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# THE ENDLESS ADVENTURE

## VOLUME TWO

### WALPOLE AND THE FIRST PARLIAMENT OF GEORGE THE SECOND

1727-1735

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*By the same Author*

ALEXANDER HAMILTON. An  
Essay on American Union. 8vo

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*Enoch Seeman print*

*Emery Walker Ltd ph sc*

***Queen Caroline***  
*from the picture in the National Portrait Gallery*

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# *The* **ENDLESS ADVENTURE**

*by*  
**F. S. OLIVER**

**MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED**  
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**1931**

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*To*  
**MY WIFE**

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## **NOTE TO THE SECOND VOLUME**

My original intention was to publish the first two volumes together at the beginning of 1930. The proofs of the present volume (down to page 286) were finally revised and corrected for the press (as they now appear) by the previous midsummer. At that date an interruption, which had been threatening for some time, occurred, and prevented me from doing any work for considerably more than a year.

A change has been made in the programme set out in the second paragraph of the first volume, *i.e.* the present volume ends at the beginning of 1735, when the second Parliament of George the Second assembled after the general election. The Queen's death in November 1737 would have been a less convenient stopping place.

F. S. OLIVER

*February 1931*

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# **BOOK FIVE**

## **THE ACCESSION OF GEORGE THE SECOND AND QUEEN CAROLINE**

**(JUNE 1727)**

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# ***I.—How George Augustus from boyhood was ill-treated, by his father, George Lewis, and how their mutual dislike culminated in a public quarrel (1694-1717).***

George Augustus of Hanover was eleven years old at the time of his mother's disgrace.<sup>[1]</sup> Thenceforward his father treated him with unvarying coldness, and the boy's impetuous nature reacted against this injustice.

The young prince lived with his grandparents and was educated under the supervision of the Electress Sophia, who did her best to inspire him with a love of England. The very fact that she had failed in a similar attempt upon her son made it easier to succeed with her grandson. He appeared to be an apt pupil, and delighted to give enthusiastic expression to sentiments which might disgust his father. As he grew to manhood his extreme unlikeness to George Lewis was admired by casual visitors from England. They were charmed by his frankness and affability. He boasted to them that every drop of blood in his veins was English; but not even filial impiety could work this miracle, for he was as much a German as his father, save that he could speak, with an awkward fluency, the language of his future subjects.

So the rancour continued and increased, as it was bound to do, being pent up for twenty years in the narrow circle of the Hanoverian court.<sup>[2]</sup> About midway in this period<sup>[3]</sup> George Augustus married Caroline of Anspach. It was the greatest stroke of luck that ever befell him. The penniless princess was comely; her charm was even greater than her beauty; her loyalty to her fretful little husband never wavered from first to last; and to crown all she had more political sagacity than any other royal personage of her time. Other wooers had sought her hand. She had refused a superb alliance with the Archduke Charles, who a few years later became Emperor.

George Augustus came with his father to England in the early autumn of 1714. He was then in his thirty-first year, a lively young gentleman with a complexion tending towards the mulberry shade and a handsome little pair of legs. People smiled at the contrast between the heavy phlegmatic King and this consequential subordinate figure. They compared George the First irreverently to a sullen ox and his son strutting beside him to chanticleer. The country nevertheless gave a hearty welcome to both, and Parliament being in a generous mood voted an independent income of £100,000 a year to the new Prince of Wales.<sup>[4]</sup> It was an immense revenue for one who had but few official expenses and lived under his father's roof. This munificence was not altogether pleasing to the King, who would have preferred to keep George Augustus a pensioner on his own grudging bounty. Moreover, the importance which Englishmen attached to the position of a Prince of Wales added jealousy to dislike, so that before long a most cordial hatred grew up between father and son.

After two years spent in England George the First could bear his exile no longer. In July 1716 he returned to Hanover, accompanied by Stanhope, and remained there for seven months, despite the courtierly remonstrances of his British cabinet.

The Prince of Wales had been named Regent for the period of his father's absence, but this appointment had been the subject of prolonged discussions and much ill-feeling. The King would have liked to exclude his son altogether from the regency, but such a display of animosity must have raised too angry a storm. He insisted, however, on his royal right to control his family as he thought fit, and with this object he hampered his son with restrictions which in the eyes of disinterested persons were contrary to precedent, impolitic and insulting. Some of the Prince's closest personal friends (Argyll among the number) were removed from his household. The cabinet received strict injunctions to watch the Regent closely and restrain him from overstepping his authority. Bothmer was left behind in London as intelligence officer or spy. His instructions were to report at once to the King if he should detect any signs of encroachment on the part of the Prince, of laxity or even of friendliness on the part of ministers.

It is believed that Bothmer wrote to Hanover by every post. His commission was very congenial to his nature. He welcomed the opportunity of ingratiating himself with the King. It must surely add to his own importance could he succeed in embroiling the father with the son. He was jealous of the English ministers, for his position as royal counsellor was not now all it had been in old days before the accession. He might regain some of his former influence if the King's confidence in the cabinet could be shaken. And in addition he had a personal grudge against Walpole, whose opposition to the boundless rapacity of the German favourites had caused him acute distress.

Sunderland, viceroy of Ireland, went abroad a few weeks later to take the waters of Aix. There was never any concealment of his intention to proceed to Hanover when he had completed his cure. He took leave of Townshend 'with a thousand protestations that he would do nothing to hurt any of them, and that his main intention in going was to persuade the King to come soon back.'<sup>[5]</sup> His assurances may not have been believed, for it had been widely rumoured during the spring and summer that he was engaged in an intrigue to get rid of Townshend, Walpole, Cowper and a number of others,

to make himself chief minister and to reconstruct the administration with the assistance of the Tories. He had lately paid several visits to Bath, where Marlborough, his father-in-law, lay recovering slowly from a second stroke of palsy. The duke was nearly helpless owing to his infirmity, but the duchess was reported to be very active in the matter, and to have brought in Cadogan and other adherents of the Marlborough connection.

Notwithstanding that the Prince had entered upon his regency with a bitter grievance, he bore himself modestly and discreetly at the beginning. It is true that Walpole and Townshend soon became uneasy when they saw him showering civilities on Argyll and his other personal friends, as also on the discontented members of the Whig party, and even on the Tories. They suspected him, probably with justice, of a design to unite the Opposition under his own patronage, and to embarrass the government so soon as Parliament should reassemble; but, as they had no more to go on than vague suspicions, protest and action were alike impossible. In the Prince's public behaviour there was nothing to reprehend.

When autumn came and there was still no word of the King's return the Prince's desire to cut a figure in the eyes of his future subjects got the better of his prudence. His friends encouraged him to show himself in public, to make progresses in country districts, and to distribute largesse to poor people. His manners were lively and gracious, and he let it be seen how much he enjoyed a popular acclaim. His wife contributed greatly to his success; for the English race has healthy instincts and loves a fine woman, especially when she is prodigal of her smiles. In the news prints the affability of George Augustus was contrasted maliciously with the King's coldness and taciturnity. The young couple was praised for strengthening the dynasty in the affections of the people. It does not appear that the Regent ever infringed the restrictions of his office, or that ministers would have been justified in objecting to anything he did. Nevertheless he acted very foolishly, for he knew that his activities were certain to arouse the paternal wrath. He must have suspected that Bothmer would place his every action in the most unfavourable light. Although he was careful not to put himself technically in the wrong, it seems as if he was deliberately bent on giving offence.

Ministers were in a difficult position. To have offered opposition to the Prince's proceedings would have been to play his game. By keeping on terms with him they risked their favour with the King; for Bothmer's reports were already producing upon the slow but retentive mind of George the First an impression that Townshend, and to some extent Walpole, were transferring their allegiance to the heir-apparent.

At the very time when the political misunderstanding about the French treaty was in process of being cleared away by the good offices of Stanhope and the frankness of Townshend,<sup>[6]</sup> the latter statesman committed two serious blunders in his correspondence with the King. The long sojourn of George the First in Hanover was causing many difficulties in carrying on the business of government in Britain. Townshend was unwise enough to suggest that, if the King's absence should continue over Christmas, it would be desirable to give the Regent greater discretionary powers for dealing with urgent matters of administration. In a second dispatch which arrived a few hours later he communicated, but without any hostile comment, an offer from the Prince to summon Parliament forthwith.

The King managed to conceal his wrathful thoughts until he had received Bothmer's confidential reports upon the state of things in London. That these reports were both false and mischievous cannot be doubted. It now seemed quite clear to George Lewis that Townshend was party to an attempt to set the Prince above the King. Stanhope, the peacemaker, was reluctant to accept this explanation, but appears to have been half convinced by the private information which his master gave him. Sunderland, on the other hand, though in no way concerned with Bothmer and his inventions, was ready to believe the worst of colleagues whom he wished to displace. The royal anger at last blazed forth. Townshend must be dismissed at once. It was the utmost that Stanhope could achieve to procure an offer of the viceroyalty of Ireland for his fallen colleague.<sup>[7]</sup>

When the King returned to England at the end of January 1717 Stanhope renewed his efforts for peace, and Townshend's just indignation yielded to his own high sense of duty. The offer of the viceroyalty was accepted, and the appearance of a reconciliation was produced. Unfortunately other influences were at work. Sunderland was not satisfied with becoming a mere secretary-of-state, for he had hoped to oust his rivals from office. Walpole was equally dissatisfied because Sunderland and Stanhope had now the chief share in government. In April Walpole's intrigue against his colleagues in the matter of the Swedish subsidy was only defeated by four votes. A schism could no longer be averted. The two brothers-in-law and their personal following went into opposition.

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The King made no effort to hide his displeasure with his son. He rarely spoke to him, treated him with unvarying

coldness, subjected him to slights and humiliation; but as there was nothing tangible to charge against his conduct as Regent it was impossible to make a public quarrel.

In November, however, seven months after the Whig schism took place, a boy was born to the Princess. The parents wished the duke of York, Bishop of Osnaburg, the child's great-uncle, to stand godfather. The King, from no motive that can be discovered, save to mortify his son and daughter-in-law, decreed that Newcastle should act as sponsor. He well knew that the Prince entertained for that nobleman a peculiar dislike and contempt. When the company assembled in the Princess's bedroom for the inauspicious ceremony, everyone except Newcastle understood that the King intended an insult to his son. Even the duke himself cannot have been wholly at his ease, for he had some inkling of the Prince's antipathy. Nevertheless he could rejoice in what he imagined to be a signal mark of his sovereign's favour. The King was in his ceremonial mood—clouded, taciturn and ungracious; a contrast in everything save bad temper with the Prince of Wales, who moved restlessly to and fro, fuming and muttering.

When the religious part of the proceedings was concluded George Augustus could contain himself no longer. Advancing upon Newcastle, and looking up into his astonished sheep-like face with fury, he shook his fist under the statesman's nose—or, according to another account, trod heavily upon his gouty toe—accompanying his action with incoherent words of menace. It was too much. Being done in the King's presence it savoured of high treason. The Prince was at once placed under arrest, and on receiving his freedom a few hours later was turned out of his lodgings in the palace. The Princess, who had not yet fully recovered from her lying-in, received peremptory orders to follow her husband. Their Guards and Beefeaters were taken away, and all other distinctions of royalty.

