6-1-1947

Horace Walpole's letters as a mirror of eighteenth century English society

Dorothy Roberts Simpson

Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation


This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. For more information, please contact cwiseman@auctr.edu.
HORACE WALPOLE'S LETTERS
AS A MIRROR OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
ENGLISH SOCIETY

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
DOROTHY ROBERTS SIMPSON

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JUNE, 1947
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, AN OVERVIEW ..........................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. HORACE WALPOLE, THE MAN</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. HORACE WALPOLE'S VIEWS AS EXPRESSED IN HIS LETTERS</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

It has... been well said that the history of England throughout a very large segment of the eighteenth century is simply a synonym for the works of Horace Walpole.¹

The foregoing statement concerning Horace Walpole is a typical one. But nowhere does one find a penetrating analysis of the kind of mirror Horace Walpole uses to reflect life in eighteenth century England. Granted that Legouis and Cazamian are nearer the truth in saying Walpole's letters "offer a varied and animated picture of English life in the second half of the eighteenth century;"² granted also that "when you find a specially illuminating passage in a secondary authority on the history of the period, trace it to its source and the chances are you will come upon Horace Walpole."³ But, to be sure, though these comments are generally accepted, they are somewhat misleading. While it is true many eighteenth century histories quote Walpole, it is not to be assumed either that he is an unbiased and perfectly reliable authority or that his interpretation of his times are accurate, balanced, and profound. For such assumptions would be untrue. The truth of the matter

seems to be that Walpole's letters, as this study purposes to show, are only a partial and superficial mirror of eighteenth century English society of which he was so representative.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first is an overview of the many-sided eighteenth century English society. In this chapter attention is called not only to some of the political, religio-philosophic, socio-economic and literary aspects of the era, but to some phases of the highly developed social life with its great stress upon manners. In the second chapter is a brief analysis of the character of Horace Walpole, who like the century he so entertainingly reflects, is full of change and contradiction. The third chapter reveals the views of Horace Walpole, the letter writer, upon some of the basic aspects of his complexed century. In the fourth chapter, a summary of the views is given, together with an estimate of their intrinsic value as a true mirror of eighteenth century society in its reaches and depth.

No attempt has been made to examine the correspondence as belles-lettres, nor to discuss Walpole's other works, except wherever they were pertinent to the present study.

Although more recent editions of Walpole's Letters are now available, the investigator confined many of her primary quotations to the older Cunningham edition, which she began with.

The writer wishes here to acknowledge her appreciation to her advisor, Mr. G. Lewis Chandler, for his encouragement and advice while the study was being made. She also wishes to thank the library staff for their gracious assistance.
CHAPTER I

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW

...It is often the custom to think of the eighteenth century...as a period of effete politeness and intelligence, of culture decadence, of skepticism.¹

So writes A. S. Tuberville, who is not without justification in thus expressing himself; for many other writers have expressed the same point of view. Perhaps Carlyle felt this when he called the eighteenth century an age of shams.² No such general characterizations, however, do full justice to the era. For beneath the surface of eighteenth century society, great fundamental, though scarcely perceptible, changes were taking place which had their beginnings in the preceding century.

In the seventeenth century, England had beheaded a king—Charles II; had established the Puritan Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell; had deposed in a bloodless revolution the Catholic James II; had extended the English crown to the latter's Protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband, William of Orange. The significance of these violent political changes cannot be over-emphasized: first, for the far reaching effects upon English constitutional history; secondly, upon

Europe in general; and finally, upon the temper of the
eighteenth century.

When, therefore, in 1702 Anne ascended the throne, she
found party spirit high—the major domestic issue of her
entire reign being, in fact, the eternal conflict between
the Whigs and the Tories. The latter, generally believed in
the divine right of kings, and were anxious to preserve alike
the church and state from Puritans and Catholics, and thought
it better to submit to a Catholic reign than disturb the suc-
cession by civil strife.¹ Opposed to the Tories were the
Whigs "composed largely of the leaders of great noble families
and the rich merchants of the towns".² Their main object in
the eighteenth century was "to establish a system of govern-
ment in which the will of the people as expressed by Parlia-
ment should be supreme and the power of the monarchs subject
to the limitation Parliament imposed."³

These two political parties differed, in addition to these
points, on the conduct of the war which Anne had inherited.
In fact, near the end, but for the genius of Malborough, England
would have lost the war. So important were the political impli-
cations of the war with France that Morgan considers the vic-
tories, together with the union of Scotland and England, as the
most significant political achievements of Anne's reign.

Likewise significant from the point of parliamentary growth,

¹William H. Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth
Century (London, 1925), I, 3.
²Ralph P. Boas, Social Backgrounds of English Literature
(Boston, 1932), p. 145.
³William H. Lecky, op. cit., p. 3.
was the fact that Anne's successor was from Hanover. Being a foreigner who spoke no English, George I seldom went to Cabinet meetings. Consequently, the Whigs became powerful and acquired an ascendancy so great that their adversaries were scarcely able to modify the course of legislation, and that ascendancy continued without interruption and almost without obstruction for forty-five years.

The Whig minister, Robert Walpole, was without a peer. His domestic policy was chiefly financial, but "there was no aspects of the national life which he left untouched, one might almost say uncontaminated; and every institution, religious and secular, was carefully lulled to sleep."\(^1\) His policy of "let the sleeping dogs lie" has become a by-word. Indeed as Petrie says, "Walpole made apathy a political virtue."\(^2\)

If he was a great prime minister whose touch literally turned objects to gold, he certainly did not excel as a war minister. He was more interested in building trade than in making war. As La Prade says:

Walpole did not work to avoid war wholly because he thought its advocates chiefly after his own scalp. He felt that the very merchants induced to support the cause would suffer an immediate loss of trade and a great burden of debt.\(^3\)

Critics differ on the statesmanlike qualities of the statesman, if Walpole might be called one. Petrie is denunciatory in his estimate of Walpole in the following:

\(^1\)C. Petrie, \textit{The Four Georges} (Boston, 1936), p. 78.
\(^2\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 77.
Until 1742 he dominated the scene in person, and for eighteen years the evil that he did lived after him.¹

But Turberville considers him a great constructive force. He writes:

Walpole stamped upon his policy the hallmark of much that is best in the eighteenth century—a conciliatory, tolerant temper, the lenient spirit of compromise which is the most stable security of peace.²

Paradoxical as it might seem, these conflicting opinions are both true and false. In all fairness to Walpole, though certain methods employed by him would be considered unethical today, one must remember that he strengthened the financial standing of England; he furthered his country's economic interest and he kept England out of the war a long time—in fact, throughout the reign of George I and during the greater part of the reign of George II.

The latter loved wars and wanted not only to participate in them but to lead his forces into the fight. When Walpole was no longer able to keep England out of war, first with Spain and then with France, he was forced to resign.

His ultimate successor, William Pitt, was as much a lover of war as Walpole was of peace. Misery or the cost of war, when England's integrity was at stake, meant little to Pitt. "William Pitt was fashioned in a grander mold than any other figure in the eighteenth century."³ Pitt, this grand war-loving

³Nelson Bushnell, the Historical Background of English Literature (New York, 1930), p. 217.
minister, became the champion of the people in introducing measures for the benefit of and later against the personal rule of George III, thus earning for himself the title, "The Great Commoner". Under his ministry, Great Britain's supremacy of the seas was established by her victory over Spain; her empire in North America was extended by the acquisition of French Canada, and her empire in Asia extended by the acquisition of India.

Although England had been victorious in these wars abroad, at home in the reign of the two Georges she had reached a "period of stagnation", says Bushnell. He attributes this to the fact that during this period, the English were so well satisfied with the newly established order of things that they did nothing to bestir themselves from their smugness. One possible exception, perhaps, was the force with which England quieted the Jacobite uprising, which may be compared to an iceberg. Though much lies above the water, its great bulk is not perceptible. England succeeded in overcoming, however, in this era the last formidable revolt as she overcame her other enemies abroad. And though not kings of whom England was greatly proud, the first two Georges had it to their credit that they did not interfere with Parliament.

Not so with young George III. Poorly educated and ill-suited for his responsibilities, he was determined to rule as well as reign. Wishing to be his own Prime Minister, he dismissed Pitt and appointed Tory ministers whom he could direct
and who lost for him and for England the American colonies.

As Turberville points out of George III:

"He is in considerable measure responsible for the most calamitous blunders of his lifetime, the assaults upon constitutional liberty...the breach with the American colonies and the refusal of Catholic emancipation to Ireland."

Thus in the end George III was the loser of all these things he, in assuming the royal prerogative, fought for. England, nevertheless, was still powerful at the close of the war, although she looked on herself as on the verge of ruin while the French believed her position as a world power to be practically at an end. But the loss of the American colonies made England more liberal to those possessions that remained to her. She gave toleration, for example, to the French Canadians and separate Parliament to Ireland. Her own parliament became the ruling power of Great Britain. She had suffered great territorial and financial losses, indeed; but she had made great gains also. Her empire in India was extended and she had acquired the vast tract of land--Australia.

Side by side with these political losses and gains, went certain philosophic trends and development of which the most characteristic doubtless was rationalism. Because of this, the age is frequently referred to as one of reason and enlightenment.

Perhaps one of the most influential books of the century was one on political economy by Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*. In it he advocates free trade and advances the philosophy that

---

the greater the sum of individuals who prospered, the
greater would be the national wealth. This theory naturally
had a pronounced effect on economic situations. Some indi-
viduals, after reading it or learning its philosophy, went
into enterprises; others went abroad on expeditions and
returned with fabulous wealth.

Among other authors and philosophers who definitely in-
fluenced the thought-life of the eighteenth century was John
Locke. In fact he was one of the most outstanding philosophers
and thinkers who bridged the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries.
In his chief work, "Essay on Human Understanding," he advances
the idea of empiricism. So profound was the influence of the
work that Hulme says in praise of it:

Few books in any language have been more effective
in planting in the soul the love of truth...in exposing
sophistry, in training the mind to think clearly, in
arousing ambition to know all that may be known. ¹

Locke's writings embrace not only education, but religion
and politics. It is his political theory that is a reality
today. In his Two Treatises on Government, he voices the
theory of popular sovereignty, enunciated in the latter seven-
teenth century and established in the eighteenth. To this point
Leslie Stephens states of Locke, "His writings have become the
political Bible of the following century."² In substantial
agreement with Stephens on Locke's influence, Lecdon states:

He exercised over the thinkers in the first
half of the century much the same influence as

¹Edward Hulme, History of the British People (New York, 1926),
I, 372.
²Leslie Stephens, English Thought in the Eighteenth Century
(London, 1927), I, 327.
Darwin and Spencer exercised over it in the nineteenth.  

Certainly a thinker over whom Locke exerted a tremendous influence was Hume—one of the most acute thinkers of the century. Locke's empirical theory was carried on by Hume to the point of pure skepticism.

An extreme view of this skepticism is deism, which may be defined as a natural and rational religion. This philosophy predicated upon a God, but not a creed, a reason but not a mystery, an understanding but not a revelation, had developed in the preceding century but reached its zenith in the eighteenth century and gained a wide following both in England and on the continent, especially France. Many selections from Shaftesbury and Pope reflect this philosophy.

