

*A British Editor
Reports the American Revolution
With Curious Side Lights on Benjamin Franklin*

SOMEWHERE it has been said that history is the accepted lie. A harsh verdict this, and yet how often the student of history is surprised to find in contemporary newspaper accounts that facts are altered or distorted by the viewpoint or design of the observer. Certainly, political propaganda in the press is of ancient lineage.

A three-year file of the *Cumberland Chronicle and Whitehaven Public Advertiser*, a provincial weekly edited and published by J. Dunn of Whitehaven, England, was purchased by the author in Newcastle upon Tyne in the summer of 1954.¹ Reading through the issues, beginning in November, 1776, the impression grew that this and other contemporary English papers represented a rich mine of source material too little used in American research. Newspapers, J. B. McMaster once said, best reflect the thoughts, the opinions, the details of the pulsing everyday life of a people. Excerpts from the *Cumberland Chronicle* help to recreate the viewpoint of the British rural public toward the American Revolution as it was influenced by the press.

It is not surprising that bulletins from America dominated the foreign news in the pages of the *Chronicle*. It was not that many sons of Whitehaven were actively engaged in the defense of Boston or the fighting on Long Island. The casualty lists, when they begin to appear, are sparse and could not have been attended with the feverish expectation which greeted those of later conflicts. In the first place, war was then a gentleman's game, fought mostly in fine weather. Comparatively few people were killed. Moreover, in this American campaign a paternal monarch had contrived that the subjugation of

¹ This file of the *Cumberland Chronicle* is now in the Library of Congress.

his misled, revolting colonials was to be accomplished by mercenaries recruited in the dominions of his German cousins, and by Highland regiments made up of landless, cattle-thieving caterans who had fought for the Stuarts against King George's grandfather at Prestonpans and Culloden. Even the line companies were recruited of alien stock in Ireland, as the lists of prisoners taken by General Washington were later to testify.

The interest of the good folk of Whitehaven in the western war, while personally detached, was nevertheless real and poignant. In the secret recesses of their stout British souls they resented this unfortunate strife against their brethren. It was all very well to fight the Papist Frenchmen in Flanders or Canada, but these stiffnecked folk in the American colonies were, after all, of English stock. So, in the files of the *Cumberland Chronicle* one detects the fervent aspiration that the stubborn American colonists would somehow see the error of their ways. A benevolent, aggrieved monarch was ready to forgive and forget.

The sentiments of the *Chronicle* appear to reflect fairly those of the countryside in which it circulated. The paper went as far south as Liverpool, and passed north over the border into Scotland, where it was dispensed by Mr. Wilson, bookseller at Dumfries, and by Mrs. Schaw in her millinery shop at Edinburgh. Sergeant Brooke, the tavernkeeper, was agent in Carlisle; Mr. Scott, the postmaster, was agent at Keswick. All subscribers were presumably anxious to get news from America; they were to receive it in a flood. But Editor Dunn, good canny man, saw to it that all war information was interpreted according to the probable wishes of his subscribers.

If, as frequently happened, there were tantalizing delays, Editor Dunn could always guess, sometimes correctly. When all England was expectant for the news of the taking of Philadelphia, the man-of-war *Isis*, with the important dispatches from America, lay storm-bound off the Scilly Islands. This circumstance, however, did not discourage the indefatigable editor from issuing his "Victory Gazette." "The master of a Dartmouth ship passed under the stern of the *Isis* during a hard gale of wind and spoke with her but could learn no particulars of the dispatches except that they contain GLORIOUS NEWS FOR OLD ENGLAND AND THAT GENERAL WASHINGTON WAS

COMPLETELY BEAT.”² But when there was bad news to impart, like the British defeat at Saratoga, the reluctant Mr. Dunn died hard indeed.

How easily our public gives credit to bad news even upon vague reports of deserters! Many in London implicitly believe that General Burgoyne has laid down his arms and yet this report rests only upon two deserters who ran away from an out-post. This extraordinary surrender is said to have happened on October 16 and yet there are letters here from Montreal under date of October 25 with no mention of this pretended capitulation.³

And there is a suggestion of amusing ingenuousness in the editor’s assurance of veracity given in his bulletin of November 29, 1777: “Last week Lord Exeter dismissed his coachman from his service for drinking the health of General Washington. THIS IS AN ABSOLUTE FACT.” One is constrained to wonder whether all Mr. Dunn’s announcements on the American war were based upon similar guarantees of truthfulness.

For the better appraisal of the bulletins which follow, let us imagine one of the *Chronicle*’s readers, a bluff, hard-riding Cumberland squire whom we shall call Squire Western, in full Tom Jones flavor. He sits in an old hall on one of the bare, rainy headlands of the Solway Firth past which Prince Charlie rode on the fateful march to Derby. On the Squire’s table lies a welter of papers—the programs of the Doncaster races, the assizes at Penrith, and the dancing assembly at Cockermouth, and the well-thumbed *Cumberland Chronicle and Whitehaven Public Advertiser*.

Squire Western has followed the course of the American rebellion with intense interest. Perhaps he has a son, an ensign in Sir Peter Parker’s fleet, riding the long Atlantic swells outside Charleston harbor, or perhaps a lieutenant with Carleton on the heights of Quebec. It is November, 1776, and the Squire thrills with the news of the taking of New York. Hopefully, he awaits that most welcome of all *Chronicle* bulletins announcing that the leaders of the rascally crew—arrogant Hancock, saucy Sam Adams, and that perfidious old philosopher from Philadelphia—are being led up the Tower Hill.

