1766 in Labaree, et al., eds., *Papers of Franklin*, 13:23-26. Franklin erred; the Stamp Act Congress had already made it clear that leading colonists felt they could not be adequately represented in Parliament.
- 22 Crowley to Franklin, 8 February 1766, in *ibid.*, 13:122.
- 23 Crowley's "letter" to a "Gentleman in America" is in *The Public Advertiser*, 21 October 1768; reprinted in Crowley, *Letters and Dissertations*, pp. 47-49; quotes from pp.48-49.
- 24 Dated 21 October 1768, from *The Public Advertiser*, 24 October 1768; reprinted in Labaree, et al., eds., *Papers of Franklin*, 15:238-241 (quote from p.241). A handwritten copy is also in Additional Manuscripts 36, 596, fos. 201-204 (quoted portion, fos. 203-204), British Library.
- 25 See, notably, Franklin to Lord Kames, 25 February 1767 and to Jacques Barbeu-Dubourg, 2 October 1770, in Labaree, et al., eds., *Papers of Franklin*, 14:62-71 and 17:233-234, resp. There are three copies of Crowley's plan in the Benjamin Franklin Papers at the American Philosophical Society library, all of them signed *Amor Patriae*, with no hint as to actual authorship. Two are

- dated 17 November 1770 and can be found in Volume 53, fol. 5 (which has the plan alone) and Volume 69, fol. 92 (which includes the memorial with the plan). The third, dated 10 December 1770, is in Volume 69, fol. 93. This last includes the plan and conditions but not the introductory memorial. Albert Henry Smyth, ed., *The Writing of Benjamin Franklin*, 10 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1905-1907), 10:291-292, mistakenly presented the plan as Franklin's. I made Smyth's error my own in *Neither Kingdom Nor Nation: The Irish Quest for Constitutional Rights, 1698-1800* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), pp.92-93.
- 26 William Franklin to Benjamin Franklin, 31 January 1769, in Labaree, et al., eds., *Papers of Franklin*, 16:35. Thus, four years later (see note 2 above) the father was echoing the son.
- 27 Benjamin Franklin to William Franklin, 1 September 1773, in *ibid.*, 30:387.
- 28 See Amor Patriae to Pitt, 2 February 1766 and 17 November 1770, in the Chatham Papers 30/8/97 and 30/8/82, resp., Public Record Office, Kew. Basil Williams, "Chatham and the Representation of the Colonies in the Imperial Parliament" *English Historical Review* 22 (1907): 756-758, edited yet another version, also from the Chatham Papers (30/8/97). "That the scheme was Chatham's own in its details is not probable, but its main outlines at any rate concides with his well-known views for making the house of commons more truly representative." (p.757) Compare Williams with Burt (see n. 1 above) on this matter. Both were a bit off in their observations.
- 29 Crowley mentioned his approaching Rockingham in a letter to Dartmouth of 1 February 1766 in the Dartmouth Papers, D (W) 1778/II/58. He apparently sent his finished plan to George III- -see the *Letters and Dissertations*, p.136.
- 30 See R. Hingston Fox, *Dr. John Fothergill and His Friends* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1919); Betsy Copping Corner and Dorothea Waley Singer, "Dr. John Fothergill, Peacemaker" *Proceedings of the American Philsophical Society* 98 (February 1954): 11-22; and Franklin's commentary in Labaree, et al., eds., *Papers of Franklin*, 21:360-599, *passim*.
- 31 Crowley (as Amor Patriae) to Pitt, 2 February 1766, Chatham Papers 30/8/97.
- 32 Problems of representation went to the very core of political identity in the empire and may well have been worsened with any attempt to alter the basic composition at Westminster. The Irish, for example, might have taken issue with the larger American representation in the Commons provided for in Crowley's plan- -50 M.P.s versus their 30- -because Ireland's population was larger than that of the colonies. Crowley was probably considering representation for the Anglo-Irish elite more than for the island as a whole- -thus his favoring the eastern fringe, which could have shaken an already precarious political situation for the so-called "Protestant Ascendancy" in that "kingdom." And of course an infusion of Irish and American members would have affected the movement for Parliamentary reform just getting underway in Britain itself.
- 33 Crowley (as Amor Patriae) to Pitt, 2 February 1766, Chatham Papers 30/8/97, PRO.
- 34 The Revolutionary Era does not really have an equivalent to the "blundering generation" historiography of the Civil War, though Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Background of the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, revised ed., 1931) does come close to performing that role.

- 35 See Crowley, *Letters and Dissertations*, p.35, an undated "Memorandum," ca. 1766. Crowley had no objections to using British troops to enforce imperial law in the colonies- -see *ibid.*, p.65 and his argument, ca. 1768-1769, that troops ought to be used to humble the Patriots "arbitrary and rebellious Spirits."
- 36 *Ibid.*, p.244, from "A Dissertation on Disputes between Great Britain and her Colonies," which he signed ANALYSIS A.P., and dated 10 October 1775.
- 37 After all, many British parliamentarians held to a centrist political philosophy, a view best articulated for the Revolutionary generation in William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765-1769), but they still adapted their ideas to their needs. Even now, in the midst of devolution within the British Isles and wider involvement in the European Community, centrists may yet find a way to keep their notions about indivisible sovereignty and the crown in parliament intact. But then Americans have been able to perform their own logical gymnastics with their concept of federalism. These are issues that I am pursuing at greater length elsewhere. I will only note here that the intergrationist approach taken by Crowley was taken by others over the same ten year period. For an early example see *An Account of a Late Conference on the Occurrences in America, In a Letter to a Friend* (London: J. Almon, 1766); for a later one see political reformer Samuel Clay Harvey's proposal, reprinted in Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, 9 vols. (Washington, D.C.: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1837-1853), 4th series, vol 1, pp.1204-1208. There were also those who sought a solution by moving in the opposite direction- -allowing the colonists some form of legislative autonomy while preserving direct imperial ties through the crown in parliament or the crown alone. For an example of the former see Joseph Galloway's 1774 plan presented at the First Continental Congress- -a revision of Franklin's 1754 Albany plan- -reprinted in Julian Boyd, *Anglo-American Union* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941); and the latter in [John Cartwright] *American Independence The Interest and Glory of Great-Britain. A New Edition* (London: H.S. Woodfall, 1775), the "postscript," pp. 1-51. Cartwright's ideas went far beyond those of Pownall and, in some respects, past those of Crowley as well.
- 38 Crowley, *Letters and Dissertations*, pp.249-251, from "A Copy of a letter to His MAJESTY," dated 31 October 1775.
- 39 From Crowley's blast at "the chief Priests or Preachers, Scribes or Clerks and Elders, who as Tools do rule," a printed sheet dated 3 October 1782, Adverse Box C2, Friends House Library, London.
- 40 From Crowley's 1784 handbill in *ibid.*
- 41 Crowley's will, proved in London on 18 December 1787, is in the Wills and Administrations at Somerset House, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, no. 1160, volume 12.
- 42 Mary Crowley had died in 1778. The burial records for both Thomas and Mary Crowley can be found in the London Quarterly Meeting, Digest Register of Burials, 1749-1837, Friends House Library; also the Society of Friends, Quarterly Meeting, London and Middlesex: no. 860, Burials 1776-1779, p.156, Public Record Office (Kew), Record Group 6/975 (for Mary); and no. 862, Burials, 1783-1787, p.270, PRO (Kew), RG 6/670 (for Thomas).