A notification of the Prince's misbehaviour was circulated through British ambassadors and ministers to every capital in Europe. Persons who visited the offending couple were forbidden to show themselves at court. It was a bitter experience, and the pity is that neither the wise Caroline nor her foolish husband drew any profit from it. In later days, when they had to deal with the mutiny of their eldest son, they remembered their own punishment, not as a scandal to be avoided, but as a precedent to be followed.

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## ***II.—In what degree the Whig Schism and the Royal Quarrel were related, and why the parties to both were at last forced to a reconciliation (1716-1720).***

Although the gestatory periods of the Whig schism and the royal quarrel began simultaneously in the autumn of 1716—although the schism and the quarrel acted and reacted on one another in various ways—although their consequences soon became inextricably involved—although in the end, as usually happens when two sets of persons are out of favour at the same time, the Whig leaders who had gone into opposition tended to make common cause with the aggrieved Prince—in spite of all these confusions, the motives which caused the two disturbances were entirely unsympathetic. The political split was looked on by George Augustus and his friends with cold satisfaction as a division in the ranks of their enemies; for in the Prince's household Sunderland himself was not more cordially detested than were Walpole and Townshend. The feuds in the royal family, on the other hand, were nothing to the dissentient Whig statesmen, who were wholly occupied with their own grievances and with projects of revenge. Their sympathies at the beginning and for many months afterwards were neither with George Lewis nor with George Augustus, for it could not serve their own advantage to take a side in the dispute.

These unnatural and impolitic estrangements ran a course of nearly three years. As time went on the rank and file of the Whig party, whose chief concern was to keep the door barred against the Tories and also against the Pretender, could no longer conceal their disgust. Even those angry persons who had engaged in one or other of the quarrels as principals began to entertain misgivings. Among the prominent actors Walpole was the first to come to his senses, and with his usual sagacity he chose the right road to a general appeasement.

'Walpole,' wrote Lady Cowper in her diary, 'was every day this winter once, if not twice, at Leicester House. . . . Walpole has engrossed and monopolised the Princess to a degree of making her deaf to everything that did not come from him.'<sup>[8]</sup> Caroline had sounder judgement than all the other royalties put together, as stout a heart as any of the statesmen. She realised that pique and personal grievances must give place to policy. Walpole judged rightly that there could be no reconciliation unless the Prince of Wales were forced to make an absolute submission to the King. He judged no less rightly that this could only be brought about through the influence of the Princess with her husband.

It was impossible to take the Prince himself into full confidence, for he could not be trusted to abide by any decision fraught with painful consequences, if he were given time for brooding on what it involved. He was also incapable at this time of keeping his own counsel; it was not until later days that he learned the art of secrecy. Walpole worked through the Princess to bring George Augustus into such a mood that a sudden push might lay him at the King's feet. Until the very end—indeed until the letter of submission was ready for his signature—he was carried no further than to see that a reconciliation was essential to his own interests, and that it could not be brought about without some sacrifice of his pride.

Peace was the interest of everyone concerned. Walpole was tired of a brilliant but fruitless opposition; he longed to be once again in office. The schism had always been repugnant to Stanhope's conciliatory nature: not being a born parliamentarian he found no joy in the House of Commons battle, and took Walpole's attacks on government too much to heart. As for the Prince, he could no doubt live very comfortably as a private person on a hundred thousand pounds a year; but, though avarice was one of his strongest passions, he loved the trappings and the pageantry of royalty even more. He could not bear to be deprived of his Guards and his Beefeaters. The Princess, poor woman, had more vexations than any of these others; her husband's increasing ill-temper left her no peace; her ambition fretted in exclusion; her strong maternal instincts were outraged by being cut off from her children. Moreover, even the stubborn old King had strong reasons for desiring an accommodation. Like many people who come suddenly into vast fortunes he had shortly discovered that he was in pecuniary difficulties. His expenditure had far outrun his income, and he needed £600,000 to clear off his debts. So long as Walpole remained in opposition it would be hard to bring the House of Commons to agree to this indecent request. And though George the First affected complete indifference with regard to his son, and asked impatiently, 'why the Whigs could not come in without him,' he had perhaps by this time begun to understand that the nation regarded his own part in the royal quarrel as even less excusable than that of the Prince.

At an early stage of these proceedings Walpole appears to have secured the goodwill of Stanhope, whose temper, inclinations and persuasiveness in private intercourse made him a fit collaborator. In addition to the King and the Prince of Wales two other very headstrong and hot-tempered men, one on each side, had to be brought into the arrangement. Stanhope undertook for Sunderland, and Walpole for Townshend. It was agreed between these leaders that the Whig schism should be ended and the royal quarrel patched up as parts of one and the same transaction.



It was desirable that there should be as few terms as possible in the treaty of peace. Here lay the chief difficulty, for both the King and the Prince had been talking very big. George Lewis had protested on many occasions that he would never remove the ban until his son was 'delivered up, bound hand and foot'; while George Augustus had maintained with an equal vehemence that he would never submit until his adherents were also forgiven and restored to office.

The problem was how the King might be gratified with the outward signs of an unconditional surrender, and how at the same time the Prince might come back with flying colours bringing his friends with him. A solution was not in reality so hard to find as it appeared to be. The persons who figured for the moment most prominently as the Prince's friends were Walpole, Townshend and the other leaders of the dissentient Whigs. These men the King was not only willing but eager to take back into his service, if only Sunderland and Stanhope would let him. Sunderland and Stanhope no longer offered any objections, providing the royal quarrel was simultaneously made up. They showed reasons, moreover, why the amnesty should be somewhat widened so as to include a few of the Prince's personal friends.

By virtue of the proposed arrangement each of the royal personages might save his face, might flatter himself and assure his own courtiers that he had carried his point against the other. After all, family quarrels are very much the same whether those concerned in them be kings or crossing-sweepers; a drop or two of real grievance to a flagon of wrath! There was now but little left of the famous feud save the lees and fumes of ill-temper. A letter of submission was drafted, and the King was forced by his ministers to approve its terms. Then the Prince of Wales was pushed to it, and signed. In an hour or two—before he had time to repent—he was admitted to an audience and expressed sorrow that he had incurred his father's displeasure. The King was in one of his worst moods, but fortunately the effect of anger was to render him almost inarticulate. In five minutes the interview was over. Not a word of kindness had been said on either side. Ministers, however, were faithful to their promises, having determined that there must be outward and visible signs of reconciliation. When the Prince returned to Leicester House he had an escort of Guards; there were Beefeaters round his chair; there were hallooing and all marks of joy which could be shown by the multitude. It was two years and five months since he had enjoyed these delights. Now at last his emotions were stirred to their depths. When he came to the Princess his eyes were red and swelled, 'as one has seen them on other occasions when he is mightily ruffled.'<sup>[9]</sup> He looked grave and the company was immediately dismissed.

The rest is like the rapid scenes at the end of a comedy. When the comely Lady Cowper returns at five o'clock to her waiting at Leicester House she finds the Guards before the door, the rooms full of company, everything gay and laughing, nothing but kissing and wishing of joy; in short, so different a face of things, that she cannot conceive why people should be so pleased, after so many resolutions as she had previously heard never to submit. When she wishes the Prince joy and comfort of what has been doing, he embraces and kisses her five or six times 'with his usual heartiness when he means sincerely.' The Princess bursts into a loud laugh—'So! I think you two always kiss upon great occasions.'

The Germans have been kept in the dark; all but the duchess of Kendal, who has been heavily bribed, and who has also been placated by an expression of the Princess's gratitude from her own lips. Next morning Bothmer and Bernstorff come to court ignorant of what has happened. 'Little Lord Stanhope,' of the Prince's household—not Lord Stanhope the secretary-of-state, but Philip Dormer Stanhope, afterwards the illustrious Lord Chesterfield—meets them in the outward room, and at once explains to them 'in his shrill scream' that '*la paix est faite*,' and how the mischief at which they have laboured so industriously is ended. Bernstorff is bewildered: 'Monsieur, vous avez été bien secret dans vos affaires.' Stanhope is merciless: 'Oui, oui, nous l'avons été; le secret est toujours nécessaire pour faire les bonnes choses.' Bothmer, unable to bear the insult, and the being given up by his old master, bursts into tears.

Grave statesmen also play their parts in the whirl of the ending. There is hugging and kissing between the two old and the two new ministers. They walk all four abreast—Stanhope, Walpole, Sunderland and Townshend—'with their arms round one another to show that they are all one.' Sunderland gives a reconciliation dinner to six of his own friends and six of the returned prodigals.

The King alone is sulky and out of spirits, but his temper improves when, in a few days, Walpole—the magician who 'can turn stones into gold'—persuades the House of Commons to pay off the royal debts by a somewhat scandalous transaction. The same zealous benefactor procures for the Prince and Princess substantial allotments of stock in the South Sea Company, which he has so recently been denouncing in Parliament as a fraudulent undertaking. A few months later they sell out by his advice at the top of the market and make large profits. The falling curtain is a shower of gold.

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### **III.—*How one of the results of the reconciliation was to exasperate George Augustus against his former allies, the dissentient Whigs (1720-1727).***

A new drama opened twelve months after the reconciliation and ended only at the King's death six years later.

George Augustus was ever a warm but injudicious admirer of his own gifts. He had the histrionic temperament without the dramatic sense; he played many parts but rarely produced the sublime effects which he intended. Failures, though they vexed his spirit, did not much disturb his self-approval, for when things went wrong he laid the blame on others. He valued himself highly both on his magnanimity, and on his skill in political intrigue; but he was too much of an egotist for the first and too hasty in his judgements for the second. He believed sincerely that he had behaved very handsomely to Walpole, Townshend and their followers by bringing them back into the administration, and that henceforth he might expect their devoted service. He was satisfied that he had outmanœuvred his father and that, because his friends were now in office, he himself had become a partner in government. It soon appeared that he was mistaken in most of these assumptions.

The Prince never rightly understood how the reconciliation had been brought about, who had been the chief contrivers of it, and what had been their real motives. He mistook his own motives as much as he mistook those of other people. He considered that he had behaved very nobly in insisting upon the reinstatement of his friends, and ignored the fact that his main object had not been to protect these persons, but to save his own face by an apparent victory over his father. Nor did he realise that he had been forcing an open door, and that, so far as his father's personal feelings were concerned, he would rather have had the dissentient Whig leaders back without the Prince than with him. He was entirely ignorant of the bargain, tacit or otherwise, which had been struck by Sunderland and Stanhope on the one hand and Walpole and Townshend on the other, whereby his own submission and the ending of the royal quarrel were the price which Walpole and Townshend undertook to pay for their own restoration to office. On the contrary, he thought of himself as the principal and most forceful figure in these negotiations. It never entered his mind that he had played a subordinate part from first to last and that the result owed nothing to his initiative. He never suspected how cleverly he had been guided by his wife and Walpole along a path that he would have been quite incapable of finding for himself. His idea that he had scattered favours and obligations broadcast was absurd. No debt of gratitude was owing in any quarter, for no one concerned in these transactions had followed anything except his own interest.

