

## CHAPTER III

### A CHARACTERIZATION

No more is known of the ancestry of Josiah Tucker than that his father was a Welsh peasant of small property. No hereditary tendencies can be suggested, therefore; but a brief characterization<sup>1</sup> of the man may be drawn from his life, and especially from his writings. Since interest in his life, and especially from his writings. Since interest centers in his authorship, emphasis will be laid upon those traits that give individuality to his writings.

#### I. TUCKER A THINKER

Tucker was, first of all, an able thinker. His mind was clear and logical. This made him systematic in his treatment of every subject, a characteristic attested to by nearly every one of his writings. It also led him to desire consistency<sup>2</sup> with all the passion of the philosopher. Again, his mind was actively inquisitive. It raised questions and proposed problems. This made him critical. He accepted nothing upon faith which he could test by reason.<sup>3</sup> Still,

<sup>1</sup> The characterization which follows is no eulogy; it is a simple statement of the impressions made upon the writer in his reading of Tucker's works.

<sup>2</sup> "Tho I make no pretensions to infallibility . . . yet I would willingly support the general character of a consistent writer . . . This hath been my aim thro' life and wherever I have failed it was thro' ignorance and not by design." *Letters to Dr. Kippis*, pp. 4 and 5.

<sup>3</sup> This is well illustrated (remembering that Tucker was an 18th century clergyman) by his assertion of "the inalienable right of private judgment" in his *Letter to Dr. Kippis* (p. 18) where he says: "Christ

again, his mind was progressive. It moved on persistently until it had reached answers to its questions and solutions to its own problems, which answers and solutions satisfied its own logical tests. This made him constructive and creative. He never left a subject satisfied with mere destructive criticism. His writings abound with "polities" and remedies.<sup>1</sup> After criticising the existing poor system, he gave a detailed plan for bettering it; <sup>2</sup> when he discussed American affairs, he offered his own solution of the problem; <sup>3</sup> he criticized Locke and Hobbes, and then offered his own system of political thought; <sup>4</sup> and so on, almost every criticism of his being followed by a constructive program. The most striking and comprehensive illustration of his tendency to invent ways and means is to be found in the "skeleton" of his great work.<sup>5</sup> A large part of this great

himself expects that we should use our reason and our judgment in understanding His laws and applying His general instructions to particular times and circumstances."

<sup>1</sup>To those who might regard him as a political and commercial nostrum peddler, because of his many schemes for betterment, Tucker says, in justification of the theorist reformer: "I am also aware that there is a customary prepossession entertained against projects of all kinds and that projectors are looked upon as a race of beings who have something very singular and whimsical in their composition. And yet I think it must be allowed, that notwithstanding all the prejudice which some chimerical gentlemen of this stamp have drawn upon themselves, there must be both projects and projectors, when things are bad and wanting mending; otherwise they never could be better nor the faults corrected." This is but a paragraph of a three page defense of the theorist-reformer. See *Essay on Trade, 3rd Ed.*, pp. 141-144.

<sup>2</sup>See *Manifold Causes of Increase of Poor*.

<sup>3</sup>Viz., Complete voluntary separation from the colonies, the central thesis of all of his American tracts.

<sup>4</sup>See his *Treatise on Civil Government*.

<sup>5</sup>See *Appendix* of this monograph, where the "skeleton" is printed in full.

work, as therein outlined, would have consisted in "polities" for reforms in commerce and in government.

A logical, inquiring, creative mind is the mind of a theorist, and Tucker was a bold and original theorist. Two tests of the well-grounded theorist were fully met by him:

(1) He did not lose faith in his conclusions because passing events did not immediately justify them, or because men did not at once accept them and act upon them.

