NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Speech of John Dickinson Opposing the Declaration of Independence, 1 July, 1776

This extraordinary document is the actual manuscript from which John Dickinson of Pennsylvania read his speech against the Declaration of Independence. Among our historical records it is unique, for it alone gives some positive and reliable information of the details of arguments, to some extent the very words that were used, during "the greatest debate of all," as John Adams called it, on 1 July, 1776. Its publication removes at least a part of the proceedings of that critical Monday morning from the realm of conjecture.

The manuscript has remained so long unpublished because, separated from the main body of Dickinson's papers, it came only recently to The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and thus within the ken of historical scholars. Most of the papers of John Dickinson passed when he died (1808) into the possession of his elder daughter, Sally Norris Dickinson. She was a maiden lady, who left her property to her younger sister, Maria, the wife of Albanus Charles Logan. From the Logan family the great collection of Logan Papers came to the Society in the nineteenth century. This included many folio volumes of Dickinson material, indeed most of the "Farmer's" personal files. But some papers remained in Logan garrets, and not until this past decade, when the collection known as the Maria Dickinson Logan Manuscripts was catalogued, and a number of scattered items added to the enormous Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, did these return to their proper place among Dickinson's records.

The present document was one of those added to the Gratz Collection. Its identification as Dickinson's July first speech was not at first acceptable, because two sheaves of papers bearing similar endorsements were filed together. The first consists of four folio pages
of closely written notes, labeled "Arguments in Congress to prove Dependance of the Col’s on G B."); the second of five folio pages endorsed "Arguments ag’t the Independance of these Colonies—in Congress." Both are the same size (12 3/8 in. x 7 3/4 in.), both are indisputably in Dickinson’s handwriting, endorsements as well as context. The endorsements clearly distinguish the two documents, but endorsements are unreliable indices, so likely they are to have been added for other purposes than the enlightenment of subsequent historians; so a thorough analysis and comparison of both folios was made. The conclusion was irresistible, that they belonged to two different occasions. One is obviously a speech, one is obviously not a speech. One has a definite beginning and a definite end, the other cannot be fitted into it. One cannot have been written before May, 1776, for it refers to events that transpired then, the other does not mention these events though they would have buttressed the argument, and so was probably written earlier. Careful study of the contents of each enabled the exact identification of the document given here as the speech of July first.

The other, though it cannot be considered here, is also of considerable interest. It has been established to be the draft of an address to the people of the colonies against independence presented to Congress in January, 1776. In that month the issue between the radicals and "Mr. Dickinson’s party" was squarely joined. The conservatives were still strong enough to prevent articles of union,\(^1\) countering with the motion (made by James Wilson) for an address. On January 24 a committee composed of Dickinson, Wilson, and three others was appointed to prepare such an address; on February 13 a report was made by James Wilson, "very long, badly written and full against Independency," one delegate thought it. "Wilson perceiving the Majority did not relish his Address and Doctrine never thought fit to stir it again."\(^2\) The address was tabled, that is, defeated; and with it was defeated the conservative plan for a more gradual approach to independence than the radicals’ enthusiasm permitted. Previously thought to be the work of Wilson, this document proves the still-born address was written by John Dickinson, and

---

\(^1\) Merrill Jensen, *Articles of Confederation* (Madison, 1940), 87-88.

affords an excellent characterization of his strategy during the winter of 1775-76.

Both documents are uncommonly difficult to read; they are the notes a man makes for his own use in speaking, abbreviated, cryptic, scrawled, meant for no other eyes than his, written in the fullness of argument by one familiar with the issues to be discussed. Their object was to facilitate presentation and to organize thinking, rather than to please a reader. The independence speech, however, is the more carefully prepared. The first two pages are written out in full sentences, properly paragraphed, meticulously corrected for style; then there is a break, and most of the rest is in sketchy form until the conclusion, which is again written out (at least partially) and corrected. Possibly when he first sat down to write, Dickinson intended to commit the whole speech to paper, but for some reason (hardly the shortness of time, for he had from 11 June till 1 July) finished only the introductory remarks, leaving the rest in tentative notes. Whether this was the case or not, it is highly suggestive that he did work out the beginning so carefully. Fully aware of "The Consequences involvd in the Motion," conscious that by opposing it he would "give the finishing Blow to my once too great, and, my Integrity considered, now too diminish'd Popularity," he framed an introduction that would convince even his opponents of his earnestness, his desire to follow the right course, his freedom from self-interest, his sensibility to the occasion. He wrote and re-wrote, he emended and scratched out, polished a phrase here, a sentence there, until he had it just as he wanted it, and as we may surely consider it, the permanent record of his thoughts and feelings about his unpopular role in the momentous struggle.

It is a convincing testimony. It commands a sympathetic reading; even after the passage of so many years it has not lost the power to move. There is nothing trivial about this speech, nothing casual or off-hand, and however much we may look upon Dickinson's career up to that day as partisan, factional, and motivated by economic considerations, here we must acknowledge he rose to the highest calling of statesmanship. John Adams, victor of the debate, was impressed. He had expected very little discussion, but Dickinson he

---

\[Jensen, op. cit., is the most recent and in many respects the best account of the conflict of parties in the Congress preceding the Declaration.\]
found “determined to bear his testimony against [the independence resolution] with more formality.”

He had prepared himself apparently with great labor and ardent zeal, and in a speech of great length, and with all his eloquence, he combined together all that had been written in pamphlets and newspapers, and all that had from time to time been said in Congress by himself and others. He conducted the debate not only with great ingenuity and eloquence, but with equal politeness and candor, and was answered in the same spirit.  

The aptness of Adams’ description leaps from these pages. Labor, ardor, eloquence and zeal are here in full measure; there are no weazel-words, no escaping of issues.