If some of the Prince's notions with regard to the reconciliation were mere illusions, others were of a more substantial order; and yet these also turned to disappointment through the caprice of fortune. He had expected, and so apparently had the Princess, that the settlement would give him an important share of government. The possession of political power would enable him to defeat his father's malice, and he need no longer fear the personal slights and humiliations that had so much vexed him in the past. Here he built upon foundations a good deal solidier than the imaginary personal devotion of his recent allies. For, as Walpole and Townshend were only secondary characters in the government of which Stanhope and Sunderland were the heads, self-interest would have inclined them to hold their followers together in order to resist complete absorption. It would not have been unnatural for this section to pose as 'the Prince's friends' and to make as much use as possible of his name, his influence and his patronage. It seems not improbable that in April 1720 not only the Prince and Princess, but also Walpole and Townshend, looked forward cheerfully to a period of political intrigue during which they would all be ranged upon the same side. For they could not then have foreseen how swiftly circumstances would change or what a cleavage of interests would shortly be produced.

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For the next twelve months<sup>[10]</sup> the thoughts of princes, politicians and common men were fully occupied, first by the inflation, and afterwards by the collapse, of the South Sea Bubble. By April 1721 Stanhope was dead and Sunderland had been driven from office. Walpole and Townshend were the King's chief ministers. They were no longer in a secondary position, under superiors against whom it might be their interest to intrigue. They had arrived by a remarkable series of fortunate accidents at the very height of their ambition. They could go no farther, though they might easily fall. In order to maintain their power they must possess the King's full confidence. They must obey their master's orders in all things. In national affairs they might presume to tender advice which in most cases he would be ready to welcome and wise enough to follow. But there were other matters on which they dared not even to offer counsel. They had no hope of teaching their sovereign to act with decency in his own family affairs, or of mitigating the harshness of his conduct to his



son. Intercession was altogether out of the question, for George Lewis would have concluded at once that those who pressed it on him were paying court to his successor. Walpole and Townshend, it must be remembered, were new ministers, not old and tried servants who might perhaps have taken liberties of this kind with less danger of being misunderstood.

As the financial disturbance passed slowly away, it became clear that the Prince had gained nothing by the so-called reconciliation beyond his Guards and his Beefeaters. In public affairs he was no more than a cipher. In the pageant of royalty he was an inconsiderable and neglected figure. Slightings were put upon him deliberately. He was harassed by constant fault-finding and vexatious commands. The King rarely spoke to him, and, on ceremonial occasions, made an open show of his disfavour. The Prince could not stifle his resentment. He was discreet neither in the things he said nor in his choice of the company to whom he said them. His words were reported, and were construed as provocations. Until the King's death six years later these rubs, protests and rebukes continued without intermission.

Equanimity was not one of the Prince's virtues. Anyone who was concerned directly or indirectly in opposing his will must necessarily be a 'scoundrel,' and he rarely paused to inquire how far the offender might be acting under irresistible compulsion or from a sense of duty. His anger now burst forth against Walpole, Townshend and certain others. He had honoured these men by calling them his friends; he had helped them back to office; and now they turned against him in order to curry favour with his father. They were ingrates, renegades and traitors. He made no secret of his feelings, and all London knew that he never referred to Walpole save as a 'knave' or a 'rascal,' to Townshend except with contempt, and that he had sworn to be rid of them both so soon as he ascended the throne. People did not realise how little finality there was in his judgements, or with what facility he could revoke them if the circumstances changed.

Fortunately the views of the Princess were different, though she kept them to herself. She was a politic woman who aimed at power. Two things were essential in order that she might achieve her purpose:—she must preserve her influence over the Prince, and this could only be done by seeming to agree with him in everything; but also she must see to it that, when he became king, he employed capable ministers who would be her faithful servants as well as his.

Just as Caroline had schooled herself long ago to a serene indulgence of her husband's amours, so she must now appear to share his indignation against Walpole and Townshend. Her agreement with the Prince was, however, only apparent. She had come to understand Walpole very well during the negotiations that took place during the winter and spring of 1720. He was a man after her own heart. He was singularly free from the faults she most disliked in a counsellor—vagueness, pomposity, prolixity and the use of jargon. His ideas were sensible, his language clear and to the point, his word could be trusted and he had great force of character. She placed him head and shoulders above all his contemporaries. She felt certain that he would act faithfully towards any master whom he undertook to serve. Moreover, she realised the nature of the change that had taken place when he suddenly became one of the chief ministers, and she saw clearly enough the consequences that were involved in this change. She knew that what appeared to the Prince to be antagonism and ingratitude sprang from no personal animosity, but solely from the fact that Walpole, if he was to remain at the head of affairs, had no option but to obey his King's commands. A weaker or a worse man might have resorted to underhand methods and tried to keep well with both parties. The temptation was strong, for George the First was an old man, and his death was not likely to be long delayed. In spite of this, however, Walpole never wavered in his duty, never sought to play a double game, but left the future to take care of itself. He was never a refining but always a very robust diplomatist. Next to the retention of power, his main object was to possess the good opinion of the Princess. Was she likely to consider him less worthy of George the Second's confidence because he had incurred that Prince's displeasure through his fidelity to George the First? He was taking great risks, for everything depended on Caroline's good sense and good temper; but he knew the woman he was dealing with, played his game boldly and won it as he deserved to do.

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#### IV.—*How George Augustus learnt of his father's death from Walpole, whom he received ungraciously and ordered to take his instructions from Sir Spencer Compton (June 14, 1727).*

Townshend's dispatch announcing the death of George the First reached Walpole at Chelsea not long after midday on Wednesday the 14th of June 1727. He left the dinner-table at once and rode with the news to Richmond Lodge, where the Prince and Princess of Wales lived during the summer months.<sup>[11]</sup>

Walpole had never underrated the dangers which a change of sovereigns must bring upon his administration; but he was not a loser by the fact that it had come about so suddenly. For those who hoped to supplant him were taken unawares, and were deprived of the opportunities which a protracted illness would have allowed them for intrigue. The Prince, though he had spoken freely of his hostile intentions, was not credited with having made any plans for bringing them into effect. The decision as to who should be chief minister must be taken in the bustle of a few days, and various circumstances made in Walpole's favour. His head was as cool as any man's in England, and he would have to deal with people who were likely to be much flustered. He was deficient neither in nerve nor in tact; had a very quick eye; in judgement and force of character there was no one to match him. Moreover, his knowledge extended to every department of government and took in the whole range of public affairs; he knew far too much to be ignored at the change-over. When a counsellor of such ascendancy is called in by persons who are perplexed and diffident, they invite him at their peril; for although they may begin with a fixed determination to apply to him merely for information, they will soon be found angling for his advice, and may easily end by entrusting him with the carrying of it out. If only the Queen's favour could be relied on there seemed to be no reason why Walpole should despair.

Any one of four things might happen to Walpole.

The *First* of these was ruin. Impeachment might follow on disgrace. He might fall as Bolingbroke had fallen, never to rise again. For his enviers and enemies were legion; he had never been a thoroughly popular character save for a few months after the bursting of the South Sea Bubble. He had been kept in power by the favour of the old King; the new King was against him. The *Second* was deprivation of office, but without pains, penalties or forfeitures. In this case he might hope, like any other parliamentarian, to win his way back to power through the ill-luck or incompetency of his successors and by the prevalence of his own ability. The *Third* chance was that he might be continued in office, though grudgingly and on sufferance. This fate would have had no terrors for one who knew so well as he did how to serve and win the confidence of kings. The *Fourth* was that his power might suffer no diminution, and that he might be received at once into full favour.

We may safely conjecture that as Walpole rode to Richmond he ignored none of these possibilities; for though he was a sanguine man he was also a very sensible one. Full favour seemed the least likely of the four; absolute ruin hardly less so. It is probable that Walpole hoped no higher than to be continued on sufferance, and that he was fully prepared to be dismissed.

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George Augustus was a prince of fixed hours and habits. Every day after a midday dinner he went to bed, and none of his people would dare to break in upon his slumbers. The Princess, as became a dutiful wife, sat silently in his room with her book or needlework.

It was still early afternoon when Walpole arrived at Richmond Lodge, and the royal awakening bell had not yet rung. The minister's business would brook no delay.—'It was impossible to disturb his Royal Highness.'—Walpole insisted, and the people in waiting stood aghast when he pushed past them into the august presence.

George Augustus sprang up in a fury—an absurd little figure, as he stood with his breeches in one hand, while the fat statesman knelt and kissed the other reverentially. Even the unexpected form of address—'Your Majesty'—was at first unheeded; for the royal orders had been disobeyed; the royal nap had been infringed; and by whom? By the man in all England whom George Augustus believed himself to detest most cordially.

These peevish trifles coloured the whole interview. The new King excelled himself in discourtesy. He refused to accept Walpole's word that George the First was dead, and was only gracious enough to believe when he had read

Townshend's dispatch.

The minister asked who should draft the speech to the Privy Council:—‘Sir Spencer Compton.’ He asked also for other directions that the occasion required:—‘You will take your instructions from Sir Spencer Compton.’

The Queen was silent and gave no sign of encouragement. If she was indeed Walpole's friend and had endeavoured to smooth his way in advance it was clear that she had failed.

The conference lasted for but a few minutes. There was no room for doubt; Sir Spencer Compton was chief-minister-designate, and the present holder of that office stood in the darkest shadow of disfavour. Dismissal was certain, and ruin might possibly not be so remote as it had seemed; for exiles, confiscations and attainders were not yet out of fashion. After all, it was only thirteen years since Walpole had himself impeached Bolingbroke and secured his conviction.

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It was not long before George the Second and Queen Caroline were in their chariot, rattling and jolting towards Leicester House as fast as postilions could take them. The King's fit of ill-temper soon gave place to more pleasing emotions, but his animosity against Walpole was in no wise affected by this change of mood. He had altered not a little in the last ten years, and was no longer the lively, affable and beaming prince who had won popularity in the days of his regency. He had passed from youth into middle age.<sup>[12]</sup> Ill-usage had brought out the less amiable side of his nature. The habit of finding fault had grown upon him, so that he found it harder to show gladness than displeasure. Hereafter we hear little of his smiles. Vivacity had turned to restlessness. He was excessively pompous, though in a diminutive and ridiculous way. His reign was not many years old before he aroused among his subjects an intensity of dislike which his father's coldness had never provoked. For this eventful afternoon and evening, however, he was radiant with self-complacency. In London the coming of the King and Queen was expected, the news of their accession being already widely known. Their reception rooms were flooded by a tide of courtiers whose congratulations were none the less welcome because they wore the mask of condolence.

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## ***V.—How all the world took Walpole's ruin for granted, but how, nevertheless, Compton soon found himself in difficulties (June 15-18, 1727).***

Meanwhile Walpole had turned his horse's head homewards. He dismounted on his way at Chiswick, where Compton had a summer villa. This grave gentleman was a younger son of the earl of Northampton and had recently shared with Lord Scarborough the chief place in the favour of George Augustus. He was Treasurer of the Prince's Household, Paymaster of the Forces and Speaker of the House of Commons. In the last of these offices he had been more distinguished by the tact with which he conformed to the moods of the House than by the authority with which he maintained its order and the freedom of its debates. He was no statesman, hardly even a politician, but only a courtier and public functionary. As he was several years older than Walpole it was somewhat late to begin learning a new trade.