Opposed to rationalism is sentimentalism—a mood in which a luxury of grief is made preeminent by substituting feeling for logic. This sort of reaction and mood is found in the novels of Sterne and Richardson, in the plays of Cibber, Steele, Coleman and Kelly; and in the poems of Blair, Cowper, Burns and Collins. The greatest effect of sentimentalism was the decline of satire, so prominent in the early part of the century.

Closely related to and perhaps an outgrowth of sentimentalism is romanticism—a revolt against classicism in literature. Romanticism is characterized by an interest in nature, in lowly life, in common man, in strange lands, in primitive...
literature and antiquity. This movement which had its true rise in the middle part of the century reached fruition in the nineteenth.

With romanticism and sentimentalism, Leslie Stephens classifies Methodism, stating thus, "Wesleyanism was in one sense a development of sentimentalism."¹ It appears, however, that the revivals largely grew out of reaction against the low estate into which the church had fallen. Sydney says:

Both in church and state leaders were careless in their lives and ungodly in their conduct, neglected their duty and became corrupt and altogether abominable....²

In substantiation, Lady Mary Wortley Montague writes that more atheists were to be found among the fine ladies of the times than among the lower sort of rakes.

Therefore in protest against atheism, deism, formalism and abuses in the Anglican Church, the two Wesley brothers, John and Charles, traveled over England in all kinds of weather, to all kinds of people exhorting them to conversion and the substitution of a new faith and a new hope. The movement became known as Methodism, one of the greatest religious movements of all time. Wesley, himself, converted great numbers.

In the wake of these revivals, a new humanitarianism developed which resulted in improved educational facilities for the poor, in the establishment of Sunday schools, in effecting prison reforms, in providing better care for the

¹Leslie Stephens, op. cit., II, 437.
insane and in improved working conditions for the laborer.

The new labor problem was due directly to the Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions which were taking place in the latter part of the century. Before the substitution of machinery for hand labor, England had been largely rural. Now a great number of farmers left their farms for the city to become wage earners. This shift from rural to urban areas caused an increase in city problems and crimes.

In the midst of all this, the middle class rose steadily in affluence and influence. Before the eighteenth century, England had more or less certain clearly defined classes of society into which people were born and there remained. Wealth now enabled one to change stations. Money became as important as blood in establishing one's social status. As Botsford says:

By ownership of land, by admission to Parliament, by intermarriage with the aristocracy the middle class passed over into the best society.¹

In truth, this best society has been called a coterie of shams. The following description gives a typical drawing-room scene:

A vision of beaux in coloured silk garments drinking coffee out of enamel cups while engaging in elegant small talk with ladies of towering powdered head dress and patched cheeks.²

Indeed the center of social life was the drawing room,

²A. S. Turberville, Johnson's England, p. 11.
where both women and men dressed elaborately in keeping with
the artificiality of polite society. Perhaps one of the best
descriptions of this society drawing room is revealed in Pope's
"The Rape of the Lock." In this poem, the poet satirizes, as
well as poor sportsmanship; the foibles of drawing-room society
with its emphasis upon manners and decorum.

This emphasis upon manners could be observed also at the
theatre. In the first part of the century, the opera was the
serious rival of drama. In mid-century, however, Garrick and
Siddons did much to revive an interest in Shakespearean drama
on the stage. But the eighteenth century by its very temper
was not given to the production of heavy drama. Though there
were a few tragedies, the latter part of the century abounds
in comedies, some of the most outstanding being those of Gold-
smith and Sheridan.1

Besides, at the theatre and in the drawing room, society
met promenading in the beautiful gardens at Ranelagh and
Vauxhall, at masquerades in Soho, at Bath and other famous
watering places, at levees, clubs and coffee houses. For
diversion they danced and played cards. Eighteenth century
people had a mania for cards, the example having been set
by Queen Anne. Her good friend, the Duchess of Malborough,

1See A. S. Turberville, Men and Manners, Chapter XIII, for
a discussion of drama and the stage.

She Stoops to Conquer is generally considered Goldsmith's
best play.

School for Scandal is considered Sheridan's best play.
said that she could not read; to play cards was all she could do. Of course, associated with cards was gambling which enjoyed national popularity. As Turberville states:

Gambling from the reign of Anne till the beginning of the nineteenth century was a national disease among the leisure class of both sexes.¹

So prevalent was it that many serious attempts were made to check it, but "efforts of Parliament and of city magistrates failed to curb either this mania or the activities of extra-legal operators."²

Moreover, excessive gambling was accompanied frequently by over indulgence in spirituous liquors. At the beginning of the century hard drinking among the upper class was the rule as much as tea and coffee.

Literacy was low, very low. In lieu of more intellectual pursuits, the literate classes perhaps did squander what to us must appear much valuable time. To their credit, however, some, like Addison and Steele, advocated more education and more solid culture. But Daniel Defoe courageously advocated—way in advance of his day—higher education for women.³

For girls, generally, it was considered sufficient for them to know the three R's and the social graces. They learned to play a musical instrument, by all means to dance and to make

¹ A. S. Turberville, Men and Manners, p. 88.
² J. S. Botsford, op. cit., p. 250.
pastry. Some girls were taught at home by governesses. Others went to a convent which, instead of a glorified prison, became a haven for the girls. The deplorable lack of education—on the whole for women—cannot be over-emphasized. Says Turberville:

Lord Chesterfield declared that he had never known a woman of solid reasoning, good sense... or one who...acted consequentially for twenty-four hours altogether.¹

Exceptions to the rule were Hannah Moore, Fanny Burney and Lady Mary Wortley Montague, "Blue Stockings," as literary women were called then.

For men in the eighteenth century, education was not so uncommon as for women. Boys attended either private or free schools.² The former were really boarding schools in London and smaller areas accessible to many. Of the free schools, Christ's Hospital and Westminster were most notable. If, after finishing one of these schools, a young man desired further education, he went to one of the universities or traveled abroad or did both. Most of the upper class men of society and men of letters were well trained.

The literature of the first part of the eighteenth century, or neo-classic period, is characterized by its elevating literary form over matter, its emphasis upon polished diction, its dominant rational spirit, its conspicuous lack of enthusiasm and imagination. Literary developments of the age are

¹ A. S. Turberville, Men and Manners, p. 109.

the perfection of the heroic couplet, the beginnings of journalism, the entry of the middle class into literature, and the beginnings of the modern novel. Alexander Pope—critics agree—is the typical or chief representative poet of the age. Leslie Stephens says:

Pope had at least two great poetical qualities. He was amongst the most keenly sensitive of men, and he had an almost unique felicity of expression which has enabled him to coin more proverbs than any other writer since Shakespeare.1

Great prose writers of this period were Addison, Steele, Swift and Defoe.

The death of Pope in 1744 and of Swift in the following year marked the passing of the last great neo-classicists.² In the next few years, there was a decline in neo-classicism and eventually but slowly a rise of romanticism. Samuel Johnson, the greatest literary personality of the age which followed Pope, tried in vain to uphold the neo-classic standards.

Many of Johnson's contemporaries made great contributions to English literature. James Boswell made an outstanding contribution in his Life of Johnson, the only biography of its kind in English literature. Edward Gibbons, eminent historian, wrote The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Edmund Burke, statesman, orator and writer, wrote On Conciliation with America, and Reflections on the Revolution in France. Oliver Goldsmith, poet, playwright, and novelist, wrote "The

1 Leslie Stephens, op. cit., p. 350.

Deserted Village," which is as well known almost as Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Church Yard." Richardson wrote his Clarissa Harlowe, Fielding his Tom Jones; and a host of others made great contributions to literature.

Notwithstanding the fact that classicism prevailed till near the end of the century, romanticism in the last decade or two was definitely triumphant. This movement had been manifesting itself sporadically throughout the century, but it did not reach fruition till the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

In this chapter the political, religious, philosophical, social, economic and literary developments of the eighteenth century have been sketched and briefly discussed. In this sketch and discussion many observations may be made. Chief among these might be that the century, many sided in its interests and developments, is certainly not to be taken lightly, as it is sometimes customary to do; for in this century the French, American and Industrial Revolutions had far reaching and profound effects upon the course of economy and politics, literature, philosophy and science, education and human welfare; secondly, that the century produced some of the greatest names in and contributors to the fields of literature, politics, art, furniture, philosophy and history, religion, military science and philanthropy; third, that the century was one of great changes and conflicts; for on the continent, as in England, the old order was breaking down, tastes were changing; reaction had set in not only against the established institutions but likewise against the philosophy behind them. As Houston says, "The eighteenth century saw the germination of new ideas."1

And it is this germination of new ideas that makes the cen-
tury significant, profound, interesting and provocative. It
is indeed unjust, if not erroneous, to call the eighteenth cen-
tury "a period of effete politeness, of culture decadence,"
It is in such a century, a century of great issues, great
changes, brilliant performances and world shaking revolutions
that Horace Walpole lived. In the next chapter we shall study
this man in the light of the background given in this chapter.
Horace Walpole was truly a product of the eighteenth century, a most urbane man who reflected the savoir-faire spirit so very characteristic of certain aspects of the age. Even his external appearance and mannerisms indicated not only his well-known personality traits and characteristics but also those of the age in which he lived. Living in an era dominated and controlled by the aristocracy, a coterie that stressed delicacy, sophistication, conformity, conventions and the artificial, Horace Walpole absorbed and believed in the conventional ideals and standards of his eighteenth century set. As A. B. Mason says:

His entrance into a room was in that style of affected delicacy which fashion had made almost natural, chapeau-bras between his hands as if he wished to compress it, or under his arm; knees bent and feet on tiptoe as if afraid of a wet floor.1

And as every one knows, his elaborate dress corresponded fittingly with the upper class spirit and taste of his day. We even learn from his critics that in some ways, he carried this spirit to an extreme. "Supercilious, absurdly dandified and affected," writes Thackeray.2 In perfect agreement with

---

Thackeray, Macaulay writes: "Most Frenchified English writer." Moreover portraits of Walpole by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Muntz, Ecardt and others justify the impression.

From all of this, one would think that it is easy to understand Horace Walpole the man. It is true that he had obvious mannerisms, that he had habits easily observed and as easily criticized; that his tendency to appear a dandy and a dilettante made him seem slight, superficial, almost inconsequential. But, in fact, Walpole is a very difficult man to understand and to characterize accurately. As Bradford states: "Men of Walpole's type trifle forever and do not live at all." If Bradford is correct, Horace Walpole is indeed elusive to grasp, not easy to understand. Moreover, unlike Johnson, he had no Boswell. In fact, unlike many men of letters, he had but few biographers. Unlike the average man, regardless of profession, he had no close family ties. Most of the time no near relative shared his home. Even with his closest friends he appears to be not unrestrained. While in the eighteenth century, it was fashionable to suppress emotion and enthusiasm, in Walpole this trait was carried to an extreme. This fact perhaps lies behind Macaulay's reason for saying "His features were covered by mask within mask."

Another difficulty in getting to know Walpole is in the

1T. B. Macaulay, "Horace Walpole," Critical and Historical Essays (Boston, 1900), III, 197.
2G. Bradford, "Bare Souls," Harper's, CXLIX (June, 1924), 115.
3T. B. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 188.
fact that critics themselves disagree so much in their opinions of him. Macaulay's statement about Walpole's masking has been cited. More, on the other hand, thinks Walpole transparent in character—hence slight and easily understood:

It is one of the most curious anomalies of psychology that Macaulay should have written of the most transparent of men, both in his vanities and his excellencies as of bearing 'features covered by mask within mask.'