II

What we have previously known of the July first debate has come from the letters and notes of the persons who witnessed or took part in it. Organized, collated and edited by E. C. Burnett, these have given us the general outline of the day’s proceedings, but despite the thorough researches of Mr. Burnett and others there are still many perplexing questions unanswered.

These facts seem clear: The Congress assembled shortly after nine o’clock Monday morning. We may surmise there was a general anticipation of big doings in the order of the day. John Adams, early in the morning, wrote to a Southern sympathiser, “May Heaven prosper the new-born republic, and make it more glorious than any former republics have been!”

Several letters were read, some from the generals of the armies in the field, one each from the conventions of New Jersey and New Hampshire; six thousand dollars were voted for Virginia purchasing agents; then the crucial resolution of the Maryland convention instructing its delegates to vote for independence was read. These matters having been attended to, the session resolved itself into a committee of the whole, Benjamin Harrison in the chair. Both the Lee resolution to declare the colonies independent, and the declara-

* Burnett, op. cit., 522.
* Ibid. 521.
tion that had been composed were referred to the committee, but on that day only the resolution was to be considered.\(^7\)

Who spoke first? Adams says his speech was a reply to Dickinson's; Dr. Benjamin Rush's account declares Dickinson's followed Adams'. The weight of evidence is on the side of the former, and indeed from a reading of Dickinson's speech it is not difficult to conclude that it came first. It does not appear to be an answer to specific points in a debate, but only to generalized arguments current on the issue. Rush's description deserves some attention, however; it is very short, and may be quoted in full:

Mr Jn\(^\circ\) Dickinson possessed great political integrity in every stage of the controversy, but wanted political fortitude. In the debates upon the declaration of Independence Mr Jn\(^\circ\) Adams began a Speech by invoking the God of Eloquence to inspire him upon such a copious Subject. Mr Dickinson began a reply to Mr Adams's Speech in the following Words. "The Gentleman who spoke last began by invoking a heathen God. I shall introduce what I have to say by humbly invoking the God of heaven & earth to inspire me with the knowledge and love of truth, and if what I am about to say in opposition to the declaration of Independance should be injurious in any degree to my country, I pray God to overrule my Arguments, and to direct us to such a decision upon this weighty question as Shall be most for the interest & happiness of the people committed to our care."—I know added he further—that the tide of the prejudices & passions of the people at large is thoroughly in favor of Independance. I know too that I have acquired a character, and some popularity with them both of which I shall risk by opposing this favorite measure. But I had rather risk both, than Speak, or Vote contrary to the dictates of my judgement and conscience."\(^12\)

Now Rush was not present at the debate,\(^13\) so we may discount his narrative of the order of speaking. It is obvious likewise that he had only the foggiest notion of exactly what Dickinson said; but he does appear to have learned something about the speech, especially to

\(^7\) Ibid. 506-507.
\(^8\) Originally, abou [struck out].
\(^9\) Originally, th [struck out].
\(^10\) Adams denied this. "It has been said by some of our historians, that I began by an invocation to the god of eloquence. This is a misrepresentation. Nothing so puerile as this fell from me." Burnett, op. cit., 522, n.
\(^11\) Originally, this [struck out].
\(^12\) This is an excerpt from a manuscript in Rush's hand, entitled by him, Anecdotes—facts Character &c, now in the Library Company of Philadelphia. The inverted commas are as I have given them.
have accepted that self-immolating opening. Rush and Dickinson were intimate friends in '76, and except for a period of sharp disagreement during the founding of Dickinson College in the 1780's they remained so until Dickinson's death. Rush doubtless questioned Dickinson about his conduct. The significance we may attach to his paragraph is, that he represented a type of informed opinion in Philadelphia that played its part in the "legendary and myth-making process" concerning this day. His account clearly was the source for the description of the debate given by his friend, Dr. Ramsay, in his *History of the American Revolution*.14

If Dickinson spoke first, then Adams' opening was modeled upon Dickinson's reference to the "Custom in a wise and virtuous State, to preface Propositions in Council, with a Prayer," and he began, as he described it,

by saying that this was the first time of my life that I had ever wished for the talents and eloquence of the ancient orators of Greece and Rome, for I was very sure that none of them ever had before him a question of more importance to his country and to the world. They would probably, upon less occasions than this, have begun by solemn invocations to their divinities for assistance; but the question before me appeared so simple, that I had confidence enough in the plain understanding and common sense that had been given me, to believe that I could answer, to the satisfaction of the House, all the arguments which had been produced, notwithstanding the abilities which had been displayed, and the eloquence with which they had been enforced.15

The debate proceeded after Adams sat down, for some time, when the new delegates from New Jersey elected for the purpose of voting independence arrived in the hall. "... Mr. Stockton, Dr. Witherspoon, and Mr. Hopkinson, very respectable characters, expressed a great desire to hear the arguments. All was silence; no one would speak; all eyes were turned upon me. Mr. Edward Rutledge came to me and said, laughing,16 'Nobody will speak but you on this subject. You have all the topics so ready, that you must satisfy the gentlemen from New Jersey.' I answered him, laughing, that it had so much the air of exhibiting like an actor or gladiator, for the entertainment of the audience, that I was ashamed to repeat what I

14 Trenton ed., 1811. I. 430.
15 Burnett, *op. cit.*, 522. n.
16 Strange indeed, as Hazelton remarks, since Rutledge opposed Adams on the resolution.
had said twenty times before, and I thought nothing new could be advanced by me."\(^{17}\) The New Jersey delegates, he tells us, insisted.

We observed to them that the Question was so public and had been so long disputed in Pamphlets Newspapers and every Fireside, that they could not be uninformed and must have made up their minds. They said it was true they had not been inattentive to what had been passing abroad, but they had not heard the arguments in Congress, and did not incline to give their opinions until they should hear the sentiments of Members there. . . . I was somewhat confused at this personal application to me . . . after some time I said, "This is the first time of my life when I seriously wished for the genius and Eloquence of the celebrated orators of Athens and Rome. . . ." All this to be sure was but a flourish; and not as I conceive a very bright Exordium: but I felt awkwardly . . . I wish someone had remembered the speech, for it is almost the only one I ever made that I wish was literally preserved. . . .

