

MS American Loyalists 1783¹

Much of Charles Wesley's poetry in the late 1770s and the turn to the 1780s revolved around the war in North America, criticizing the motives of the American rebels, chastising the British military leaders (particularly William Howe) for their missteps, and calling upon the British people to pray for God's forgiveness and renewed blessing of their righteous cause—see in particular MS Howe, MS Patriotism, *Hymns for the Nation* (1781), and *Hymns for the National Fast* (1782). As the war drew to a close, with the provisional peace agreement of November 1782 finalized in September 1783, Wesley's attention turned to the fate of British soldiers and those colonists who had remained loyal to Britain. He gave voice to their suffering, their sense of betrayal by the actions of their commanders, and the less than enthusiastic welcome on their return in an extended poem cast in their voice.

This poem has survived in two settings. The most complete version is within the same notebook that contains MS Patriotism, starting on what would be page 133, but paginated separately (as shown below). This notebook is part of the collection in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre, accession number MA 1977/559 (Charles Wesley Notebooks Box 2). There is also a looseleaf copy of the poem, containing only the first three parts, in the collection at MARC: accession number MA 1977/583/2 (Charles Wesley Notebooks Box 4). Interestingly, this shorter version was titled "The Testimony of the American Royalists," highlighting their specific support for the monarchy.

It is unclear which of these versions was first, and there are only scattered variants. Thus the longer version is transcribed below, with variants in the loose-leaf version annotated. The transcription is provided with permission of the Librarian and Director, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under the editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: August 1, 2010.

**The Testimony
of the American Loyalists²
1783.³**

- [1.] Outcasts of men, by all forsook,
To whom shall we for succour look
 To whom our griefs declare?
Will high or low incline their ear,
Or with humane compassion hear
 The cry of sad despair?
2. Yet will we speak, if haply some
In less flagitious times to come
 May call our woes to mind,
With melting eye our sufferings see,
Mov'd with the mournful history
 Their brethren leave behind.
3. Transplanted to a foreign land,
We our fidelity maintain'd
 To that from which we came,
Nor ever once degenerate⁴ prov'd,
But still our King and Country lov'd,
 In every place⁵ the same.

²MA 1977/583/2 reads "Royalists."

³Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 1:123–29.

⁴Ori., "ungrateful."

⁵Beneath "place" the word "state" is written. Neither is crossed out.

4. Cherish'd beneath our Country's wings,
Protected by the best of kings,
 In affluence and peace
(By British wealth and blood secur'd)
Under our vines we sat, assur'd
 Of lasting happiness.
5. But Faction's sons, from Gaul⁶ set free,
For mad, unbridled liberty
 With fierce ambitions burn'd,
And sav'd by Her from hostile harms,
The Parricides rebellious arms
 Against their Mother⁷ turn'd.
6. The spark which first from Britain came
His Patriots blew into a flame,
 To raise their Party higher,
Nor fear'd intestine war to wage,
Whole nations in the cause t' engage,
 And set the world on fire.
7. By Patriots who their Country sold,
With arms, intelligence, and gold
 Abundantly supplied,
What wonder, if the desperate Few
Into an host tumultuous grew,
 And God and man defied!

⁶I.e., France.

⁷MA 1977/583/2 has "Country" instead of "Mother."

8. The Great in their defence arose,
Glad, “that they dared their King oppose”;
The Friends of wickedness
Their virtue prais’d with zeal unfeign’d
In senates throng’d their Right maintain’d,
And wish’d their cause success.

Part II.

- [1.] T’ insure success infallible,
They sent their Party’s Chiefs to quell[1]
Their own most dear allies,
With Fifty thousand Veterans brave,
To conquer, reconcile, and save
Their feeble enemies.
2. But not to conquer or suppress,
Not to restore the public peace,
Was the Commander’s⁸ care,
Not to revenge his Country’s wrong,
But by a thousand arts prolong
The ruinous, gainful, war.
3. With ease the Rebels he o’rthrew,
And rais’d; and routed them anew;
And took; and let them go:
Pitied,⁹ when at his feet they lay,
And scorn’d to seize his helpless prey,
Or give the final¹⁰ blow.