Nor does Kerr agree with Macaulay either—that Walpole's mind is a bundle of whims and affectations. Rather Kerr says it was "because he had a mind of his own that he has been pointed out by literary demagogues." But Leslie Stephens agrees with Macaulay about Walpole's whims and adds that Walpole is likewise full of spite and can never be fair to an enemy of his father. Berry contests charges of affectation made by Macaulay and Dorothy Stuart against Walpole. Berry, also, more or less in accord with Greenwood and Gwynn,

---

finds Walpole's nature affectionate. Dobson,¹ too, cautions about believing charges made against Walpole of coldness and want of generosity, pointing out Conway and Mme. Du Deffand to refute those charges.

From this we see not only that critics do not agree on Walpole, but also that, apparently, Walpole himself, like his era, was full of contradictions, inconsistencies and conflicts.

His disposition was warm, impulsive, and friendly yet apparently cold, affected and forbidding. This mixture probably accounts for much of his contradiction and apparent masking. This mixture also illuminates and humanizes Macaulay's rather jaunty statement:

When he talked misanthropy he out-Timoned Timon. When he talked philanthropy, he left Howard at an immeasurable distance. He scoffed at courts and kept a chronicle of their most trifling scandal.²

Let us notice his friendships. Walpole had a capacity for making friends, it seems, but lacked the power to retain them. With many an old friend, he came to an abrupt parting of the ways—suggesting some queer personal trait. The first serious break with a good friend was with Gray, when they were on the continental tour. One by one, he fell out with other friends: Bentley, Montague, Mason and others. Perhaps the most tragic example of that paradoxical nature exhibited to his friends was in his treatment of Mme. Du Deffand. She loved him (he said) as much as his mother. "All she asked was...

¹Austin Dobson, op. cit., p. 321.
²T. B. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 188.
to let her fondness for him find vent in words."\(^1\) This he denied. Her letters, he instructed, were to be impersonal and chatty, but not affectionate, so great was his fear of ridicule.

A few years later, this dread of ridicule so obvious in his relationship with the charming old Frenchwoman, he apparently forgot in the new relationship with two young women whom he called his wives—ostensibly to avoid ridicule, but in reality inviting it. (He was past seventy then). Love, which he spurned years before, now had him at past seventy, fretting under it like a young man. Mystifying!

Another contradiction in Walpole's nature, assailed by Macaulay as a whim, was his unwillingness to be called a man of letters; yet he was so eager for literary fame that he was asking friends to return his letters. He was preparing them for publication.\(^2\) No doubt there are many other contradictions and paradoxes in Walpole's nature. But in spite of these, and in spite of conflicting opinions among critics on Walpole, we shall try to arrive at a fair estimate of the man.

To be sure, in dress he was an extremist. He perhaps merited the title of dandy and fop. Always neat, he doubtless became more fastidious after his visit to France. "In Paris ... he had means to dress himself in the height of the fashion and did so with considerable

\(^1\) Ibid.

\(^2\) Macaulay says Walpole "wished to be a celebrated author, and yet to be a mere idle gentleman." Op. cit., p. 195.
attention to the details." Hawkins quotes a specific description of his usual dress:

His dress... was most usually... a lavender suit, the waistcoat embroidered with a little silver or white silk worked in the tambour, partridge silk stockings, and gold buckles, ruffles, frills and generally lace... very much underdressed, if at any time except in mourning, he wore hemmed cambric.

And his general appearance was one of affectation— in youth something of a snob, all through his life something of an aristocrat. To the more masculine type of men, Walpole appears effeminate, so immaculate and fastidious was he.

His reactions to life justify somewhat Bradford's caustic comment: that men of Walpole's type trifle forever. Indeed Walpole appears to sit on the side lines and views the game in a most objective manner— as a spectator, rather than a participant. Walpole says himself he desires to die when he has no one left to laugh with him. One writer has said he had a contempt for mankind. He sneers at people, despises, as up-starts, the rising middle class, looks down upon men of letters, scoffs at religion, men of science, marriage— all. Hazlitt says, "Walpole never speaks with respect of any man of genius. He envied all great minds."

---

1 Stephen Gwynn, op. cit., p. 49.
3 Gamaliel Bradford, op. cit., p. 115.
4 Anon., "Horace Walpole in His Old Age," Living Age, LIX (December, 1858), 915.
call Johnson a bear, a proud pedant. He detested Goldsmith, thought Fielding a commoner, spoke grudgingly of Garrick and all other actors. He disparaged Addison and Dryden. Towards these and a long list of others, generally acclaimed great, then and now, he exhibited a marked antipathy. Whether because of some political grudge, haughty aristocratical disdain, or what, failure to recognize any merit in his contemporaries is a grievous fault in Walpole.

Another fault that repelled was what appeared to be his cold-bloodedness. He seemed not merely artificial but actually unnatural. While it was fashionable in the eighteenth century to suppress enthusiasm and emotion, in Walpole this trait was carried to an extreme. Gwynn attributes this to the fact that in his childhood Walpole perceived that there was something not quite normal in his—then—closest relationships—that with his mother excepted. She alone, it appears, understood him. Younger by eleven years than any of his brothers and sisters, as a small child, he seldom had any one to play with, until he was sent at eight to be tutored with his young cousins. Till then, he was often alone, neglected by brothers, sisters and father—Robert Walpole, the busy great prime minister. Naturally, the most constant associate being his mother, Walpole probably acquired some traits and mannerisms which his enemies have unfairly and derisively labeled as effeminate. Then, too, as Gwynn says, "he was...extremely

---

1 Stephen Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
weak and delicate...the care of him engrossed the attention
of his mother."¹

Then what happened after his mother died might have been
a contributing factor to this apparent cold-bloodedness.
Within a year of the first Lady Walpole's death, her son had
the bitter experience of seeing his mother's rival (whom he
detested, naturally) legally installed in his mother's place.
Because of Walpole's deep-sealed hurt, Gwynn says:

I do not think it mended matters that the
second Lady Walpole died within a few months
of the first.²

Thus Walpole's known cold-bloodedness and apparent misanthropy
did mask a plain starving for affection. Perhaps, too, this
mask or compensation did greatly influence the development of
many well known peculiarities already discussed.

And yet, notwithstanding these peculiarities and eccen-
tricities of Walpole, so glaringly pointed out by his most
severe critics,³ Walpole had virtues often overlooked; for
what may have been termed a fault in his person according to
present day standards would be considered a virtue. In an
age when less attention was paid to personal cleanliness
than to the mode, when cologne was substituted for the daily
bath, Walpole was fastidiously clean and neat in the superla-
tive degree. Herein he deserved to be praised rather than

¹Ibid., p. 16.
²Ibid.
³In Macaulay's trenchant and too generally accepted essay,
Walpole's faults lived after him.
censured. This same fastidiousness, this same neatness, this passion for orderliness, we find reflected in his literary work, in his other habits of daily living.

He was most abstemious. With him was no carousing, intemperate drinking and eating. In an age when men were noted for intemperance, in an age given to excess, Walpole could easily be distinguished from the "two bottle men," and "men who are mountains of roast beef." Their conviviality did not appeal to Walpole, who was frugal and had the good sense and the foresight, early, to perceive that to be temperate was the only way to preserve his frail constitution.

In spite of his care to preserve his health, from twenty-five years of age he suffered acutely from gout. But he bore this pain unflinchingly. This stoicism was a great virtue. For suffering made walking difficult and caused his hand to swell and to discharge large chalk stones. At this he would often smile and remark to his friends that he could "chalk up a score." No doubt this stoicism, coupled with his abstemiousness enabled Walpole, the sickly boy, to live out his three-score, ten plus an extra decade.

His critics do not emphasize these aspects of his character nor his kindness to women and children, though some grudgingly admit his kindness to a few men friends. Walpole made a home for a distant kinswoman long after she, crippled and ill, had outlived her usefulness as his father's and his own housekeeper --remaining in London with her through the hot months of the

1 Austin Dobson, op. cit., p. 76.
summer till death released her from long suffering.¹ This is one of several such cases. The Conways knew his heart was kind. When business called them away from England to Ireland, it was the bachelor Horace Walpole with whom they left their three year old daughter. Indeed, "it was an odd charge to be undertaken by a fashionable and most worldly gentleman of five and thirty."² However, as has been said, these qualities are often overlooked by those who most bitterly attack him.

Nor do his critics point out Walpole's fondness for dogs. Few mean men love dogs. When Mme. Du Deffand died, she left Walpole her favorite dog, knowing Tonton would be taken care of.³ When hydrophobia necessitated the killing of many dogs, Walpole grieved very much. To him it seemed so unkind, so inhumane to kill the dumb creatures.⁴ If one should take time to find out the facts, Walpole would appear surprisingly kind.

This kindness manifested itself by doing the unusual.

¹Mrs. Leneve was a kinswoman, who kept house first for Sir Robert but died in Horace Walpole's house in Arlington Street. She was seventy-three and had been an invalid twenty-five years. Consult Stephen Gwynn, op. cit., p. 176.

²Ibid., p. 134.

³Tonton bit every one including Walpole.

⁴In a letter to Sir David Dalrymple, June 20, 1760, Walpole wrote concerning Walton's Complete Angler that he wished the gentlemen did not think angling so innocent an amusement, and asked if people should torture animals for sport. Letters of Horace Walpole, ed. Peter Cunningham (Edinburgh, 1906).
Critics have made much over Walpole's brief rupture with Gray but less over Walpole's frequent overtures of peace and Gray's rejection of these efforts at reconciliation.

In the case of Conway, nothing was too much for Walpole to do to promote his interest—even to taking care of Conway's three year old daughter while the parents were in Ireland.\(^1\) When politics and fortune turned against Conway in his subsequent dismissal from office, Walpole offered to share his ample fortune with him. Such generosity and loyalty to friends is a bit unusual—especially in a person reputedly mean and cold blooded.

After the death of his friends, Bentley and Galfridus Mann, Walpole helped to provide for their orphaned children. Neither of the fathers was among his circle of "best friends." They were erstwhile friends and beneficiaries of his in a way, and by no means, men to whom he was indebted. Yet, years afterwards, he showed kindnesses to their children. He did, indeed, merit the comment of Greenwood that Horace Walpole was "of a genuinely affectionate nature, unselfishly ready to help not only friends, but mere acquaintances in their need or business."\(^2\)

Side by side with Walpole's care for his friends, was his pride in his family. One cannot help observing the high pinnacle upon which he placed Sir Robert, how indispensable the son felt the prime minister to be to England, the fidelity he displayed toward him when his political enemies were trying to oust him.

\(^1\)See Stephen Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

\(^2\)A. Greenwood, *op. cit.*, xi.
This fidelity led to undying hate for his father's opponents. The one speech of any consequence Horace Walpole made in the house had been in defence of the prime minister. When Walpole (Horace) became an old man, he was still attempting to help retrieve the family fortunes, going repeatedly to the rescue of his mad, ungrateful nephew, the earl of Oxford, sincerely trying to help settle his muddled affairs—indeed a thankless task. Moreover, he took a deep interest in his nieces, looking after their welfare till he married them off—one the third time. A great rebuke to this family pride, however, was the shameful conduct of Mary, Countess of Oxford, his sister-in-law. To Walpole, she was a constant source of worry, for he gloried in the name of Walpole.