One of George the Second's faults was his want of providence. There is nothing to show that he had ever acquainted Compton with his intention of making him chief minister when the old King died. It is quite certain that he had never discussed and concerted with Compton how the head of the new administration should take over from Walpole. Nor on this eventful afternoon did the King send by Walpole any instructions to Compton, but left him to learn what he could from his discarded predecessor, and to draw whatever conclusions might occur to his flustered and astonished mind. It is not altogether inconceivable from what we know of George Augustus's character, that the decision to appoint Compton was not what it appeared to be—a long-settled intention—but only a fancy which had floated vaguely in his mind, and which had crystallised on the spur of the moment. He may have acted merely in a fit of temper and with the desire to humiliate Walpole, or in an access of vainglory to show the Queen that he possessed the kingly gift of making swift decisions.

On receiving Walpole's news and message from the King, Compton had not a notion what to do. Consciousness of his own inexperience began at once to prey upon his apprehensive mind. He referred to formal matters of procedure as if they presented vast difficulties, and let it be seen at once that the thought of facing the House of Commons as its leader filled him with dismay. His timidity and unpreparedness lay before Walpole's shrewd eyes like an open book. It was evident that Compton feared the responsibilities of office a great deal more than Walpole need fear impeachment.

The outgoing minister could not have come into a situation which afforded greater scope for his peculiar talents. Walpole treated Compton frankly as head of the King's government, was friendly and respectful, solicited his favour and protection, undertook in return that his own influence with the Whigs and with Parliament should be used to strengthen the hands of the new minister. Compton appeared grateful and gracious. A man in a panic will not grudge fair promises of reward to one who will lead him into a happier mood. It is true that his assurances offered no real security, for he was the sort of person who would go where he was driven. On the other hand, was it likely that a government under his presidency would possess so much nerve and energy as would be required for dealing with Walpole as Walpole had dealt with Bolingbroke?

Walpole and Compton drove from Chiswick together and the chief members of the cabinet were hastily summoned to meet them at Devonshire House. The first matter which called for attention was the King's speech to the Privy Council—a formal affair, and there were precedents at hand to guide the draftsman. But Compton was much too diffident, much too perturbed to undertake it. He drew Walpole aside. Would Walpole be so kind as to compose this document while Compton waited on the King? Walpole was tactful enough to demur; the service asked of him was surely too high and confidential to be entrusted to a subordinate. Compton, however, pressed it as a personal favour and hurried off to court. So the speech was written in a few minutes, as well as any clerk of the Privy Council could have done it, and when the new minister came back he copied it out in his own hand and carried it to the King.

Compton showed a singular simplicity in this transaction. For the man who had supplanted Walpole to ask help and favours of him was the height of ineptitude. Before the day was ended various people knew that Compton had felt himself unequal to the performance of his first official duty and had been obliged to apply to his predecessor. The Queen was one of those who heard of it, and she kept her own counsel.

Next morning (Thursday) Compton committed a still more fatuous blunder. The King wished an unimportant change to be made in the wording of his speech. To his surprise and annoyance the minister insisted that Walpole, who was cooling his heels in an adjacent room, should be sent for to do what was required. The First Lord of the Treasury might have been a footman for all the recognition he received from his angry sovereign, but he could at least note with satisfaction that the royal frowns and other signs of displeasure were directed quite as much against Compton as against himself.

On this day and the three following (that is, until Sunday evening) Compton's appointment and Walpole's disgrace were regarded as certainties by everyone. The world of fashion and ambition thronged the Speaker's levees in St. James's Square, where he was much more at his ease receiving compliments and bestowing smiles of patronage than he was in the King's closet delivering his opinion on affairs of state. The First Lord of the Treasury, on the other hand, was not only deserted but shunned. People who wished to stand well in the new reign were afraid to be seen talking to him lest they should be thought his friends. When he appeared at court they edged away and he was left in an empty circle. His son-in-law, Lord Malpas, who held the office of Master of the Robes, was summarily dismissed, and this was taken as a signal proof of the King's enmity.

The Jacobites exulted in the thought that a strong government would be succeeded by a weak one. There was the usual stir among them of confused activity and sanguine correspondence. The Tories hoped that they might be included in a coalition. The opposition Whigs, and those on the government side who were determined to stay on the government side whatever happened, began to draw together. Walpole's friends, who from choice or necessity would share his fate, did not view the situation differently from other people. They were too much cast down by the prospect of immediate dismissal and possessed too little energy of mind to project their thoughts into the future.

There is no doubt that during these four days Walpole himself was in a very gloomy mood. He was superior, however, to his followers in fortitude and foresight. He saw that the men who would succeed him were incompetent, that they would soon be at loggerheads and that the public business would fall into confusion. He might be called back before long to set things straight, if in the meanwhile he had not inflamed the King's hatred by factious opposition; but a repetition of his tactics after the Whig schism would cut off all hope of such a summons. He schooled his friends. They might do themselves more good and their successors more harm by assistance given at well-chosen moments than they could ever hope to achieve by the most violent attacks in Parliament.

Both friends and enemies were puzzled more than a little to understand why 'Robin,' whose name was a byword for shrewdness, had never paid his court to the new King's mistress; why, when men of all parties had sought for years, and were now seeking more busily than ever, to secure themselves against the hazards of a new reign through Mrs. Howard's favour, he alone had stood aloof. It seemed to these observers that he had gratuitously offended the only person whose friendly intercession might possibly have saved him. But 'Robin's' shrewdness was not at fault. It would have been hard to make an enemy of Mrs. Howard, for she had a heart which did not harbour enmity; or to wound her vanity, for she had no vanity. Her nature was as kindly as her manners were gentle. No King's mistress was ever less ready to take offence, less greedy, so little of an intriguer or a mischief-maker. Her character, quite as much as her position, had won her a very wide circle of friends, men of all parties and of many interests; but she showed no desire to influence the King's choice of servants, and, even if she had had the will to do so, she knew very well that she had not the power.

Mrs. Howard<sup>[13]</sup> had been for many years a lady-in-waiting, and during the whole of that period Caroline, though smiling and gracious, had shown herself an exacting task-mistress. She had kept her rival closely attached to her person and had treated her with complacency; but she had watched and jealously remembered all those statesmen and courtiers who had neglected the wife in the hope of standing well with the favourite.

Caroline accepted polygamy as an institution inseparable from monarchy. So far was she from offering obstacles to her husband's gallantries, or from making him scenes and reproaches, that he came to treat her with an engaging candour in the matter of his love affairs, and even appealed to her for sympathy. Her chief object was not to prevent him from having mistresses, but to prevent his mistresses from having power. What might have happened had he fixed his affections on some clever and aspiring woman it is impossible to say, for he never committed this mistake. We may suspect that perhaps he was not much more independent of conjugal influence in the selection of his paramours than in the appointment of his ministers.

After the accession, when Mrs. Howard had at her feet almost as many flatterers as Compton, she bore herself with modesty and an irreproachable discretion. The Queen could find no fault with her behaviour, but noted carefully the faces in the adjacent throng. None of these courtiers, save Lord Isla, was ever permitted, during the Queen's life, to enjoy the favour of George the Second. During this farce of a fortnight a vast number of very clever people did very foolish things. Ambition might as well have burned incense before two wooden idols as before Compton and Mrs. Howard. What Walpole knew, and what the others ignored, was that George Augustus had but one counsellor whose advice he ever followed, but one friend whom he trusted fully, but one mistress whom he really loved—Caroline, his wife.

What the world thought about the rise of Compton and the ruin of Walpole for at least ten days after the King's accession

was very wide of the mark. Behind the smiling outward appearances of triumph things had been going none too prosperously with the chief-minister-designate. George the Second was nearly as sharp of sight as he was quick of temper. His judgements of men were shrewd enough after he had made a trial of them, though not before. His first thoughts were nearly always wrong. He would rate very high the capacity of some grave and formal courtier, if such a one had treated him with servile deference and applauded his opinions. Another who had been bold enough to differ with his views must be a bad man—a ‘rascal,’ a ‘scoundrel,’ a ‘coxcomb,’ a ‘liar’ and a ‘puppy.’ But it needed only a short experience of his servants’ work to open his eyes to their faults. It took somewhat longer to open his eyes to their merits. The faculty of judging beforehand what a man will be worth to a master who has not yet employed him is one of the rarest gifts. It is a less thing, but still no mean talent in a king or in anyone else, to judge truly and swiftly after he has made a trial.

Just because George was himself so irritable and so easily flustered, he could not abide a counsellor who ever lost his temper or his head. Just because he was himself so much given to blustering talk, his minister must speak calmly at all times and to the point. Just because he felt insecure in his own hasty opinions, he required coolness and self-confidence in his servants. And because he was the most impatient mortal alive he insisted upon having his myriad questions answered plump.

Poor Compton was more easily flustered than his master. He could not speak to the point, but delivered himself of circuitous phrases. He seemed to have no views of his own; he was painfully diffident; his answers were never direct, but always qualified; he hesitated, ‘would ask time to consider’ and usually wished to go away and talk the matter over with someone else. He was also very timid and spoke of the House of Commons as one who feared it. This was no sort of minister to serve George the Second. In a few hours doubt was beginning; a few days were enough to show that Compton had neither the brains nor the heart for his destined position. The King had blundered, as he usually did when he acted on his own initiative. Fortunately no formal announcement of the appointment had been made, either privately or to the public.

The Queen’s opinion of Compton differed from that originally held by the King; but, acting with wisdom, she kept it to herself for several days. She knew the Speaker for what he was—a deferential, incompetent figurehead of a man, of mediocre intelligence, with little knowledge of affairs, with a clouded judgement, an excessive pomposity and no courage. The dynasty was not yet so firmly established that it could afford to put such a character into the highest position. On her private account she had already placed a bad mark against his name for the reason that, like Chesterfield and a good many others of the Prince’s household, he had paid his court too assiduously to Mrs. Howard.

By Sunday the 18th of June people were beginning to wonder why Compton’s appointment had not yet been gazetted, and why Walpole still continued to show himself at court and in his office as cheerful and imperturbable as ever. On this day the British ambassador, Horatio Walpole, arrived from Paris. He was ill received. He bore the hated name of Walpole. The King’s first words to him expressed displeasure that he had left his embassy without permission. Horatio justified himself by the urgent solicitation of Cardinal Fleury, that some trusted person should carry his good wishes at once to the King and express his fervent hope that his Majesty’s accession would make no difference in the relations of the two countries. These had been altogether friendly and satisfactory under the late King’s government, and the Prime Minister of France was anxious that they should continue upon the same footing.

George the Second desired nothing better. He was delighted with Fleury’s tactful letter, and wrote a cordial answer to it at once in his own hand. He parted from his ambassador not ungraciously, and may have begun to reflect that at least one department of his affairs was in safe hands.

This visit was of course Horatio’s own contrivance, and Fleury very wisely played the game of his friend, for it suited French policy to keep the Walpoles in power.

