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The 'Canada-Guadeloupe' Debate and the Origins of the Grenville Programme for America.

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4. The 'Canada-Guadeloupe' Debate and the Origins of the Grenville Programme for America.*

In April of 1763, Lord Bute, exhausted by his efforts to gain an acceptable peace with France and Spain and discouraged by the virulence of the opposition to his government, resigned his office as First Lord of the Treasury. While the composition of the ministry remained otherwise virtually unchanged, Bute's place was taken by George Grenville, who had left the government scant months earlier in disagreement over a minor point in the peace settlement. In the unfolding developments which ultimately produced the American Revolution, the Grenville ministry — basically a continuation of the Bute ministry — played a key role. It was responsible for replacing a better than half-century tradition of ad hoc administration of colonies with a deliberate American policy, capped by the Stamp Act, which drew the ire of colonials and initiated an ever-escalating crisis.¹ The purpose of this paper is to deal with the question of why the Grenville ministry came to focus its attention on American, something Whig governments had successfully avoided for fifty years.

The importance of America to the British government was in part a product of the circumstances of the time. The New World was the principal theatre of fighting in the Seven Years' War, and many great victories had been achieved there.² Beyond this obvious commitment, however, the government of Grenville as the heir of the Bute ministry had a special interest in America. The chief policy of Bute had been to

achieve a peace. He had found Britain's enemies prepared to surrender American territory, and this was reflected in the peace settlement. In selling the settlement to Parliament and the public, the Bute ministry emphasized the American aspect of the war and the value of the gains in the New World in full knowledge that these had been the major concerns of most of the opponents of the settlement. The critics thus had much of their ground taken from under them. Whether or not the government was genuinely interested in America, the domestic politics of achieving the peace had committed it. Ironically enough, the friends and self-proclaimed spokesmen for the American colonies were themselves partly responsible for the initial shift in fundamental attitude which culminated in the Stamp Act, for they had assisted in creating an intellectual climate in which it was possible to make North America the focal point of the peace treaty.

The process by which the Grenville government found itself committed to American reform can best be explained through a careful examination of the great press war of 1759-62. It has become fashionable to disparage the importance of the 'Canada versus Guadaloupe' debate, and possible to do so because of the weaknesses of interpretation of those who initially argued its importance.³ A specific discussion of the relative merits of Canada and Guadaloupe played only a small role in the enormous public airing of North America issues between 1759 and 1762, and the arguments for and against those particular territories had little impact upon British policy toward the peace negotiations.⁴ The press debate was far more general than the label 'Canada versus Guadaloupe' would suggest, however, and significant in different ways than its effect on British territorial preferences at the bargaining table.

The years between 1759 and 1762 saw a series of two broad public press campaigns. The first, begun in the fall of 1759 following the conquest of Quebec, sought to focus public attention on the New World, and particularly upon the North American continent. Generated by the American Lobby in England, the underlying point of this campaign — which included the exchange over the relative merits of Canada and Guadaloupe — was to ensure that North America would not be treated as a sideshow and sacrificed to European interests at the end of the war, as had happened in 1749. American 'experts' and British critics of the government worked very hard to guarantee that the peace would centre on North America. As it transpired, North America was exactly what the French (and subsequently the Spanish) were prepared to sacrifice most readily. The Bute government, desperate for peace, thus found itself with a settlement which met most of the telling points of the American campaigners. This coincidence was just that — a coincidence. Nevertheless,

the volume and intensity of the press discussion had high-lighted and brought into general public understanding certain broad themes about Britain's American Empire. The British government — insofar as it had a policy not dictated by a desire for peace — viewed North America principally in strategic terms and only marginally in commercial ones. But from the standpoint of the public discussion, the vast commercial potentialities of the American market seemed the critical reason for preferring Voltaire's 'arpenes of snow' to West Indian sugar islands. If the future market was the positive side of retaining French North America, a related concern for the dangers of an expanded British North America was the negative. The risk was well worth taking, but conscious it was a risk, men would naturally seek to minimize it in terms of developing new colonial policy.