⁸General Sir William Howe.

⁹MA 1977/583/2 has “*He spar’d*” instead of “Pitied.”

¹⁰In MA 1977/583/2 “final” is underlined and “gracious” written in the margin as an alternative.

4. But did he spare a Rival Chief,
Or yield a British host relief?
 Deaf to his King's commands,
Refusing his decisive aid,
He left his Countrymen betray'd
 To the rebellious bands.
5. Averse from¹¹ us our King who lov'd,
He angrily repuls'd, reprov'd,
 And from his presence cast,
Forbad us force with force t' oppose,
And favour'd our revengeful foes,
 And spar'd from first to last.
6. Witness the victories he gain'd,
But stopt — and unconcern'd remain'd,
 To let the vanquish'd breathe,
(Whene'er they gave up all for lost)
And recollect their scatter'd host,
 So oft redeem'd from death.
7. "Why shoud he crush the *huted*¹² Few,¹³
"The famish'd sick to death pursue,
 "Or their Commander seize,
"To give their Cause a¹⁴ mortal wound,
"His patriotic friends confound,
 "And his proud Rivals please?["]

¹¹MA 1977/583/2 has "to" instead of "from."

¹²I.e., in huts encamped at Valley Forge.

¹³Ori., "foe."

¹⁴MA 1977/583/2 has "its" instead of "a."

8. Concluding worst than he began,
Fulfilling¹⁵ his pacific plan,
 He set the rabble free,
Their towns and provinces restored,
And left us to the yoke, or sword
 Or lawless Tyranny.

9. One only task was yet behind,
T' adorn a Chief, so brave, so kind
 His prostrate foes to spare,
While Beauty's charms compleat his bliss,
And lawrel'd hosts with shouts dismiss
 The Thunderbolt¹⁶ of war.

10. The Triumph he himself decreed
Let fame thro' every nation spread,
 And praise what he hath done,
"His Country sunk, his Party rais'd,
"Unking'd¹⁷ his humbl'd King, and plac'd¹⁸
 "Rebellion on the throne."

¹⁵Ori., "~~In Compleating~~."

¹⁶In MA 1977/583/2 "Thunderbolt" is underlined; "Soul and God" is written in the margin as an alternate.

¹⁷"Unking'd" is underlined, and "Pull'd down" written below it as an alternative.

¹⁸MA 1977/583/2 reads "His humbled King unking'd, and plac'd." But "humbled" is underlined and "conquer'd" is written in the margin as an alternate.

Part III.

- [1.] With all his spoils the Hero sails!
Yet private still alas prevails
Above the public good,
And Britain's generous sons agree
"The friends of freedom shall not be
Too suddenly subdued."^[19]
2. The men with their Commanders join
To carry on the *sole design*
For which they cross'd the main,
Themselves enriching at our cost—
"Let George's provinces be lost,
So they the plunder gain."^[20]
3. Th' inviting, wide-extended field
Doth booty,¹⁹ if not glory yield,
And still secures their pay:
Men, Generals, sport, and take their ease
And both our wives and daughters seize
As their own lawful prey.
4. True followers of the gallant H—s,²⁰
The cause of Rebels they espouse,
And vow to leave them free,
Studious their foes to sooth and please;
On them is shown their tenderness,
On us their cruelty.

¹⁹MA 1977/583/2 reads "plunder" instead of "booty."

²⁰Almost certainly: Howe's.

5. Averse from us who take their part,
And serve them with a chearful²¹ heart
And²² too officious care:
They knew it our sincere intent,
T' uphold²³ the British Government,
And terminate the war.
6. The arms we lost by rebel power,
Our Countrymen woud not restore
Or trust us to defend
Ourselves, our Country and our King,
“For who in earnest fight, may bring
“The quarrel to an end.^[3]”
7. Who fought against their sovereign Lord,
Forfeiting oft both life and word,²⁴
Are by our chiefs²⁵ dismiss:
Us only they with rigor treat,
And none the fate of rebels meet
Except the Loyalist.
8. None for our lives or safety cares,
Whom Congress drags to death, nor spares
The febleness of age:
Cl—n²⁶ a tame indifference shows,
Nor dares retaliate on our foes,
Or check their bloody rage.

