

*Independence:
The View from Britain*

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WE LOOK BACK on the Declaration of Independence with nearly two hundred years of hindsight. It is regarded as one of our charters, almost as noble as the Constitution. Consequently, the reaction of the British in 1776 to the Declaration may seem strange to us. The document was approved by Congress and printed in broadside form on July 4. Gen. William Howe, encamped on Staten Island, New York, must have seen it by the next day or two. His brother, the admiral, did not arrive until July 12, and then was immediately made acquainted with the document. However, both men, inspired by their commission to make peace and obsessed by the notion that reconciliation was possible, put little importance on the Declaration. In their view it was an action that could easily be rescinded; it was a bargaining point that could be withdrawn. They were resentful only that Congress had acted even though it knew the Howes were coming commissioned to make peace.

The reaction of other British officers that July is difficult to learn. Evidently they took their cue from their commanders and treated the Declaration indifferently. Generals Clinton and Cornwallis were in South Carolina and did not join the Howes until August 1. The admiral's secretary wrote in his journal on July 12 that he 'heard, that the Congress had now announced the Colonies to be INDEPENDENT STATES, with

several other Articles of Intelligence, that proclaim the Villainy & the Madness of these deluded People.'¹

One of General Howe's aides was Lt. Col. Stephen Kemble, a native of New Jersey whose sister was the wife of Gen. Thomas Gage, Howe's predecessor. Kemble comprehended the temper of Congress and in his journal he wrote ominously on July 14: 'From appearances think the Rebels will not listen to any proffers for an Accomodation; their declaration of Independancy is a convincing proof that they will oppose every mode for a Reconciliation unless on their own terms.'² He knew his fellow Americans much better than the Howe brothers ever learned to know them.

Down in British East Florida, to which southern Tories had fled and continued to flee, news of the Declaration was received in St. Augustine with rowdy contempt. The official reaction was to burn John Hancock and Sam Adams in effigy on the public parade.³

Not till September did the Howe brothers take official notice of the Declaration. By that time they had been victorious on Long Island and were preparing to push Washington out of New York City. Congress was not unwilling to hear what the Howes had to offer and appointed a committee of three to meet with Admiral Howe on September 11. He complained that 'since I left England, you have yourselves changed your ground by the Declaration of Independency. That act, gentlemen, if it cannot be got over, precludes all treaty-making; for, as you are aware, I have not, nor do I expect ever to have, powers to consider the colonies in the

¹ Edward H. Tatum, Jr., ed., *The American Journal of Ambrose Serle, Secretary to Lord Howe, 1776-1778* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1940), p. 80.

² Journal of Stephen Kemble, July 14, 1776, in William James Morgan, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, 6 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1964-72), 5:1077.

³ James Grant Forbes, *Sketches, Historical and Topographical, of the Floridas* (New York: C. S. Van Winkle, 1821), pp. 23-24.

light of independent States.⁴ In other words, submission must precede negotiation. The committee rose and departed. Eight days later the Howe brothers decided to go over the heads of Congress and appeal directly to the public. They issued a broadside that began: 'Although the Congress, whom the misguided Americans suffer to direct their Opposition to a Re-establishment of the constitutional Government of these Provinces, have disavowed every Purpose of Reconciliation not consonant with their extravagant and inadmissible Claim of Independency, the King's Commissioners think it fit to declare that they are equally desirous to confer with His Majesty's well-affected Subjects . . .' and so on.⁵ It was not a reply to the Declaration, of course, and it was not quite honest, since it implied that the Howes had power to redress colonial grievances, instead of only to receive submission and grant pardons and perhaps make recommendations to Parliament. This was a vital distinction which they constantly attempted to blur.

It is astonishing how casually the Declaration was first reported to official London. On July 8 ex-Governor Tryon in New York wrote to Lord George Germain, the colonial secretary, and Admiral Shuldham wrote to the Admiralty Office, but neither of them made any reference to the momentous document. On the same day General Howe also wrote to Lord Germain, and buried in his letter is the brief sentence: 'I am informed that the Continental Congress have declared the United Colonies Free and Independent States.' That was all, as if he were reporting that Congress had recessed or had issued some new currency. These three letters reached London on August 10, making very good time crossing the Atlantic. Not until July 28 did Admiral Howe get around to

⁴ Henry Strachey's Minutes, in Bellamy Partridge, *Sir Billy Howe* (London, New York, and Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1932), p. 65.