An example of his confidence in his own conclusions, even when events seemed to argue against them, occurs in a postscript to one of his American tracts,<sup>1</sup> in which he forcefully presented his conviction that separation was inevitable. In the postscript he stated that news of a victory over the American rebels had just come. This was early in the war (1776), but so far from doubting his thesis and withholding his tract from publication, or qualifying his conclusions so as to save his reputation in case the British should ultimately retain the colonies, he boldly issued the tract, and commented:

"Arguing from mere contingencies and the chance of war is at best but the *chance of war*, and is the more fatally delusive, as it is so flattering to human vanity. Indeed it has no weight at all in the balance against the natural and therefore, in the end the necessary, course of things."<sup>2</sup>

His faith in the ultimate triumph of right reason and his belief that his own conclusions were products of right reason, despite the rejection of them by others, is well illustrated in his argument for the union of England and Ireland. He closed a compact, forceful plea thus:

"Nevertheless, strong and convincing as these reasons for

<sup>1</sup> *Series of Answers, etc.* (1776).

<sup>2</sup> See *Postscript of Series of Answers*.

union are, I do not depend on them for success in the present <sup>1</sup> case. For that man must be very ignorant of human nature, who expects to subdue deeprooted prejudice merely by the force of reasoning.<sup>2</sup> But there is a tide in human affairs to which prejudice itself must yield, because it cannot resist it."<sup>3</sup>

(2) Depending upon his reasoning, he made a number of prophecies, which were amply justified by events. For examples, he prophesied the separation from the American colonies, the union with Ireland, the ultimate abolition of special chartered privileges, and the rise of a great American nation. In every case his prophecy was a logical conclusion from his knowledge of men and of conditions.

## II. TUCKER AN OBSERVER

Tucker was, secondly, a careful observer of the world about him and a close student of recorded facts. Although he was so confidently logical a theorist, he was not a mere dialectical visionary. A study of his writings amply confirms his own clear statement<sup>3</sup> that he was not content with mere formal beauty or accuracy.

That he was no cave-hermit philosopher is abundantly proven by his works. They evidence his instinct for personal observation and for original research. His earliest work, *The History of Methodism*, was the result of his study of this sect, as its votaries lived and preached in his own city. For his treatises upon trade, he drew his materials, in part, from conversations with merchant parishioners, from observations in and about Bristol's wharves and harbors and places of manufacture, and from personal

<sup>1</sup>The tract is dated October 19, 1785.

<sup>2</sup>*Union or Separation*, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>"I have ever made it a rule to prefer things to words, ideas to sounds, and sense to language." See *Letter to Dr. Kippis*, p. 117.

knowledge of English pastures, marshes and rivers. When he wrote of the poor system, he quoted the poor laws; when he condemned monopoly, he examined the grants of privilege under Elizabeth and James I.; when he discoursed upon politics, he first traced out the historic Gothic system of England. These are but illustrations.<sup>1</sup> One of the clearest impressions left upon a reader of his works, is that he was a close observer of men and of things and a thoughtful student of history.

To say that Tucker studied facts, and either directly induced his theories, or corrected his theories to accord with his fact findings, is not to say that he made no use of other men's writings. He appears to have been well acquainted with what previous writers upon economics, politics and religion had written, and was, doubtless, in some measure influenced by them, but he did not give much weight to mere authority.<sup>2</sup>

His knowledge and thought emboldened him to criticize commonly accepted ideas, if his own independent conclusions were antagonistic to them. He says:

“One would not willingly run counter to the settled notions of mankind and yet one ought not to make a sacrifice of truth to mere numbers and the authority of opinion, especially if it should appear that these are truths of great moment to the welfare of society.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the section treating of Tucker's *Historical Sense* in Chapter I, Part II, of this monograph for a fuller treatment of this idea.

<sup>2</sup> “When other arguments are equal the weight of authority ought to turn the scale, and this maxim I venture to apply to all cases whatsoever, in church or in state, and to all arts, sciences and professions.” *Letters to Dr. Kippis*, pp. 68 and 69. For a similar statement see *Treatise on Government*, p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> *Four Tracts*, p. 20.