It appears that after Adams' speech the question was put, and carried in the affirmative. That evening Adams wrote Samuel Chase, who had gone to Maryland to keep the Maryland Convention in line, that the debate had taken most of the day, but that "it was an idle mispence of time, for nothing was said but what had been repeated and hackneyed in that room before, a hundred times, for six months past.\(^{18}\)

There does not seem to be any reason to doubt the narrative of Adams in general, except on the point of the repetition of his speech. In 1805 he spoke of giving a second speech for the benefit of the Jersey late-comers, but in 1807 he mentioned only one address. Whether he did repeat his speech we shall probably never know, although the application to him to give a résumé of the arguments for the benefit of the new arrivals is so vividly portrayed in each case that we are justified in supposing some incident of the sort took place.

III

Amongst these imperfect accounts of the day's proceedings, the present document stands out in clear and bold relief, as exact reality rather than hazy memory. In addition, there is a description by John Dickinson himself which buttresses our stock of evidence, and which deserves some mention here. It is in the series of letters he

\(^{17}\) Burnett, loc. cit.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
published in Philadelphia newspapers in January, 1783, addressed "To my Opponents in the late Elections of Councillor for the County of Philadelphia, and of President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania," usually referred to as his *Vindication*.\(^{19}\) This is doubtless the publication of his speech which Adams once referred to as inaccurate, and certainly it is the basis for reconstructions given by Botta, Bancroft, and some others. The occasion of its writing largely determined its character. Dickinson had just been elected President, that is to say, governor, of the State. During the campaign he had been venomously attacked in the newspapers by someone writing over the name "Valerius," who reviewed his career from 1765, among other things criticising his opposition to independence. Dickinson had refrained from answering him before the election, and had written to each printer in the city asking that nothing be published in his defense; thus his defiance to Valerius. After his victory, however, he did answer, in a long, earnest and spirited defense of his whole public life. There is nothing quite like the *Vindication* in the literature of the American Revolution. No other leading man of that day had occasion to defend his conduct so specifically before the public, so none set down his defense as soon after the war was over. Thus this document has a certain claim to contemporaneity, and except for the heat of political controversy which evoked it might be considered an authentic account of his position in 1776.

The thing which prevents us from accepting the *Vindication* at its face value is the apparently unnecessary character of the whole business. Doubtless Dickinson had been affronted and wounded by Valerius’ attack, and it is understandable that having won the election in spite of it he wished to offer some reassurance to his supporters of the falsity of the charges. But the elaborate document he turned out strikes one as considerably more than was called for. It has the look of an opportunity long awaited, and his letters of the period between 1776 and 1783 bear out this impression. These cannot be reproduced here, but it may help the reader to evaluate the first four paragraphs of the speech if he knows that Dickinson fully expected to be overwhelmed with a tempest of popular resentment,

that he planned his military service as a gesture of loyalty to the American cause, an exhibition that he was as firm a supporter of his country as the radical party could offer, and that he constantly exaggerated political disagreements into personal antagonisms. He developed a hypersensitivity on the matter of his integrity; indeed, it was in this mood that he wrote the beginning of his address as reproduced here, and he had hardly recovered his serenity when in 1783 he produced the *Vindication*.

He had the manuscript of the speech before him as he wrote; therefore we may consider the *Vindication* as it were, his own explanation of certain passages in the speech. Where apposite, selections from it have been appended as footnotes to what follows. In general he denied that he had been, as Valerius charged, the "early and persevering enemy of the independence of America," asserting that he only opposed the declaration of independence being adopted "at the time when it was made." This was not entirely accurate, for certainly none who were caught between the Tories on the one hand and the radicals on the other had been so constant as Dickinson in seeking to avert separation; though to be sure by the spring of 1776 he had become reconciled to it, and based his opposition to the Lee resolution on policy rather than on principle. The whole argument below is concerned with the time and circumstance of the moment, the strength of the Family Compact, the possibility of an invasion of Portugal by Spain, the formation of governments in America, the support of the people. Indeed, were it not for the first few paragraphs, which certainly deal with the principle of independence implicitly, it might seem that his opposition was truly confined to that of policy alone. But Dickinson had too long been the vigorous opponent of Sam Adams, R. H. Lee, John Adams, and the others who were clamoring for a declaration. He could not in 1776, any more than in 1783, or 1941, convince even his most warm admirers that he favored a policy he had so long and so earnestly combatted.

His motives—even more important a consideration in 1783 than in 1776—he insisted were unimpeachable; to make the charge truly discrediting, Valerius would have to show him motivated by unworthy ends: "It will not be enough to prove that I was mistaken: so far from it, that if it appears I was actuated by a tender affection for my country, I know my country will excuse the honest error."
He cited, with some exaggeration which under the circumstances is neither strange nor unpardonable, his previous career, and his subsequent military career, to prove his "tender affection" for the American cause, asserting that when he was risking nothing but his own life, security and fortune he used no caution in opposing the British, but when in Congress he was risking the lives, fortunes, and security of others then he employed the utmost circumspection and deliberateness.

Thereupon he recited his objections to independence at the time it was proposed. First, the military campaign then under way would probably decide the outcome, and to declare independence would add not one man nor the least supply to American strength. Instead it would "commit our country upon an alternative, where, to recede would be infamy, and to persist might be destruction." Second, it would injure us at home, with friends in England, and abroad. Foreign aid would not be obtained by separation; France and Spain should be consulted first rather than offended by precipitate action. Domestic quarrels and state governments should be concluded, western land questions settled, the people won to independence before it was declared. Without these prudent measures, the resolution would accomplish nothing tangible or important, but would lay the whole future of the country under a cloud of the most equivocal uncertainty.