⁵ Broadside in the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

enclosing a copy of the Declaration to Germain, and then he did so without comment.

But by the middle of August a copy of the Declaration did reach London by some other means, as it was completely printed in *The London Chronicle* under date of August 16, although that issue of the paper appeared on the 17th or 18th. The British ministers and King George now all had a chance to read the forthright statement and react to it. The Declaration could not have come as a total surprise or shock to the British. At least two pamphlets had appeared earlier in the summer predicting that the colonies were going to separate themselves from the crown. Thus the Methodist evangelist, the Reverend John Wesley, had declared in his *Some Observations on Liberty*, and so had the anonymous author of *Independency the Object of the Congress in America*. John Cartwright had even advocated independence for the colonies in 1774 in letters to the London *Public Advertiser*.

The St. James's Chronicle (London) for August 15-17 printed the Declaration in full, but with some curious editing to protect the king's name. In the second paragraph, where it reads 'The History of the present King of Great-Britain,' the wording has been changed to read: 'The present History of Great-Britain.' This omission of the king then makes it possible to change all the charges leveled against him from 'he' to 'it,' referring to Great Britain rather than the monarch. It was a foolish gesture, since *The London Chronicle* used the personal pronoun.

The London Gazette, which confined itself to royal court news, did not bother to publish the Declaration, and *The Daily Advertiser* published extracts of it. However, the monthly magazines picked it up as quickly as they could. It should be explained that these magazines were published at the very end of the month which was named on the cover. Thus it was that *The Gentleman's Magazine* printed the Declaration in its August issue, without comment, except that on a later page

reference was made to the document to be found on an earlier page: 'Whether these grievances were real or imaginary, or whether they did or did not deserve a parliamentary inquiry, we will not presume to decide.' *The London Magazine* and *The Universal Magazine* also published excerpts from the Declaration in their August issues, without comment and without the enumerated grievances against King George.

A weekly paper called *The Crisis* had been started in London in January 1775. It was definitely pro-American in the growing dispute and argued that Englishmen should be as concerned for their liberties as the Americans were. It was radically anti-ministry, and its editor remained anonymous. The issue for August 24 gleefully published the Declaration 'of the brave, free, and virtuous Americans, against the most dastardly, slavish, and vicious tyrant that ever disgraced a Nation.' *The Crisis* continued until October 12 and then gave up.

Up in Edinburgh, *The Scots Magazine* for August not only carried the Declaration but a scornful refutation of it signed by 'An Englishman.' The author denied the statement that 'all men are created equal' and added that even if it were true it was hardly a reason for rebellion. Further, it ridiculed the phrase about an 'unalienable right to liberty' from a land filled with slaves, whose liberty was completely alienated. Similarly 'the pursuit of happiness' was not something, he said, that could be taken away from one man by another. 'What they possibly can mean by these words, I own is beyond my comprehension.'

The first reaction of press and public in Great Britain was contempt for the ideology of the Declaration expressed in its opening. It was a rhetorical attempt to justify treason, they said. The philosophy which Jefferson had phrased so luminously they denounced as absurd. The stratified society of Britain could not comprehend such a pious platitude as equality. For centuries they had seen and accepted inequality;

monarchs and the ranks of nobility were founded on general recognition of some persons being superior to others. The Church of England also had its hierarchy. Heredity determined one's station, and equality was as contrary to nature as it was dangerous politically. The further notion that pursuit of happiness was some kind of a right with which government must be concerned was such a fantastic idea it invited derision. There was a credibility gap here which could not be bridged.

The second noticeable British reaction was anger over the ingratitude of the colonists for imperial protection and the opportunities empire afforded. The Americans were better off than the colonists of any other European power. Their complaints were imaginary or trivial. Their leaders had magnified their dissatisfactions and deluded the public. It was the familiar conspiracy theory. The Declaration was a triumph of propaganda over sense.