The principal component of the negative argument was the concern that an enlarged and unthreatened North America would ultimately separate from the mother country, possibly by military rebellion. Such predictions were hardly new; they had been voiced at one time or another by most men knowledgeable of America. Such experts had identified several areas of concern: in constitutional terms the pretensions of the local assemblies; in military terms, an increasing ability of Americans to fight their own battles; in economic terms, the rise of manufacturing, in which the colonies would process their own raw materials and have no need for the metropolis.⁵ But these fears had previously been scattered and buried over time in private manuscripts and occasional tracts; now they came clearly into focus as a central feature of the burning public issue of the moment. Perhaps significantly, it was an American colonial — Benjamin Franklin — who made such prophecies a critical part of the press discussion over the retention of Canada, in his influential pamphlet *The Interest of Great Britain*. Before Franklin, only one pamphleteer of the period, opposed to Canada, had warned that the elimination of the French from North America contributed to 'the risque, and that perhaps in no very distant Period, of losing what we now possess,' noting that 'a Neighbour that keeps us in some Awe, is not always the worst of Neighbours.'⁶ But such an argument had been advanced only tentatively and briefly by William Burke in a tract which emphasized commercial considerations.

Franklin, in London to represent the Pennsylvania Assembly in its struggle with the Penn family, had been actively promoting Canada and also waiting for an opportunity to defend his fellow Americans from the charge of separatism.⁷ Burke's brief comments gave the Pennsylvanian his opening, and the result was a virtuoso performance which cleverly combined both of Franklin's objectives. The gambit was not a new one,

having been used by several American agents earlier in the century. It consisted of raising the issue of American separatism, denying it vehemently, and then arguing that only particular American policy advocated by the pamphleteer would assure that the ugly spectre would never occur.⁸ Franklin greatly extended the device to advocate the retention of Canada, insisting that the Americans would remain loyal unless abused by administrations which ignored their best interests, such as the retention of Canada to eliminate the French and Indian menace.⁹ He went on to argue that the immense land mass of Canada would enable America's rapidly increasing population to 'find employment in agriculture,' and not in manufacturing.¹⁰ In the course of his comments, Franklin only increased the sensitivity of his British readers to the problem, and he turned the American independence issue into a central one in the debate over Canada. He emphasized the growth of American power, and at best, offered the British a century's grace.¹¹ At worst, Franklin's arguments could lead to the conclusion that some action must be taken now, while there was still time.

Franklin's arguments received wide and immediate exposure, and the future intentions of Americans moved to centre stage. William Burke recognized his opening and answered Franklin with a pamphlet devoted almost entirely to insisting that only the retention of the French in North America would check the Americans, who would otherwise soon proclaim their independence.¹² Another pamphleteer accused Franklin of having raised the independence issue as a red herring to disguise the absence of good reasons for keeping Canada.¹³ William Beckford, Pitt's firmest supporter among the London merchants, called the fears of American separation the 'greatest Bugbear' for the supporters of Canada, and refuted them at great length.¹⁴

By the spring of 1761, what had previously been a scattered dialogue among those on the fringes of power had been converted by the pamphleteers into a discussion within the centres of British decision-making. The Duke of Bedford, who would become the Bute government's chief peace negotiator, wrote the Duke of Newcastle opposing the retention of Canada, commenting, 'indeed....I do not know whether the neighbourhood of the French to our Northern Colonies was not the greatest security of their dependence on the Mother Country who I fear will be slighted by them when their apprehensions of the French are removed.'¹⁵ Soon after, Lord Morton attempted to answer such arguments in a letter to Chancellor Hardwicke, noting the objection 'that the awe of the French keeps our Colonies in dependence upon the Mother Country.' Morton dismissed such a fear, saying:

The answer to this is obvious: if our Governments are properly circumscrib'd and care taken that the new settlements should be formed into new Governments of small extent; the mutual jealousies amongst the several Colonies would always keep them in a state of dependence...¹⁶

Morton thus suggested some of the natural inclinations of any ministry which eliminated the French from North America.