Of course in his Vindication he admitted he had been mistaken. He had no choice. But he contended his errors had been honestly made, not by an ill will but by a patriotic care for the public welfare. "I will only add upon this point—that, I am acting a very small and a very short part in the drama of human affairs. I wish to do right; and to give satisfaction. The opinions of men are fallible, and sometimes unjust. There is one supreme judge who cannot err; and when I endeavour, that my defects may not, for want of integrity, be displeasing in his sight, I would have you gentlemen, assuredly to know, that, notwithstanding my sincere desire to please you, I shall little trouble myself how your applauses or your censures are bestowed." With this final defense of his position, we can have no captious exception.
IV

To make the manuscript intelligible it has been necessary to do a considerable amount of reconstruction. This has been kept within very narrow limits. Letters have been added to complete words which Dickinson characteristically abbreviated, occasionally a clause has been completed where the meaning otherwise would not be clear, any reading dubious or conjectural has been defended in the footnotes. Marginalia and interlineations have been enclosed in parentheses, additions to the text in brackets. Where the sense is gone beyond recovery, the notes have been given as they stand. In a few places a word or a phrase has been further elucidated in order that the reader may make reconstructions for himself of the arguments, if not of the text, of the speech. Erasures and eliminations have been indicated where they have been decipherable.

Iowa State College

J. H. Powell

Arguments ag^4. the Indepandence of these Colonies—
in Congress—

The Consequences involvd in the Motion now lying before You are of such Magnitude, that I tremble under the oppressive Honor of sharing in its Determination. I feel Myself unequal to the Burthen assigned Me. I believe, I had almost said, I rejoice, that the Time is approaching, when I shall be relieved from its Weight. (While the Trust remains with Me, I must discharge the Duties of it, as well as I can—and I hope I shall be the more favorably heard, as I am convinced, that I shall hold such Language, as will sacrifice my private Emolument to general Interests.)^20 My Conduct, this Day, I expect will give the finishing Blow to my once too great, and (, my Integrity considered, now)^21 too diminish’d Popularity. (It will be)^22 my Lott to know, that I had rather vote away (the Enjoyment of that dazzling)^23 display, (that pleasing Possession,)^24

^20 Insertion in the margin.
^21 In place of, now, for my Integrity
^22 In place of, But that it is
^23 In place of, that
^24 In place of, dazzling Splendor, [. . . one word illegible] warm Rays of which my wisest [?] Passions have agreeably flattered
than the Blood and Happiness of my Countrymen—too fortunate, amidst their Calamities, if I prove (a Truth known in Heaven,) that I had rather they should hate Me, than that I should hurt them. But thinking as I do on the Subject of Debate, Silence would be guilt. I despise (its) Arts, I detest its Advantages. I (must speak, tho I should lose my Life, tho I should lose the Affections of my Country.) Happy at present, (however,) I shall esteem Myself, if I (can so far rise to the Height of this great argument as to) offer to this Honorable Assembly in a full & clear Manner, those Reasons, that have so invariably fix’d my own Opinion.

It was a Custom in a wise and virtuous State, to preface Propositions in Council, with a Prayer, that they might redound to the public Benefit. I beg Leave to imitate the laudable Example—And I do most humbly implore Almighty God, (with) whom (dwells) Wisdom itself, so to enlighten the Members of this House, that their Decision may be such as will best promote the Liberty, Safety and Prosperity of these Colonies—and (for Myself,) that his Divine Goodness may be graciously pleased to enable Me, to speak the Precepts of Sound Policy on the important Question that now engages our Attention.

Sir, (Gentlemen) of very distinguished Abilities and Knowledge differ (widely) in their Sentiments upon the Point now 25 Here is inserted a marginal note to follow the word Heaven: Where Men differ on which side is Passion, i.e., "... in Heaven, where men differ as to which side is excited with Passion." Here also is another marginal notation, apparently to follow this sentence: Drawer Resentment, one Pp of Virtue, i.e., "The drawing of resentment is one proof of virtue."

26 In place of, a prudent, a profitable Reserve—
27 In place of, the
28 Originally, Art
29 for[eit], struck out.
30 In place of, Love of
31 This whole insertion in place of, will speak, tho I speak Death to my Existence, tho I [(am) struck out] speak Death to the Affections of my Country towards Me.
32 In place of, am able to produce
33 In place of, who is
34 Originally, this Body, & [struck out].
35 In place of, When Men
36 (so), [struck out].
37 Originally, as Gentlemen have done too in [struck out].
agitated. They all agree, that the utmost Prudence is required in forming our Decision, (But immediately disagree) in their Notion of that Prudence. Some cautiously insist, that We ought to obtain that previous Information which we are likely (quickly) to obtain, and to make those previous (Establishments that are acknowledged to be necessary.) Others (strenuously assert), that tho regularly such Information & Establishment ought to precede the Measure proposed, (yet, confiding in our Fortune more boldly than Caesar himself, we ought to) brave the Storm in a Skiff (made of Paper.)

In all such Cases, where every Argument is adorn'd with an Eloquence (that may please and yet mislead,) it seems to me the proper (method) of (discovering) the right Path, to enquire, which of the parties is probably, the most warm'd by Passion. Other Circumstances being equal or nearly equal, that Consideration would have Influence with Me. I fear the Virtue of Americans. Resentment of the Injuries offered to their Country, may irritate them to Counsels & to Actions that may be detrimental to the Cause, they would dye to advance.

In place of, When at the same Time all
In place of, — and yet dissenting once again
In place of, a comma here.
In place of, insisting — ing struck out.
In place of, soon
In place of, that
In place of, Regulations, which We may soon form— and
In place of, boldly asserting
In place of, yet, like Caesar trusting to our Fortune, We may safely trust &[?] venture into the [a reference to Plutarch which would have escaped few of the members present].