The sharp rejoinder that appeared in *The Scots Magazine* at the end of August was reprinted in *The London Chronicle* for September 10, or possibly the author also sent a copy of his letter to that paper. It was further reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for September. Even so, a reaction was setting in, and Englishmen uncovered some second thoughts. William Lee, a Virginia merchant resident in London the past seven years and indeed a city alderman, writing on September 10, declared that 'Independence . . . has altered the face of things here. The Tories, and particularly the Scotch, hang their heads and keep a profound silence on the subject; the Whigs do not say much, but rather seem to think the step a wise one, on the part of America, and what was an inevitable consequence of the measures taken by the British ministry.'⁶

In its October issue *The Gentleman's Magazine* printed a

⁶ Quoted in John H. Hazelton, *The Declaration of Independence: Its History* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1906), p. 234.

reply to 'An Englishman,' the author of the contemptuous review of the Declaration. The answer was from one who signed himself 'Philander' of 'High Wycomb.'⁷ He said he was ashamed to own the first author as a fellow citizen, because he set no high value on his own natural rights and denied that such rights have ever been oppressed. His argument that all laws take away liberty left him unable to defend himself against becoming a slave, unless he could agree with the Declaration that men have a *right* to liberty.

Official reaction did not yet manifest itself. Parliament was in its long summer recess, and most of His Majesty's ministers were out of London at their country residences. They did not feel compelled to issue statements, and as a matter of fact they looked upon the Declaration as a kind of dying gasp from a revolutionary force that was expiring. The military situation made them optimistic. Howe not only controlled New York City; his brother had an immense fleet with which to blockade the coast; and General Carleton was invading Lake Champlain from the north with a Canadian army. The rebellion couldn't last.

Summer passed into fall, and Parliament did not reconvene until October 31, at which time the king's opening speech, prepared by Lord North, plunged immediately into the American dispute. His Majesty pretended that his deluded subjects were oppressed by their leaders, who prevented their return to duty. 'But so daring and desperate is the spirit of those leaders, whose object has always been dominion and power,' he declared, 'that they have now openly renounced all allegiance to the crown, and all political connection with this country . . . and have presumed to set up their rebellious confederacies for independent states.'⁸ And so on.

Tradition required that both the Lords and the Commons

⁷ Philander has not been identified, but it may be worth noting that Lord Shelburne had been elected to Parliament from the family's borough of High Wycombe.

⁸ *The Parliamentary History of England*, 36 vols. (London: T. C. Hansard, 1806-20), 18:1366.

reply to the king's speech, usually by agreeing with it. The fiction of answering was maintained even though Lord North was the acknowledged author and could not escape hearing all that was said about the speech. Several dissenting voices were in fact raised.

In the House of Lords, the Marquis of Rockingham, leader of the opposition, rose to condemn the king's speech with sarcasm. 'I ask them [the ministers], in the course of their experience, whether they ever heard, or can now be persuaded to think, that a whole people, so numerous, and living under so many different forms of government . . . ever unanimously confederated to join in a revolt, under a mild, wise, and equitable administration of public affairs?' If the colonies 'declared themselves independent, it was long after they were declared enemies,' and for his part he could not possibly see what degree of obedience was due where public protection was openly withdrawn.⁹

This was the taunt of all Lord North's critics: that ministerial policy of the last few years had driven true-born Englishmen on the other side of the Atlantic to revolt and separation. The Duke of Manchester compared the Roman and British Empires: both oppressed their provinces and both maintained mere forms of constitutions after despotism was felt everywhere, forcing the provinces to resist such unlawful powers.¹⁰ The Earl of Radnor doubted if the present generation of Americans was any different from their ancestors who fled across the ocean to escape 'ecclesiastical and civil persecution and oppression of a tyrant.'¹¹ The Duke of Richmond reminded the ministers that the opposition had predicted their measures of the last session would produce separation of the colonies, and therefore the ministers must have designed it. He ridiculed the conciliation effort of the Howe

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1370.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1376.

brothers, since government allowed them to do nothing more than receive submission and grant pardons. It was absurd, he asserted, for the king to speak of his desire to restore to America the blessings of law and liberty enjoyed by every British subject, when the Navigation Acts had long withheld from America advantages enjoyed by English residents.

The Duke of Grafton, who had headed the ministry from 1766 to 1770, rose 'to express the most marked abhorrence of the measures hitherto pursued . . . measures which had compelled America to declare herself independent, though he was sorry for it, and thought she acted extremely wrong in so doing.'¹² Finally, the Earl of Shelburne declared he 'was astonished that the House could continue to submit coolly to the contempt with which administration had treated it' in the speech. He said he 'knew enough of the science of metaphysics to detect the manifest falshoods, clothed in the semblance of truth, particularly when the garment was so thin.' He spoke at length, refuting the king's speech in detail and expressing concern over England's enemies uniting with the Americans.¹³

Against these impressive cannon, Lord North could rally no supporters of equal weight. The Earl of Fauconbergh, the Earl of Darby, Lord Cardiff (the son of Bute), and the Earl of Sandwich all spoke in defense of the ministry, denied all responsibility for provoking the colonies, and labeled the Americans ungrateful and misled by their leaders. Actually Lord North did not have to worry about the opposition; he had the votes to support his policies no matter how loud or bitter his critics sounded.

