'Capability'. Brown, however, had a genius for choosing people, for he relied on a series of foremen who carried through the work on site.

This could be on a mind-boggling scale involving, if need be, rebuilding the house. His style was different from Kent's, and he had no time for classical temples and fake ruins. The formula he evolved never changed. He always created a great lake or what seemed to be a winding river by damming or diverting water, designed in such a way that the source was concealed by a bridge or a cascade suggesting that the water went on beyond. Lawns swept down to the water's edge from an undulating terrain, manufactured if need be by moving tons of earth. Clumps of trees were then carefully dotted around, different varieties ensuring contrasts of colour through the seasons. These were skilfully placed in order to frame calculated views both towards the house, the focal point of the composition, and also from it. Particular attention was paid to the approach drive, so that the visitor would glimpse the mansion from afar in a series of carefully arranged pictures. The whole park was then encompassed by a thick belt of trees through which a carriage drive wended its way so that the owner could take his guests to view the beauties of the nature he had perfected.

For twenty years Brown triumphed spawning a host of imitators and then, in the 1770s, he began to be attacked. Taste changed, his work was seen as 'desolate' and, worse, people began to appreciate the countryside as it was and were horrified at Brown's manipulation of it. In the 1780s William Cowper, the poet, summed up the shift:

> Improvement, the idol of the age,
> Is fed with many a victim. Lo! he comes,
> The omnipotent magician, Brown, appears . . .
> He speaks. The lake in front becomes a lawn,
> Woods vanish, hills subside, and vallies rise,
> And streams, as if created for his use,
> Pursue the track of his directing wand . . .

But the style 'Capability' Brown represented was to cross Europe, sweeping away the formal gardens of earlier times in favour of *le jardin anglais*. First to France, then down into Italy and across Germany and on into Russia. Brown's work epitomises the apogee of one of the few art forms whose origins were wholly English.

Chapter Fifty-One

DISINTEGRATION AND DEFEAT

A twenty-four year old young man came to the throne in 1760, the deceased king's grandson, George III. Although Hanoverian in appearance, with protruding eyes and weighty lower jaw, he regarded himself foremost as king of Great Britain rather than as Elector of Hanover. When he met his first Privy Council he referred to 'this my native country'. Unlike his predecessors he hated Hanover, and had grown up and been educated in England speaking English as his first language. In this he formed a marked contrast to his forebears, nor was that all, for he was a pious Anglican and a devoted husband. He began his reign with an idealism which made him ill-equipped to cope with the tough realities of political life. Worse, he inherited a man he hated as chief minister, William Pitt.

George III was dominated by a proud and pompous Scot, Lord Bute, who was renowned more than anything else for his handsome legs. Politically he was a disaster. The king's ambition was to make a clean sweep at his accession, allowing Bute to advance to the highest office. George had been brought up to believe that both his grandfather and great-grandfather had been reduced to ciphers by members of the Whig oligarchy, which had dominated the political scene for four decades. The fact that this was untrue did not eradicate it as a belief from the king's mind. When George came to the throne everyone longed for peace. Pitt, believing, as it turned out correctly, that France and Spain were about to sign an offensive alliance, wished instead to pre-empt this by declaring war on Spain. No one would support him so Pitt resigned in October and the king was at last rid of him.

The following year, war was indeed declared against Spain, one which went triumphantly, for the British took Martinique, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent. Bute, who was no war minister, panicked, and began negotiations for peace with France. The old Duke of Newcastle resigned over the abandonment of the alliance with Prussia, thus enabling the king to promote Bute to the summit as First Lord of the Treasury. But it was done at the huge cost of losing from the government the key

figure in the long decades of Old Corps Whig rule. Newcastle was the focus of the vast network of Whig families and their connections which had been crucial to the working of any administration. For the first time since George I they found themselves fallen from power.

On 10 February 1763 the Treaty of Paris was signed in which Britain gained a vast expansion of empire at the expense of the French: the whole of Canada, Louisiana east of the Mississippi, Cape Breton and the Islands in the St. Lawrence, Tobago, Dominica, St. Vincent, the Grenadines, Senegal and Florida. This mighty triumph, whereby Britain now ruled the greatest empire since the Roman, was to prove the prelude to tragedy. And this began firstly at home, where politics entered a period of remarkable instability.