The taking of New York by General Howe furnished gladsome details for readers of the *Chronicle*.

² Nov. 8, 1777. Gen. Howe occupied Philadelphia in September, 1777.

³ Dec. 13, 1777.

The Provincials in their tumultuous retreat from Manhattan lost 8000 men. The Rebel General Putnam was taken prisoner and General Washington lost his arm.

Assurance is given from St. James that his Majesty will persist in the American war, were it at the peril of his crown, and will next summer have sufficient troops to finish the Revolution in one campaign.⁴

What inspiring news! Loyal hearts beat high and a cadence of general jubilation rose in all the ports of the Irish Sea.

At Liverpool several hundred people were waiting for the post-man with the great news. As soon as he alighted from his horse they decked him with ribbons. In the evening a great part of the town was illuminated and sky-rockets played off. The mob went round and did considerable damage to the dwellings of the American sympathizers who had refused to light up.⁵

In Belfast, "the populace in consequence of the good news from New York, had a sheep roasted on Lowka Tarn and provided several gallons of rum and a barrel of ale. Some of the gentlemen displayed their dexterity in skating."⁶

Peering over Squire Western's shoulder, we note the first of many letters all purporting to emanate from the pens of unnamed, mysterious "Gentlemen in New York," letters highly satisfactory in dramatizing continuing dissension in American ranks.

The Americans already see that there is no depending upon troops who run away at the first onset. Many of the inhabitants of this Colony have applied for his Majesty's protection. The Quakers are disgusted to a man, Congress having no less imprudently than barbarously ordered some of their faith to be hanged for daring to refuse the paper currency. The Delegates from Pennsylvania have withdrawn from Congress and will henceforth acknowledge no authority but that of the King.⁷

General Washington's order book was found in New York and received by Lord Germaine who laid it before his Majesty. It contains the whole economy of the wretched state of the rebel army. Every page is full of punishment for cowardice. Even a lieutenant colonel was shot for cowardice.⁸

All the letters lately received from America agree in this point, that there are great differences in Congress between the Delegates of the Northern and

⁴ Nov. 5, 1776. Gen. Israel Putnam was not taken prisoner in the disorderly American retreat from New York in September, 1776.

⁵ Nov. 19, 1776.

⁶ Feb. 18, 1777.

⁷ Nov. 26, 1776.

⁸ Feb. 4, 1777.

Southern provinces; the New England men want to get General Washington removed from the command and to appoint General Green. It is added that General Washington has resigned in disgust and Congress has accepted his resignation.⁹

Bound Brook, New Jersey. Two trusted servants of General Washington were convicted of a plot to murder him. They were executed in the presence of the entire army.¹⁰

The smug contentment of the *Chronicle* over the favorable news from the Hudson and the apparent disintegration of colonial resistance was sadly jarred by the report of Washington's Christmas victory at Trenton. It was difficult to minimize the shock, but readers were consoled with the fallacious statement that all the prisoners had been retaken from General Washington. "The affair of the surprise upon the Hessian troops in their outpost at Trenton is variously related. We lost 500 prisoners but these were soon after retaken."¹¹ "The Hessians were surprised by the stratagem of General Lee who clothed his men with British uniforms, stolen from a transport in New York, and by that means deceived the Hessians. It was not long however before the British troops rescued them and took their captors captive."¹²

Unpleasant truth could not always be distorted, and the coffee-house strategists abounded in sage comment. The Hessian defeat at Trenton loosed opinions on the use of mercenary troops, of whose capacities Editor Dunn himself had doubts.

The German troops should never be engaged except under the direction of British officers. The Hessians at Trenton have lost all the credit they gained at Long Island. We have it on good authority that some of them fired two rounds and then threw down their arms.¹³

There is an intimation that perhaps the Hessian officers serving in America did not bring to their task a full measure of devotion or conviction, and that there were desertions as yet unnoted by historians. "We learn from Cassel that Lieutenant Colonel Sichreyvogel, lately returned from America, is condemned to be in prison

⁹ May 9, 1778. Gen. Nathanael Greene.

¹⁰ Nov. 5, 1778.

¹¹ Jan. 28, 1777.

¹² Mar. 4, 1777.

¹³ May 9, 1777.

two years in the fortress of Spangenberg for having quitted the army without leave." From Hanover came the report that "Lieutenant Colonel Block who also came back from America is under orders to set out as soon as possible on his return thither."¹⁴

Mercenary troops were not confined to the German states, although "the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel has lately been at much pains to encourage matrimony in his dominions. This they say is owing to the good market he is likely to find for his male subjects in the American War—thirty pounds per head or rather per *hide*."¹⁵ Editor Dunn was much more hopeful of the possibilities of Russian troops as auxiliaries in the American war.

The Empress Catherine of Russia has concluded a treaty wherein she has agreed to supply his Britannic Majesty with 50,000 troops half of which are to be employed in Germany and the other to be sent to America, and to be in the Downs by the latter end of January, and also 20 battleships which are to be employed against the French or Americans wherever they are wanted.¹⁶

And not unmindful of the part Swiss mercenaries had played in the wars of the Middle Ages, Mr. Dunn might have suggested the tapping of this approved source of manpower for the British army. Unfortunately, the artful Dr. Franklin had anticipated him: "The American Congress have agreed with the States of Switzerland for the loan of 20,000 men who are now preparing to embark from France."¹⁷

Volunteer officers from Europe, as well as mercenary troops, found their way to the American battlefield, some of them being smuggled in by Yankee privateer captains.