The same division erupted in the House of Commons. A Mr. Neville dutifully moved an address of thanks to the sovereign and expressed the House's 'detestation and abhorrence of the audacious and desperate spirit of ambition,

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1382.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1384-85.

which has at last carried those [American] leaders so far, as to make them openly renounce all allegiance to the crown, and all political connexion with this country.'¹⁴ The motion was seconded by a Mr. Hutton and supported by a Mr. Wombwell, who 'censured the Americans as a bragging, cowardly banditti.'¹⁵

These nobodies were in contrast to the distinguished personalities in the Commons who, without welcoming the Declaration of Independence, felt that recent policy had encouraged it. They included respected military officers like Gen. Henry Conway and Col. Isaac Barré, the future Prime Minister Charles James Fox, former treasury lord Thomas Townshend, the redoubtable Edmund Burke, the former governor of Florida George Johnstone, and widely known liberals like John Wilkes, Temple Luttrell, and the scholarly future Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord John Cavendish. The latter wanted to insert a statement that the House could not 'conceive that such an event, as the disaffection and revolt of a whole people, could have taken place without some considerable error in the conduct observed towards them,' and pointed out in particular that 'no hearing has been given to the reiterated complaints and petitions of the colonies.'¹⁶ John Wilkes argued that the Declaration changed the conflict: 'instead of negotiations with colonies, or provincial assemblies, we have a war to carry on against the free and independent states of America; a wicked war, which has been occasioned solely by a spirit of violence, injustice, and obstinacy in our ministers, unparalleled in history.'¹⁷ He advocated repeal of all acts injurious to America passed since 1763.

Thomas Townshend confessed his uneasiness over the arm-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1397.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1402.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1398-99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1404.

ing of France and Spain and the possibility of their now supporting America. As for the Declaration, he echoed Rockingham by reminding the House that 'we have put the colonies totally out of our protection' by restricting their trade, until 'we are to wonder at their declaring themselves independent.' As for despising the American leaders, 'If you force men together by oppression, they will form into bodies, and chuse leaders.'¹⁸ His sarcasm forced Lord North into a weak defense of ministerial policy and of his desire to restore peace.

Also alarmed by the growing naval strength of France and Spain, Colonel Barré urged the ministry to 'recall . . . your fleets and armies from America, and leave the brave colonists to the enjoyment of their liberty,' a recommendation that only brought laughter from the government benches.¹⁹ On the vote, the ministry was supported 232 to 83.

On November 6, Lord John Cavendish introduced a motion to consider revising all acts of Parliament complained of by America in petitions or the Declaration of Independence. Edmund Burke seconded the motion and lashed out at the ministry's preference for military victory over reasoning with America. Fox spoke again, declaring that if the House refused to pass the motion, it would make clear to the Americans that the published promises of the Howe commission would not be honored.²⁰ Nevertheless, the House defeated the motion 109 to 47.

In all of this debate in both houses of Parliament, nothing was said about the substance of the Declaration itself. After its introductory commentaries on the aims of government and society, the heart of the Declaration is the indictment of George III. Carefully listed are eighteen accusations against the king personally, 'repeated injuries and usurpations' which

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1416-18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1427.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1448.

he had perpetrated. This focus on the monarch, after a decade of complaints about acts of Parliament, accorded with Jefferson's concept that colonial assemblies were coordinate with Parliament and that what held the Americans in the British Empire was only their acknowledgment of a common king, who was here disavowed. Tom Paine's *Common Sense* had adopted this position and articulated it so well early in the year.

Whether all members of the Continental Congress actually believed in this bill of particulars in every instance, it is safe to say that today even the most chauvinistic historian will not endorse each one of them as the personal responsibility of the popeyed king. Indeed at this distance, it is clear that the British government was the furthest removed from despotism of any in Europe. Yet the Declaration had placed that government in the embarrassing position of opposing liberties it had traditionally championed. This is what made the ministry so angry.