Much of the fault for that can be laid at the door of George III. His two predecessors had been shrewd enough in the main to stick with ministers who enjoyed long periods of office and who, with the aid of the old Duke of Newcastle, could work the Whig connection and sustain a majority in the Commons. That had already broken down in 1754. By the 1760s Newcastle was old and Pitt, at best, increasingly unreliable. The old framework had disintegrated so that George was to spend a decade attempting to find a minister of his own liking with whom he could work and, in turn, could command a majority in the Lower House. The resignation of the Whig oligarchs was to contribute to the emergence of an opposition party, at precisely the moment when the old one had died. The demise of the Tories began with the eclipse of the Jacobite cause, but how deep their commitment was remains open to question. Their loyalty had been transferred to the king's father, Frederick, Prince of Wales, but he also died. During the Seven Years' War the Tories had changed their stance so much that they even supported the Whig government, eroding their political identity even further. It virtually vanished entirely in 1760, when the new king appointed several Tories to positions at court and in the government. Moreover, they found in their new monarch precisely the ideals which the Tories had enshrined as their deepest principles, conservative Anglicanism and a deep reverence for established order.

The Old Corps of Whigs for all those decades had been held together by their efforts to keep the Tories out. Fallen from power, they disintegrated, and dissolved into a series of constantly shifting alliances of different groups of politicians held together around this or that leader, such as the Duke of Bedford or the Marquess of Rockingham. The result was inevitably cha-

The British monarch remains to this day Commander-in-Chief of the Army. George III took the position seriously and retained command of the American War until 1778. The portrait commemorates the summer of 1779 in which the king played an active role in meeting a threatened invasion from France.

otic as one administration succeeded another. Bute was quickly found to be a man of straw. Then came George Grenville who was an arrogant bully, followed by the Marquess of Rockingham who barely tried. Finally there was the Duke of Grafton, who was more interested in his race horses than running the government. When the king was at last driven to approach the one man he hated, Pitt, that administration collapsed through the minister's megalomania. None of this constantly shifting kaleidoscope of politicians jostling for power made for firm policy at the top, precisely what was needed as the country slowly drifted towards a major catastrophe which resulted in the loss of its North American colonies.

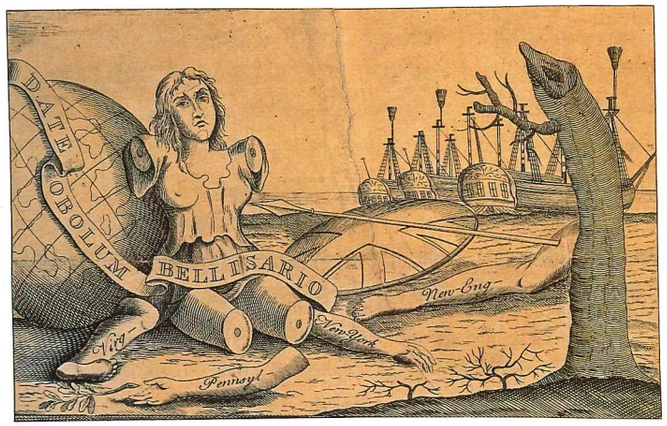
By the time that the Treaty of Paris was signed there were thirteen American colonies. Some had been founded over a century before, others were more recent, all of them established by royal charter. Since the reign of William III they had become answerable in practice to Parliament. Although the colonies varied widely in their system of government, in their religious preferences and in their social structure (with the differences especially marked between those in the cold north and those in the warm south), they were to all intents and purposes composed of British people who happened to have settled abroad, people who dressed and looked like anyone else in eighteenth century England, who spoke English, read books printed in London, purchased British goods and in their own artifacts imitated from afar the styles and fashions of the mother country. The vast majority of them were stoutly Protestant, for dissent from the religious situation at home had led their ancestors to emigrate in the first place. Unlike England where only a tenth of the population was dissenting, in the colonies the percentage rose to three-quarters.

In retrospect it was to prove unfortunate that no one in England had given much thought to the long-term consequences of the creation of these colonies. Each had its own locally elected assembly and crown appointed governor who was paid by the colonists but was in the last event answerable to a government which was answerable to Parliament. The administrative hold of England was therefore slender, and devoid of any formal structure which included Parliament. No immediate problems arose, because England for most of the previous century had been caught up in its own domestic crises and subsequent to that with the war against Louis XIV. During his time in office, Walpole had shown no interest in the colonies either, but by the middle of the eighteenth century the situation changed, prompted by the acquisition of Canada in 1763 from the French. In one way that removed any threat of invasion from the north but it drew attention sharply to the huge cost of defending the North American colonies during the Seven Years' War, colonies, moreover, which were known to have traded with the enemy. That had been paid for by the British tax-

paying gentry classes who increasingly began to feel that the colonists should at least contribute something towards their own defence. The colonists did not share that view, arguing that as they were not represented in Parliament it had no right to impose taxes on them. Parliament, for its part, did not regard the colonists as being any different in status from the majority of the population in England, who also had no right to vote but nonetheless paid taxes as Parliament decreed.