Walpole's intellectual grasp is often belittled, more by implication and other subtleties than by direct attack. But Walpole, who, as a child was precocious, as a man was by no means "stupid" or possessed of a "diseased mind," as Macaulay has so unkindly and so falsely stated. On the contrary, Walpole became at Eton so proficient and distinguished himself so well in his studies that he early acquired an intellectual snobbery. He had such a remarkable memory that he "could easily recollect a thousand passages...something above the

---

1 The Countess was unpopular with both the men and women of court circles. The king was offended with her for boasting that he had showed her great courtesies. The divorce from her husband was highly publicized with all its disgraceful scandals. See P. Cunningham, I, 362, 391; II, 6, 12, 14, 252.

2 Leslie Stephens, op. cit., p. 391.

average rate of a school boy's diversions.\textsuperscript{1} The only blot on his records of literary achievements was the failure to learn mathematics.\textsuperscript{2} Today no one expects to learn all subjects with equal facility and interest. Though this failure counteracted some of Walpole's conceit, it in no way relegates him to the class of the weak-minded or the slow. It is doubtful if Stuart is wholly correct in saying his reach was never much greater than his grasp.\textsuperscript{3} Rather, as Leslie Stephens says, Walpole was the possessor of an intellect agile and alert rather than profound.\textsuperscript{4} Stephens also states, "The more we examine his works the more we shall admire his extreme cleverness."\textsuperscript{5}

The writer has attempted to present impartially Horace Walpole's virtues and vices to the end of understanding and delineating the whole man. Indeed his faults and virtues are complementary and tend to both strengthen and weaken each other. For example, "his faults as well as his virtues," as Leslie Stephens says,

qualified him to be the keenest of all observers of a society unconsciously approaching a period of tremendous convulsions.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{1}Stephen Gwynn, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{2}Walpole says he was so incapable of learning mathematics, his professor refused to take his money. Then Walpole privately hired a teacher for a year, with no better results. See Gwynn, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{3}Dorothy Stuart, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{4}Leslie Stephens, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 350.
\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{6}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 339.
In perfect agreement with Stephens, Dobson says, "The qualities which are his defects in more serious productions become merits in his correspondence, or rather they cease to be defects."¹ Now out of this rather heterogeneous and paradoxical group of characteristics, let us select what seems to be most significant in evaluating this often abused personality.²

Horace Walpole, beneath that ever green politeness,³ beneath the mask of cold-bloodedness, beneath those absurd affectations, beneath that apparent indifference, was kind and sympathetic, loyal and generous to friends and acquaintances. It is equally true, however, he was uncertain of temper, selfish at times, often an implacable enemy, exhibiting an undeniable spitefulness, occasionally narrow and perverse in his judgements, especially of his contemporaries. This aristocrat was scornful of royalty and "trucked to none of the successive ministers upon whose will or whim the payment of his salary depended."⁴ Walpole is described as exceedingly courteous, "receiving his friends with a suavity of the old school. But beneath this courtesy was a contempt for mankind...a frigidity of nature

¹Austin Dobson, op. cit., p. 336.

²G. W. Krutch says:
Because of Macaulay, references to Horace Walpole are usually condescending even when his talents and achievements are being recognized. "Horace Walpole," Nation (October 12, 1940), p. 337.

³Dorothy Stuart, op. cit., p. 23.

⁴Walpole held sinecures. Sometimes pay was late. But Walpole never solicited favors of the ministers.
beneath an evergreen politeness."^1

It is true, as Stephens says:

Walpole was a gossip by nature and education, and had lived from infancy in the sacred atmosphere of court intrigue; every friend he possessed in his own rank either had a place, or had lost a place or was in want of a place, and generally combined all three characters.2

This gossip had a morbid curiosity which delighted in pulling the skeleton out of his neighbor's closet. Moreover, he had the collecting habit which Macaulay spoke of as "researches after Queen Mary's comb, Wolsey's red hat...and the spur which King William struck into the flank of Sorrel."3 All of this is, however, significant in the character of Walpole, the letter writer.

He was well informed in all the intellectual pursuits of the day. He was an artist of some ability, an expert in landscape garden, an antiquarian, a novelist--in fact, he made a definite contribution to the development of the Gothic novel--a virtuoso of some importance.

Thus we have studied a man whose life span covered most of the eighteenth century and whose character was symbolic of many of the conflicts and contradictions of that checkered century. Born during the first quarter and living to within three years of the beginning of the nineteenth, he writes:

---

1William Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 151.
2Leslie Stephens, op. cit., p. 332.
3T. B. Macaulay, op. cit., p. 189.
...I sometimes think I have lived two or three lives. Besides as I was an infant when my father became a minister, I...knew half the remaining courts of King William and Queen Anne, or heard them talked of as fresh...kissed the hand of George I, and am now hearing the frolics of his great, great grandson;—no, all this cannot have happened in one life! ¹

CHAPTER III

HORACE WALPOLE'S VIEWS AS REVEALED IN HIS LETTERS

It was the purpose in Chapter I of this thesis to treat briefly the many-sided nature of the eighteenth century to the end of setting forth not only the important phases and events of the century but the fact that it was not, as many are too prone to believe, a century dominated mainly by frills, fancy, and fops. It was a hard thinking, incisive thinking, deep thinking century of worthy philosophers, able statesmen, provocative theorists, creative artists, conscientious and inspired reformers and teachers, profound scholars, and eminent writers. In a very important sense, it was, indeed, fertile soil out of which grew our modern period with its dependance upon industry, science, education, religion, democracy—all of which received much of their present direction, course and timber in the eighteenth century.

That this century, like all others, had its own interpreters is natural. Through the on-the-spot reactions and comments of these interpreters, we of a latter day may learn a great deal that is factual, human, confidential, illuminating. But we must know the interpreter—his mind, his training, his character, his associations, his position, his ability. Therefore in Chapter II of this study, these aspects of Walpole, whose letters satisfactorily contain his reflections and interpretations of the main issues and activities of his day, were discussed.
In the present chapter, we shall study the letters of Walpole with respect to the light they throw upon him and upon the century in which he lived and of which he was so definite a part. To the literary investigator interested in the eighteenth century, these letters are highly important, since, as Moore succinctly states, "they constitute a complete historical document for the period." It is, therefore, primarily as "a complete historical document," not as a specimen of eighteenth century belles lettres, that Walpole's letters will be treated here.

It is well to remember that, while Walpole was a member of Parliament for twenty-seven years, in 1768, at the age of fifty-one, he gave up his seat. This retirement from Parliament to Twickenham is significant to the student of Walpole's letters. The letters written after that date reflect his new way of life. As Gwynn says, in the correspondence we observe less of narrative and description and more of philosophy. Thus in his letters, Walpole is narrative, descriptive and philosophical in his treatment of his interests and views.

---


2 In the eighteenth century when social life was so highly developed, there flourished a rare form of literature reserved for persons of social distinction, letter writing. The writer tries to make himself agreeable, and perhaps the recipient of the letters too, in conformity with the belief that politeness in the beau-monde is an attribute more desirable than character. Many developed well this fine art of letter-writing, but Horace Walpole, prince of letter writers, excelled them all.

3 Stephen Gwynn, op. cit., p. 240.
What are Walpole's interests and views on politics, government--its machinery, its officers; on problems national and international?

To ascertain Walpole's idea of the nature and function of government, one should read his letters discussing the American and French Revolutions. If one reads his views on the former alone, he might conclude that Walpole was a Whig of which there were conservatives, liberals and radicals. If the latter (the French Revolution) one might, however, classify him as a hidebound Tory; but such a conclusion would be fallacious and unjust. Walpole was a liberal Whig like Burke. Unlike Burke and the Tory Johnson, Walpole believed in the philosophy of government of which Locke's writings were the "political bible:"\(^1\) namely that the sovereign's authority is limited by the terms of the compact that the sovereign out of respect for certain inalienable rights--among them: life, liberty and property--of his subjects, must serve the public will or be dismissed; that good government is necessary for national prosperity, happiness and order. These views are set forth rather clearly in Walpole's letters dealing with the American Revolution. Therefore, just as the Whigs did not submit to James II in the Revolution of 1688 but deposed the sovereign, so the colonists had the right to rebel against their unjust taxation and the infringement upon their liberty. Though he believes in a limited monarchy, he envisions with some hint of approval the developments of mighty republics in America.

In a letter to Mann in May, 1770, Walpole says:

You have seen the accounts from Boston. The tocsin seems to be sounded to America. I have many visions about that country, and fancy I see twenty empires and republics forming upon vast scales over all that continent which is growing too mighty to be kept in subjection to half a dozen exhausted nations of Europe.¹

Walpole doubts "if the Americans will be as pliant as we say they must be."² Revealing his sympathy for the colonies, Walpole writes Conway a few months later:

I have no time to tell you some manoeuvres against them that will make your blood curdle.³

Still their champion, he writes in December that

The Americans at least acted like men...our conduct has been that of pert children. We have thrown a pebble at a mastiff.⁴

The statement above is very important. In it Walpole not only admits England's guilt in the American affair but suggests how uncalled for was the provocation. But he goes further. In a letter to Reverend William Mason, he openly admires the Americans and praises them for their love of liberty.

The Americans are the only people by whom one would wish to be admired. The world is divided into two nations--men of sense that will be free and fools that like to be slaves.⁵

¹Horace Walpole's Letters, ed. by Peter Cunningham (Edinburgh, 1905), V, 235. All letters from this edition will be referred to only by volume and page.
²Ibid., VI, 69.
³Ibid., p. 141.
⁴Ibid., p. 159.
⁵Ibid., p. 237.
He even manifests joy over the victories of the colonies and reveals that the failure of the king's army is soft-pedaled in the papers. Almost everywhere he scoffs at the stupidity and blunders of the British armed forces and of Parliament:

One effect the American war...has not had that it ought to have had; it has not brought us to our senses.¹

And he jeers at Lord North's conciliatory plans in which it is conceded that the opposition have been in the right from beginning to end. For Walpole this came too late. Finally came the not unexpected news—America is lost. In his reaction to this news, Walpole with cultivated restraint, yet with an I-told-you-so attitude writes:

I cannot put on the face of the day and act grief. Whatever puts an end to the American war will save the lives of thousands—millions of money, too. If glory compensates such sacrifices, I never heard that disgraces and disappointments were palliatives; but I will not descant, nor is it right to vaunt of having been in the right when one's country's shame is the solution of one's prophecy, nor would one join in the triumph of her enemies.²

In fact, he seems thoroughly ashamed of his England, not because she lost the colonies but because she so unnecessarily and blindly lost her leadership in the pursuit of liberty and justice.