## III. TUCKER INDEPENDENT

Tucker was independent. His confidence in his own conclusions, and his light estimate of mere authority or of public opinion, are bases for an independence in thought. The fact that he did not servilely seek preferment has already been developed in treating of his life. Perhaps the most marked illustration that he was a truth-seeker rather than a place-seeker, was his resignation of the commission to write a treatise of commerce for the instruction of the Prince of Wales.<sup>1</sup> Such a commission might have contributed both to his fame and to his fortune, but when he found that his conclusions were very variant from popular ideas, and would, therefore, be accounted unsuitable for the instruction of the Prince, he yielded the opportunity rather than that he should present a treatise whose teachings should be acceptably altered from the conclusions to which his study had led him. This act alone is ample proof that his frequent declarations<sup>2</sup> of independence are not empty words.

Tucker struggled for a still higher form of independence. He endeavored to free himself from the insular prejudices of a British citizen, and he strove consciously to become a citizen of the world.<sup>3</sup> Although not a widely traveled man, he lived, observantly and thoughtfully, in a world's trading port and preached a world-embracing religion, so that from speculations upon international commerce and upon the uni-

<sup>1</sup> *Four Tracts preface*, pp. ix and x.

<sup>2</sup> Typical of them is: "The writer of the following pages professes himself to be of no party; he disdains the idea of bigotry in behalf of any set of men whatever; he owes no particular service either to those in power or to those in opposition; he aspires to the character of an independent man, a friend of his country, etc." *Dispassionate Thoughts on Amer. War*, pp. 6 and 7.

<sup>3</sup> This thought is further developed in the section on *Jealousy of Trade* in part ii, chap. iv. of this monograph.

versal brotherhood of man, his thought passed the confines of island narrowness and sought world relations. His advocacy of the naturalization bills, and his condemnations of war and of jealousy of trade, are all, in large part, the fruits of his cosmopolitanism.

#### IV. TUCKER SINCERE

Tucker was a sincere man. Faith in his own thought and contentment with his moderate preferment consort naturally with sincerity. He sought the truth, and expressed it boldly when he thought that he had found it. Neither the contumely of a derisive mob<sup>1</sup> nor the gilded promises of powerful politicians<sup>2</sup> induced him to write other than he believed. His style as a writer, in its directness and utter lack of affectation, reflects this spirit of sincerity. He testified frequently to the intent of being an honest seeker after truth. To Dr. Kippis he wrote:

“ You are, on the whole, a candid and impartial seeker after truth; and I solemnly promise to follow you in the same pursuit . . . let what will be the consequence . . . If I am mistaken few persons have taken more pains to be rightly informed than I have.”<sup>3</sup>

He relied upon reason and honesty, and desired his works to be accepted solely upon their merits. As to any errors he may have made, he says:

“ Should anything appear which convinces me that I have been essentially mistaken in what I have asserted, I here assure the public that I will immediately retract it; thinking it no disgrace for a fallible man to confess himself mistaken.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Gent's Mag.*, vol. xxi, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> See *Letters to Shelburne*, pp. 2 and 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to Dr. Kippis*, pp. 5 and 132.

<sup>4</sup> *Preface to Six Sermons*, p. iv.

This honest desire to get at the truth was further evidenced by Tucker's custom of submitting his more important manuscripts to friends for criticisms. This was neither perfunctory, nor merely complimentary to the friends. He sought real criticism. In his letters to Dr. Birch and to Dr. Forster, he insisted that they should point out every error which they detected. The best evidence that he really sought the critical judgment of friends is the fact that he sometimes acted upon their expressed judgment. He entirely suppressed <sup>1</sup> a lengthy preliminary discourse citing errors of Locke, because advised by his friends that this might carry readers aside from the central point of the *Treatise on Government*. Two of his most important works <sup>2</sup> survive only because of this practise of seeking honest pre-publication criticism. Only a few of the quasi-manuscript copies, which he had privately printed to distribute among friends for criticism, remain.

#### V. TUCKER PRACTICAL

Tucker was a practical man. He managed the church property, under his care, successfully. He was an effective politician, influential in Bristol politics. He aimed always to focus his thought upon any subject into a "polity" to better conditions. These "polities" he endeavored to keep as free as possible from chances for political jobbery.<sup>3</sup> He aims to formulate such programs as will be practicable, and not such as satisfy a visionary ideal. Compromises of this kind he frequently comments upon, for example:

"The author has the following proposals humbly to offer, not as what he himself can recommend as the wisest and best

<sup>1</sup> See *Treatise on Government*, Preface, p. i.