Admiralty Office, September 1, 1777. Lord Mulgrave in the Ardent man of war, while cruising in the Channel, took a vessel with 300 barrels of gun powder not declared in her lading. On board her were several French officers of distinction and a German Count disguised as common mariners, who were discovered by their speaking such elegant French. They afterwards came on deck dressed in their French uniforms and denied that they were bound for America. Lord Mulgrave refused to release them.¹⁸

¹⁴ Nov. 29, 1777.

¹⁵ Feb. 18, 1777.

¹⁶ Oct. 1, 1778. England was seeking some *rapprochement* with Russia at this time, but no treaty was concluded.

¹⁷ Dec. 31, 1776. No such agreement appears in the Journals of Congress.

¹⁸ Sept. 6, 1777. Constantine John Phipps, Baron Mulgrave.

The number of these foreign adventurers in the American service appears to have given the harassed authorities in Downing Street some concern. Exaggerated reports were circulated as to their numbers and qualifications. Mauduit du Plessis wrote to his brother in L'Orient that

After having traveled through New England with great fatigue, we came to the grand army commanded by General Washington who received us in a very polite and most distinguished manner. There is a very large number of foreign officers in his army, French, Prussians, Germans, Swiss, Italians, and some Spanish to the amount of about 1600; among the rest of the foreign officers is a nephew of the famous Cardinal Alberoni, who possesses, as General Washington says, "all the wisdom of his father" and is admitted to all the councils. The nephew of the Marquis of Monti is also here as Colonel, with a great number of engineers.¹⁹

Squire Western may well have been dismayed by this formidable array of talent, but he could take comfort in the thought that these volunteers did not always measure up to expectations, or so his *Chronicle* assured him.

A gentleman well acquainted with the character of the Marquis de la Fayette, a French General in the American service, reports that he is a composition of madness and of that species of courage bordering on desperation. In France he is generally considered as a person similar to the famous Captain Montague, commonly remembered by the name of "Mad Montague."²⁰

Boston, that hotbed of rebellion, naturally usurped a large share of the *Chronicle's* overseas intelligence. Waxing virulent, Editor Dunn described Bostonians as "Saints without a grain of religion. Traders without head or heart. Subjects without loyalty. Neighbors without amity. Faithless friends, Implacable enemies."²¹ These strictures were later little softened when the editor eagerly exploited the lack of unity which he observed, or pretended to observe, between Boston's citizens and their French allies quartered in the town.

From the differences in religion and manners there can be no great cordiality between these extraordinary allies. Recently Admiral d'Estaing made a requisition for provisions for his fleet. The Bostonians (expecting to

¹⁹ June 14, 1777. Mauduit du Plessis was a French officer serving with the American forces.

²⁰ Sept. 3, 1778.

²¹ Dec. 3, 1776.

be paid in Louis d'ors) furnished 3000 barrels of meat and flour. Then Monsieur paid them in Congress paper money which he had bought up at 65%. A very good French trick!²²

Mr. Dunn, having maliciously and gleefully suggested the shock to the Puritanical conscience of the fact that "high mass is now celebrated in all the Episcopal churches of Boston," introduced a tinge of spite in his report of the orders given out to the Boston ministers of the gospel.

An Order of Congress has been given to all Preachers in their invocations and addresses to the Almighty not to throw out any invectives against the scarlet Whore of Babylon. And further that if their good Allies the French should think proper to have public processions through the town all good subjects are requested to let them pass quietly and not shew any outward marks of dislike.²³

Of perhaps even greater interest, as the war progressed, were the bulletins from Philadelphia. Doubtless, Editor Dunn's satisfaction anticipated that of his readers as he prepared his items for the press.

So adverse are the people of Philadelphia to the present unnatural war against the Mother Country that General Putnam is obliged to have recourse and even to violence to prevail upon the citizens to throw up a breastwork without the town for its defense. General Putnam under pretense of speaking an oration collected the citizens in a large church yard, and when they were all assembled, gave each man a pick and spade and marched away at the head of them to throw up his entrenchment.²⁴

Philadelphians themselves would have been surprised to have learned of an event that appeared in the *Chronicle* on April 26, 1777:

It is very remarkable that the first English property the Philadelphians wantonly destroyed was salt from Liverpool which they threw into the Delaware to the amount of two or three ship loads. This winter an uncommon mortality prevailed which all the inhabitants agree is occasioned by the want of salt. Thus Providence frequently suffers our crimes to carry with them their own punishment.

Less than a month later, a letter somehow smuggled out of Pennsylvania brought good news of a different sort.

²² Nov. 26, 1778. Charles Henri Théodat d'Estaing, admiral of the French fleet aiding the Continental cause.

²³ Oct. 8, 1778. No such order appears in the Journals of Congress.

²⁴ Feb. 12, 1777. In December, 1776, largely because of a demoralizing fear of British invasion of the city, Gen. Putnam was forced to use stern measures to secure the building of the city's defenses. It was at this time that Congress fled to Baltimore.

I have been down to Lancaster where I had considerable conversation with the Hessians in prison there. Notwithstanding the usage they met with to induce them to forfeit the favor of their Prince they are firm in our cause. John Dickinson's house is taken for a barracks and citizens resolve vengeance against him should ill luck cast him into their hands. They are more violent against him as they say he has carried off copies of the most secret papers of Congress on board the Roebuck off the Eastern Shore of Chesapeake.²⁵

Major Stockton was brought prisoner to Philadelphia as were the men taken with him near New Brunswick. They threatened the Major very hard as they say he assisted in taking Lee. He was brought into Philadelphia in a wagon with his back towards the horse, in irons, and a drum going before him beating the rogues' march.²⁶

While the British fleet was making its leisurely progress up the Chesapeake during the sultry summer weeks of 1777, the expectancy in Whitehaven grew apace.

