

MARY BETH NORTON. — *The British-Americans. The Loyalist Exiles in England 1774-1789*. Little, Brown & Co., Boston & Toronto, 1972. 339 pp.

Loyalists have been curiously handled by historians. Traditionally ignored by British scholars, snubbed or misunderstood by Americans, they have been the object so often of much misguided devotion by Canadians.¹ Recently, they have begun to emerge both from oblivion in America and the hands of the mythmakers in Canada. Among the most recent valuable studies must be counted Nelson's work on their ideology, *The American Tory* (1962), Smith's investigation of their military role, *Loyalists and Red-coats* (1964), and Brown's analysis of their socio-economic status, *The King's Friends. Composition and Motives of the American Loyalist Claimants* (1965) and his *The Good Americans* (1969). To this select list must now be added Dr. Norton's examination of the loyalist exiles in England.² Such scholarship, no longer isolated, holds the realistic hope that the loyalist phenomenon will become a matter of growing scholarly concern.

Dr. Norton's work, a revision of her 1969 Harvard dissertation, focuses on the seven or eight thousand people who fled to England from 1774 to 1784. They formed about ten percent of those who abandoned their homes in the Thirteen Colonies. Her raw material is found principally in Audit Office papers (A.O. 12 and A.O. 13) at the Public Record Office, but now available at a number of archives in Canada and the United States, and yet ignored by scholars until Brown demonstrated their enormous value. The usefulness of this source and others are described in an excellent bibliographical essay (pp. 260-72).

The author believes that most loyalists originated where the serious fighting occurred. This view is in marked contrast to the earlier notion that the number of exiles in a particular region was directly proportional to the strength of loyalism in that locality. Brown had earlier concluded that loyalism was a "distinctly urban and seaboard phenomenon," with major rural inland pockets only in New York and North Carolina. Dr. Norton believes that only the presence of the British army gave Americans adequate incentive to declare their loyalty to the crown. The principal exodus of loyalists from Massachusetts, as an example, took place in 1775 and 1776, before the British garrison at Boston withdrew. There were more exiles in England from Massachusetts than from any other colony, yet it was generally thought the province was the "most disaffected" of any in America. By contrast, few fled England from New York, which had strong loyalist

¹ For a bibliographical survey see Wallace BROWN, "The View at Two Hundred Years: The Loyalists of the American Revolution," *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, LXXX (April 1970), 25-47.

² An introductory survey of the question was presented by Wallace BROWN, "American Loyalists in Britain," *History Today*, XIX (October 1969), 672-78. A few prominent refugees were earlier considered by Lewis EISTETIN, *Divided Loyalties. Americans in England during the War of Independence* (Boston: 1933).

feelings, until after the defeat at Yorktown, a fact explained only by the presence of a strong British garrison on Long Island and Manhattan Island.

Dr. Norton shows that exile did not tend to break down social barriers between loyalists. She found "little sense of community among refugees" (p. 78). Initially they thought of their dislocation as temporary; the news of the setback at Saratoga (1778) obliged them to begin to make rather more permanent plans. Hitherto they had congregated largely in London; thereafter an exodus began to the provinces, especially to Bristol, Glasgow (Virginians), and Chester (New York). Presumably it was Glasgow's domination of the Virginia tobacco trade which drew the colonists from the Chesapeake northwards, but Dr. Norton does not comment on this.

Wherever the exiles went in Britain, they found not a home as they had hoped but largely an alien culture and a government uninterested in their advice and initially unmindful of their plight. As Dr. Norton puts it, "the loyalists realized how American they were only after they had abandoned America" (p. 41). Their isolation was later given further emphasis as their knowledge of America became dated and distorted, the fate of any exile, it would seem! Brown had earlier found that the government was in general "woefully negligent in rallying and making use of the loyalists," while loyalist strength "would have been considerably greater had the British government and army shown more interest and finesse toward their real or potential allies, or at least avoided harassing them." Dr. Norton now has added to this picture by showing how little heed at first was paid the advice on American affairs given by loyalists to the government of Lord North. Before the Declaration of Independence those who had fled America for England wholly failed to make any impression upon British policy. They were rarely consulted; and when, as in the case of Thomas Hutchinson, the former governor of Massachusetts, they were frequently asked their opinion, their views were ignored. Only after the defeat at Saratoga did loyalist suggestions begin to coincide with British policy. Their view was that the overwhelming body of Americans preferred union with Britain to independence; the war therefore should be carried on chiefly in those parts supposedly more loyal than "the reportedly more disaffected northern colonies" (p. 167). Dr. Norton believes that the only time the loyalist lobby succeeded it helped solidify the government in its own mistaken direction of the war: the launching of the southern campaign which led to Yorktown. The evidence she advances, however, is not conclusive.