The ministry which ultimately settled the peace was not that led by William Pitt and the Duke of Newcastle, but one dominated by Lord Bute, the former tutor of the new king. The accession of George III to the throne vastly altered the complexion of British domestic politics and international policy. George III had little interest either in Europe or in the creation of an overseas empire on which the sun would never set. Instead, he had only two ambitions: to be a proper king and to have international peace.¹⁷ These ambitions Lord Bute attempted to fulfill. Pitt left the ministry in October of 1761 and because of his stature was immediately disparaged by government publicists. He had accepted a peerage for his wife and a pension for himself, he had always stood above the government, he was a warmonger.¹⁸ Lord Bute carefully orchestrated the onslaught by giving his writers detailed instruction of the points to be made.¹⁹

Although he had agreed not to enter opposition upon retirement and always considered himself above the hurly-burly of public mud-slinging, Pitt's friends were soon responding in kind to the criticisms. Bute was a singularly inviting target for invective; he was a Scotsman (with the family name of Stuart), he had been a power behind the throne, he was alleged to have enjoyed the boudoir favours of the king's mother, the Dowager Duchess. Many of the most vicious sallies appeared in cartoons, which were posted on walls and distributed in the streets. Government had no control over these efforts, and Bute never developed machinery to answer them. Over the years, more than 400 anti-Bute cartoons would be published, and only four favourable to him.²⁰ The prints and cartoons helped inflame the London 'mob,' and a particularly nasty incident occurred in November of 1761, as Bute was on his way to London Mayor Beckford's annual dinner. An angry crowd pushed in on him, his bodyguards responded aggressively, and it took the appearance of the constabulary to save him. Bute remained convinced that the incident had been arranged, but could not prove it. This violence was the first of many incidents, as Bute slowly but inexorably became the most unpopular man in England. Eventually he travelled through London only in disguise and received a steady stream of hate letters. Not even his departure from politics ended the abuse.

For the moment, however, Bute continued to instruct his stable of writers. Bute had considerable assistance in recruiting pamphleteers and journalists from Bubb Dodington and Henry Fox, both experienced manipulators of the public press. Charles Jenkinson, Bute's private secretary, did much of the direct hiring and supervision of the scribblers.²¹ London was full of unemployed writers and aspirant politicians, who could be bought by the piece or the soul. The Bute stable grew steadily, including at its fullest extent, John Campbell, Philip Francis, Edward Richardson, John Shebbeare, William Guthrie, Arthur Murphy, Tobias Smollett, Hugh Baillie, James Marriott, and James Ralph, as well as an assorted number of lesser lights whose efforts have passed into total anonymity.²² Jenkinson at least opened subtle negotiations with Samuel Johnson.²³ Pamphlets, letters and articles in newspapers and journals, and ultimately, two newspapers of its own, were among the products of the Bute publicity department. Pamphleteers were not only bought, but bought off. Benjamin Franklin, one of the staunchest opponents of a premature peace as late as mid-1761, was silenced when his illegitimate son, William, was mysteriously appointed governor of New Jersey.²⁴ Bute and Jenkinson were not above rewriting the material they purchased to make it less obviously inspired by the government.²⁵ In such an atmosphere, no question, including that of America, could be considered on its merits. The first phase of the Canada debate, in which the future of the empire was discussed by men knowledgeable and interested in the subject, gradually gave way to a new phase, in which American issues were completely subordinated to British domestic and international considerations by the supporters of both government and opposition. The issue was no longer North America, but the peace settlement.

Personal polemic dominated the public debate in the winter of 1761-62, and the declaration of war on Spain in January of 1762 was almost anti-climatic. The expense of a Spanish war and a strengthened German position — the new Russian king was an admirer of Frederick II of Prussia — led the government to determine to reduce expenditures on the German War. The king and Bute had always opposed it, and now had some justification. Newcastle objected to such a change in policy, and by May of 1763 he had joined Pitt in retirement from the ministry. Meanwhile, peace talks resumed with France.²⁶ Negotiations in 1761 had proved abortive, for despite the French willingness to sacrifice much of its North American territory, Pitt had demanded more. The 1761 negotiations nevertheless served as the basis of new discussions, and it seemed at times that news of fresh British victories only brought embarrassment to the Bute government. The French West Indies were totally

conquered, and a British force soon began an assault on Spanish Havana. The French and Spanish had their backs to the wall. The French sacrificed more continental American territory. Louisiana east of the Mississippi was given up, in return for Martinique and Guadaloupe. The French were granted fishing rights in Newfoundland and the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon in return for the surrender of all claims to territory in the northern part of the American continent. The Spanish proved no problem after the conquest of Havana. In a complicated arrangement, Britain returned Havana and Puerto Rico and kept Florida, while France compensated Spain for its losses by ceding it the western half of Louisiana and the port of New Orleans.