General Howe has attacked the Rebels at Christiana in the state of Delaware. Two of the Rebel generals were wounded, Lafayette, mortally so.

A lady who arrived in town this week informs that on Saturday last she crossed Hudson's river with Mrs. Hancock and Mrs. Adams on their way to Boston. The ladies informed her that they had left Philadelphia on account of General Howe being expected in that city. The case of these unfortunate women is truly piteous, the former is joined to the Type of Folly and Ignorance, and the latter to the most accomplished knave New England can boast of.²⁷

And Philadelphia's reception of Cornwallis, who entered the city ahead of Howe (late though the advice was to reach England), surely proved British convictions of fundamental colonial loyalties: "Nothing can more fully prove the loyalty of the Philadelphians than the circumstance of 500 of the inhabitants marching out to welcome Cornwallis and place themselves under his protection. The city ex-

²⁵ Although Dickinson was superseded in Congress in 1776, he remained active in the American cause. His country home, Fair Hill, outside Philadelphia, was burned by the British in November, 1777, and his home in Delaware ransacked by the British in 1781.

²⁶ May 17, 1777. This may possibly be a reference to Maj. Richard V. Stockton, a Tory, who was captured on Feb. 18, 1777. Stockton is considered by some to have directed the British to the headquarters of Gen. Charles Lee, who was taken prisoner by the British near Basking Ridge, N. J., in December, 1776, and confined in New York until his exchange in April, 1778. John Richard Alden, *General Charles Lee: Traitor or Patriot?* (Baton Rouge, La., 1951), 332-333.

²⁷ Nov. 1, 1777. Mrs. Hancock and Mrs. Adams (both John and Samuel) were not in Philadelphia at this time.

hibits a noble appearance. 300 sail of ships are lying in the Delaware displaying the colors of the insulted Mother country.”²⁸

In the face of such loyal enthusiasm, the actions of General Benedict Arnold following the British evacuation in June, 1778, only seemed the more ruthless to *Chronicle* readers: “two regiments of rebels under the command of Mr. Benedict Arnold marched in. They commandeered all clothes, hats, shoes etc., and sent them off in wagons to York and Lancaster. Several Tories have been committed to the Philadelphia gaol along with Hessian prisoners of war. A party of the rebels troops went to the house of Joseph Galloway with intent to plunder and demolish it. His lady made application to Mr. Arnold who ordered them to desist and promised her protection.”²⁹

Philadelphia further elicited Editor Dunn’s interest because it was the seat of the rebel government. Nothing could have afforded him greater pleasure than bulletins reflecting strife or discord within the halls of Congress. Lack of authenticity (if he ever suspected such) bothered him not at all—the more harrowing the tale, the better.

Congress has dwindled to a few inconsiderable members and these are in low esteem with their people. The two Adams are in New England. Franklin has gone to France. Lynch has lost his senses. Rutledge has fled home in disguise. Deane is persecuting in Albany as Jay is in the country. However if the delegates embrace the terms offered them they may yet escape the halter.³⁰

One of the members of Congress had the resolution to make the following short speech. “I am convinced that the interest of America is inseparable from that of Britain, and that our alliance with France is unnatural and absurd. I therefore move that this phantom of Independence may be given up.” He had scarcely uttered these words before the President of Congress sent a messenger to fetch Count Pulaski who happened to be exercising his Legion in the court-yard below. The Count flew into the chamber where the Congress sat and with his sabre severed from his body the head of this honest Delegate. This head was ordered by the Congress to be fixed on the top of the Liberty Pole of Philadelphia as a perpetual monument to freedom of debate in the Continental Congress of the United States of America.³¹

²⁸ July 14, 1778.

²⁹ Sept. 17, 1778.

³⁰ Jan. 21, 1777. At this time Congress had fled to Baltimore, and because of a deadlock over confederation and other matters, many members of Congress were absent. E. C. Burnett, *The Continental Congress* (New York, 1941), 213–232 *passim*. The members mentioned in this bulletin are: John and Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Lynch, Edward Rutledge, Silas Deane (in France), John Jay.

³¹ Dec. 31, 1778. Count Casimir Pulaski, Polish officer with the Continental Army.

On December 31, 1776, the *Chronicle* printed the bulletin that Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin had sailed for France: "We are well informed that Dr. Franklin sailed for France from Philadelphia on Sunday, the 27th ult." Henceforth, all the Doctor's movements and sayings, even his dress, household, and amusements, were to be of the greatest interest to the readers of the *Chronicle*. And, since the envoy was so closely watched by Lord Stormont's³² very effective secret agents, all intelligence was relayed to England (and Whitehaven) with surprising expedition.

Letters by the French mail bring an account that Dr. Franklin has landed at Nantes. The doctor brought in his convoy two sloops laden with 550 hogsheads of Virginia tobacco and 220 hogsheads of Maryland tobacco. The Doctor has gotten permission from the French Farmers General to sell this tobacco at public auction.

Dr. Franklin gives out that he has come to France to print some new works but it is generally supposed that, in company with Mr. S. Deane, he is come to negotiate a peace with the Court of London.³³

The uneasy British Board of War may have been uncertain as to the real motive for Franklin's visit to France, but Editor Dunn had secret intelligence which he hastened to impart to his readers.