Oh! my Lord! I have no patience with my country! And shall leave it without

¹Ibid., p. 237.
²Ibid., p. 446.
regret! Can we be proud when all
Europe scorns us? It was wont to
envy us, sometimes to hate us, but
never despise us before. James I
was contemptible, but he did not lose
an America! His eldest grandson sold
us, his younger lost us—but we kept
ourselves. Now we have run to meet
the ruin—and it is coming! 1

Always an opponent of tyranny, Walpole sympathized deeply
with the colonists. Taxes and acts passed against them as
Englishmen are oppressive and unreasonable: "Liberty," Walpole
says, "should exist anywhere amongst Englishmen, even across the
Atlantic." The war, he considers as a civil war not as a revo-
lation. In the crisis involving America, then, Walpole not
only demonstrates that trait of sympathy which has been referred
to in the preceding chapter but exhibits a definite stand for
liberty and justice. Like Burke in his famous speech, "On
Conciliation with the Colonies," Walpole names England as the
aggressor and defends the opposition of the colonists.

But this picture of his views on government, as illustrated
in his reactions to the American crisis, needs modification.
His reaction to the French Revolution affords this modification.
One must remember that, paradoxically, Walpole was a true-blue
aristocrat as well as a liberal. In fact, to him the French
Revolution was effected by a disorderly mob unlike the American
Revolution. Like Burke, Walpole cannot conceive of a government
in the hands of a motley rabble, nor can he support blind fury
in its attack upon an established order. Government is too
organic a thing to be disturbed without dire consequences.

1 Ibid., VIII, 115.
Of course, the people have their rights and these rights should not be infringed upon. But neither should the people infringe upon the rights of others. The French people unjustifiably attacked the rights of those qualified and ordained to rule. With the royalty, then, lies Walpole's sympathy in the French crisis. Even the motto of the Revolution—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—has a vicious, unsavory connotation to him. He is no egalitarian; he is no idealist; he is no democrat in the sense that certain contemporaries like Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine, William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft were.

More than twenty years before the French Revolution erupted, Walpole, visiting in France, sensed a growing disorder and instability in the government of that country. Disturbed, he writes:

The scene that is closed here seems but opening in France. The Parliament of Paris banished; a new one arbitrarily appointed; the princes of blood refractory and disobedient; the other Parliament mutinous; and distress everywhere...What may happen when the king is despised, his agents detested, and no ministry settled? It is the crisis of their constitution.

He concedes that the government needs reform but is horrified at the velocity of the Revolution. He observes that all France is mad. Liberty, he says, displayed by massacre and without legal trial, is barbarism. He thinks the Etats-Generaux, having no sense, prudence or balance, mostly to blame. The king, he says, has shown himself more than willing to make concessions and is deserving of some consideration, weak though he is. To

---

1 Ibid., V, 283.
see France which to Walpole was the most cultivated and the most orderly of all nations degenerate into anarchy and republicanism is tragic.

When Miss Hannah More wrote Walpole that she was sorry to see the rabble triumph as they did in the storming of the Bastille but hoped some good would be derived therefrom, Walpole agrees that the Bastille had outlived its functions and confesses that he hates to drive by it knowing the miseries it contained; nevertheless he says:

The destruction of it was silly and agreeable to the ideas of a mob, who do not know stones and bars and bolts from a lettre de cachet. If the country remains free, the Bastille would be as tame as a ducking-stool, now that there is no such thing as a scold. If despotism recovers, the Bastille will rise from its ashes!—recover I fear it will. The Etats cannot remain a mob of kings, and will prefer a single one to a larger mob of kings and tyrants....In short a revolution procured by a national vertigo does not promise a crop of legislators. It is time that composes a good constitution.1

In letter after letter, Walpole deplores the chaos and fall of France. He is horrified at the indignities experienced by the royal family. Like Burke, he thinks a nation of courtiers has become an underworld of cut throats and sophists.

Walpole's views on government then are typically Whig. He believes in liberty under law and order; he believes in justice and expediency; he believes in changes without violence. Of the types of government, he prefers a monarchy. Not, therefore,
in the radical wing of eighteenth century political philosophy with its natural rights theories and its opposition to institutions of any kind, Walpole is a liberal of the type of Edmund Burke and Alexander Hamilton. Like Hamilton, Walpole believes decidedly in class distinction. His aristocratic views are constantly recurring in his letters. Indeed, his views on the French Revolution show his contempt for the lower-class. The middle-class he also dislikes. But Walpole does not approve of slavery. His hatred of slavery he expresses in a letter to Bentley:

Colonel Codwington left his estate for the propagation of the gospel and ordered that three hundred Negroes should be constantly employed upon it. Did you ever hear a more truly Christian charity, than keeping up a perpetuity of three hundred slaves to look after the Gospel's estate? How could one intend a religious legacy, and miss the disposition of that estate for delivering three hundred Negroes from the most shocking slavery imaginable?

He calls slavery a horrid traffic:

We, the British Senate, that temple of liberty and bulwark of Protestant Christianity, we have this fortnight been providing methods to make more effectual that horrid traffic of selling Negroes.

Yet Walpole is no abolitionist. He is no aggressive reformer either in politics or in social practise. "Whatever is, is right." In fact he says, "I do not love removing landmarks,"

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{II}, 394.\]
\[2\text{Ibid.}, \text{I}, 197.\]
\[3\text{Ibid.}\]
the Whig principle so aptly expressed by his late father, Prime Minister Walpole, in "Let sleeping dogs lie." However, Walpole does not hesitate to speak out against injustices and corruption; and the eighteenth century was fertile field for such. He inveighs heavily and often against the illegal practice of buying votes. He calls it "the prostitution of patriots." He decries the contemptible law enforcing practices of his day. Following is an example. Some drunken constables decided to execute the law against disorderly conduct. Indiscriminately they locked up about two dozen women. The next morning half a dozen were dead and another dozen in a critical condition. The tragedy of it was, most of the women were innocent. Walpole makes this comment concerning the constables:

...I question if any of them will suffer death, though the greatest criminals in this town are the officers of justice; there is no tyranny they do not exercise, no villainy of which they do not partake.¹

In a similar vein, he writes some years later on the degeneracy of his country:

...What is England now?—a sink of Indian wealth, filled by nabobs and emptied by macaronis! A senate sold and despised. A country overrun by race horses! A gaming, robbing, wrangling, railing nation without principles, genius, character or allies....²

Frequently he deplores the lack of police protection. Robbery is so common "one is forced to travel even at noon as if he was going to battle."³

¹Ibid., V, 485.
²Ibid., II, 281.
³Ibid., p. 283.
He cites this instance:

Lady Waldegrove was robbed t'other night in Hyde Park under the very noses of the lamp and patrol.¹

A little later after Lady Waldegrove and Lady Coventy were robbed in the park, the King provided the latter with a guard. When she ventured out, twelve other guards followed her.

As for himself, Walpole takes his "blunderbuss" with him at all times because, as he writes to the Countess of Ossory:

We are robbed in the face of the sun as well as at the going down thereof.²

Expressing more than alarm, rather disgust, at the indifference manifested toward such evils by politicians, he writes thus to the Earl of Strafford:

But though our sedentary politicians write abundance of letters in the newspapers, full of plans of public spirit, I doubt the nation is not sober enough to set about its own work in earnest. When none reform themselves, little good is to be expected. We see by the excess of highwaymen how far evils will go before any attempt is made to cure them.³

and thus to the Countess of Ossory:

If I went to Almack's...I might still be in vogue; or if I paid nobody, and went drunk to bed every morning at six, I might expect to be called out of bed by two in the afternoon to save the nation, and govern the House of Lords.⁴

In other words, politics were rotten and had been so for

¹Ibid., p. 404.
²Ibid., VIII, 512.
³Ibid., VIII, 287.
⁴Ibid., VI, 63.
years. Walpole, for fifty years, laments in his letters this particular neglect. In the last instance cited, he makes a thrust at members of Parliament,¹ although (in the same letter) he admits that in his younger days as a member of Parliament he had been no more diligent in discharging his duty than those he now accuses. Nevertheless, Walpole gives a general impression of politics.

Though, like many others in the eighteenth century, Walpole was not diligent in discharging his official duty, he was, as his letters show, somewhat interested in the political scenes and expresses definite reactions to it. In fact, no important event or issue escapes his notice.

When the Jacobites rebelled early in 1745, it was rumored that the Pretender at the head of three thousand men was preparing to invade England. Walpole correspondence shows that he is obviously frightened. He writes Mann in the summer that there is nobody left in England but two or three solitary

---

¹A. S. Turberville gives a picture of a typical member of Parliament in the eighteenth century thus:

...A prince of wits, a member of Parliament who has never been known to do anything but sleep...whose existence was like this: He gets up at nine, puts on a gorgeous dressing gown, plays idly with his dog till twelve, crawls to White's, spends five hours at cards, sleeps till supper after which filled with claret is carried in sedan chair to home and to bed.

Men and Manners in the Eighteenth Century, p. 94.
regents, that he wished himself out of England; the French boast of plans for invading England. In September, he writes that reports from Scotland vary. The number seems to have increased and the rebels are on their way from Edinburgh to London. Walpole says he has trained himself to expect the ruin and can see it approach without any emotion, realizing he must suffer with the rest of the fools.¹ In November the rebels are reported to be in England, but what direction they will take is uncertain. As the month passes, fear leaves also.² Finally in December, Walpole writes:

We dread them no longer. We are threatened with great preparations for a French invasion, but the coast is exceedingly guarded....³

Then in January, he is able to say the rebellion is over—because of the genius and the cruelty of the Duke of Cumberland in his victory at Culloden.⁴

In the summer, the trial of the rebel Lords was held. In the letters describing the trial, Walpole cannot conceal his sympathy for the accused and subsequently convicted. He says it was the most melancholy scene he ever saw. Lord Balmerino, in particular, wins all his sympathy. But there are other tragic figures, too, on trial, for whom Walpole cannot restrain a feeling of pity, especially Lord Cromortie and Lord

¹Ibid., I, 392.
²Ibid.
³Ibid.
⁴The Duke's cruelties won for him the nickname of "The Butcher of Culloden."
Kilmarnock. But it is Lord Balmerino, who touches Walpole most. He describes him:

...The most natural brave old fellow I ever saw: the highest intrepidity, even to indifference. At the bar he behaved like a soldier and a man; in the intervals of form with carelessness and humor. He pressed extremely to have his wife, his pretty Peggy with him in the Tower.... When they were to be brought from the tower in separate coaches, there was some dispute in which the axe must go--old Balmerino cried, "come, come, put it with me."¹

And Walpole says, Balmerino died like a gentleman, never displaying any fear. It appears that even the King was inclined to show some mercy, but not the Duke.

Walpole gives little lights on the morbidness of the people who bought up every available space to witness the execution. Balmerino, walking from his prison to the execution and seeing the spectators, compared them to rotten oranges.²

Typical of people who liked to observe such gruesome scenes was George Selwyn, friend of Walpole, who, when asked how he could endure such a sight as seeing a head cut off, answered that he had made amends by seeing it sewed on again. As Gwynn says, it was a strong stomached generation indeed.³

Another side-light Walpole gives in this description of the trial is how women of quality often fell in love with prisoners. As in other instances, he portrays fine ladies falling in love with convicted highwaymen; in this description of the trial of

¹ Ibid., II, 39.
² Ibid.
³ S. Gwynn, op. cit., p. 94.
the rebels, Lady Townshen fell in love with Lord Kilmarnock, and would scarcely go anywhere for fear of meeting bloody minded people who, as she says, eat rebels.