(. . .) [one word, interlined, illegible, struck out].
In place of, even without exam
Originally, it see . . . [two words illegible, struck out]
The reading here is uncertain; a tear along a fold in the MS obliterates certain letters.
In place of one word, illegible, struck out.
In place of, investigating
Originally, it is [it struck out].
Originally, Their [struck out].
Originally, not [struck out].
Originally, inj [probably injurious, but struck out before the word was finished].


From here on the MS is no longer in complete sentences, but only in short, cryptic notes, from which I have made the reconstructions indicated in brackets.

That is, the general spirit of Americans to preserve their lives, liberties and property is lively enough. There is no need to stir the people to further animation. The last four words read, Gen Sp of Am[.] Doubtless Dickinson had some notions on this topic which do not appear in these jottings; but certainly it may be agreed that the spirit of that summer in America was animated!

The text is Ppply. The Vindication of 1783, which as mentioned above may be considered Dickinson's own interpretation of the present document, contains the following paragraph, clarifying the sense of this passage: "My first objection to making the declaration of independence, at the time when it was made, arose from this consideration: It was acknowledged in the debate, that the first campaign would be decisive as to the final event of the controversy. I insisted that the declaration would not strengthen us by one man, or by the least supply—on the contrary, it might be construed to manifest such an aversion on our part, as might inflame the calamities of the contest, and expose our soldiers and inhabitants in general to additional cruelties and outrages— We ought not, without some prelusory trials of our strength, to commit our country upon an alternative, where, to recede would be infamy, and to persist might be destruction." (Stillé, Life of John Dickinson, pp. 368-9.)

This might also be read Enterprise, possibly Independence.

This phrase is written, form afor aid. Reading uncertain.

That is, the American colonies unconnected with foreign alliances.

Or possibly, imminent.
Emp[ire is] in ano[the]. World 65—Masserano 66—Intellig[ence] from (Cadiz) 67.[.]


66 Probably here a reference to the remote situation of Spain, from her colonies, as France had been when she lost Canada. This was a point the conservatives had stressed before. They seemed much more concerned about the danger to the Spanish colonies than did the Spanish court.

67 Filippo Vittorio Ferrero-Fieschi, Prince de Masserano, an Italian nobleman under the guardianship of the Spanish king (of which crown he was also a pensioner), had recently been appointed Spanish Ambassador to England. Dickinson was well advised to be concerned with Masserano's oblique role in the diplomatic currents that largely determined success or failure of American independence. See note 100, below.

68 Cadiz is conjectural, for the reading is not clear. No commissioners had been appointed to Spain as yet. Probably Dickinson said, that we should wait until definite news arrived from Cadiz regarding Spain's threatened invasion of England's ally, Portugal (Cf. note 100, below).

69 Conformance, or Conformity[?]

70 In place of, new Star

71 In place of, Pol[itica]l Hemisphere

72 Reading uncertain; the obvious meaning is shared.

73 Originally, flatter [struck out].

74 No indentation in the MS.

75 Probably, we had news that our Commissioner [Silas Deane] had reached Bermuda by the fifth of May. Deane had left in the Rachell early in March.

76 i.e., France and Spain.

77 Reading of these two words uncertain.
May they not say to Us, Gentlemen, You falsely pretend to consult Us, & disrespectfully proceeded without waiting our Resolution. You must abide the Consequences. We are not ready for a Rupture; You should have negotiated till We were. We will not be hurried by your Impetuosity. We know it is our Interest to support You, but We shall be in no haste about it. Try your own Strength & Resources in which You have such Confidence. We know now You dare not look back. Reconciliation is impossible without declaring. the stage you have. Yours is the most rash & at the same Time the most contemptible Senate that ever existed on Earth!

---

*No new paragraph in the MS.*

*Here two letters are struck out.*

*Originally, are not afraid* [struck out].

*This sentence is, Recon is imposs wout decl arg. The reading is not clear. It obviously does not mean, “reconciliation between France and the American colonies is impossible without declaring,” for Dickinson was arguing the opposite; but it is almost equally meaningless if understood, “reconciliation between England and the colonies is impossible without declaring independence,” unless one accepts the highly involved reasoning of a few of Dickinson’s audience who believed that independence would lead to immediate steps toward reconciliation by Parliament. This Dickinson certainly did not accept.*

*A tear at the fold of the MS renders this word nearly illegible. The text indicates Senate, Assembly, or a similar word.*

*These passages from the Vindication state the argument of this paragraph:*

“Foreign aid would not be obtained by the declaration, but by our actions in the field, which were the only evidences of our union and vigour that would be respected,—and by the sentiments statesmen should form upon the relative consequences of the dispute. . . .

“We ought to know the disposition of the great powers, before such an irrevocable step should be taken; and, if they did not generally chuse to interfere, how far they would permit any one or more of them to interfere. The erection of an Independent Empire on this continent was a phenomenon in the world—Its effect would be immense, and might vibrate round the globe—How they might affect, or be supposed to affect, old establishments, was not ascertained—It was singularly disrespectful to France, to make the declaration before her sense was known, as we had sent an agent expressly to enquire, ‘whether such a declaration would be acceptable to her’; and we had reason to believe he was then arrived at the court of Versailles—Such precipitation might be unsuitable to the circumstances of that kingdom, and inconvenient—The measure ought to be delayed, till the common interests should be in the best manner consulted, by common consent. Besides, the door to accommodation with Great Britain ought not to be shut, until we knew what terms could be obtained from some competent power—Thus to break with her, before we had compacted with another, was to make experiments on the lives and liberties of my countrymen, which I would sooner
Suppose on this Event Great Britain should offer Canada to France & Florida to Spain with an extension of the old limits. Would not France & Spain accept them? Gentlemen say the trade of all America is more valuable to France than Canada. I grant it; but suppose she may get both? If she is politic & none doubts that, I aver she has the easiest game to play for attaining both, that ever presented itself to a nation.