Those who pretend to be in the secret say that the Doctor cannot agree with the chief members of Congress and that he prefers France for a residence until the disputes between England and France are settled. The Doctor keeps himself very reserved in his conversation.³⁴

It is generally reported in America but more particularly at Philadelphia that Dr. Franklin carried off with him 30,000 pounds sterling in gold and silver with which he pretended he could bribe the French Prime Minister to engage his King in a war with England. Few of the loyal people in America think that the Doctor will apply that money to any other purpose than that of securing himself an agreeable retreat under the protection of the French Court.³⁵

Curiosity about Franklin's mission and his activities was mingled with the hope that the great man's efforts would come to naught. Numerous and at times contemptuous reports of his futility reached the *Chronicle* office.

³² David Murray, Viscount Stormont, was British envoy to France, 1772-1778, and Secretary of State for the Southern Department, 1779-1782.

³³ Jan. 21, 1777. Silas Deane.

³⁴ Jan. 7, 1777.

³⁵ May 31, 1777.

The Premier, being told the other day that Dr. Franklin was to return to America, in a French man of war, said "Well if ever he quits France he ought to be hanged." The auditors, although not courtiers, assented.³⁶

A gentleman who is no friend to America was observed Tuesday last at a coffee house in the west end of London to enclose the Gazette Extraordinary (news of the taking of New York) to Dr. Franklin at the Café de Conti in Paris. When asked his reason, he said he wanted to give the Doctor a shock as severe as he himself ever communicated with his electrical conductor.³⁷

Nothing here can hold the attention of the populace. Dr. Franklin who was so much talked about after his arrival is now as little talked of in Paris as is Mr. Wilkes in London."³⁸

When Lord Stormont demanded his late audience with the French King and was about to remonstrate with him in the most spirited and definite terms on the assistance given to the Americans, his Majesty anticipated his address. "My Lord, I know the cause of this visit. I have given directions for every American vessel to depart my ports in 24 hours on pain of confiscation of ship and cargo."³⁹

We are told from Paris that Dr. Franklin, lately come from Versailles to this city to pay a visit to Mons. Gerard; and in passing through the Rue St. Jacques was hissed and hooted by the Parisian gentry with that degree of boorishness that would have discredited a St. Giles banditti, insomuch that the Doctor was under the necessity of taking refuge in an adjacent hotel.⁴⁰

The general satisfaction in Britain over this obvious lack of French enthusiasm for the American cause can readily be imagined. Squire Western, a confirmed monarchist, knows that King Louis would never sow the seeds of revolt in his own dominions by aiding rebellion overseas. And surely no French nobleman of family would help to pull down hereditary authority.

A correspondent assures us that the intended voyage of the Marquis de La Fayette to America is a political fabrication since the very yacht which he is said to have purchased from the Duchess of Kingston is docked at Shadwell. It is true that this Nobleman intended to go to America but he was soon dissuaded from such a romantic project.⁴¹

³⁶ Feb. 4, 1777.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Mar. 4, 1777. John Wilkes was arrested and expelled from Commons in 1764 for printing remarks against the king.

³⁹ Mar. 11, 1777.

⁴⁰ Oct. 22, 1778. Conrad Alexandre Gérard was named French minister to the United States in March, 1778, and arrived in America in July, 1778.

⁴¹ Apr. 26, 1777.

As for the French treaty for which Dr. Franklin had labored so assiduously, the *Chronicle* reported it hopelessly rejected.

Reports of a treaty between the French Court and the Congress are premature. Mr. Carmichael, the official Secretary of the American Mission has actually gone back to America with the refusal of both France and Spain to acknowledge the independence of America. Indeed the reports of a Franco-American alliance were invented by stock-jobbers on Exchange Alley where they have been only too successful in depressing the public funds.⁴²

Some of the *Chronicle's* correspondents were doubtful as to whether the Doctor's errand in France was entirely diplomatic; sinister and diabolical schemes were suggested. On March 4, 1777, an alarmed agent of Lord Stormont sent an agitated report from Paris:

We now entertain no doubt that the motive of Doctor Franklin's journey hither was entirely philosophical and that he is consulted daily by our own Ministry. Know then, that upon the principle of Archimedes the Doctor with the assistance of French mechanics is preparing a great number of reflecting mirrors which will reflect so much heat from the sun as will destroy anything by fire at a very considerable distance.

This apparatus is to be fixed at Calais on the French coast so as to command the English shore whereby they mean to burn and destroy the whole navy of Great Britain in our harbors.

During the conflagration the Doctor proposes to have a chain carried from Calais to Dover. He, standing at Calais, with a prodigious electrical machine of his own invention, will convey such a shock as will entirely overturn our whole island.

This fantastic suggestion might well tax the credulity even of Squire Western. More plausible was the suggestion reported in the *Chronicle* on October 1, 1778.

The enterprising Marshal Broglie⁴³ was lately overruled in his random scheme of invading the South of Britain by Dr. Franklin who told the French Ministers that such a measure would thoroughly arouse the whole island of Great Britain. For, continued the sagacious Doctor, "should they once be fully alarmed I know too much of them not to dread the consequences." The Doctor then gave a plan for our army to remain nigh the coast which would oblige the British to draw all their strength to the South. We would then send a force of frigates to Cruize on the north and west coasts of England and Scotland with instructions never to land without a certainty of plunder.