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## ***VI.—How Walpole, aided by the Queen, overcame the King's aversion, supplanted Compton and arrived at a stronger position than he was in during the previous reign (June 18-July 15, 1727).***

Caroline was not one of those queens who have ruined themselves through favourites. She had no irrational likes and no ungovernable dislikes outside her own family. It is true that, if a politician had slighted her in paying court to Mrs. Howard, he was never forgiven; but this was more policy than pique; she would not endure to have her power undermined. She was a woman of strong sense but not of warm affections; good-humoured and not ill-natured; but her opinions of statesmen were not based on sentiment, or on gratitude for past services; not even on friendship until she had proved their worth by a long experience. She forgot old grievances very quickly when their springs were dried up. She would have chosen a First Lord of the Treasury on the same principles on which she would have chosen a butler, a gardener, a bailiff or any other of her servants; that is, by his fitness for the post, his abilities, his record of past services, his character from his late employer. Judged by these standards Walpole stood above all his colleagues and every member of the Opposition. He had been a loyal servant and had managed the late King's business with consummate address. No one knew so well as he did how to keep a turbulent nation and a troublesome Parliament within bounds. He was the most sagacious man in politics and probably the most intrepid. There was every reason to believe that he would serve a new master as ably and as faithfully as he had served his old one.

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Caroline never openly opposed her husband's opinions even in their most private conversations. She let him have his say and sat quietly over her needlework, while he marched up and down scolding, boasting and proclaiming a large variety of contradictory decisions, playing the King, as he imagined, in a very kingly fashion. But although she was ever the submissive wife, the humble seeker after light, George Augustus was her puppet. Her chief weapons were the innocent and deferential question and the half-hearted defence of people whom she was determined to get rid of. It delighted the vanity of George Augustus to answer her inquiries at length, expounding the mysteries of state and the whole art of kingship. She used his cleverness as deftly as his folly, and what with her adroit questionings and appeals to have the principles of government made plain to a woman's inferior mind, the King, at the end of these domestic conferences, usually found himself where the Queen wished him to be—either fortified in his original resolution, if she approved of it, or, quite as often, on the side opposite to that which he had taken so vehemently at the beginning. Every time she held out her hand he drew from it the card she wished him to draw. She is not the only woman in history or in private life who has ruled by the same arts.

It does not need an inspired imagination to divine a great deal of what these two royalties said to one another during the early days of their reign. George was incapable by nature and habit from hiding his vexation with Compton from the Queen. Her part was skilfully to offer excuses for that minister which the King would impatiently brush aside.<sup>[14]</sup>

'Compton lacks experience; he will speedily improve under your Majesty's wise tuition.'

The King as he strutted up and down, snubbed the Queen for offering so silly a defence. 'Had not Compton been Speaker of the House of Commons for years? Had he not held other posts as well? Could such a man ever be taught if he had not already learned his lesson?'

'Walpole must be made to help him at the beginning. Walpole is too much afraid of your Majesty to refuse. You can part with him when he has served his purpose.'

'Why should my chief minister have to go for help to that scoundrel?'





*Francis Hayman R.A. pinxit*

*Emery Walker Ltd. ph. sc.*

***Sir Robert Walpole, K.G. in the Studio of Hayman***  
*from the picture in the National Portrait Gallery*

‘Has he not already gone to Walpole for help? Was not the speech to the Privy Council drafted by Walpole? When your Majesty wisely decided that the wording should be changed did not Compton call in Walpole to make the alterations that were necessary?’

‘If that is so, Compton is a coxcomb and a puppy, and I will soon send him about his business.’

‘But Compton is devoted to your Majesty and can be trusted at least to secure a good Civil List.’

‘The Civil List! He is a poltroon about the Civil List. As in the last reign! No better! As if I am to have no more than my father had, and Fritz, who is worthless and only a boy, as much as I had! The rascal will be quite unmanageable if they make him independent.’

‘Compton thinks my jointure should not be more than sixty thousand pounds.’

‘Jointure indeed! You are always thinking of your jointure. Sixty thousand, let me tell you, is not a bad jointure; but the King must have the revenue of a king. Provisions are now much dearer than they were when my father came to England. <sup>[15]</sup> Compton, I tell you, is afraid of Parliament. Pulteney told me himself that Compton is not offering enough.’

‘Would it be a good thing to give the government to Pulteney and Wyndham?’

‘Only a silly woman would ask such a silly question. Then the government would be led by Bolingbroke, who is a traitor. And Wyndham is a traitor too: he should never have been let out of prison. The Tories are all traitors. Pulteney will only talk, talk, talk, and the members of the House of Commons will cheer, cheer, cheer; but Walpole will have their votes.’

‘Argyll or Carteret?’



‘I have told you again and again that Argyll has no judgement; whenever I have taken his advice I have regretted it. Besides, the English hate him because he is Scotch. Carteret is a dirty liar who tells all kinds of lies—big lies and little lies.’

‘The duke of Newcastle has a very large Parliamentary interest.’

‘What an idea indeed! Newcastle is not fit to be the chamberlain of a small German princeling. Everything frightens him; if you clap your hands he starts and turns pale. Besides, the head of the Government must be in the House of Commons; for it is the House of Commons that votes the Civil List; and this is the most important thing that has to be done at present. . . . That scoundrel Walpole can do anything he likes with the House of Commons.’

‘But your Majesty, and I too, have great grievances against Walpole.’

‘What grievances have you? As if *your* grievances mattered! It was my father’s wickedness which made Walpole do us grievances. He was only a servant.’

‘But a good servant would have opposed the King’s injustice.’

‘Let me see him! Let me see him! *My* servant will do what I tell him: he will know who is master.’

‘The late King once told me that Walpole could change stones into gold.’

‘The late King said what was true.’

‘And that government gave him no trouble when Walpole led the House of Commons.’

‘My late father spoke the truth in this also.’

‘What a pity that Walpole cannot be trusted.’

‘How do you know that he cannot be trusted, under a King who is strong, who is wise? Foreign affairs are very good; the country is very quiet; Walpole has done this. And I am very popular. The people cheer me wherever I go. I need not be afraid of Walpole.’

‘But surely the foreign policy is Townshend’s doing?’

‘*His* doing! Townshend is a choleric blockhead. Without Walpole he would set Europe by the ears in six months.’

‘I cannot forget that Walpole was a servant whom the late King employed to do you injuries.’

‘And if he did me injuries it was because he was a faithful servant. Walpole is a servant and will always remain a servant under a strong king. I will see to it that he never becomes master. I intend to consult him about the Civil List.’

‘But, Sir, you will not act in haste: it would be wise to take time for considering this intention very carefully before you speak to him.’

‘How foolish and like a woman! What do any of you know about public affairs? A king should take prompt decisions. I will send for Walpole at once.’

George Augustus paced to and fro in high good-humour. It would be a fine stroke of statecraft to employ the late King’s servants (‘the rascals!’) to do the new King’s business. It seemed to him that the conclusion he had come to was due solely to his own brilliant inspiration. He had read his admiring wife a lecture on the art of government, and had drawn the card which from the beginning of their conversation she had intended he should draw. So the knave of diamonds was summoned and Caroline without a smile became absorbed in her needlework.

Walpole on being questioned did not talk in parables or pompous phrases, but came straight to the point. He knew very well that kings and queens, like other people, have their price. He had offered many bribes in his time, had rarely seen them refused, and usually had got good value in return. His proposals on the present occasion went beyond anything he had ever ventured on before, but he gained a profit commensurate with his boldness.

If his Majesty were willing to provide out of his own income for the Prince of Wales (‘Oh!’) but at his own absolute discretion (‘Ha!’) the Civil List might be raised to a nominal £800,000 secured on certain taxes. If there were any surplus—which there certainly would be on the present yield, and, as the national revenue was expanding, this surplus would tend to increase—the King, and not the Sinking Fund as formerly, should have the benefit. With this addition, his income, taking one year with another, might average about £900,000. The Queen should have a jointure of £100,000 a year with Somerset House and Richmond Lodge as residences during her widowhood.<sup>[16]</sup>

‘Would Parliament agree to an augmentation so proper and so equitable?’

‘That would depend to a great extent upon how the proposals were brought before Parliament. The members of the legislature were a very reasonable and a very loyal body of men, but they were apt to get wrong notions into their heads if there was any blundering, or lack of firmness.’

It was not Walpole’s object to belittle the difficulties, otherwise he might have added what he knew to be the case, that politicians of every section—Jacobites no less than Tories and discontented Whigs—were at this time hoping more or less vaguely for personal advantages through the new King’s favour. As there could be no worse way to his favour than by attempting to whittle down his income, there was little likelihood of strenuous opposition to any Civil List the government might propose.

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When expectation is founded on hope, credulity gives way slowly. The world was surprised at the delay in gazetting new ministers, but remained convinced, notwithstanding, that Walpole was ruined, and that his frequent conferences with Compton and the King were all in the ordinary way of business at a change of government.

Early in the following week<sup>[17]</sup> an incident occurred which caused considerable astonishment and some misgiving. Lady Walpole, on coming to court, found herself in a crowd of scornful women, who affected to be unconscious of her existence and who would not make way to let her approach the Queen. Caroline, so as to be seen and heard by all around her, beckoned in a very friendly fashion and exclaimed, ‘There I am sure I see a friend.’ Lady Walpole was received with marks of special favour, and at her leaving the circle had as many civilities showered upon her as she had endured insolences only a few minutes before.

Still the world clung to its belief, and found much comfort in an ingenious rumour which stated circumstantially that Walpole was to be kept in office until the Civil List had been voted, and that he was then to be discarded.

Poor Compton judged differently. He had no stomach for his task, and he was well aware that he had failed to give satisfaction during the few days which had passed since he was summoned from Chiswick. He took the simplest but least heroic way out of the difficulty by acknowledging his unfitness. This decision was soon known, and Walpole smiled to see his own neglected levees regain their accustomed throngs. His harmless rival was raised to the peerage (partly because it was no longer desirable to retain his services as Speaker) and in due course became Earl of Wilmington and Lord Privy Seal. Like many another faint-heart he brooded as the years went by upon the glory he had missed. When he was no longer faced by the bugbear of responsibility he easily persuaded himself that it had had no terrors for him. He attributed his withdrawal to the machinations of his enemies, to the Queen’s disfavour, and to his own magnanimity. By such reflections as these he sought to confirm his courage, and determined, in the privacy of his study, that if the prize should ever again come within his grasp he would not let it go. Fortune treated him with a singular tenderness; for when he came at last to die<sup>[18]</sup> he had actually been the nominal head of an administration for upwards of a year, during which time others had exercised the power he did not covet and had borne all the responsibility he so much feared.

Walpole was even better than his word, for he carried the Civil List without a division. The only opposing voice was ‘honest’ Shippen’s, and he could find no seconder. Before the middle of July everything was settled to the satisfaction of the King, who dismissed his faithful Lords and Commons in a gracious speech.

The Queen was no less pleased than her husband with the result. It had been reported to her in former days by some mischief-maker that Walpole had once referred to her in general conversation by an opprobrious epithet. Caroline, whose own language was not distinguished for its delicacy, supported the alleged insult with her customary philosophy, and now she wiped the score off her books by a good-humoured message to the chief minister that ‘the fat bitch had forgiven him.’

With the King matters that touched his income were too serious for jesting. He took Walpole by the hand. ‘It is for *my* life,’ he exclaimed with deep emotion, ‘and it is for *your* life.’ It must be said for George Augustus that he kept his word so far as circumstances and his own blundering would let him.