So the scene was set for the blue touch-paper to be ignited which was slowly to smoulder and then erupt into a war and the loss of the colonies. After the peace with France, ten thousand troops were stationed in North America to defend the colonies and in 1765 Parliament decided to impose the first ever direct internal tax to help meet the cost of this. The amount levied only came to a twenty-fifth of the cost but that was beside the point. The colonial assemblies complained bitterly and there were riots in Boston. The local militia refused to put them down as they would be suppressing their own kind. Across the Atlantic Parliament saw its sovereignty being challenged by a people they viewed as little more than insolent rebels.

The colonial assemblies, finding their authority as they saw it threatened, met in the autumn in New York and declared that the British Parliament had no right to impose taxes on them: 'No taxation without representation.' The Stamp Act had succeeded in bringing to the centre of the stage a reality, that these colonial assemblies had managed until then to govern two and a half million people with a very large measure of independence from the homeland, something which they now had no intention of relinquishing. There was no sympathy, however, in Parliament for this viewpoint, although the unrest the Stamp Act had unleashed eventually forced its repeal. This was accompanied by the Declaratory Act which firmly asserted Parliament's right to legislate for the colonies. There was no gratitude for the repeal;



Benjamin Franklin, a prominent American scientist and politician (who invented the lightning conductor) was sent to England to lobby Parliament about the colonists' tax grievances. Franklin's attack on the Stamp Act, a bloody image in which Britannia's severed limbs represent the loss of her American colonies if the Act is imposed. The result would be to damage trade, indicated by the ships up for sale with brooms tied to their masts.

indeed the colonists now forcefully pressed for the right to govern themselves and began to reject parliamentary legislation. Parliament found itself still left with the problem of finding a means whereby the colonists could be taxed externally to contribute towards their own defence. The solution found was to introduce customs tariffs on paper, paint, glass, lead and tea.

In the colonies this was met by a boycott of British goods which the colonial assemblies believed would apply the necessary pressure on the home economy. Patriotic groups of objectors were formed, such as the Massachusetts Association. In January 1768 Massachusetts petitioned Parliament on the grounds of 'no taxation without representation'. In England attitudes hardened sharply, and an order was issued for the dissolution of the Association. Two regiments were sent to impose order. In October, Boston banned British imports, a ban which spread throughout the thirteen colonies. In May of the following year the British Cabinet was again forced to climb down and suspended all the tariffs, except that on tea.

And it was precisely at that point, after a decade of constantly shifting alliances and changing ministries, that the king found his equivalent of Walpole. Frederick North, Lord North, as heir to an earldom, sat in the Commons. Physically he was devoid of any attraction whatsoever, with pop eyes protruding from a swollen face atop an unwieldy body. Remarkably able and with an abundance of tact, he was also blessed with a brilliant wit and an aura of benevolence. Not for nothing were members wary of a man who seemed to slumber on the front benches only to 'awake' in time to trounce his opponent. From the king's point of view he had found a minister with whom he could work and who was able to sustain a majority in the Commons. Within a short time North attracted enough support from various groups to be able to carry the day. The truth was that he was destined to preside over the most catastrophic retreat by Britain until the years 1939 to 1979.

Worse still, the king's obsession with North contributed to the emergence for the first time of something vaguely resembling an opposition party. That found its focus in the Marquess of Rockingham and hence was known as the 'Rockingham Whigs'. Rockingham attracted intense loyalty and drew much support from members of the old Whig families who had enjoyed power earlier in the century. They also had a genius as their propagandist, Edmund Burke, who defined this nascent political 'party' as 'a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.' Their main contention was novel. In the past those who opposed the crown did so on the basis that the monarch needed to be rescued from the clutches of corrupt and evil counsellors. The Rockingham Whigs argued that it was the councillors who were

being corrupted by the king and the court influence. They had to be removed and the king forced to submit to a policy change. In the plight of the colonists the Rockingham Whigs found a cause with which they could identify, and in adopting it they split the nation in two.

George III was personally in favour of modifying the Stamp Act and only later hardened his attitude to the colonists, but from the outset he saw it as his duty to defend the rights of Parliament. Everything on both sides of the Atlantic was in place for combustion. On 16 December 1773 the Massachusetts patriots dumped three hundred and forty chests of East India Company tea into the Boston harbour, an act known to posterity as 'The Boston Tea Party'. The effect in England was dramatic. The Boston Port Act ordered the closure of the port until the Company was compensated for its loss. Worse, the colony charter was revoked, its assembly dissolved and all rights of appointment, except for judges of the supreme court, were vested in the governor. The colony saw its freedom taken away by what they regarded as an arbitrary tyrannical power.