When we have bound ourselves to a stern quarrel with Great Britain by a declaration of independence, France has nothing to do but to hold back & intimated Great Britain till Canada is put into her hands, then to intimated us into a (most disadvantageous) grant of our trade. It is my firm opinion these events will take place, & arise naturally from our declaring independence.

As to aid from foreign powers: our declaration can procure us none during this present campaign though made (today). It is impossible.

Now let us consider, if all the advantages expected from foreign powers cannot be attained in a more unexceptional manner. Is there no way of giving notice of a nation's resolution, than by claiming it to all the world? Let us in the most solemn manner inform the House of Bourbon, at least France, that we wait only for her determination to declare our independence. We must not talk generally of foreign powers, but only of those we expect to favor us. Let Spain assure us that we never will give any assistance to her colonies. Let France become guarantor of arrangements of this kind. 

die than agree to make; at best, it was to throw us into the hands of some other power, and to lie at mercy . . .” (Stillé, op. cit., 369-70; 370-71.)

84 No new paragraph in the MS.
85 The text is, pol. “Politic,” like the noun politics, had the connotation “wily,” or “cunning.” “If she is crafty,” might render the meaning.
86 Reading uncertain, due to a tear at a fold in the MS.
87 The text of this sentence is very hard to make out. The only thing that is clear, is the double ee, which prevents “guarantor.”
88 The reading of this paragraph is illuminated by this passage in the Vindication: “We ought to retain the declaration, and remain as much masters as possible of our own fame and fate—We ought to inform that power, that we were filled with a just
Besides, first [we ought to] Establish our governments & take the Reg[ula]. Form of a State—These prev[en]t[ive] Meas[ures] will shew Deliberat[ion], Wisdom, Caution & Unanim[ity].

[It is] Our Inter[est] to keep Great Britain in [the] Opinion that We mean Reconciliation as long as possible—. . . . [The] Wealth of London &c is pour'd into [the] Treasury. The whole Nation is ardent (against) Us. We oblige her [by our attitude] to persevere [in] Her Spirit. See [the] last Pet[ition] of London.

Suppose we shall ruin her. France must rise on her Ruins. Her Amb[ition]. Her Religion. Our (Dangers from hence) We shall weep at our . . . We shall be Overwhelm'd with Debt. I Compute that Debt at 6 Mill[ions] of P[ennsylvania] Mon[ey] a Year.

The War will be carried on with more Severity. The Burning of Towns, the Setting Loose of Indians. Our detestation of our oppressors; that we were determined to cast off for ever all subjection to them; to declare ourselves independent; and to support that declaration with our lives and fortunes—provided that power should approve the proceeding; would acknowledge our independence, and enter into a treaty with us upon equitable and advantageous conditions." (Stillé, op. cit., 371.)

This passage should be compared with the following in the Vindication: "Other objections to making the declaration, at the time when it was made, were suggested by our internal circumstances. To me it seemed, that, in the nature of things, the formation of our governments, and an agreement upon the terms of our confederation, ought to precede the assumption of our station among sovereigns. A sovereignty composed of several distinct bodies of men, not subject to established constitutions, and those bodies not combined together by the sanction of any confirmed articles of union, was such a sovereignty as had never appeared. These particulars would not be unobserved by foreign kingdoms and states, and they would wait for other proofs of political energy, before they would treat us with the desired attention." (Stillé, op. cit., 372.)

Here I find one whole line of the manuscript is indecipherable. It appears to read, Disadv[antage] to Admon from Oppon Her Union from our Declon—

Dickinson referred to the Address, Remonstrance and Petition to the Throne by the City of London favoring the American cause and justifying the grievances of the colonists. The King returned a rebuking answer. Cf. Gordon, History of the American War (London, 1788), I. 322.

No new paragraph in the MS.

For the importance of this argument, and anti-catholicism generally, see Metzger, The Quebec Act, A Primary Cause of the American Revolution, (N. Y., 1936).

One word indecipherable.
tiers[, has] Not yet [been] done[.] Bost[on] might have been (burnt) [though it was not.]


People[^96] [are] changeable[.] In Bitterness of Soul they may compl[ain] ag[ains]t. our Rashness & ask why We did not apply first to for[eign] Powers, Why We did not settle Diff[erence] among ourselves, [why we did not] Take Care to secure unsettled Lands for eas[in]g their Burthens instead of leav[in]g them to ... [^97] Col[onie]s, Why [we did] not wait till [we were] better prepar[d, [or] till We had made [an] Exper[imen]t. of our Strength[.]

3--[A third advantage to be expected from a Declaration is said to be the] Proof [it would furnish] of our Strength[^98] of Spirit[.][^99] ([But] This [is] possibly[^99] [only] the first Campaign [of the war.]) France & Spain may be alarm'd & p[ro]voked [with each other;] Masserano [was] an insult to France[.][^100] There is] (Not

[^95] No new paragraph in the MS.
[^96] No new paragraph in the MS.
[^97] One word illegible. It appears to be, P-lar. Could it be Populous?
[^98] The word, Strength, appears to have been deleted, then restored.
[^99] Reading of this word uncertain. It seems to be P-sily, or P-bly. The meaning here is a repetition of what Dickinson had said above (see n. 60).
[^100] See n. 66, above. Very little seems known about Prince de Masserano, one of the several Italians in the service of Spain (Grimaldi, foreign minister at Madrid, was himself a Genoese). To call his appointment as Spanish ambassador to England “an insult to France,” is to overstate the matter, for Masserano was not the only advocate of Spanish aggression regardless of the wishes of the French. The Count de Aranda, ambassador at Versailles, “flamed with zeal for a joint war with England” (Bemis, Diplomacy of the American Revolution, p. 42); and a bellicose spirit animated the Spanish Court throughout 1776, to the discomfort of Vergennes. How then shall this cryptic reference to Masserano be interpreted?

