

By JAY LOVESTONE

Reminiscences of an American Loyalist 1738-89. Edited by Jonathan Boucher. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York.

THE Reminiscences of an American Loyalist" is the autobiography of a certain Reverend Jonathan Boucher who was rector of Annapolis on the eve of the first American revolution. The memoirs thus gathered are edited by his grandson. Mr. Boucher was a well-known preacher in his day. He was pro-government to the core. With the outbreak of armed struggle in the colonies Boucher was forced to go back to England where he was subsequently entrusted with the education of the sons of several outstanding figures in British tory politics at the close of the 18th century.

The writer of these memoirs came to Virginia in 1759 and soon became an intimate friend of George Washington. This friendship continued till late in 1775 when the preacher, much harassed by revolutionists, was compelled to flee the country.

Thru Tory Eyes.

A good portion of these reminiscences is of no interest at all to the reader. The details of personal and family life concern us only to the extent that they give us a picture of the social conditions at hand. In this respect, the Boucher memoirs have lasting value to the student of American history. Of course, no primary-school historian will gather any inspiration from this book. But for the historical materialist, the Marxian student of the first American revolution, there is substantial instructive material available in this writing.

Reverend Boucher looks at the first American revolution solely thru the eyes of the hide-bound tory, pro-government man at any cost and at any and all times. He tries hard to give us the impression of fair-mindedness and nonpartisanship. He succeeds only in emphasizing his tory viewpoint. For instance, Boucher speaks disdainfully of George Washington because his first education was received at the hands of a convict servant whom his father bought for a school-master.

The Church and Our First Revolution. BOUCHER vividly describes the weakening, the sharp shaking of the foundation of the established church in the colonies in the immediate pre-revolutionary days and during the revolution. He says boastfully:

"In my own parish I remember with pride and comfort I had not a single dissenter of any denomination. Some of the thoughtful people of those less happy parishes applied to me to go amongst them and endeavor to check the delusion. Accordingly I prepared some sermons which I delivered among them, and by the blessing of God with such effect, that many who had been decoyed from the church returned to it . . ."

In the eyes of Mr. Boucher, who was a typical tory preacher, the forces opposed to the government "seemed to aim at a total renversement, and to stick at nothing to attain their end." This is the usual criticism of revolutionists at all times by all shades and sections of the defenders of the status quo of class relationships. Tho admitting that some individuals of his order "had been irregular, licentious and profligate," he bitterly cries out against an act providing for the trial of his fellow bible-pounders by a court composed equally of laymen and clerks.

Then Boucher lifts the lid off the attitude of his church to the revolution when he declares: "The church and the churchman did stand much in their way; or the great placemen had cunningly contrived to place our order in the front of the battle, that themselves might take shelter behind us."

Those of our devout who have no sense of humor might well chafe at Reverend Boucher's implied disapproval of the reactionaries' skilful use of the church and their faith in the prowess of the heavenly father's representatives on earth as a shield against revolutionary bullets and bayonets. To go on:

"The unpopular part I had lately taken respecting government had set the people against me," says our tory preacher. This leads Boucher to characterize the Americans of his day as "indeed a singularly violent, purse-proud and factious people." All of which goes only to show that the masses were right in their attitude towards the church which then, as is today, was primarily an integral part of the whole state apparatus which they were fighting to destroy. Boucher clearly reveals to us the close workings between the assembly of Maryland and the church in these enlightening lines:

"The management of the assembly was left very much to me; and hardly a bill was brought in which I did not either draw or at least revise, and either got it passed or rejected. It is not necessary here to set down how such things are done; they were done in that provincial assembly; and I have not a doubt but that they are done in the same manner and by the same means in the British parliament. All the governor's speeches, messages, etc., and also some pretty important and lengthy papers from the council were of my drawing up. All these things were, if not certainly known, yet strongly suspected."

Indeed, the pious and righteous preacher doesn't utter a harsh word in all his reminiscences about the means used to forge such a oneness of church and government. The tory confession is not so all-inclusive as all that. The reverend takes much pain, however, to question all the means used by his enemies—the opposing class, struggling for supremacy.

An Estimate of Washington.

A VERY interesting tory estimate of Washington is thus given by Boucher:

"I cannot conceive how he could, otherwise than thru the interested representation of a party, have ever been spoken of as a great man. He is shy, silent, stern, slow and cautious, but has no quickness of parts, extraordinary penetration, nor an elevated style of thinking. In his moral character he is regular, temperate, strictly just and honest (excepting that as a Virginian, he has lately found that there is no moral turpitude in not paying what he confesses he owes to a British creditor) . . . But he seems to have nothing generous or affectionate in his character."

Boucher goes on to tell about one of his meetings with Washington while the latter was on his way to assume command of the Continental Army. "Everybody seemed to be on fire, either with rum or patriotism, or both." The preacher narrates how he warned Washington that many events would transpire which have since then occurred. Washington then assured him that no such things as a civil war or struggle for independence would ensue. Says Boucher: "With more earnestness than was usual with his great reserve he scouted my apprehensions, adding (and I believe with perfect sincerity) that if I ever heard of his joining in such measures, I had his leave to set him down for everything wicked."

Obviously, Washington couldn't then see the objective logic of class warfare. The inexorable development of the conflict of opposing classes cannot be halted or dominated by personal wishes, promises, or hopes of any individual, no matter who he may be.

(To Be Concluded Next Issue.)