The winners in this ten days’ confusion and intrigue were Walpole and the Queen. Though there had been no acknowledged alliance between them they had a common cause. Their victories—the one as well as the other—were more complete than either, perhaps, had dared to hope for. The door was closed in the faces of those who in former days

had preferred the mistress to the wife. No man was retained in office or appointed to one because he was a friend of Mrs. Howard's. Nor is there any evidence that this lady made the slightest attempt to influence the King's choice. The Queen's understanding with Walpole was never broken until her death ten years later. She had chosen him as the best man for the King's service; and she had chosen rightly; but he was more her servant than George the Second's.

The crisis left Walpole in a much stronger position than he had ever occupied before. The late King had valued his services highly, but he had preferred Townshend both as a companion and as a counsellor. Foreign affairs had been discussed freely between George the First and the secretary-of-state, and on many occasions Walpole had not been informed of important decisions until after they had been taken. It had been through Townshend also that the influence of the duchess of Kendal had been kept favourable, on the whole, to the administration. But Townshend with all his virtues was not a deft diplomatist, and it had been hard for Walpole to endure the minor troubles which had arisen through his brother-in-law's mishandling both of the sovereign and the mistress.

More serious perhaps had been Townshend's dangerous proclivities in the sphere of foreign affairs. Now there was a change for the better. The Queen had far greater influence with George the Second than the duchess of Kendal or any other mistress had ever had with George the First. Moreover, it was Walpole and not Townshend who enjoyed the Queen's confidence, and as for the King, his opinion of Walpole's abilities was very high, of Townshend's very low. All Walpole's men were retained in office, except Yonge, whom the King's personal dislike excluded for a year; Lord Malpas received another appointment; and, best of all, some half dozen ministers, whom Walpole knew to be his ill-wishers, were dismissed, and others, on whom he could rely, were put into their places.

Within the space of a fortnight Walpole had experienced a strange variety of fortune. He had been insulted and superseded. He had been shunned by the world. In the end he had done away the King's hatred and confirmed himself in the Queen's favour. He had outmanœuvred and overcome every rival. The discomfiture of the Opposition was complete. Neither the Tories who followed Wyndham nor the discontented Whigs who pinned their faith to Pulteney had gained so much as an under-secretaryship or even a gracious word. Bolingbroke, the invisible leader, had made nothing of it, and could now see not the slightest chance that his attainder would be repealed by an administration that had become wholly Walpole's. The Jacobites had not been forgiven, and beheld with dismay the man whom they most feared in a stronger position than he or any other chief minister had ever occupied before. The general election that followed a few weeks later confirmed Walpole's power over the House of Commons.

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## VII.—*Concerning the character of George the Second.*

One of George the Second's first acts after becoming king was a felony, for which, had he been a private person living at the present time, he might have suffered penal servitude for life. It happened in this way.—George the First had made and executed his will in duplicate. One copy was lodged with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the other with a German prince. At the first meeting of the Privy Council the Archbishop produced his copy in a sealed packet and handed it to the King. The King put it in his pocket unopened, and nothing more was ever heard of it. Somewhat later the venal German received a subsidy from the British Government on some military pretext, whereupon his copy also passed into the hands of the King. The contents were never made known, and the beneficiaries, whoever they may have been, were never paid. Some years later,<sup>[19]</sup> however, when Lady Walsingham (the daughter of the duchess of Kendal by George the First) married Lord Chesterfield, that nobleman threatened an action-at-law to recover a supposed legacy, and is said to have received twenty thousand pounds to settle his claim out of court. Frederick the Great bestirred himself, but without success, in the matter of another legacy which was believed to have been left to his mother, who was sister to George the Second.

Certain allowances must be made for George Augustus owing to the peculiar views which, not only he, but also his father, entertained with regard to their private concerns. In matters that affected the United Kingdom they were constitutional sovereigns, but in Hanover, and in the regulation of their families, they were still despotic princes of the Holy Roman Empire. The unfortunate wife of George the First, who died a prisoner in November 1726, had left a will which her husband treated in precisely the same fashion as his own was afterwards treated by his son. It was said that he had previously dealt with the wills of his parents-in-law, the duke and duchess of Zell, in a similar manner. George the Second believed, or affected to believe, that by these means he had been wrongfully deprived of valuable bequests, both from his mother and from his maternal grandparents. He had no remedy in either case, but it gratified his resentment as well as his avarice to retaliate upon his father's legatees. In any case he considered that these testamentary matters were a private family affair, and had nothing to do with the laws or the people of England.

In the face of these proceedings it may seem paradoxical to maintain that George the Second was a just and honest man; yet he is not undeserving of this praise, if we judge him upon the whole tenour of his conduct. He was also by nature and intention truthful. It is impossible, however, for a man to be entirely truthful who speaks habitually without thinking. Such a one will occasionally blurt out statements on the spur of the moment for which there is no warrant in the facts; and being rashly committed, he must at least equivocate, if only to cover up his own folly; and he may easily plunge in deeper from a lack of moral courage to recant. But George the Second (unlike his son Prince Frederick) was none of your temperamental liars; he hated deception and wished to stand by his word; but the same precipitancy which led him into blunders that could only be retrieved at the expense of his dignity brought his truthfulness at times under suspicion. Nevertheless it was acknowledged even by his censorious father that he possessed a kingly sense of honour.<sup>[20]</sup>

There was little resemblance between George the Second and his father, save that both men were in the main just, brave and honourable. In almost everything else they differed exceedingly—in their qualities, their defects and their dispositions; in their tastes, except that both thought Hanover a pleasanter place than London; in their manners, except that both were Germans; in their appearance, except that both had eyes that goggled. George the Second was not built on big lines, and his character was no more massive than his person.

He was diminutive, but not dwarfish, for he had no deformities. His whole person was on a scale with his inches—slight, dapper and shapely. He was very vain of his figure, of his legs, of his carriage and address. He would never tire of walking to and fro to show off his advantages, as certain game-birds do in the courting season. He was no less vain of his perspicacity in great affairs, of his military skill, of his knowledge of men, of his way with women. This vanity made him appear ridiculous both at home and abroad, in calm weather as in the most serious and tragic situations. His ministers could never be certain that at the last moment his vanity would not break forth and upset their best-laid plans.

Those who worked with George the Second did not value him at his own rating. In great affairs they found him the reverse of perspicacious. His darting intelligence was for ever misleading his judgement. He could rarely determine for himself which was the dominating factor in any situation, but needed to have it pointed out to him by others, who, if they were wise, left him to take credit for the discovery. The utmost that can be said for his statesmanship is that it was usually possible for a strong minister, with tact and patience, to lead him in the end to safe decisions. He could easily understand, if only he were brought into the right mood. His military skill was never put to the proof, but only his intrepidity; it is inconceivable that he had in him the makings of a great soldier. As for his knowledge of men, it

amounted to this—that he was very quick and shrewd in finding faults, though apt to be misled by his prejudices; also that when he had a good servant, he would soon know it, though he could not detect merit in advance and without a trial. His most successful ministers were not found by himself, but were forced on him by others—Walpole, by the Queen; Pelham, by Walpole; Pitt, by public opinion.

In the matter of women George the First and George the Second were exceedingly unlike, although both were described by their contemporaries as men of an ‘amorous complexion.’ George the First was a simple creature with strong appetites and no imagination. His successor was a sentimental egotist, whose chief interest lay in the ritual and conventions of gallantry. He valued himself highly on his love-letters written in the French tongue. When absent from the beloved object he wrote to her frequently and at great length—thirty pages being no exceptional effort—and the Queen received more and longer letters than any of her rivals. Competent judges have pronounced these effusions to be models of a delicate ardour.<sup>[21]</sup> He valued himself also on his success in love-making, but with less justice; for no king, unless he courts incognito, can safely vaunt his powers of seduction. The entertainment of mistresses, unless it had been notorious, would have afforded him but little pleasure; for what he chiefly coveted was the reputation for gallantry. Personal charms were not the only consideration which influenced him in his choice. When he formed a connection of this sort he looked beyond the enjoyment of beauty to the gain of a sympathetic and admiring audience. The members of his harem, from the Queen downwards, were required to listen with a show of delight to endless dissertations, the purpose of which was to prove the King’s pre-eminence over other mortals in wisdom, courage, gallantry and politeness.

On the business side he was a miracle—nay, a monster—of punctuality, of regularity and of industry. He would walk about watch in hand until the exact moment had come for keeping his next appointment. If yesterday he had discharged a certain duty at a certain hour, this was a reason for discharging the same duty at the same hour to-day, to-morrow and for ever. When he was awake he seemed never to be idle. And yet, in spite of these admirable habits, his business was never well done, because he so rarely saw things in their true proportions, and also because he wasted so much of his own and other people’s time in talking.

Few of the ministers who served him had so quick an intelligence or so bad a judgement as their master. In the simplest situation there may be a hundred considerations which an ingenious mind can drag into the discussion; but even in the most complex situation there are seldom more than two or three which really matter. Perhaps the people who get the most fun out of life and who make the most entertaining company are those who most quickly discover the greatest number of not wholly irrelevant associations; but such men are not apt to arrive at sound conclusions. They see far more than other people, but they also see far more than their minds can arrange and digest. They see far more than is needed. A very nimble and wide-ranging intelligence is usually an obstacle to effective action in practical affairs. It is apt to be the ruin of statesmen, soldiers and men of business. It is possible of course for a man to see very little, and none of it worth regarding: such a one we call a fool. But of those whom we acknowledge at once to be very clever men, it is surprising what a large number end as discredited politicians, as defeated generals, as petitioners in the courts of bankruptcy. It is easy enough to say that good judgement consists in a firm grasp upon the two or three things that really matter; but it is one of the puzzles of human life how some people come at this and how others miss it. For of those who possess the gift of good judgement only a small minority seem to arrive at their conclusions by any conscious process of reasoning or selection. They seem rather to be guided by a kind of instinct, to be blessed with a fortunate blindness which fails to observe things that are only of secondary importance.

George Augustus had few friends among his own sex except Lord Scarborough and, in later years, Lord Waldegrave. These men were both worthy of affection, and were genuinely attached to their sovereign. They were not favourites in the invidious sense, for they never engaged in political intrigues or were enriched by their master’s bounty.

Walpole falls into a different category. He was not so much a friend as a trusted counsellor, and the same may be said of Pelham. Though the King’s intentions towards these ministers were honourable, his blunders and precipitancy kept them always on tenterhooks. No member of the Opposition was in fact so difficult to deal with, or so often engaged, though unconsciously, in thwarting their policy. It is impossible to be on terms of thorough friendship with a monarch of this sort, and the clear-eyed Walpole was not the kind of servant to cosset himself with sentimental loyalties. He was too often the victim of the King’s lightness to bear him much cordial affection. At the best of times Walpole’s feelings for his sovereign were tinged with contempt; at others he found it hard to conceal his dislike; pity was probably the tenderest emotion this warm-hearted statesman ever felt for his master.

Although George the Second had no genius for friendship and no craving for male society, companionship and intimacy



were essential to him. He could not exist without a sympathetic audience into whose ears he might pour the contents of his varying moods. He found what he needed in the Queen; he sought it, though with less success, among his mistresses. His requirements were despotic. He was out of humour in a company which might forget, even for a moment, his superiority at all points. He could not bear a level glance; in his presence, eyes must be downcast in awe or upcast in admiration. It was easier to find the companionship he required among harmless women than among good men; and, to his credit be it said, he could not endure the society of men, however smooth-tongued they might be, unless they were good, and he did not suffer fools gladly.