The issue to which Dickinson referred was a very serious one indeed, for Franco-Spanish solidarity was the only hope America had for financial and diplomatic support, and this solidarity had been weakened. Though the traditional “Family Compact” dating from 1733 had been made a full and thorough-going alliance in 1761, and was in the period following the Seven Years War the central focus of the diplomacy of
both powers, France had shown herself unwilling to aid Spain in her imperialistic ambitions, particularly since these ambitions would inevitably involve both nations in war against England, whose victory in 1763 had been overwhelming. In 1771 Spain had broken with England over the possession of the Falkland Islands. The willingness of Louis XV to disregard his obligations, and his unwillingness to fight England, left Spain isolated on this occasion; Charles III might have gone on into war without France, thus effectively dissolving the Family Compact, but he chose to back down instead. The possibility of maneuvering a rupture was attractive to England. She made many attempts to split France and Spain in the next few years, particularly by stirring up trouble between Spain and Portugal. This was not hard to do. A constant source of contention between these two countries was the unsettled boundary of Brazil and the Spanish colonies in the Rio de la Plata region, now Uruguay. Prospering under the strong statesmanship of the Marquis de Pombal (then Portuguese ambassador to London), the Brazilians had seized some Spanish outposts in 1775, some others early in 1776. The ministers of Charles III were excited with desire for revenge, and planned an invasion of Portugal itself. Portugal was allied with England, who would certainly have to take her part. But England was engaged with the rebellion of her American colonies; there could scarcely be a more favorable chance to move against Portugal. In March, 1776, Spain agreed to join France in subsidizing Beaumarchais' "secret aid" to the Americans, actually giving a million livres in May. She wished to keep the colonies active in their revolt, so that England would be exhausted (Bemis, op. cit., 25-26, n.). Meanwhile Masserano in London was laying the groundwork for the rancée against Portugal, seeking "with address and dexterity," the French chargé wrote, just how far England would or could support her ally.

But the real question was, would France support her ally, Spain, in a policy of aggression? Would the Family Compact preserve itself here, though it had failed in the Falkland Islands episode? With the Anglo-Spanish animosity at a high pitch, with France hesitant, weakened financially and not certain to gain by war anything she might not also gain by peaceful diplomatic manipulation, Dickinson certainly was not unjustified in his fear that France and Spain might become "alarm'd & provoked with each other." A separate policy on the part of Spain, would so weaken France as to make her effective support of the Americans almost impossible.

Apparently Dickinson discussed the possibility of a break between France and Spain rather fully. A nearly indecipherable marginal note: Ewan the mere Title of Rey not assumed without consult[ing] other Powers . . . [four words illegible], points to a discussion of the history of the Family Compact going as far back as the Peace of Utrecht.

But Dickinson, like some Englishmen, failed to consider the Count de Vergennes. To this minister the Family Compact was as important as it had been to Choiseul, whose career had ended in its defense. His policy was to try to dissuade Spanish "irredentists" but even if that failed to present a united front against England. His acute chargé at London, M. Garnier, gave an excellent picture of the position Masserano represented, in a letter of 15 May, 1776: "Either I am much deceived, or they flatter themselves in Madrid that they could, without the help of France, without compromising us, conquer Portugal before the Court of St. James's should have decided to support her, and that, having arrived before Lisbon, the Catholic King would be still in a position to prevent a general war by offering the restitution of his conquests, on condition that the Brazil boundary question should be settled immediately, and to his full and entire satisfaction." Masserano, Garnier found, was not unwilling obliquely to bring up the question of treaty obligations: "... when the Spanish Ambassador told me of Lord Suffolk's re-
the least Evid\[ence\] of her gr\[an\]t[in]g Us fav[ora]ble Terms\. Her p\[ro\]bable Cond\[ition\]^101 The Glory of recov[erin]g Canada [will be enough for her.] She will get that & then dictate Terms (to Us\[.\])

A PAR\[TI\]T\[I\]ON\(^{102}\) of these Col\[onie]s will take Place if G\[reat\] B\[ritain\] cant conq\[uer\] Us\. To escape from the protection we have in British rule by declaring independence would be like] Destroy [in]^8 a House before We have got ano[the]r[^,\] In Winter, with a small Family[;] Then ask[in]g a Neighb[our] to take Us in [and finding] He [is] unprepared[.]

(4^\text{th} [It is claimed that] The Spirit of the Col\[onies\] calls for such a Decl\[arati\]on[. I] Answ[er, that the spirit of the colonies is] Not to be relied on[.\]) Not only Treaties with for\[eign\] powers but among Ourselves should precede this Decl\[arati\]on\[.\] We should know on what Grounds We are to stand with Regard to one an-

other.\(^{103}\) [We ought to settle the issues raised by the] Decl\[arati\]on of Virg\[ini\]^a about Col\[onist\]s in their *Qifmts*.\(^{104}\) And, too,] The mark, viz: that M de Pombal is too well informed of the nature of England’s engage-
ments to fear being abandoned by her, it came into my mind that this might be an indirect lesson which Spain wished to teach us.” If Spain went ahead with her plans for an invasion, Garnier proposed that France should open secret negotiations at once with America, lest England conclude a peace in order to be free to avenge Portugal in South America. (Stevens, Facsimiles, 868.) Thus France would be protecting Spain against England, preserving the Family Compact, and weakening England by pro-
moting the revolution, all at the same time.

The upshot was, of course, that Spain was dissuaded by France from invasion, and gradually began to look upon the American revolution as a danger to her own colonial interests. So much so, indeed, that only with difficulty could she be persuaded to join the Franco-American alliance in 1778.