⁴² Jan. 17, 1778. William Carmichael; the Franco-American treaty was signed in February, 1778.

⁴³ Victor François, Duc de Broglie.

It is evident that Editor Dunn not only had great respect for Franklin's versatility, but also that he credited him with plenty of leisure in all the stress of the French embassy for other pursuits and interests.

In consequence of Dr. Franklin's having communicated to the Faculty of Medicine at Paris the great effects of the use of the ashes of tobacco in the cure of dropsies which were discovered a short time since by Dr. Garden of Charleston, South Carolina, King Louis' physicians have tried it upon two soldiers, patients in the Hotel Royale des Invalides, one of whom had been afflicted for four months with a dropsy of the belly and the other had been tapped four times. To the surprise of the practitioners the medicine produced the most salutary consequences in a few weeks.⁴⁴

Franklin's magnanimous gesture in directing that American privateers were not to interfere with the scientific expedition of Captain Cook provoked from the *Chronicle* only the cryptic comment: "See, brother, how we apples swim."⁴⁵

The tireless secret agents of Stormont apprised Lord North that Franklin was not confining his efforts to the French Court. In the *Chronicle* of May 17, 1777, it was noted that "a private letter from France by yesterday's mail mentioned that Dr. Franklin was gone to the Court of Berlin but was not expected to stay many days." None of Franklin's biographers has recorded this visit, but there can be no doubt that if made (and who is the presumptuous skeptic who will dispute with Editor Dunn?), it was returned with proper punctuality. In the same issue, no less, we learn "from a private letter from Nantes, the Rebel head-quarters in Europe," that "the Emperor of Germany has done Dr. Franklin the honour of a visit at his house about three miles from Paris and was in conference with the Doctor for several hours. His Imperial Majesty proposes to visit England in the course of a few days, incognito." These accounts of imaginary visits may amuse the latter-day reader, but just how boldly the figure of the American envoy to France loomed over Britain is adduced from the fact that when Lord Camden made his momentous announcement, "I am for peace for America and with all the world

⁴⁴ Mar. 28, 1777. Alexander Garden, noted American botanist.

⁴⁵ In March, 1779, Franklin issued a "passport" for Capt. James Cook to protect him against American privateers on his return from his third voyage to the Pacific. Franklin did not know that Cook had been killed in the Hawaiian Islands a month before. Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), 617-618.

besides," Lord Onslow rejoined that peace now with the American rebels would simply result in making Ben Franklin King of the United States of America.⁴⁶

British fascination with Franklin's activities elicited from time to time news items which revealed an almost fond respect for the statesman rather than fear or deprecation.

The reception that Dr. Franklin and Silas Deane, Esq. met with at Versailles was honorable to the highest degree. Martial music struck up and the French flag was lowered in solemn salute. The Major of the Swiss Guards announced "The Ambassadors from the Thirteen United Provinces." Ushered into the Royal presence, the College of Paris, the Bishops and Nobility rose and saluted them. Good old Franklin was observed to weep. The Count de Vergennes relieved the confusion of the Philosopher by presenting him to the King who took the Ambassador's hand and entered directly into conversation.⁴⁷

Dr. Franklin is the idol of Paris. All sides and sexes join in his praise, and the ladies strive most which shall do him the kindest offices. In short he has perpetuated his name to eternity. Happy had it been for England if she had listened to his advice.⁴⁸

Never, perhaps, was more grudging respect accorded him in the British press than after he protested the mishandling of American prisoners of war. The issue became a matter of public interest early in the war, as this item in the *Chronicle* of November 5, 1776, testifies:

The disposal of the American prisoners has for some time past been an object of great concern to Government, as the keeping them either in the Colonies or Great Britain might be productive of many inconveniences. A very extraordinary measure has at length been adopted which is to transport all the rebel prisoners to Gibraltar where they are to continue until the war with America is terminated or until they can be sent to the East Indies as soldiers in the East India company's service.

When the prisoner situation became more acute and prisoner treatment more severe, Franklin's protests increased in volume and intensity.

⁴⁶ June 7, 1777.

⁴⁷ Apr. 11, 1778. Charles Gravier, Count de Vergennes; Franklin was received by Louis XVI on March 20, 1778.

⁴⁸ June 3, 1779.

The compelling of men by chains stripes and famine to fight against their friends and relations is a new mode of barbarity which your nation alone has the honor of inventing. The sending American prisoners of war to Africa and Asia is a manner of treating captives that you can justify by no other precedent except that of the black savages of Guinea.⁴⁹

Even the sullen, hostile Commons sat in shamed silence as this indictment was intoned to them and as Colonel Isaac Barré rose to urge "the absurdity of suffering our commanding officers in America to exchange prisoners while we would not listen to the remonstrances of Dr. Franklin who was commissioned to treat with Lord Stormont respecting prisoners taken on the seas on this side of the Atlantic who were thrown into loathsome dungeons under the denomination of pirates."⁵⁰

The strange feeling of mixed respect and fear with which Squire Western and his compatriots regarded Dr. Franklin was accentuated by the exploits of the American privateers, whose cruises in 1777 and 1778 were supposed to be directed from the mission at Passy. It was evident that the neutrality of France was an open farce. On December 27, 1777, the *Chronicle* reported that "accounts from Paris say that several merchants in the ports of that Kingdom, to the number of twenty and upward, have united themselves under the title of the Royal French American Merchants. The plan was Dr. Franklin's." Earlier in the year a bulletin from Bordeaux reported that in a riot between British and American sailors, French laborers in the port had sided with the Americans.⁵¹

Of greatest concern to the *Cumberland Chronicle* and its readers were the daring raids of the impudent Yankee privateer captains, Jack Manley, Gustavus Conyngham, and the dastardly Scot himself, John Paul Jones. The tide of war had crept up to the hitherto inviolate shores of Britain upon which no hostile foot had landed since Norman William drew up his long galleys under the chalk cliffs of Hastings.