Yet no official in London stood up immediately and denounced or refuted one by one these charges. Of course, the king himself was not going to dignify them by replying. Apparently his ministers felt that to answer and deny the accusations would give official recognition to a document they wished to classify as propaganda. Yet the uneasy feeling persisted that unless some notice was taken of the bill of particulars, certain Englishmen and several foreign governments might believe the charges or chalk them up to exaggerations of oppressive actions the king had taken. It was acknowledgment of the old saw that people would conclude there must be some fire to have produced so much smoke.

Accordingly, Lord North resorted to the usual eighteenth-century stratagem: he employed a writer to produce an anonymous pamphlet that would exculpate His Majesty.²¹

²¹ Earlier he had used James MacPherson to answer Congress's declaration of 'the causes and necessity of their taking up arms,' July 6, 1775.

He had at hand just the person for this chore in John Lind. Lind was an Oxford graduate and son of a poor Anglican clergyman, then deceased. He had become an Anglican deacon himself and had gone as chaplain to the British minister to Constantinople, but there becoming too acceptable to his boss's mistress, he was dismissed. He went to Warsaw and was employed as tutor to Prince Stanislaus, where he remained for a decade, returning to England with a pension in 1773. He had debts of his father to pay and support of his two sisters to assume, yet he moved in government circles socially and became acquainted with Lord North.²² He had written two political pamphlets that were much admired and undoubtedly were known to North. In the fall of 1776 he wrote *An Answer to the Declaration of the American Congress*. It was an adequate performance, but Lind lacked the force and color of someone like Tom Paine. Point by point he took up Jefferson's accusations against the king and answered them at least to his own satisfaction and that of Lord North. The pamphlet ostensibly ran through several editions before the end of the year to meet a growing demand. Actually, the first edition ran to 137 pages, but was promptly revised and shortened 'at the desire of the Ministry.' Then eight thousand copies of the 132-page version were ordered from the printer, William Strahan. As they were issued they were successively labeled second to fifth editions to give the impression of widespread popularity.²³ A reset edition appeared in 1777, and two other editions were printed in Aberdeen and Dublin that year. Two translations into French were issued in London and The Hague for circulation on the continent.

Since one of Jefferson's complaints embraced ten specifics and Lind answers them separately, he made a total of twenty-eight 'articles' or indictments. Briefly he argued that the

²² *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. 'Lind, John.'

²³ I am indebted to Thomas R. Adams, director of the John Carter Brown Library, for information on the printing of Lind's pamphlet.

colonies had no real grievances, that their complaint was they were *liable* to be taxed more than they could bear, that it was *possible* they might be oppressed, and that it was *possible* the British government might misuse its powers. Lind added that no government can be imagined where such possibilities do not exist. The grievances enumerated by Jefferson, however, were not potentials but actualities. For this effort it is alleged that Lind earned a pension of £100 a year for his two sisters.

At the same time Thomas Hutchinson wrote and printed a reply to the Declaration which he entitled *Strictures Upon the Declaration of the Congress at Philadelphia*, dated October 15, 1776. He gave the pamphlet away. Hutchinson had been governor of Massachusetts Bay, but he had gone to England in June 1774 and had a long interview with the king which revealed that he did not comprehend the gravity of the situation at home. His sense of personal loyalty to the sovereign led him to a belief in the inferiority of the colonies; consequently he could not mentally bridge the gap that had been opened or attribute it to anything other than corrupt leadership among the Americans. Though respectfully treated and never in want, Hutchinson was always homesick for Boston, but died in England in 1780.

Of the Declaration he said he thought it would have been better for Congress to leave the world in ignorance of its motives for rebellion than to offer 'such false and frivolous reasons in support of it.' The body of Americans, he insisted, were loyal and felt no constraints, but a few men in each colony had independence in view before any taxes were imposed by Parliament. He raised the charge of inconsistency of slavery against those pursuing liberty and happiness, and he contradicted or answered the accusations leveled against the king, chiefly with reference to Massachusetts.

The Universal Magazine for November published a reply to one of the weakest charges against the king—that he had

'excited domestic insurrections' (meaning slave revolts) and 'aroused the Indians' against the frontier inhabitants. The writer signed himself 'L.' It was John Lind, and either he contributed this letter as a separate piece or the editor lifted the reply from Lind's pamphlet in answer to Article xxvii. The letter pointed out that His Majesty's governors merely offered freedom to the slaves of 'these assertors of liberty.' As for stirring up the Indians, he defended it on two grounds: the Congress was first to engage Indians, and since force had become necessary that force which was most easily procured was logical to use.