As peace negotiations continued through the spring and summer of 1762, the public debate over the forthcoming treaty got into high gear. Bute had long sought a newspaper to advance government arguments against William Beckford's *Pittite Monitor*, and though some of his advisors counselled against such a move for fear of starting a press war, Tobias Smollett's *The Briton* made its first appearance on 29 May, 1762.²⁷ A week later, John Wilkes and Charles Churchill began *The North Briton* (an obvious play on both Smollett's paper and Bute's origins), and within days *The Auditor*, edited by Irish playwright Arthur Murphy, entered the lists.²⁸ These newspapers continued the personal invective begun with Pitt's resignation, although neither Murphy nor Smollett were capable of matching the smutty innuendoes of Wilkes and Churchill. Nevertheless, the government's case was ably argued by a number of pamphleteers, and more than three times as many pamphlets favoured the peace as attacked it.²⁹ The pamphlet arguments were merely the public statement of the general position of the ministry, expressed privately to members of Parliament.

From the standpoint of America, the result of the complex diplomatic and political maneuverings was curious. The American colonies, as they had always suspected, became a pawn to British interest in the peace settlement. Contrary to their initial fears, however, the colonists were not being asked to surrender territory. They received as much or more than the 'friends of America' had ever in their fondest hopes imagined. Indeed, the complete satisfaction of the American colonists' interests and demands was made the principal justification of the peace. Britain had not only all Canada, but most of Louisiana and Florida as well, and controlled all the North American continent east of the Mississippi. Some limited fishing rights had been permitted the French in the north Atlantic, but only the extreme critics of the peace took these seriously. A war which had been begun in the interests of the American colonies would end with those interests more than amply served. A steady stream of

government polemic pointed out that the peace terms more than met the Pittite demands of 1759, 1760, and 1761. The opponents of the ministry could only answer that new conquests had been made since those earlier days, and that too much outside America had been surrendered.

In pamphlet after pamphlet and article after article, the spokesman for the ministry wrote as the legitimate descendents of the North American lobby.³⁰ The war had been begun for the security of America, and the peace guaranteed that war aim. All the commercial arguments earlier advanced for Canada and Louisiana were trotted out, and in many cases, improved upon. The American colonies would grow and prosper, proving a matchless source of raw materials and market for British manufactured goods in a great new empire. The absurdity of some of the rhetoric was clearly demonstrated when Arthur Murphy printed in *The Auditor* an anonymous letter he had received extolling the economic virtues of the Florida peat bogs.³¹ The letter had been submitted by John Wilkes, who made great fun of the incident in *The North Briton* and undoubtedly narrowed Murphy's credibility.³² Nevertheless, the government's critics were reduced to such stunts and to half-hearted denials of the value of the newly-acquired North American territory. After all, Pitt's supporters had wanted America, and Bute's pamphleteers were giving the nation America, in spades.

In number XXIV of *The North Briton*, Wilkes unleashed his invective against Bute in obvious bitterness at seeing his best American arguments cut from under him. A barely disguised 'Earl Buchanan' (later referred to in the piece as the 'E. of B.,' lest anyone miss the point) failed to understand the value of beaver skin for warmth:

In Scotland, my Lord, we have no such thing: if any Lady there be so nice as to require artificial warmth, we have cats and dogs for the purpose. Thus we encourage our native manufactures; and the delicious roughness of those animal skins promotes that friction which — but such delicacy is rarely found in our hardy naked-thighed country.