At times, it seems, Walpole is less interested in politics than in the people who make politics. His comments on these people are lively and illuminating.

Lady Sundom was an important character in the reign of Queen Anne. She excelled in back-door politics—intrigue, so characteristic of early eighteenth century politics. On her death, Walpole says:

Lady Sundom is dead, and Lady M. disappointed: She who is full of politics as my Lord Hervey, had made herself an absolute servant to Lady Sundom but I don't think she has left her even her old clothes.1

Then Walpole goes on to say she was rich but never took money. Sir Robert enlightened him on the fact that she took jewels. When comment was made on her wearing diamond ear rings worth fourteen hundred pounds, a lady said in defense of her wearing the bribe, how would people know where wine was sold if there was no sign.1 In those days current feeling was that every man has his price.

Then Walpole gives another picture, one of the famous Duchess of Malborough. As every one knows, for years she ruled Queen Anne.

Old Malborough is dying, but who can tell! Last year she had lain a great while ill without speaking: her physicians said, "She must be blistered, or she will die." She called out, "I won't be blistered and I won't die." If she

1 Ibid., I, 114.
takes the same resolution now I don't believe she will.\(^1\)

And she did not for three more years! No doubt as despicable as Walpole has made Old Malborough—as he calls her—appear, he likes her imperious will. Indeed, he often secretly admires many characters that he ridicules.

Although Walpole admits Pitt was his father's great enemy, he admires the statesman. He speaks of him in the following:

> He spoke at past one for an hour and thirty-five minutes; there was more humor, wit, vivacity, finer language, more boldness, in short more astonishing perfections than even you, who are used to him, can conceive.\(^2\)

But the idol—Pitt—fell from the pedestal upon which Walpole had placed him when he accepted a pension and a barony for his wife.\(^3\) Walpole confesses he (Walpole) had been duped into believing Pitt disinterested. Walpole (beneficiary of the government himself) says to Conway, "Keep your virtue....Do let me think there is still one man upon earth who despises money."\(^4\)

An important person but a ridiculous one was the Duke of Newcastle. Although the first part of the letter which follows gives a vivid description of the funeral of George II, much of the letter delineates the obnoxious Newcastle:

> This grave scene was fully contrasted by the burlesque Duke of Newcastle. He fell into a fit of crying the moment he came into the chapel, and flung himself

---

1. Ibid., I, 99.
2. Ibid., II, 484.
3. Ibid., III, 453.
4. Ibid.
back in a stall, the archbishop hovering over him with a smelling-bottle; but in two minutes his curiosity got the better of his hypocrisy, and he ran about the chapel with his glass to spy who was there or not there, spying with one hand and mopping his eyes with the other. Then returned the fear of catching cold; and the Duke of Cumberland who was sinking with heat, felt himself weighed down and turning round found it was the Duke of Newcastle standing upon his train to avoid the chill of the marble.¹

Perhaps Walpole did not like Wilkes any more than he did the Duke of Newcastle. In fact, Walpole was loathe to have him drop in for a visit when the letter writer was in Paris. But Wilkes commanded the regard of most people somehow. And even though he might not have admired Wilkes as an individual, Walpole's Whig principles responded to the issue involved. In December 1768, Walpole says:

We are as much occupied as we were four years ago with Wilkes. His spirit which the Scotch call impudence and the gods confidence rises every day....²

The career of Wilkes was a checkered one, and it was Walpole who records closely every rise and fall in that career: how Wilkes was sent to the Tower for duelling; how he was expelled from Parliament, imprisoned, discharged, re-arrested, expelled from Parliament again; re-elected to his seat there; how, despite his disreputable career, he was elected Chamberlain of London.

George II, Walpole describes as having been very kind to his father, the fallen minister. But George was not liberal in his gifts. The only thing George II gave to his Prime

¹Ibid., III, 361.
²Ibid., V, 139.
Minister, says Walpole, was a cracked diamond. The old warrior, George II, Walpole, however, depicts most frequently, and best in a lighter vein, as:

I told you we were to have another Jubilee Masquerade; there was one by the King's command for Miss Chudleigh, the maid of honor, with whom our gracious monarch has a mind to believe himself in love,—so much in love, that at one of the booths he gave her a fairing for her watch, which cost him five and thirty guineas, actually disbursed out of his privy purse and not charged on the civil list.¹

and on another occasion in a drawing room:

George II strode up to Miss Chudleigh and told her...he appointed her mother housekeeper at Windsor, and hoped she would not think a kiss too great a reward—against all precedent he kissed her in the circle.²

Walpole adds that for two years George II had a "hankering" for her. She was thirty and he seventy.³

Walpole apparently enjoys putting George II in this ridiculous position. He records two or three incidents with Lady Coventry, who was also light minded. The King sent for her to dance, engaged her in conversation, asked her if she regretted that they were having no masquerades that year—to which the lady naively replied, "No," the only thing she wished to see was a coronation. George laughed and good

¹Ibid., p. 156.
²Ibid., p. 235.
³Miss Chudleigh was a maid-of-honor of questionable character. She was mistress of the King for a while. After his death, she was sued by her husband for divorce, and convicted of bigamy. She lost one of her titles.
humoredly repeated it.¹

Indeed, these intimate, gossipy reports of the personality, activity, and trivialities of personages in high life found everywhere in Walpole's letters, throw important light upon both the aristocracy of Walpole's day and upon Walpole himself. One observation one may make is that Walpole was no recluse. He knew everybody--everybody who counted. Yet, as Ker says:

His opinions about his contemporaries have been hardly dealt with as though it were an exceptional thing or a mark of incurable levity to make critical statements.²

These opinions of Walpole, though not always fair, accurate, or penetrating are often exclusive, rare, and illuminating in the same way that entries in Pepys' diary are. Like Pepys, Walpole was ubiquitous and had a wide acquaintance with all sorts of influential people outside of court and political circles. He knew men of letters; he knew actors; he knew painters; he knew business men; he knew ministers.

Let us notice, first, his opinion of Dr. Johnson, the man who, after Pope, was the greatest force in the neo-classic tradition:

Let Dr. Johnson please this age with the fustian of his style and the meanness of his spirit; both are good and great enough for the taste and practise predominant.³

¹Lady Coventry, by coincidence, did not see the fulfillment of her wish. She died a few days (about three weeks) before George II passed suddenly, missing after all a coronation by a very few weeks.

²Paul E. More, Shelbourne Essays, IV, 234.

³Letters of Horace Walpole, VI, 110.
and in this:

I have no thirst to know the rest of my contemporaries, from the absurd bombast of Dr. Johnson down to the silly Dr. Goldsmith; though the latter changeling has had bright gleams of parts, and the former had sense till he changed it for words, and sold it for a pension. Don't think me scornful. Recollect that I have seen Pope and lived with Gray.¹

In nice turns of phrases, he often menacingly cuts at Dr. Johnson's weaknesses and idiosyncrasies:

Verses by Dean Barnard...are an answer to a gross brutality of Dr. Johnson, to which a properer answer would have been to fling a glass of wine in his face. I have no patience with an unfortunate monster trusting to his helpless deformity for indemnity for any impertinence that his arrogance suggests, and who thinks that what he has read is an excuse for everything he says.²

Of Goldsmith, the most versatile literary figure of the time, he apparently thinks little more. To the Countess of Ossory, Walpole calls Goldsmith "a silly fool and idiot." He considers "She Stoops to Conquer" a low farce.³ When he writes to Mason of Goldsmith's death, he admits the poet had genius but not common sense.⁴

But Boswell (like his hero Johnson) Walpole detests. He writes Gray asking if he had read Boswell's book, Account of Corsica. The author "is a strange being,...has a rage of knowing anybody that ever was talked of."⁵ Walpole says

¹Ibid.
²Ibid., p. 302.
³Ibid., p. 29.
⁴Ibid., p. 72.
⁵Ibid., V, 85.
Boswell forced himself on him in Paris against his wishes—"in spite of my teeth and my doors." Then they quarreled over Rousseau, and Boswell publicized the quarrel in the newspaper. Later, Walpole speaks of Boswell as the quintessence of busibodies. Again he had called on Walpole and been admitted—which Walpole says he should not have been. The object of his visit, it appears, was to acquaint Walpole with Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*. As usual, Boswell received a very cool reception. In another instance, Walpole expresses his disapproval of Boswell and Johnson. He says Johnson has bigotry, prejudice, pride, brutality, fretfulness and vanity; that Boswell is the ape of Johnson without a grain of his sense.

Nor does Walpole have a high regard for other poets like Akenside or Thomson. He calls the latter dull and speaks of the former as a tame genius.

Fielding, he considers a vulgar, licentious person. Elected justice, Fielding was visited by a client seeking legal advice to whom Fielding sent word he was at supper, and found banqueting with commoners of both sexes. That of course was an irresponsible, vulgar neglect of public duty—and Walpole inveighs heavily against such irresponsibility. For Richardson, he has no praise. When he went to Paris, Walpole was shocked by two things, atheism

---

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., VIII, 44.
3 Ibid., IX, 25.
4 Ibid., I, 347.
5 Ibid., II, 162.
and admiration for Richardson. Walpole says French taste is very bad if it can tolerate Richardson.\(^1\) He praises the first volume of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* but is greatly disappointed with the second volume. His overall criticism of the work has to do with its length, self glorification and faulty Latin.\(^2\) Yet, on the whole, Walpole considers the set a creditable achievement in scholarship and literature. Later, Walpole is able to say:

> Mr. Gibbons never tires me! He comprises a vast body and period of history, too; however I do wish he had been so lucid as Voltaire.\(^3\)

For Burke, Walpole has a great deal of admiration. From time to time in his letters Walpole speaks of Burke or rather he does not attack him as he does of his contemporaries. Of course, Burke was a Whig like Walpole. Both men, as it has been pointed out, sympathized with the colonies and both were horrified at the French Revolution. Both men had similar theories of government, of liberty, of society. Both favored the established order of things and based their faith on reason and experience. Both were English to the core, yet so different in background, station and taste. Nevertheless Walpole consistently thought well of Burke, calling him a sensible man. This is what Walpole thinks of Burke's *Reflections*:

> It is sublime, profound and gay. The wit and satire are equally brilliant.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Ibid., IV, 425.
\(^2\) Ibid., VIII, 15.
\(^3\) Ibid., IX, 235.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 260.
Then later there appears in Walpole's letters this comment apropos of a letter from Burke to a member of the national assembly:

Burke has published another pamphlet against the French Revolution.... But it is not equal nor quite so injudicious as parts of its predecessor. His invective against Rousseau is admirable, just and new. Voltaire, he passes almost contemptuously. I wish he had dissected Mirabeau too; and I grieve that he has omitted the violation of the consciences of the clergy, nor stigmatized those universal plunderers, the national assembly, who gorge themselves with eighteen livres a day; which to many of them would three years ago, have been astonishing opulence.1

Here it is obvious that Burke expresses Walpole's sentiments not only against the French Revolution in general, but likewise against the philosophy of Rousseau, Voltaire, Mirabeau, the Clergy, the Assembly and politics as a whole. Finally, Walpole in his own words says: "I declare I am a Burkish."2 In no such strong terms does Walpole profess his admiration of any other contemporary.