²¹MA 1977/583/2 reads “willing” instead of “chearful.”

²²Ori., “A.”

²³MA 1977/583/2 reads “To prop” instead of “T’ uphold.”

²⁴MA 1977/583/2 reads “And forfeited so oft their word.”

²⁵Ori., “generously.”

²⁶General George Clinton

9. Witness the venerable man, ⁺
Whose blood with that of thousands slain
 Beneath the altar cries:
The martyr his reward receives,
But an eternal monument leaves
 Of Cl—n's²⁷ cowardise.
10. “But did he not at last awake,
“And force the rebel-powers to quake,
 “While on their troops he flew?”
He beat their troops, he took their town
And sated with immense renown
 Back to his fort withdrew.
11. There with his sweet Imperial²⁸ lyre
He cool'd the flame of martial fire
 That burnt within his breast,²⁹
And far from the loud din of arms,³⁰
And sooth'd with his own Music's charms,
 Injoy'd a glorious rest.

⁺ John Roberts³¹

²⁷General George Clinton.

²⁸“Nero's” is suggested in a bottom note as an alternative to or explanation of “Imperial.”

²⁹MA 1977/583/2 reads “That warm'd his generous breast.”

³⁰MA 1977/583/2 reads “And hid from all the din of arms.”

³¹John Roberts was condemned and hung in November 1778 for lending support to the British army during their occupation of Philadelphia.

[Part] IV.

- [1.] Soon as we saw our native shore,
We deem'd our griefs and sufferings o're,
And fondly hoped to find
A friend in every British breast,
Those patrons of the poor distrest,
Those lovers of mankind.
2. But who the fugitives receiv'd,
Who our necessities reliev'd,
Or reach'd us out their hand?
To them we for protection fled;
They scarce permitted us to tread
Th' inhospitable land.
3. Here, for our Country's sake undone,
We pined, unpitied, and unknown,
Without a comforter:
None for our souls or bodies cared,
Our story with compassion heard,
Or dropt a generous tear.

4. The people swimming with the tide,
And strenuous on the rebels side,
 Rejoic'd in their success
(Rais'd from the dust to sovereign sway;)
And prais'd the men who cast away
 Our useless colonies.

5. What wonder then, if the true Seed
Of Those that doom'd their King to bleed,
 In Satan's cause⁺ employ'd,
Sworn enemies to the regal State,
Unshaken Royalists shoud hate
 And wish us all destroy'd.

6. Triumph'd the Great in deeper guilt,
In loyal blood of thousands spilt,
 In England's glory gone;
They trampled us with proud disdain,
Us who so long oppos'd the men
 They set in George's throne.

⁺ Commonly called, The good Old Cause, or The Solemn League and Covenant.³²

³²Invoking an analogy with the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) between the Scots and the English Parliament at the time of the English Civil War.

7. Of ill-got wealth and power possest,
Coud pity move a patriot's breast,
Or make a Sh[elburne] feel?
(Statesmen who mock the quenchless fire,
Till Satan pays his slaves their hire,
And gives them thrones in hell.)
8. Woud men like these the presence bear
Of us, who coud their arts declare
Their deeds of darkness trace,
And tell to all succeeding times
Their treasons, cruelties, and crimes,
And monstrous wickedness!
9. Again they practis'd all their wiles
T' appropriate their Country's³³ spoils
Her justice to defeat,
To make her falsify her word,
And leave the Loyalists abhor'd
To perish at her feet.
10. And if the Patriots still prevail,
If public faith and justice fail,

³³Ori., "the Nation's."

A full reward we have
For all our sufferings in their Cause,
While Britain doth our every loss
Compensate — with a grave!