Wilkes moved on from such scurrility to the colonies. The 'E. of B.' continued:

We have some provinces in North America inhabited by merchants, planters, and a thousand various species of mushrooms — they are rich — too rich — very rich — their trade promotes ours — they ruin their mother country — we abound in trade, we must clip it....The seat of the empire may be transferred, if they grow too powerful, and America give laws to the universe-that shall not happen while I am at the helmIt is a great rule in politics, that colonies and dependent coun-

tries should be kept poor; not to raise their heads or wag their tongues, lest they should spit at their mother country.³³

Wilkes could only fulminate in such imaginery conversations, for the government had neither abandoned America to the French nor indicated a colonial policy.

Nevertheless, as Wilkes well realized, the ministry was committed by its tactics. Having made America the fulcrum of the peace, the Bute government would have to focus its attentions on that continent. No longer could the colonies be governed absentmindedly. They had been made the cause of the war, and their territorial security and further prosperity the justification of the peace. The nation would expect to be recompensed. America would have to prove profitable, and would in future have to bear some of the burden of its own defense. Bute's advisors fully recognized the position. One of them put it well when he argued,

'the settlement of America must be the first and principal object. It will certainly be the chief point, upon which all future opposition will attempt to throw its colours, and raise its battery. It will prove, in a word, the chief engine of faction.'³⁴

With parliamentary approval of the peace easily secured in December of 1762, the government could turn to policy for America. Once it did so, it set in motion a chain of events which ended only with American independence. While the pamphlet on one level can hardly be taken seriously, since rhetoric and propaganda was its essence, on another level it was quite critical both for Britain and for her American colonies.

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NOTES

- * The author gratefully acknowledges a research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which made possible the preparation of this paper.

- 1 Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Lawrence H. Leder, *Liberty and Authority: Early American Political Ideology, 1689-1763* (Chicago, 1968); Edwin G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, 'The American Revolution: The Ideology and Psychology of National Liberation,' *Perspectives in American History* VI (1972) 167-308. For examples of recent scholarship on British motives, see Dora Mae Clark, *The Rise of the British Treasury: Colonial Administration in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, 1960); Thomas C. Barrow, 'Background to the Grenville Program 1757-1763,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XXII (1965) 93-104, and *Trade and Empire: The British Customs Service on Colonial America 1660-1775* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Franklin B. Wickwire, *British Subministers and Colonial America 1763-1893* (Princeton, NJ, 1966); Charles Ritcheson, *British Politics and the American Revolution* (Norman, OK, 1954); John B. Shy, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1965); Bernard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American revolution, 1759-1766* (rev. ed., NY, 1965).
- 2 A position best enunciated in L.H. Gipson, 'The American Revolution as an Aftermath of the Great War for the Empire, 1754-1763,' *Political Science Quarterly* LXV (1950) 86-104.
- 3 Early interpreters of the Canada versus Guadeloupe debate include George Louis Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (New York, 1907), 132-59; W.L. Grant, 'Canada Versus Guadeloupe, an Episode of the Seven Years' War,' *American Historical Review* LVII (1911-12) 735-43; and Clarence Walworth Alvord, *The Mississippi Valley in British Politics: A Study of the Trade, Land Speculation, and Experiments in Imperialism Culminating, in the American Revolution*, 2 volumes (1916, reprinted New York, 1959).
- 4 Critics of Beer, Grant, and Alvord include Sir Lewis Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (2nd edition, London, 1963), 273-82; Marjorie G. Reid, 'Pitt's Decision to keep Canada in 1761,' *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* (1926) 21-35; and Jack M. Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy, 1760-1775* (Lincoln, NE, 1961), 1-43.
- 5 See Bumsted, 'Things in the Womb of Time: Ideas of American Independence 1630-1763,' *William & Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., XXXI (1974).
- 6 [William Burke]. *Remarks on the Letter Addressed to Two Great Men, In a Letter to the Author of that Piece* (London, nd., but January 1760), 51
- 7 Benjamin Franklin to Isaac Norris, London, March, 1769, Leonard W. Labaree et al., eds, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, 1965), VIII, 291-7
- 8 Earlier examples of similar tactics include Thomas Banister's *A Letter to the Right Honourable the Lords commissioners of Trade and Plantations...* (London, 1715) and Jeremiah Dummer's *A Defense of the New-England Charters* (London, 1721).
- 9 The Interest of Great Britain With Regard to her Colonies has been reprinted in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, IX, 59-100, and references will be to this reprint since it is readily available.
- 10 *The Interest of Great Britain*, 78-85
- 11 *The Interest of Great Britain*, 78-89