The issues are clearer in retrospect than they were in the midst of the negotiations, when Dickinson was speaking. We can appreciate his position, however, for the break he feared was at the time within the realm of possibility.

An interesting question (to which no answer can be returned) is, where did Dickin-
son get his information of Masserano and the Spanish-Portuguese affair? Some of it, but very little, was common currency; his correspondence does not reveal anything of the matter. A fuller knowledge would be a welcome addition to our understanding of the issue of independence.

\(^{101}\) What Dickinson’s apprehensions on this point were, I cannot anywhere discover.

\(^{102}\) This word is underlined twice.

\(^{103}\) Originally there followed here, Destroy[in]g a House before We have got ano[the]r[^,\] [struck out].

\(^{104}\) A reference to the quarrel between Virginia and Pennsylvania regarding jurisdic-
tion over Western Pennsylvania, which Virginia claimed, and in which in 1775 she
Comm[itt]ee on Confed[erati]on dispute\textsuperscript{105} (almost) every Art[icle]—Some of Us totally despair of any reasonable Terms of Confederation[.]\textsuperscript{106}

had established courts and a government. Riots were brewing, and a serious conflict was to last five years. Pittsburgh was the center of Virginia adherents. Force, Archives, fourth series, I; Pennsylvania Magazine, XXXVIII. 407-426; Burnett, Letters of Members, I. 103, 197, n.

\textsuperscript{105} Sic.

\textsuperscript{106} These two paragraphs from the Vindication are apposite:

"The forming of our governments was a new and difficult work. They ought to be rendered as generally satisfactory to the people as possible— When this was done, and the people perceived that they and their posterity were to live under well-regulated constitutions, they would be encouraged to look forward to confederation and independence, as compleating the noble system of their political happiness— The objects nearest to them were now enveloped in clouds, and therefore those more distant must appear confused. That they were independent, they would know; but the relation one citizen was to bear to another, and the connection one state was to have with another, they did, could not know. Mankind were naturally attached to plans of government, that promised quiet and security under them. General satisfaction with them, when formed, would be indeed, a great point attained; but persons of reflection would perhaps think it absolutely necessary, that Congress should institute some mode for preserving them from the misfortune of future discords.

"The confederation ought to be settled before the declaration of independence. [Footnote: This has been since proved, by France urging, as she has done, the completion of the confederation.] Foreigners would think it most regular— The weaker states would not be in so much danger of having disadvantageous terms imposed upon them by the stronger— If the declaration was first made, [footnote: This has since actually happened.] political necessities might urge on the acceptance of conditions, that were highly disagreeable to parts of the union. The present comparative circumstances of the states [footnote: The word "States" is used here as most familiar, tho' not used in the debate.] were now tolerably well understood; but some states had very extraordinary claims to territory, that if admitted in a future confederation, as they might be, the terms of it not being yet adjusted all idea of the present comparison between them would be confounded— Those states, whose boundaries were acknowledged, would find themselves sink in proportion to the elevation of their neighbours. Besides, the unlocated lands, not comprehended within acknowledged boundaries, were deemed a fund sufficient to defray a vast part, if not the whole, of the expenses of the war. These ought to be considered as the property of all the states, acquired by the arms of all. For these reasons the boundaries of the states ought to be fixed before the declaration, and their respective rights mutually guarantied; and the unlocated lands ought also, previous to that declaration, to be solemnly appropriated to the benefit of all the states; for it might be extremely difficult, if not impracticable, to obtain these decisions afterwards. Upon the whole, when things should be thus deliberately rendered firm at home, and favourable abroad, then let America

\textquoteleft Attollens humeris FAMAM, et FATA nepotum;\textquoteright

advance with majestic steps, and assume her station among the sovereigns of the world." (Stillé, op. cit., 372-373.) Cf. Jensen, Articles of Confederation, 107-139.
We cannot look back. Men generally sell their Goods to most Advantage when they have several. Chapmen (We have but two to rely on.) We exclude one by this Declaration without knowing what the other will give.

Great Britain after one or more unsuccessful Campaigns may be induced to offer Us such a share of Commerce as would satisfy Us, to appoint good Behaviour, to withdraw her armies, (to protect our Commerce, Establish our Militias) in short to redress all the Grievances complained of in our first Petition. Let Us know, if We can get Terms from France that will be more beneficial than these. If we can, let Us declare Independence. If We cannot, let Us at least withhold that Declaration, till We obtain Terms that are tolerable.

We have many Points of the utmost Moment to settle with France—Canada, Acadia, and Cape Breton. What will content her? Trade or Territory? What Conditions of Trade? Barbary Pirates, Spain, Portugal? Will she demand an Exclusive Trade as a Compensation, or grant Us Protection against these States only for a Share of our Commerce?

When our Enemies are pressing Us so vigorously, When We are in so wretched a State of Preparation, When the Sentiments & Designs of our expected Friends are so unknown to Us, I am alarmed at this Declaration being so vehemently presented. A wealthy gentleman told Us, that people in this House have had different Views for more than a 12 month. [This is] Amazing after what they have so repeatedly declared in this House & private Conversations, that they meant only Reconciliation. But since they can conceal their Views so dextrously, I should be glad to read a little more in the Doomsday Book of America—Not all—that like the Book of Fate might be

107 That is, France and England.

108 Actually this interlineation occurs after the word Petition.

109 That is, the first petition to the king, 1774.

110 No new paragraph in the MS.

111 With the Declaration, the important protection England furnished American vessels against the Barbary States would of course be gone. Would France supply it? For the conditions of the treaty as they were finally concluded, see Bemis, op. cit., 58-69.
too dreadful—Title page—Binding. I should be glad to know whether in 20 or 30 years this Commonwealth of Colonies may not be thought too unwieldy, & Hudson’s River be a proper Boundary for a separate Commonwealth to the Northward. I have a strong impression on my Mind that this will take place.

No attempt can be made to reconstruct this colorful figure.