Perhaps the only man in the British Isles to welcome the Declaration of Independence was the Reverend Josiah Tucker, dean of Gloucester. He had some small reputation as an economist and had already produced half a dozen pamphlets on American affairs. Usually he was a warm supporter of government measures, so much so that Edmund Burke dismissed him as 'a Court vermin.' As soon as he read the Declaration he dashed off another tract, also published in November, under the title *A Series of Answers to Certain Popular Objections Against Separating from the Rebellious Colonies*. In essence he said 'Hooray! Let's get rid of those troublesome and expensive colonies. Their trade with us will not be affected because they have no better market for their goods and no better place to buy manufactured products.' It was an interesting argument, but he did not persuade anyone in power to believe that British commerce would not suffer from an independent America, especially after his tract was disputed by one Samuel Estwick, agent for Barbados.

The attitude of the ministry, of Parliament, and of the public continued optimistic about the war. Of what importance was a document about independence if the colonies were failing in their rebellion? All the news received in London in November and December and even in January of 1777 was good news. True, Carleton had withdrawn from

Lake Champlain, but Rhode Island was occupied without a battle. Washington had retreated steadily to White Plains, where he made a lackluster stand. When he crossed the Hudson into New Jersey, General Howe turned back and captured Fort Mifflin with its hapless garrison of three thousand. He sent Cornwallis after Washington, and his lordship appeared to be driving the rag, tag, and bobtail across the state toward the Delaware River. Howe was knighted by the king. Gen. Charles Lee, the most eminent professional on the American side, was captured, and desertions were numerous. Washington's little army was raveling away; and many enlistments would expire on December 31. Still the weather continued dry and golden for the pursuers.

Eagerly Lord Germain awaited each packet from America for news that the arrogant rebels had scattered or surrendered, leaving Philadelphia open to occupation and the illegal Continental Congress dispossessed. France and Spain had done nothing, as Lord Sandwich predicted, even though Benjamin Franklin had arrived in Paris to exert his charm. Who was going to rush in to support a lost cause? The ministry and king remained smug and confident.

Only a few perceptive military minds in London were disturbed. They could not understand why Howe did not catch up with Washington and force a showdown battle. His lethargy was puzzling and even ominous. Occupation of land accomplished nothing. February began, and the news continued good, if not decisive.

Then came February 12. Capt. James Wallace of the British navy arrived in London with a letter from Howe dated January 3. It contained news that Germain could hardly believe. Somehow Washington had managed to recross the Delaware River on Christmas night and capture a thousand stupid Hessians at Trenton! This was a setback that Germain was going to minimize; he made no public announcement. Eleven days later there arrived a second letter from Howe

dated January 5. It only continued the tale of disaster. Washington had completely deceived Cornwallis, marched around behind him and captured Princeton, forcing his lordship to beat a hasty retreat all the way to Brunswick. It was a nightmare. What this reversal would do to American morale was obvious. Germain was furious in his disappointment and told Howe that the defeat was 'extremely mortifying.' He wondered in private if he could ever invigorate the brothers. He let this letter be published.

Howe's next letter, of January 20, did not brighten the scene. 'I do not now see a prospect of terminating the war but by a general action,' Howe wrote, 'and I am aware of the difficulties in our way to obtain it. . . .' It was as close as he ever came to admitting that his campaign of 1776 had achieved neither peace nor victory, that he had been, in brief, out-generalled.

Amid all this gloom the Declaration of Independence took on the aspects of a blueprint. It was not a chessboard move, not mere propaganda, not a whistling in the dark. It was serious and above all it was meant, even though the British failed to comprehend the depth of American feeling about independence. It was a trumpet call not simply to the Americans but to the liberal-minded everywhere. What good were ridicule and replies now? Unless the rebels were thoroughly defeated in battle, a new nation was certain to be born. Further, the six months of various reactions served mainly to obscure the lesson of the Declaration for the British Empire. Seeing only an 'either-or' situation, the English were unable to imagine an intermediate position of a commonwealth of self-governing nations under one king, a concept still a century off. The beam of light which the Declaration cast on a new order of government for the empire was never perceived.

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