- 12 [William Burke], *A Copy of a Letter from a Gentleman in Guadaloupe, to His Friend in London* (London, 1760)
- 13 *A Letter to a Great M-----r, on the Prospect of a Peace...* (London, 1761), 15
- 14 [William Beckford], *A Detection of the False Reasons and Facts, Contained in the Five Letters...* (London, 1761), 47
- 15 Quoted in Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution*, 276.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 278
- 17 Romney Sedgwick, ed., *Letters from George III to Lord Bute, 1765-1766* (London, 1939); James Lee McKelvey, *George III and Lord Bute: The Leicester House Years* (Durham, NC, 1973)
- 18 See, for example, *A Letter to the Right Honourable W_____ P_____* (London, 1761); *A Letter from the Anonymous Author of the Letters Versified to the Anonymous Writer of the Monitor* (London, 1761); *The Right Honourable Annuitant Vindicated....* (London, 1761); *A Second Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Bxxx* (London, 1761); *Letters to Two Great Men....* (London, 1761); *Some Reasons for Serious Candor in Relation to Vulgar Decisions Concerning Peace of War....* (London, 1762).
- 19 John Brewer, 'The Misfortunes of Lord Bute: A Case-Study in Eighteenth-Century Political Argument and Public Opinion,' *The Historical Journal* XVI (1973) 3-43, esp. 11-17. I am indebted to Brewer's work for an understanding of Bute's publicity efforts.
- 20 M. Dorothy George, *English Political Caricature to 1792: A Study of Opinion and Propaganda* (Oxford, 1959), 121
- 21 Brewer, 'The Misfortunes of Lord Bute,' 14. Some overtones of this activity can be seen in Ninetta S. Jucker, ed., *The Jenkinson Papers 1760-1766* (Lond, 1949), *passim*.
- 22 Brewer, 'The Misfortunes of Lord Bute,' 13-14
- 23 Jenkinson to Samuel Johnson, October 25, 1765, in *Jenkinson Papers*, 390
- 24 The appointment is discussed in *The Franklin Papers*, X, 146-147n, though the editors of the Franklin papers do not draw the obvious conclusion from what they admit was a curious and secretive action by the ministry.
- 25 Brewer, 'The Misfortunes of Lord Bute,' 14
- 26 Full analysis of the peace negotiations may be found in Zenab E. Rashed, *The Peace of Paris, 1763* (Liverpool, 1951), and Max Savelle, *The Diplomatic History of the Canadian Boundary, 1749-1763* (New Haven, 1940).
- 27 Brewer, 'The Misfortunes of Lord Bute,' 14
- 28 George Nobbe, *The North Briton: A Study in Political Propaganda* (New York, 1939); Howard Hunter Dunbar, *The Dramatic Career of Arthur Murphy* (New York, 1946), 150-6; Robert R. Rea, *The English Press in Politics, 1760-1774* (Lincoln, NE, 1964); Robert D. Spector, *English Literary Periodicals and the Climate of Opinion During the Seven years' War* (The Hague, 1966).
- 29 My figures, based on a new bibliography of pamphlets of the period currently in preparation. Bute, it might be added, continued to lose badly the battle of the cartoons.

- 30 The North American lobby has never been adequately studied in this period, but see Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness*, and Michael G. Kammen, *A Rope of Sand: The Colonial Agents, British Politics, and The American Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 1968).
- 31 *The Auditor*, Number XXXI (December 18, 1762)
- 32 *The North Briton*, Number XXXV (January 29, 1763)
- 33 *Ibid.*, Number XXIV (November 13, 1762)
- 34 Cited in Alvord, *The Mississippi Valley*, I., 138.