Many of Walpole's contemporaries, as has been stated in Chapter I, revolted against the literary principles of the neo-classic tradition and "turned to nature and the simple life and to the past, particularly medieval tales and ballads."3 Other manifestations of romanticism and medievalism (in fact the first) were evident in architecture and landscape gardening. When in 1750, Walpole bought a house and announced his intention

1Ibid., p. 320.
2Ibid., p. 272.
of building a Gothic castle, his interest in this phase of romanticism, especially his interest in medievalism, was obvious. It is not surprising then that against this background, here in this Gothic castle, Walpole produced a Gothic novel of no small importance, The Castle of Otranto. Four years later The Mysterious Mother appeared. It too is Gothic and exceedingly important. Stuart considers Horace Walpole, more than any other Englishman, responsible for changing the conception of the term Gothic "from an adjective of opprobrium into an epithet of praise."

So great was Walpole's appreciation of romanticism manifested by an interest in ballads that he was at first deceived by what is now generally conceded a forgery. Thomas Chatterton, it appears, duped Walpole into thinking the Rowley Poems a genuine antique until Gray pointed out that the "wonderful boy" had imposed upon him. Then followed some angry correspondence before Chatterton committed suicide. Later, Walpole defends himself as being in a way responsible for the suicide. He writes to Cole in 1777:

I believe McPherson's success with Ossian was more the ruin of Chatterton than I. Two years passed between my doubting the authenticity of Rowley's Poems and his death. I never knew he had been in London till some time after he had undone and poisoned himself there.

---

1Dorothy Stuart, op. cit., pp. 107-108.
2Ibid., V, 152, 389.
3Ibid., VI, 449.
Towards Macpherson, Walpole is shifting, first dubious, then impressed that "Ossian" is genuine.\(^1\) Then he again concludes that Macpherson is a fraud and a liar.\(^2\) Although Walpole was interested in antiquity, he did not wish to pass for an antiquarian. But this interest in romanticism and antiquarianism can be further illustrated by his choice of friends, many of whom were antiquarians, Gray, Cole, Pinkerton, Mason and many others.

Mention has been made of Walpole's attitude towards his contemporaries in literature and in politics. Let us observe next what he thinks of a few of the actors and actresses of his day.

The inimitable Garrick—the greatest actor of the day—like many other contemporaries, Walpole disparages:

> But all the run is now after Garrick, a wine-merchant, who is turned player.\(\ldots\)

> He plays all parts, and is a very good mimic. His acting...I see nothing wonderful in it.\(^1\)

Garrick does not tempt me at all. I have no taste for his buffoonery and am sick of his endless expectation of flattery.\(^2\)

When Garrick died, Walpole decries the splendor of the funeral thus:

> What distinctions remain for a patriot hero when the most solemn have been showered on a player...I do not mean to detract from Garrick's merit, who was a real genius in his way, and who, I believe, was never equalled in both tragedy and comedy.\(^3\)

---

\(^{1}\)Ibid., I, 168.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., V, 303.

\(^{3}\)Ibid., VII, 169.
Mrs. Siddons, the actress, receives greater praise from Walpole, who, after going to see her, writes that she pleased him although she was by no means the best actress he ever saw. She had a good figure, was handsome, had a good clear voice.\(^1\) Moreover, Walpole thinks her sensible and modest though quite the mode.\(^2\)

Mrs. Woffington, however, receives but scant praise from Walpole, who says she is a bad actress, but that she has life.

Walpole lived so long and had seen and known so many renowned people that it is, of course, impossible to call attention to all of them. But we have noted his comments on some of the outstanding men of letters and of the stage. His comments on others in these fields are equally as illuminating and in this respect his letters are a significant gallery of portraits. But his letters also form a book of eighteenth century etiquette. From them one learns about the taste, manners, habits, and decorum of the century.

The two Miss Gunnings are twenty times more the subject of conversation than the two brothers—Newcastle and Pelham. These are two Irish girls, of no fortune who are declared the handsomest women alive. I think their being so handsome and both such perfect figures is their chief excellence...however they can't walk in the park, or go to Vauxhall, but such mobs follow them that they are generally driven away.\(^3\)

But like many attractive poor women in England of that day, they had designs for capturing wealthy or titled husbands. The Duke

---

\(^1\)Ibid., VIII, 295.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 320.

\(^3\)Ibid., II, 259.
of Hamilton was so madly infatuated with the younger, Elizabeth, after losing a thousand pounds one night with his attention divided between the game and the attractive girl, decided to marry her.\textsuperscript{1} Walpole writes of the affair in a letter to Mann:

The doctor refused to perform the ceremony without licence or ring; the Duke swore he would send for the Archbishop—at last they were married with a ring of the bed-curtain at half an hour after twelve at night, at Mayfair Chapel....And what is most silly, my Lord Coventry\textsuperscript{2} declares that now he will marry the other.\textsuperscript{3}

And he reveals how electric was the effect of the beauty of

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 279.

\textsuperscript{2}Lady Coventry, if reports are true, was a vain, senseless woman who was forever making a faux-pas. Her name was linked with several men in the eight years she held the limelight until her death in 1760. Most notorious of her amours were those with Lord Bolingbroke and the Duke of Cumberland. She had such a penchant for falling in love with great notables that Walpole says, for his part, he expected to see her Queen of Prussia. After she was robbed in the Park, the King assigned guards to prevent a recurrence and Walpole says no less than twelve (extra) followed. This vain woman then paraded two hours, but Lady Coventry's sun set early. At twenty eight, she died reputedly from paint poisoning, although Walpole intimates it was consumption. For eight years Lady Coventry was the standard of beauty.

Her sister, the Duchess of Hamilton, never attracted quite so much attention. The Duke lived less than seven years after the wedding. The Duchess then married the Duke of Argyle and disappointed Walpole's expectation of dying of consumption.

\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 281.
these two sisters upon the beau monde:

The world is still mad about the Gunnings....There are mobs at their doors to see them get into their chairs; and people go early to get places at the theatres when it is known they will be there. Dr. Sacheverell never made more noise than these two beauties.1

These two beauties were just the type Walpole liked to write about. He is ever eager to sketch the glamorous, the sensational, the fashionable, the notorious. As he himself says:

I don't know whether you will not think all these very trifling histories; but for myself, I love anything that marks a character strongly.2

There were other famous beauties. Walpole's niece, Maria, illegitimate daughter of Edward Walpole, for instance, like Lady Coventry, had a meteoric rise. She became, first, Lady Waldegrave, then, the Duchess of Gloucester. And after the death of Lady Coventry, according to Walpole, she became the standard of beauty.3

Mention has already been made of another famous beauty of the day, Miss Chudleigh. Like Lady Coventry, she was conspicuous for her spectacular conduct—noteably the trial for bigamy.4

Naturally, the famous and notorious ladies had their male counterparts. Walpole admired Charles Fox, whom he alludes to frequently in his letters. He was noted for his excess in gambling, drinking, love affairs, and his dissolute life.5

---

1Ibid., p. 281.
2Ibid., p. 308.
3A. Mason, op. cit., p. 136.
4Ibid., p. 259.
5Ibid., p. 225.
in general. Later, however, after being made secretary of state, he showed a firmness of character hitherto unrevealed or suspected. Whereas he had taken his responsibilities lightly, he now most diligently applied himself to his duty as a statesman. Walpole records this change in Fox as follows:

Charles Fox prepared himself for that holy work by passing 22 hrs. in the pious exercise of hazard; his devotion cost him only about 500 lbs. an hour—in all 11,000 lbs.1

Again he stresses:

Mr. Fox is now as indefatigable as he was idle. He has perfect temper and not only good humor but good nature.2

Then there was George Selwyn, "who...passes for the wittiest man of that age,"3 a friend of Walpole's from the days at Eton, well liked by people in general. He enjoyed Lord Lovat's execution so greatly that he went to see the head sewed back on.4 In fact, executions were the delight of Selwyn. Walpole gives a picture of him falling asleep gambling, having just lost eight hundred pounds and with half as much before him.5 He, too, ran for office; defeated in Gloucester, he was elected at Leidgershall. Like Walpole and other members of his circle, he never married.

1A. Mason, op. cit., p. 224.
2Ibid., p. 318.
3S. Gwynn, op. cit., p. 36.
4A. Mason, op. cit., p. 62.
5Ibid., p. 104.
The foregoing presentation of a few of Walpole’s sketches of the beaux and belles of the eighteenth century may well support popular notions that the period was one of frivolity, glamour and unfaithfulness in love; that the standard for a fine lady or a fine gentleman was to achieve notoriety and be involved in sensational scandals. This aspect of the eighteenth century must, of course, be admitted, though it is both unfair and incorrect to charge the entire century and nation with such guilt. That other instances of profligacy and excesses can be shown and are found in Walpole’s letters is also true. Drinking and gambling, for example as already pointed out in a previous chapter, were prevalent in the eighteenth century. Walpole, however, practiced temperance and in his letters seems very much opposed to excessive drinking and gambling.

The following is an on-the-spot comment of a practice which Tuberville and other critics colorlessly call "an eighteenth century vice:"

At a ball at Sir T. Robinson’s which broke up at three some young men stayed till seven in the morning and drank 32 bottles.¹

With wit and irony, Walpole states:

The present state or your country is that it is drowned and dead drunk; all water without and wine within.²

Further light is thrown upon the drinking situation when Walpole says:

The Dilettanti, a club, for which the nominal qualification is being drunk.³

---

¹A. Mason, op. cit., p. 9
²Ibid., p. 25.
³Ibid., p. 212
Frequently Walpole deplores the fortunes lost at gambling. For instance, he says the following:

The gaming at Almack's...is worth the decline of our Empire....The young men of the age lose five, ten, fifteen thousand pounds in an evening there.1

Sir John Bland...has flirted away his whole fortune at hazard.2

In the following, the irony and criticism, as well as the light which is thrown upon the popularity of a vice, are powerful and arresting:

Gaming for the last month has exceeded its own out doings....One has committed murder and intends to repeat it. He betted 1,500 lbs. that a man could live twelve hours under water; hired a desperate fellow, sunk him in a ship by way of experiment, and both ship and man have not appeared since. Another man and ship are to be tried for their lives, instead of Mr. Blake, the assassin.3

While no reformer, Walpole apparently saw the folly of over-indulgence in drinking and gambling. Consequently he continually comments on carrying these pleasures to an extreme. Walpole, "temperate to abstemiousness,"4 restricted himself to ice water.5 There is no doubt he deplored some of the excesses of his generation.