<sup>2</sup> *Elements of Commerce*, 1755, and *Instructions for Travellers*, 1757.

<sup>3</sup> See *Appendix of Essay on Trade*, pp. 118-119.



but as the most feasible, the least repugnant to the obstinate prejudices of mankind and therefore the likeliest to be accepted by the contending parties.”<sup>1</sup>

He makes one sweeping declaration, which pledges him to offer nothing impracticable for publication. This is his parting word in the *Elements* :

“ But tho’ the general nature of the subject is so very plain and intelligible and tho’ the application of it would be extremely easy to a state *now* in *forming*, yet it requires the nicest and coolest judgment, to adapt the several parts of it to a state *already formed*. Nothing should be offered to the regard of the public but what is really practicable and may be introduced without throwing the body politic into unnatural and dangerous convulsions.”<sup>2</sup>

#### VI. TUCKER TOLERANT

Tucker was tolerant. He championed the right of the dissenter to dissent.<sup>3</sup> He says that

“ Persecution is popery and the worst of popery, come from whatever quarter it may.”<sup>4</sup>

He favors keeping the Catholics under disabilities,

“ not as a sect in religion but as a faction against the state . . . not surely to harass and oppress the papists, but to secure ourselves.”<sup>5</sup>

No better proof can be given that Tucker was tolerant in

<sup>1</sup> *Proposals for General Pacification, Gent's Mag.*, vol. 1, p. 221. Similar statement in *Cui Bono*, pp. 128-129, and in *Four Tracts*, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> *Elements*, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to Dr. Kippis*, pp. 61-66.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Reflect. Nat. For. Prot.*, part ii, pp. xiv and xv.

spirit as well as theory, than his strong pleas for the bills for the naturalization of foreigners, and especially of foreign Jews. His persistent advocacy of these bills brought upon him stinging reproach from his fellow citizens.

#### VII. TUCKER CONTROVERSIAL

Tucker was a controversialist. It would have been strange if he had not been one. His logical acumen, his abundant knowledge of facts, and his direct style, fitted him to be strong in debate. He took a great interest in current affairs. His exercise of the clergyman's prerogative of giving advice had doubtless cultivated a proneness to present his opinions upon subjects which interested him. Finally, his life was almost coincident with the controversial, pamphleteering, eighteenth century.

His fondness for controversy is reflected in his works, and largely explains some of the inconsistencies to be found in them. The *Essay on Trade* arranges the material advantages and disadvantages of France and Great Britain in trade, as if it were a source book for debate upon the relative commercial strength of the two nations. The naturalization papers, the treatise upon the trade to Turkey, the papers upon the subscription controversy, the American tracts, and the criticism of Locke are all avowedly controversial. Indeed, with the exception of a few didactic sermons, the *History of Methodism*, and large parts of the *Elements* and the *Instructions for Travellers*, his works are of uniformly controversial cast. His sincerity, tolerance and independence save his works from the extremes of partisanship and the wide bias of advocacy all too common in controversial literature.

#### VIII. SUMMARY

Josiah Tucker was an independent, sincere, practical, and

tolerant, thinker and writer, well read in the literatures of theology, politics and economics, but more widely versed in the facts of historic and current religious, political and commercial life. In energy and industry, in intellectual power and poise, and in moral stamina, he was eminently fitted to be the creator of an influential system of thought. Tastes and environment led him to study political and economic life. Economic problems were the more immediately pressing for solution, and his environment spoke to him most clearly in economic terms. It would, therefore, have been most natural that his great work should have been a science of economics. Such a work he did plan and partially execute; but, through the increasing burden of clerical duties, through deflection of energy in active participation in current controversy, and, not least of all, through a growing conviction that his generation was not prepared to receive the truth as he saw it, he at first deferred, and finally abandoned, the execution of the great work which would have won him high place in the history of English economics. Although this monumental work was never completed, the rough casts of parts of it, and the lesser works he has left, make possible a presentation of almost his entire system of thought.