Their fear of what that could lead to was fuelled further by the Quebec Act, which set up a form of government for the newly acquired Canada that was to consist of a governor and a council appointed directly from Britain. Amongst its provisions was one which gave religious toleration to Roman Catholics. The colonists, the vast majority of them Dissenters, read this in the light of James II's bid for absolute rule and the restoration of England to Rome. Canada was viewed as an opening move in the imposition of a popish despotism on the thirteen colonies. In the autumn of 1774 representatives of the colonists met at a Continental Congress in Philadelphia and demanded the repeal of all legislation since 1763. An attempt to reach an accommodation with the British Parliament was defeated and the radicals took over. What were called the Suffolk Resolves were enacted, which withheld the payment of all taxes until Massachussetts had its charter re-instated. A Continental Association was formed, dedicated to the non-importation and non-consumption of British goods.

On 18 April 1775 the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord, creating what were to be hailed as the first 'martyrs' in the cause of American freedom. The rebels were not without their sympathisers at home amongst those who sought reform. It was to take a year, however, before there was a reaction to the outbreak of what was in fact a civil war, in which each side was to depict the other as callous and cruel, much in the same way as they had in the English civil war. The British inertia worked in favour of the rebels who swiftly turned their militias into a citizen army. There was an inconclusive battle at Bunker Hill in which the British losses were huge, and General Howe, the commander, was subsequently forced to pull out of Boston.

On 24 August, George III issued a Proclamation of Rebellion but he was saddled with a minister, Lord North, who, like Walpole before him, could not handle a war. The British response was slow and disorganised, sending eventually 23,000 German mercenaries, then five Irish regiments and finally troops from Gibraltar and Minorca. But it was all too little, too late, and on 4 July 1776 the colonies issued their Declaration of Independence, a formal renunciation of allegiance, establishing the colonies as a state independent of Great Britain.

The main retaliatory British campaign of 1777 ended in disaster. It was to be two-pronged, with General Howe advancing from the south and General Burgoyne from the north. Howe made the decision to divert his troops into taking Philadelphia and failed therefore to join up with Burgoyne advancing from Canada. In October 1778 he was defeated at Saratoga. By then the British situation had worsened. In 1778 France declared war, in 1779 Spain and, finally, in 1780 the Dutch. This meant that conflict now spread around the globe, and overtures for peace began to be made on the basis of offering home rule and common citizenship to Britons and members of the empire. But it was too late for the Americans, who would settle for nothing other than independence. On 17 October 1781 the British troops under General Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. Lord North rightly groaned: 'Oh God! It is all over.' A year later the king was forced to accept his resignation. In 1783 peace was finally made with what had become the United States.

This was the only war Britain was to lose from 1707 to the present day. It traumatized the governing classes. At one blow, the first British Empire had been lost. The aid which the French poured into America hastened the collapse of the *ancien régime*. No one to this day has ever agreed who was at fault in what was an appalling trail of disasters and mismanagement. Once arms had been resorted to, however, the outcome was virtually inevitable. It was a civil war with all the unease of like fighting like. The Americans were Protestant English not Catholic French. The initial inertia at the British end hastened a catastrophe which was only exacerbated by trying to fight a war 3,000 miles away, over a terrain which was densely wooded and criss-crossed by unfordable rivers. The colonials knew their own country and became accomplished at guerilla warfare. Supplies took three to six months to arrive by sea and, in addition, there were all the problems of the terrible New England winters.

The British too found themselves devoid of allies. When France declared war, it was necessary to defend the island, and any troop convoys. By 1780 Britain was fighting alone in America against the colonists; in India, the West Indies, North America and Africa against the French; in the Balearics, Gibraltar, the West Indies, Central America and Florida against the Spanish; and in Ceylon, the East and West Indies and in the North Sea against the Dutch.

The newly created United States manufactured its own patriotic mythology in this scene painted in 1820 by William Trumbull of *The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown*. In fact Cornwallis was 'ill' and the surrender was made on his behalf by General Charles O'Hara. In retrospect the scene has been transmuted into one of noble heroism with the flag of the newly independent country fluttering aloft in triumph.

This was humiliation on a tremendous scale. The ruling classes had presided over failure and defeat. It was a loss of face of such proportions that it was to lead to heavy emphasis on striving to create a new inclusive identity which was British bringing in both the Scots and Irish. In the years ahead they were to learn to unite in loyalty to the crown and to a second British Empire, one based on renewed military and naval strength and held together by a new missionary spirit. Looking back, perhaps defeat came at a salutary moment, for within six years the island was to be faced with sustaining over twenty years of war, years in which the ruling classes had seen taken from their peers on the mainland everything which they represented in the cataclysm known as the French Revolution.