In this chapter, dealing with the various aspects of the eighteenth century, (the political, the literary, and the social) through the eyes and letters of Horace Walpole, we have seen

1A. Mason, op. cit., p. 106.
2Ibid., p. 106.
3Ibid., p. 238.
that politically, Walpole was safely locked in the folds of conventional liberal Whig thought and beliefs—he certainly had no sympathy with radical theorists like the French Rousseau or the English Tom Paine and William Godwin or the American Thomas Jefferson; that, in literature he knew all the influential writers, gave intelligent—though often prejudiced—reactions to their works, was interested in art and gave impetus to the new fad of Gothicism, attended the theatres frequently and knew the actors personally; that, socially, he knew everybody who counted for anything; he delighted in finding out and in writing about the scandals and activities of the fashionable ladies and gentlemen; like Pope in "The Rape of the Lock," he brilliantly portrayed the manners, customs, and taste—excessive and otherwise—of his day. An eighteenth century Samuel Pepys, the ubiquitous Horace Walpole has left to the world, in his letters, an intimate record of a curiously rich century.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

That paradoxical century of Pope and Burns, of Johnson and Blake, of Swift and Collins, of Reynolds and Hogarth, of Hume and Berkley, of Burke and Paine, of Robert Walpole and William Pitt, of exquisite refinement and disgraceful barbarity, of immense wealth and abject poverty, of childish levity and high seriousness, of deep-seated conservatism and fiery iconoclasm; that century of atomic revolutions--The French Revolution, The American Revolution, The Industrial Revolution, the Methodist Revival; that century of keen debate, biting satire and constant conflict: the Whigs against the Tories, the neo-classic tradition against the romantic spirit, the aristocratic against the democratic, the old in a death struggle with the new--such was the nature of the eighteenth century, a century tremendous in its significance and complex in its many-sidedness. Into this milieu came a man, Horace Walpole, whose life, as Mendenhall well says, was coextensive\(^1\) with his century. His interests and activities, his personality and temperament also fitted well into the current of his age. For was not his a paradoxical, complex nature as was shown in Chapter II of this thesis? Was he not by birth and position associated with the political and social machinery of his day? Did he not know everybody who counted?

\(^1\) John C. Mendenhall, ed., *English Literature 1650-1600* (New York, 1940), p. 659.
Horace Walpole, therefore, was eminently suited to be an authoritative interpreter of his age. In his letters, primarily, he lets us see the eighteenth century panorama through his eyes. And what is it we see?

Mendenhall is perhaps correct when he says that "without Horace Walpole we should have had a far less delightful sense of intimacy with the eighteenth century than is at present ours." Indeed, from our imaginary box-seats we do obtain from Walpole's letters an inimitable view--and done in beautiful technicolor; for Walpole is an accomplished stylist, a charming epistler--of eighteenth century life: the social life with all its gossip, scandals, fine gentlemen and beautiful ladies in their guarded and unguarded moments; the political life managed by both the irresponsible and the public-spirited statesmen; the moral life weakened by intemperance in drink and gambling, by unsanitary living conditions, by brutality, dishonesty and inhumane prison laws and accommodations; the literary milieu created by such men as Pope, Johnson, Burke, Goldsmith, Gibbon, Macpherson, and Chatterton. We see all this through the eyes of Walpole--and we are charmed. But when the charm wears off, we feel a sort of disappointment. The picture we had just witnessed is neither true in color nor deep in dimension and perspective. For, as Bradford well points out:

During all the last two thirds of the eighteenth century Horace Walpole held a mirror to the faults, follies and fascinations of the great world and devoted his time to keeping that mirror bright, polished and gleaming.2

1Ibid.
2G. Bradford, op. cit., p. 115.
In other words, Horace Walpole mirrors the lighter and perhaps the least representative side of the eighteenth century. In his own words, he takes the comedy view. This point is likewise substantiated by Walpole's great admirer, W. S. Lewis, in these words:

Horace Walpole...mirrors in his letters a society which flocked to fashionable watering places of Bath and made Beau Nash its arbiter, portrays an age which produced both the ill-mannered Johnson and the well bred Chesterfield.¹

Unbiased research confirms the accuracy and correctness of this estimate. Eighteenth century life is mirrored but in a partial, distorted and superficial aspect—in the letters of Walpole. Let us look closer into the matter.

Born in the first quarter of the eighteenth century before England had readjusted herself to the striking changes which the seventeenth century had made in politics and government, Walpole, son of a prime minister, knew half the remaining courts of King William and Queen Anne, kissed the hand of George I and lived to see the latter's great-grandchildren. Walpole, then, perhaps better than any other writer of the century, because of these circumstances, had an opportunity to portray the many-sided eighteenth century. But instinctively and consciously, he let the chance slip.

As for politics, with his heritage, training, and opportunity as a legislator for twenty-seven years in Parliament, Horace Walpole in no way influenced legislation in the way his father

did, or in the way that a Macaulay, a Gladstone, a Melbourne, a Disraeli in the next century did. The fact is clear had he never expressed it—he was not vitally interested in politics. And he does say of the two places he attended regularly, the House of Commons and the balls, he prefers the latter. In politics then, he was not a student. About politics he cared nothing. True, in his letters he makes many allusions to and comments upon political matters; but they are superficial treatment of the political scene. In his letters he does picture England and her government as in bad shape but never goes deep to the roots of the complexities of politics. He makes, surely, sympathetic comments apropos of the American situation but nothing profound as in Burke, for instance. As much might be said of Walpole's views on the French Revolution. But there is something more. He fears what he has observed. Instead of looking into and facing the inevitability of the Revolution, he merely, ostrich-like, dreads the consequences; in fact the circumstances drove him, like many another Englishman of the time, into the folds of the reactionaries. As far as England was concerned, his politics consists of a few observations on the lack of organized government; no police protection, save for royalty and Lady Coventry, Wilkes, riots, mob violence at elections. Indeed, his interest in politics (what interest there was) is not so much in political theory and principle as in political personalities and politicians, their idiosyncracies and whims: Lady Malborough's strong will, Lady Sundon's avarice, George I's German mistresses, George II's
levity and the like; he is more concerned with the "littleness of the great," the "hypocrisy of the pious" than with the cause and effect of their actions. It would, therefore, be as absurd to expect to find deep and profound reflections on the political scene of the eighteenth century in the letters of Horace Walpole as to expect one who has no ear for music to interpret a symphony. Walpole's letters throw only a partial, inadequate light upon the political aspect of the century. As a "complete historical document," therefore, so far as politics is concerned, they fall miserably short. Even the entries in Evelyn's diary are more faithful to the political vicissitudes of the seventeenth century than are Walpole's letters of the eighteenth century. And both men's lives were coextensive with their respective centuries.

As much might be said also about Walpole's failure to reflect seriously the religious and philosophical scene. The eighteenth century was an age of reason. Cultivated men were predominantly skeptic and Walpole was so in particular. Yet he is shocked at the atheism in France, and in England he laughs at Wesley, says that he is almost as good an actor as Garrick. He calls Whitfield a swindler. He constantly scoffs at the Methodists. He laughs at Voltaire, Rousseau and Hume, and says all are ridiculous, calls them impostors, saying he has never seen or heard anything serious that is not ridiculous. Consequently, it would be too much to expect Walpole, in the light of his own remark, to throw anything but a superfidal reflection upon the religio-philosophic phase of eighteenth century society.
Just as Walpole was a dilettante statesman, just as he was a detached spectator of the most casual type on the socio-
philosophic scene, just so Walpole was one of the most indiffe-
rent men with respect to science. (We may recall his deficiency
in mathematics). He refuses to visit Herschell's telescope
because he says knowledge of the discoveries confounds him.
Moreover, he feels that the study of history is worthless because
truth and falsity are mixed there in. In fact, he questions the
good of learning anything. To such a man, the world of science
and industry means little. The brief comments he makes upon the
subject are indeed superficial and partial. For example, he
refers to the balloon but slightly, and as negatively as he does
to the telescope. He is disparaging and short sighted in saying
air balloons are childish. Any one on foot, he says, may
walk higher than this man eagle. Wit, not depth, characterizes
Walpole here.

To have lived in a century which ushered in the Industrial
Revolution and the Agrarian Revolution and Adam Smith, Walpole
has little indeed to say about economics. He mentions, to be
sure, the high cost of living, that the country is so rich it
makes everybody poor. After the American Revolution, true he
speaks of the lack of money and how cheap prices are. But to
discuss seriously, the industrial and economic implications of
the new forces is outside of Walpole's purpose, perhaps ability.
Doubtless this is true because of his aristocratical leanings.
The dilettante in him rendered him unsympathetic to the dirt
and grime associated with industry, the evils associated with
manufacturing; he cannot sympathize with the shop-keepers; he detests the rising middle-class.

In like manner, his overwhelming prejudices and cynical aberrations warped his view of contemporary men of letters and of their works. Therefore, he is no competent literary critic—even as Dr. Johnson, his eminent contemporary, or as Hazlitt or as Bagehot or as Arnold in the nineteenth century might be considered. Walpole either fails to recognize or disparages a large circle of writers who, then and now, are acclaimed great. Many of those Walpole praised, on the other hand, have failed to withstand the test of time. With the possible exception of two or three contemporary men of letters, Walpole's favorites, to be sure, have passed into oblivion. Walpole's letters throw only a partial and superficial (sometimes venomous) reflection upon these men of genius—Garrick, Goldsmith, Fielding, Sterne, Smollet, Richardson, Gray, Johnson, Boswell, Addison, Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau and a great host of others.

What is true of Walpole's views on his fellow-writers, is likewise true of men in other professions. Notice the men in politics. Pitt is rambling and a grafter in the final analysis; the colorless Conway is a hero, the Pelhams are obnoxious. All have their faults caricatured and distorted. In short, as has been said before, Walpole is more interested in the littleness of the great, the hypocrisy of the good, the scandal of the court than in the constructive good and the greatness of human potentiality. To say he is a keen reader of character is too much.
It is not logical or customary to think most people a bundle of whims and of stupidity. That is what Walpole does. Thus the mirrors which Walpole holds up to us in his letters are concave and convex. As a result, the people and the events, the issues and the trends of the eighteenth century are entertainingly distorted.

This distortion, however, is not without merit. It greatly accounts for the charm, delightfulness and engaging flavor of the letters. One hundred fifty and two hundred years after some were written, Walpole's letters are as enjoyable as if written to us instead of to Mann, to Gray, to Chute, to Lady Ossory and to Hannah Moore. He observes keenly the follies, fascinations and faults of the fashionable world of his day. It is in his depicting of upper-class society that Walpole is at his best--the faux-pas of Lady Coventry, the gambling losses of Fox, the dramatic suicide of Sir John Bland, gambling even in death on his life insurance, the conquests of the great ladies, and the like. Repeatedly, Walpole says the world is a tragedy to those who feel, a comedy to those who think. Evidently, then, Walpole either does not feel anything (deeply) or with characteristic eighteenth century decorum does not reveal it in his letters. He (with his sinecure) cannot be a Luther or a Howard. On the other hand, he says he desires to die when he has no one to laugh with him. He goes everywhere to laugh--from the balls to the House of Commons.

An amateur in spirit, a cynic in attitude, a Castiglione courtier believing in living easily, "with no curiousness,"
Horace Walpole failed "to see life steadily and to see it whole."
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works of Specific Reference

Editions


Biography


Criticism


Periodicals

Bradford, Gamaliel. "Bare Souls," Harper's, CXXLIX (June, 1924), 115-123.


Krutch, G. W. "Horace Walpole," The Nation (October 12, 1940), 337-340.

Lewis, W. S. "Life Explores World's Finest Walpole Library," Life (October 23, 1940), 116, 117.


Anon. "Horace Walpole in His Old Age," Living Age, LIX, 915.

Works of General Reference

English Literature


Greenlaw, E. and Miles, D. Literature and Life. IV. Atlanta: Scott Foresman, 1929.


*History and Miscellaneous References*