Dr. Norton has taken great pains to identify as many as possible of the exiles. They were a mixed lot: colonial officials, lawyers, clerics, doctors, large and small merchants and shopkeepers, absentee landowners and small farmers, artisans and poor urban labourers. Unfortunately she attempts no analysis of the proportions between one group and another, nor of the relative group size of the claims for compensation which they eventually submitted to the government. Such information would enable us to estimate their relative wealth and their general ability to secure credit and so become

re-established in exile. Brown had earlier shown that, though loyalists counted many poor people among their numbers, many southerners and New Englanders were well-to-do. Probably an inordinately large proportion of these made their way to England, where London-based loyalists formed the majority of claimants, though they formed less than one-tenth of all exiles. Since forty-five percent of the 2,908 cases studied by Brown asked for compensation of £1,000 or more (and of these one-third claimed £5,000 or more), it would seem that Dr. Norton's exiles were predominately from an economic elite. This would perhaps help to explain their vociferousness in seeking compensation from Britain. The poor, with much smaller losses, made less trouble for the government.

Despite the relative wealth of the English exiles, few had sufficient capital or credit to survive indefinitely, especially in a period of wartime inflation, an important point, which neither Norton nor Brown mentions. Professional men usually lacked appropriate training for England, and so could not immediately be employed. Officials could not be easily re-employed, as few colonial positions came open. In this connection, Dr. Norton suggests rather rashly that the establishment of separate governments for New Brunswick and Cape Breton in 1784 was largely a scheme to create colonial posts for unemployed loyalists (p. 240). Clerics, if they were lucky, were offered rather mean, rural livings or were granted pensions by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

The government, or rather the British taxpayer, ultimately came to the aid of all; but before the policy was enunciated financial anxiety was the lot of most families. Although Dr. Norton's figures are not clear, it would seem that by the end of hostilities almost £157,000 had been granted in pensions to exiled loyalists. This relative parsimony on the part of the government occasioned general resentment. Widespread lobbying of the government began among the loyalists in earnest only when the terms of the peace treaty were known. Despite the beliefs of both the American and British peace negotiators that the treaty would be adhered to, the loyalists believed, quite correctly as it turned out, that the rebels would ignore Article V, by which Congress was to recommend to the states the restoration of all property of persons who had not borne arms for the king, and grant to others a year in which to attempt to recover their property. The government for its part thought otherwise. As Dr. Norton explains, "In order to cut its losses and escape from the war as quickly as possible, the Shelburne administration elected to shoulder the responsibility for compensating what it thought would be a few loyalists too obnoxious to receive consideration from the Americans. But the treaty it accepted on those grounds not only brought down the government but also involved Great Britain in the affairs of the loyalists for years to come. For, because of American hostility towards the loyalists, what the ministry had originally envisioned as a brief enquiry into a limited number of claims from refugees not compensated by the United States turned into a comprehensive, detailed, and exceptionally complex

investigation into the cases of more than three thousand loyalist exiles" (p. 184).

Faced with the failure of Article V, the loyalists, hitherto isolated individuals and insular small groupings, banded together to lobby for compensation from Britain. Their efforts were very successful. Though "blatant falsification was rare" (p. 205), the claims were invariably extravagant. Especially inflated were estimates of land values, which, for various reasons, not considered by Dr. Norton, fell in the 1780's from their pre-war heights. By the 1790's many of the exaggerations of the decade before had been transformed into serious under-assessments, as land prices recovered and attained unprecedented levels. In the end 2,291 claimants received £3,033,091 or about thirty-seven percent of their estimated losses of £8.2 millions.

It was generally found easier to estimate the value of land than of chattels or merchants' stock. Since the claims commissioners usually accepted the lowest estimates, Dr. Norton believes that "small landowners, if their land was cultivated, received a higher percentage return on their claim than did artisans, tradesmen, and professional men, the bulk of whose property consisted of furniture, houses, books, tools and the like" (p. 219). Some of the professionals were additionally compensated with pensions, but merchants apparently fared the least well among claimants.

So much attention has focused on the work of the claims commission, that it is usually forgotten that other forms of financial support for the exiles was forthcoming. At the beginning of 1786, 840 refugees were still receiving pensions amounting annually to £57,528. Most of these were poor, and as they had held no property in America, they had laid no claim for compensation. Furthermore, a large number of loyalist officers were granted half-pay, which had not been originally envisaged when they had been given commissions. In addition many with no right to half-pay actually received military pensions: "The exiles quickly learned that it was possible for men with only minimal military pretensions to qualify for allowances, and they soon came to regard the half-pay system as nothing more than another kind of compensation for their sufferings and losses in America" (p. 232). For a government struggling with "Economic Reform" in an attempt to decrease the National Debt in the years after 1783, this was remarkably generous.

The book, in conclusion, ought to be of great interest both to social and political historians of the eighteenth century. It doubtless will give rise to further, more particular study of loyalists who settled permanently in Ireland and Scotland, as well as in England. It should also prove of permanent value to historians of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, where so many of the English exiles ultimately settled.

Julian GWYN,
University of Ottawa.