Good talk could not flourish in his vicinity. Unlike his wife, he took no pleasure in the society of the learned or the witty. Unlike his father, he found no entertainment in buffoons. He never wished to listen to the views of others, but only to air his own. In a fit of ill-temper he might be silent, though he would never cease to be restless. In good spirits he was garrulous; boasting and blaming, to impress the company with his superiority. He would strut up and down in his tight waistband with his chest thrown out, displaying his handsome little legs to advantage. Whether pleased or annoyed he was for ever showing off.

He loved parade and ceremonial as much as his father had hated them. He was pleased to show himself to his subjects at state functions and military reviews. He was punctilious in performing all the social formalities of kingship. When he held his courts his manners were usually unexceptionable, and he was very observant and critical of the manners of others. But he gained no popularity by these exertions; for he had not the simple but priceless art that many kings have had—even selfish ones—of making themselves beloved by sudden rays of kindness and by touches of apt familiarity. He was as much a court functionary as the Lord Chamberlain, though of a higher grade.

In essentials George the Second remained to the day of his death as incorrigibly German as his father. It is true that, unlike his father, he could speak English, and that he did not surround himself with a crowd of greedy Hanoverian parasites; but he was an arrant foreigner all the same. A principal cause of the unpopularity of both those princes was that they saw and understood so little of the United Kingdom and its people. Neither of them ever set foot in Scotland or in Ireland. Outside London they were familiar with hardly anything except the roads to Windsor, and to Harwich where they embarked to visit Hanover. They rarely made progresses like their predecessors, or visited the country seats of the nobility, or were entertained by mayors and town councils. They held courts, interviewed ministers and laboured very hard and conscientiously at their business of constitutional monarchy; but in the lives, the work and the amusements of their British subjects they showed no interest whatsoever. The nation never regarded them with affection, but, at best, with a cold tolerance.

George the Second figures in contemporaneous letters and memoirs as a cross, exacting, consequential little man, who never unbent, but who often blew up. It needed a tragedy like the Queen's death to show him in any other light; and, even in this instance, the pure, soft light of sorrow and devotion was strangely inconstant; time and again it was quenched in the pervading glare of his egotism. Was his whole reign of three-and-thirty years one long fit of self-regarding abstraction? Were there no interludes when he sought his happiness in the happiness of others? We wonder, was he never gay, gentle, playful and kindly? Did he never laugh or smile from the heart? His father was an uncouth fellow, self-indulgent and by nature despotic; but at bottom he was a gentleman, for he could consider the feelings of others before his own. But George the Second, though a much more sophisticated character, was no gentleman. He wrote and spoke the unforgivable word of woman as well as man. In all social relations he himself was always first and the rest of the world nowhere.

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## VIII.—*Concerning the Character of Queen Caroline.*

In nothing were the contradictions of George the Second's character more flagrant than in his treatment of his wife. He preferred her society to that of every other human being. He would not discuss affairs of state with any woman except the Queen, or with any man so frankly as with her. He thought more highly of her judgement than of anyone's except his own; nor in fact was he ever at ease unless her judgement supported his opinions. Not only did he think her immeasurably more sensible than any other woman, but also more amiable and more beautiful. She was his chief minister, courtier, mistress. Moreover, he went to her for consolation in his troubles and for sympathy in his happiness, as a spoiled and wayward child goes to its mother. And yet, in many ways, he could hardly have behaved worse to her than he did. He was unfaithful on principle; and this was perhaps the lightest of his offences and the one which gave least pain. He was discourteous to her both in public and in private. He was thoughtless and unkind.

It was those with whom he lived in closest intimacy who suffered most from his want of self-control, and from the effects of his vanity and egotism. He was the King, and the duty of all who loved him and were loyal to their country was to consider his lightest whim or fancy before they thought of their own health, happiness or interests.

If anything which George Augustus conceived to be a slight were put upon his wife by another (as by his father, his father's ministers, or the Prince of Wales) his fury knew no bounds. But neither did his own rudeness to his wife know any bounds. He was unobservant and inconsiderate; her health gave him no uneasiness till she was actually dying; he would have her hold her courts, walk with him, listen to him, read and work for him, when a man of ordinary perceptions would have seen that she was ready to drop. She must herself bear some of the blame, for she hid her sufferings deliberately lest he should look for companionship elsewhere. By these arts and sacrifices she managed him. It was a heavy task, but it does not appear that she was miserable. There can be no doubt that she loved her despotic little husband with all his tyrannies, rudenesses and infidelities. Her affection for him was none the less steadfast because it was a blend of the wifely and the motherly.

Caroline also loved power; and during her reign she possessed greater power than any other. Although she concealed this possession from her husband as one of the conditions of preserving it, she was not displeased that her ally Walpole should realise it and that other ministers should suspect it. Her vexations may have been soothed by these tributes and by a quiet consciousness of her own superiority. Moreover, she saw clearly enough the difficulties of the game she played and the honour she had in winning it. Comparatively little credit could have been gained by managing a fool or a dullard; but the character of George Augustus presented a much harder problem, for, being at once self-willed, wrong-headed and quick-witted, he was for ever in danger of straying from the path of reason.

The next ten years<sup>[22]</sup> were the reign rather of Caroline than of George the Second. She was a good sovereign and came very near to being a great one. But had she possessed the dramatic instinct (which there is no reason for supposing she did) her subordinate position must have prevented her from profiting by it. Nor was a sympathetic understanding of the British people one of her gifts. How the ordinary Englishman or Scotsman felt and thought, what things might please or provoke him when he was in a mood to be ruled by sentiment rather than by reason, she never understood, or cared or tried to understand. In such matters she relied on Walpole, who was not at all times an infallible guide. She looked at her subjects through German spectacles, and saw their imperfections much more clearly than their virtues. She judged her ministers and their rivals with remarkable perspicacity, but never too favourably. She was under no man's thumb. Her friendships with statesmen—even with Walpole and Hervey—were not of the emotional sort. She was not one of those women who mix philandering and gallantry with their business; nor one of those others who seek for guidance and consolation at the feet of some favourite clergyman. There was nothing sentimental in her relations with men, and nothing devotional. She felt as little need of a lover as of a confessor. She was staunch and frank in her dealings with those to whom she gave her confidence, but never forgot, even for a moment, that they were her servants.

There was a certain hardness in Caroline's composition, and no great warmth. She was good-tempered rather than good-natured. Her family relations (except with her eldest son) were marked with a strong sense of maternal duty, but with kindness rather than tenderness. She never became a favourite, either with the populace or with the nobility and gentry. This can hardly be reckoned as a fault, for no foreign-born royal personage has ever been accepted, save in a technical sense, as the head of English society, or has ever been regarded by the people as the embodiment of the national spirit. The great court circle revolved round her mechanically and without animation. In the general political circle she was the object of greater interest, but seemed to hold herself studiously aloof. For her diversion she had her own private little circles of philosophers and divines. It was in the smallest circle of all—the circle of government—that she was the

dominating figure.

Caroline, at the time of her marriage, was one of the most attractive princesses in Europe. A little later, small-pox affected the freshness of her looks; but this injury in no degree abated her husband's devotion. To the end of her life she kept her charm of manner, high spirits and remarkable vitality. She was easily stirred to anger, but on most occasions her self-control was able to conceal it. As regards certain offences she was unforgiving; but she dissembled with sufficient skill to puzzle the objects of her dislike, if she did not entirely reassure them. Her delicacy was not of the ears or lips, for she excluded hardly any topic from her conversation. Her speech was frank and colloquial. She took no pains to veil her meaning, but spoke it straight out in French or English according to her company. And yet this lady, whose vocabulary contained so much coarseness, died but a little past the prime of life from her excessive modesty. She suffered from a navel hernia, but could not bring herself to disclose it to her physicians until her case was past cure.

She enjoyed disputations when they had nothing to do with family affairs or with politics. She liked listening to discussions on metaphysics and theology. It was the cock-pit kind of controversy which most attracted her. When two divines or two philosophers were engaged orally or on paper Caroline would not refuse to act as a court of appeal. She was a bit of a blue-stocking, a bit of a theologian, a bit of a freethinker. But she knew merit and piety when she saw them, and helped men forward who belonged to wholly different schools of thought from her own. She loved and corresponded with Leibnitz, made Butler a bishop, and on her death-bed refused the sacraments.

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## ***IX.—Of the different stages in George the Second's career, and how little his character was changed by the experience either of good or of evil fortune (1727-1760).***

The number of people whose characters suffer any fundamental change between the ages of eighteen and eighty is probably not very large; but when we recall the various phases of George the Second, and how differently he appeared to bear himself at one time and another during his long reign of three-and-thirty years,<sup>[23]</sup> we might, on first thoughts, be inclined to class him among the exceptions. In truth, however, he changed but very little. A man will surely pick up good and bad habits on his way through life. His circumstances may alter for the better or for the worse, giving freer play to his qualities or defects. He will hardly rank as a human being if he learns nothing whatsoever from experience. But let him be startled by a situation in which he can recognise no familiar features, let him be suddenly frightened or provoked, elated or cast down, and he will usually discover the same essential traits which distinguished him at the beginning.

George Augustus was twenty-nine when he became Prince of Wales.—The next thirteen years<sup>[24]</sup> are a period of humiliation, owing in great measure to his own blunders and faults of temper. He passes from youth into middle age. The effervescence of spirits gradually dies down. The appearance of bonhomie fades away. He shows himself more and more querulous and discontented. He makes no effort to dissemble his want of self-control. When he is in a rage he kicks his wig round the room and calls people bad names. Even those who meet him only casually and under the restraints of ceremonial intercourse carry away unfavourable impressions. He is quick-witted, impulsive, does not wish to deceive; but he is not amiable, or dignified or self-reliant. His judgements are freely given, but, except on German genealogies, are rarely right.

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He was forty-four when he became King.—By degrees the harshness of the foregoing estimate wears off. The world outside his closet and his council chamber never comes to love him, never can entirely forget his absurdities, but nevertheless it gives him credit for a notable amendment, for having corrected the most glaring faults of his earlier years, for having gained a considerable measure of self-control, self-confidence, dignity and good manners. In public he talks much less nonsense. People, however, who frequent his closet and his council chamber, and those of his family who live with him under the same roof know full well how little substance there is in this supposed reformation.

During this period he is managed with consummate address by the Queen and Walpole. Things on the whole go quietly and prosperously with the nation. The King has sense enough to see that his reign is a success, and vanity rather than shrewdness impels him to assume the whole credit for this result. So smoothly works the co-operation between the Queen and Walpole that everything which is done appears to be the King's own doing. He is never thwarted, or at least he is never allowed to realise that he is thwarted. He is never defeated or humiliated by his ministers. Nothing goes wrong abroad; at home there is but one misadventure, and of this Walpole cheerfully takes all the odium to himself. These are the ten happiest years of George the Second's reign.

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Within a single year of Queen Caroline's death George Augustus is in difficulties. It is true that the situation has become harder to deal with, because popular instincts and passions are awakening, and it is no longer possible to conduct foreign policy on the lines which Walpole has hitherto followed with so much success. Moreover, the King's own sympathies are in favour of a new departure.