The perturbed Squire Western from the upper windows of his hall can see, far out in the Irish Sea, the glow of burning prizes. And, still greater affront, he will soon hear the boom of cannon as a "miserable

⁴⁹ Oct. 18, 1777.

⁵⁰ Dec. 13, 1777.

⁵¹ June 14, 1777.

Scotch renegade" raids the very port of Whitehaven from which this same traitor once sailed as a mate on a slave ship. The Squire never picks up his *Chronicle* now without reading of some new tragedy.

Yarmouth, July 13, 1777. To such a daring pitch are the American privateers arrived that one of 16 guns appeared in this port today and boarded a Newcastle collier taking from it Thomas Lamb the Postmaster.

Portsmouth, July 26, 1777. A daring American privateer chased His Majesty's custom house cutter into this port in full view of the British fleet anchored at Spithead.

Stromness, Orkney Islands, August 30, 1777. A small American brig of about 200 tons came in here and was boarded. The crew which consisted of only 10 men made their escape. The master confesses that she is American property and that she has been raiding in the Highlands and had a Highland pilot on board.

Balbriggan, October 10, 1777. A saucy Yankee barkentine, mounting 12 guns, came calmly into this port and began to requisition water and supplies, the crew, meanwhile, daffing with the girls of the town. She sailed away before the alarm could be given.

Limerick, May 16, 1778. Last night an express arrived at St. James from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. It will be sent to his Majesty who is expected in town today. Two American privateers have entered the harbour of Limerick, plundered several houses, and carried off effects to a considerable value.

The going was not always so easy for the raiders; apparently there were many heady combats which have never been recorded, even some in which the Americans displayed a romantic chivalry which evoked the praise of the *Chronicle's* prejudiced editor.

His Majesty's ship Fox has been taken by two American privateers. In the midst of the action one of the privateers saw a wad in blaze in the Fox's mizzen chains. The privateer called on his comrade to desist firing which they both did and hailed the Fox to inform them that the mizzen chains were on fire. As soon as the blaze was extinguished they renewed the fight until the Fox struck. This anecdote (which for generosity is unprecedented) came out in the course of the trial of Captain Fotheringham.⁵²

At this point in the conflict, Editor Dunn, who for so many months had been collating the bulletins from America, had a rare chance to

⁵² Mar. 28, 1778.

do some war reporting at first hand. John Paul Jones attacked Whitehaven itself on April 22, 1778. It is interesting to read the sometimes bombastic accounts of this episode in American naval histories or in the biographies of Jones, and then to contrast them with the account in the *Cumberland Chronicle* of Whitehaven.⁵³ No suggestion here of heroics. We are told only of a half-drunken rabble of ill-disciplined pirates landing in the fog, spiking the guns on the mole, and then heading not for the shipping which they came to destroy, but for the alehouses. Later they beat an ignominious retreat to their boats when it was learned that the doughty Penrith Fencibles (who actually arrived next day) were on the march for Whitehaven.

Editor Dunn had no word of grudging acknowledgment even for the bravery of the leader of the landing force, who stood alone, pistol in hand, at the end of the pier and protected the retreat of his poorly organized forces. But as the cowering townspeople looked at this man on the dock they seemed vaguely to remember him. Years before there might have been observed about the Whitehaven taverns a rangy youth with a marked talent for quarreling and insubordination. He had sailed as underofficer and supercargo out of this same port, bound for the Guinea coast. His name was John Paul. Latterly, it was rumored that he had removed overseas to his Majesty's plantation in the Carolinas. Editor Dunn gave his identity.

The captain of the American ship, the *Ranger*, is said to be a very passionate man, and the crew much dissatisfied with his conduct. He is a native of Scotland and served his apprenticeship in the *Friendship*, formerly belonging to this port, is known to several people here, and went by the name Jack Paul; was sometime ago Master of a vessel, called the *John*, belonging to Kirkcudbright; stood trial in London for the murder of his carpenter, and was found guilty, but made his escape.⁵⁴

In all his bitterness, the editor continues:

Every possible means is now put in practice to secure this harbor from future attempts of such daring wretches who having lost all feeling for their native country scruple not, under the sanction of a Congress commission to sharpen the sword of America in order to lacerate the bowels of their fellow countrymen.⁵⁵

⁵³ See also Don C. Seitz, *Paul Jones: His Exploits in English Seas. Contemporary Accounts Collected from English Newspapers . . .* (New York, 1917).

⁵⁴ Apr. 25, 1778.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

But Editor Dunn's cup of gall was not yet filled. John Paul Jones sailed away into the fog of the Irish Sea, but only to new exploits. In a matter of hours, a new, unbelievable bulletin arrived. Jones had fallen in with the British sloop of war *Drake*, off Belfast Lough, on April 24 and had captured her after a fierce engagement. Proud Britannia, little accustomed to naval defeat, was in no humor to appreciate the gibes of Captain Jones.

The Ranger had picked up three Irish fishermen before the engagement. After the surrender of the *Drake* Captain Jones gave them 15 guineas and one of the *Drake's* boats. He also gave them a piece of the *Drake's* main-sail desiring them to carry it to the Governor of Carrickfergus and to tell him that he had sent it to make him a pair of trousers.⁵⁶

The news of this effrontery was too much for the patience of Mr. Dunn, already overstrained by the affair at Whitehaven. Selecting the largest type in his case, he inscribed after the above account, "UNPARALLELED IMPUDENCE!"

The exasperating aptitude shown by Captain Jones and other Yankee skippers for twisting the British lion's tail roused a lethargic national conscience. While Cornwallis was chasing the rebels through the Jerseys, the average Englishman regarded the American war with rather a detached interest. The rebellion would somehow be suppressed, and if there were fighting to do, that was what the Hessians were paid for. But when John Bull's pocketbook was threatened, when there were fears even for the safety of the Jamaica fleet and the Bombay convoy, that was quite another matter. A wave of belated patriotism swept the land. In Glasgow, a regiment for American service was raised.

The adjutant arrived on Friday with the recruiting orders for the Glasgow Regiment. The magistrates, town councils, and the deacons made a splendid procession through the town. The colours of the city were carried in loyal procession amid the acclamations of a delighted people. Many fine fellows repaired to the drum-head. And many gentlemen of property cheerfully took a share by carrying the standards and playing on the bag-pipes. A stranger would imagine that the whole inhabitants of Glasgow were engaging themselves to go to America.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ May 2, 1778.

⁵⁷ Feb. 7, 1778.

A sentimental and patriotic wool comber of Aberdeen was so affected by the threat to his homeland "that he flung down his combs and swore that he would never work again until he was avenged upon those wretched American rebels. He went immediately to a recruiting officer and, being a stout man, was offered six guineas bounty money. This he refused, taking only a few shillings to drink the King's health."⁵⁸ At Wigan, in Lancashire, the mayor headed a recruiting parade to the chant of a new anthem composed to the tune of "Hearts of Oak."

Our George whom kind heaven has sent to this land
Will send under Howe a brave Lancashire band
Then come ye bold youth; to the standard repair
And grasp at the glorious name—Volunteer
From thence each will be to his country a friend
And the dread of your Arms shall America bend.⁵⁹

The general nervousness, amounting at times almost to hysteria, was further aggravated by activities, real or imagined, of American spies in Britain. It is a matter for no little speculation just how the American Congress, with so little money at its command, could set up a third column as formidable as that hinted at in the *Chronicle*.

In the room of one spy, arrested near the great munitions depot at Portsmouth, "were found a quantity of combustibles, a dagger, all of Dr. Price's pamphlets defending the American Cause, and some letters from Benjamin Franklin."⁶⁰ Another spy, apprehended in the Strand near Temple Bar, complained of the niggardliness of his employers: "Mr. Silas Deane only promised him 300£ if he succeeded in firing the docks at Bristol or Portsmouth, . . . he only received from Mr. Deane twelve French crowns for his traveling expenses and . . . the only person in England whom he was desired to call upon was one Doctor A——k, a friend of Doctor Franklin, who lives in Westminster."⁶¹ And one wonders about the vigilance of the authorities at Whitehall when the most enterprising of agents of the American Congress in Paris, the adroit Caron de Beaumarchais, was able to visit London and audaciously seek aid for the American forces.

⁵⁸ Feb. 21, 1778.

⁵⁹ May 9, 1778.

⁶⁰ Feb. 4, 1777. Richard Price, friend of Franklin's and of the American colonies.

⁶¹ Oct. 8, 1778.

The few days residence of the famous Caron de Beaumarchais in this country was for two purposes. The first object was to have a few conferences with the Spanish Ambassador, Count de Albrodman. They usually met in Charlotte Street at a French lady's, Mme. Clergé. Beaumarchais was dressed in a common Bath coat and disguised in a great wig under the name of Dr. Duval.

His second object was to engage some English merchants in a partnership with him in a large contract that he has with Congress, to furnish them with all necessities. How far he has succeeded in that attempt, we cannot ascertain.⁶²

During the early weeks of 1779, there was a lull in the news from the American front; the columns of the *Chronicle* are filled with the account of the historic trial of Admiral Keppel⁶³ for alleged cowardice in "staying away from the French fleet in the Channel." Then, on July 15, 1779, the *Cumberland Chronicle and Whitehaven Public Advertiser* ends. There was no further printing.

Did Editor J. Dunn have any premonition of the termination of the American rebellion two years later? When the Bishop of Peterborough protested against the iniquity of "furnishing Burgoyne's savage Iroquois allies with crucifixes and tomahawks,"⁶⁴ and when the Marquis of Rockingham rose in the House of Lords on March 17, 1778, flourishing a bill for the immediate acknowledgment of American independence, did Editor Dunn and Squire Western begin to despair of their cause? Did they envisage the climax in Virginia in October, 1781, the stranded troopships in the York River, the black smoke eddying up from the burning houses in Gloucester, the grenadiers of Cornwallis marching out to surrender to the tune of "The World Turned Upside Down"? "My God!" cried Lord North. "It is all over!"

Speculation is the stuff that dreams and hopes are made of, like so many of the bulletins quoted here. Nevertheless, this unique file of the *Cumberland Chronicle* is of value and interest as a portrayal of the misinformation (and some truth) and opinions—or, perhaps, wishful thinking—of a generation of Britons involved against their will in an insensate, fratricidal war.

Reading

J. BENNETT NOLAN

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Viscount Augustus Keppel.

⁶⁴ Mar. 28, 1778.