In the nature of things Walpole cannot expect to engross the whole of the King's confidence; some at least of the late Queen's share must be given to others. But these recipients are not wisely chosen; they are less sagacious than the late Queen and less disinterested; they seek to ingratiate themselves by commending their sovereign's ill-considered projects and by undertaking to carry them into execution. George is blown this way and that by conflicting counsels and by intrigues which he cannot penetrate. The Opposition becomes aware that he sympathises with its clamours against Spain and the agitation grows more violent. In his championship of Maria Theresa and in his sudden desertion of her for the sake of Hanover, he makes himself the laughing-stock of Europe. His own folly gradually undermines the minister whom

he is most anxious to preserve. His hand is forced by his son, whom he detests and despises. Walpole is overthrown and George Augustus is humiliated.

The King is then driven to appoint ministers some of whom he hates and none of whom he approves. No sooner has Carteret succeeded in winning his sovereign's confidence and a share of his affection than George is obliged to put Pelham in the chief position, and before long to dismiss Carteret from the administration.

For eight years following the Queen's death<sup>[25]</sup> public affairs go from bad to worse. Everything is mismanaged. There are defeats and other failures abroad; there is civil war at home; the Pretender routs the royal armies and marches to Derby. Ministers rebel and dictate their own terms. The most painful part of the business is its publicity; for everyone knows that the King has been beaten not only by the Spaniards, the French and the Highlanders, but by Frederick Prince of Wales, by a section of the cabinet, and by the facts of life which he had misjudged. George Augustus came no worse off in the days when he was fighting against his father. He is as energetic, as quick-sighted, as ingenious in taking the wrong turning as he ever was. He is as precipitate, as inconstant, as much a blunderer and a slave to his temper as in his first phase. And all this is visible to the whole world. If he does not now kick his wig round the room, it is not because he is better able to restrain his anger, but only because he is turned sixty years of age and his spirits have lost much of their exuberance. By February 1746, when Henry Pelham is at last settled at the head of an administration of his own choosing, and Prince Charles Edward is in retreat to the north, there remains to George the Second hardly a shred of the prestige he had acquired during the period when he shared his throne with Caroline.

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For the next eight years<sup>[26]</sup> there is a calm interval. Pelham wins the King's confidence. The House of Commons likes him. He is a sound financier, a conciliatory leader. His mediocrity attracts no envy. No one thinks of denouncing him as 'sole and despotic' minister. His personal integrity is beyond cavil. The ablest members of the late Opposition are muzzled by office; the others are harmless owing to their inanity. During this period the country suffers no disasters and enjoys a sufficient degree of prosperity. The King escapes public ridicule and notorious defeat; but he lives in the shadow of humiliation, for he is forced to share the royal power with his son. It is often necessary to consult the Prince on public affairs and to make terms with him for the support of his parliamentary following. The very position that George Augustus had aimed at filling after he became reconciled to his father in 1720 is now occupied by Frederick. George the First and Walpole would admit no partnership in sovereignty; George the Second and Pelham, a weaker combination, are unable to prevent it.

Had the heir-apparent possessed any great qualities the situation must have become intolerable; but he is satisfied with shows and trifles and a bubble popularity. When he dies in 1751 the trouble is lessened, but does not entirely cease, for the Princess dowager must needs keep up a rival court and engage in political intrigues which the King, though he has the power to crush them, is foolish enough to endure.

During this period Europe is gradually overcast by an approaching storm. The King as usual sees a great many possibilities, but sees them in a false perspective. His prejudices are the despair of his ministers. He is very obstinate against coming to a good understanding with Prussia, merely because he dislikes his nephew King Frederick. But various difficulties resolve themselves in unexpected ways, and the clouds appear to be lifting. George the Second is an older man than his ministers, and they treat him for the most part with the deference due to age.

Pitt is now in office, as quiet as a mouse, as ceremoniously respectful as a Spanish Don, as reasonable and accommodating as any sovereign could wish. But the King dislikes him, which is not surprising or even blameworthy, and sees as little of him as possible. Pitt is content at present to be unobserved; he is hard at work in his own department and is also an influence for concord within the administration. He is busily engaged in learning a better trade than that of noisy patriot. Almost alone he foresees the troubles that are coming and endeavours to prepare himself for the future. The King is huffed and depressed by the encroachments on his power, but too timid to put an end to them. There are still the same spurts of self-will and outbursts of rage. Urgent affairs are delayed as they were in former times by his unreasonableness, by his inexhaustible arguments and interminable speeches. In the picture we have of George the Second during this period the original outlines are unaltered, though the colours have faded.

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Pelham died in March 1754.—‘Now,’ says the King, ‘I shall have no more peace.’ It proves a true prophecy. Newcastle becomes chief minister. He has accumulated a vast store of knowledge which he has neither the courage nor the judgement to turn to good account. He has compacted a great party which he is entirely unfit to lead. Had he been a member of the House of Commons he could hardly have hoped to control the rival energies of Henry Fox and William Pitt; the attempt to do so from the House of Lords through an inexperienced lieutenant is foredoomed to failure.

The period of three years and four months between the death of Pelham and the Convention of Klosterzeven<sup>[27]</sup> is the most distraught and ignominious in George the Second’s reign. Newcastle’s puppet leader in the Commons cannot stand against Fox and Pitt. Pitt is dismissed from his post of Paymaster. Fox leaves Pitt in the lurch and becomes a secretary-of-state.<sup>[28]</sup> For a year he keeps the ministerial majority together by lavish bribery and his own remarkable abilities. When disasters thicken he alleges ill-treatment and resigns.<sup>[29]</sup>

The country cries out for Pitt. A month later Newcastle gives up his post, after having held office without a break for nearly forty years. A Devonshire-Pitt ministry is forced upon the sullen King. Newcastle rallies his followers to make the task of government impossible. The King and the Duke of Cumberland see their opportunity for getting rid of Pitt, and the administration is dismissed.<sup>[30]</sup>

For eleven weeks, at the crisis of a disastrous war, George leaves the country without a government. Under adversity all his old faults blaze out. All his long experience has taught him nothing. He threatens, bullies, chokes with rage; decides this; decides the contrary; then withdraws in dudgeon and will not decide at all. His personal prejudices distort the whole picture. He plans fatuous cabinet combinations in order to relieve himself from the humiliation of employing those who are best able to serve him. He shows his political cowardice by blaming others for his own mistakes, and by treating his favourite son with gross injustice. His senses gain no sobriety, but are more perturbed than ever, as he contemplates the dismal record of the past three years. Washington with the Virginian militia, and afterwards Braddock with his disciplined and pipe-clayed veterans, have been defeated by the French and their Red Indian allies.<sup>[31]</sup> Calcutta has been taken by Surajah Dowlah, and his English captives suffocated in the Black Hole.<sup>[32]</sup> The French have been victorious in both hemispheres; Minorca has been lost to England<sup>[33]</sup> and Montcalm has stormed Oswego.<sup>[34]</sup> And now at midsummer 1757 the Hanoverian army, with British reinforcements, is hard pressed by the French. It is commanded by the Duke of Cumberland, whom the King keeps jealously under his own orders. At last, though too late to save his son from defeat, George the Second accepts the hateful alternative of taking Pitt back in coalition with Newcastle.

The last stage of this chequered history is three years of triumph. Such an era had never been before and has never been since. Pitt achieves a universal victory, not by the sudden magic of a demagogic spell, but as the result of his previous hard and patient labours, by his understanding of the heart of the problem and of the characters of men, by his power of inspiring others with his own ardour, by his loyalty to his subordinates and to his allies alike in good fortune and in bad. He well deserves his wonderful run of luck. Pitt and not the King is the national hero; but George, unobservant of this distinction, acts his self-important part in a glare of reflected glory.

The great minister, so arrogant with his colleagues, is reverential in his dealings with the sovereign, who soon recovers his spirits and dignity, issues orders, distributes rewards and punishments, and tends more and more to regard everything fortunate that occurs as the result of his own foresight and courage. He lives to see his son’s defeat at Hastenbeck avenged at Minden; to see the French and Dutch driven from India; to see Canada a conquered province and British arms everywhere victorious on sea and land. Then, at the very zenith, in October 1760, he dies of a sudden painless stroke.

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This excitable, voluble little man with the purplish face, the bulging eyes, the handsome legs, the consequential gait, the dapper shape (even in old age) is one of the most ridiculous figures in the gallery of English kings; but whether his long reign be judged by prosperity at home or by prestige abroad, it stands out, despite its strange vicissitudes, as one of the most fortunate in our history. Even his warmest admirers, however, cannot claim that he deserved much credit for what succeeded, or deny that he was directly responsible for many embarrassments and misfortunes.

Few sovereigns have had a stronger sense of royal duty, but his defects of mind and character were apt to ruin his best intentions. Moreover, there was a conflict between the duties and loyalties which he owed as King of England, as Elector of Hanover, as Prince of the Holy Roman Empire; and this conflict might well have puzzled a much clearer-headed man than George the Second. He was saved, again and again, from disaster by the efforts of others or by sheer

good luck. His industry, his punctuality in business are above criticism. He found no employment for insinuating favourites, and his mistresses counted for nothing in important affairs. Though politically a coward, he was indifferent to dangers that threatened his life. He hated lies and strove to speak the truth. His most honourable epitaph is Pitt's assurance, that 'you could trust the old King's word.'



# **BOOK SIX**

## **WALPOLE'S PRESTIGE IN EUROPE**

**(1727-1735)**

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## I.—*Concerning the state of Europe in the year 1727.*

It would need a prismatic fancy to conjure up a vision of Europe as it was two hundred years ago. Armies were then very splendid and fought battles in their fine clothes. In Parliament, statesmen wore their ribands of the *Garter* and the *Bath*. A gentlewoman's gowns cost less by the year than her husband's laced suits. The capitals and chief cities of the Continent were walled and fortified; small in scale, but in the grand manner; medleys of stateliness and squalor. For the most part these urban communities were busy, cheerful, healthy, and even cleanly after their own fashion, notwithstanding that the smell of garbage and of sewage hung about the lordliest precincts. No town was so large that half an hour's easy walking would not take a man from the middle of it out among olives and vineyards, hedgerows and green fields. There were spacious, well-kept squares; narrow, winding, filthy streets; flagrant but unregarded patches of disease and famine; a brave show of churches, spires and towers; wharves, where big-bellied merchantmen lay moored, and were loaded and discharged under the mansion windows of their prosperous owners; noble halls, ancient but unimpaired, where guilds and crafts and civic councils still held their corporate assemblies.

The salubrious uniformity of modern mushroom expansion was unknown. No two cities were alike even when they followed the same business. The artificers and burgesses of each went about their work in different ways, with an assured confidence in the virtues of their own peculiar methods. In the early eighteenth century, diversity was the hall-mark of progress. There were then no vast industrial areas, crowded and continuous, covering thousands of square miles. There has been nearly a sevenfold increase in the population of western and central Europe during the past two hundred years.<sup>[35]</sup>

But the pageantry of those times refuses to reappear at the bidding of statistics. There is a somewhat superior force of suggestion in the old maps, with their unfamiliar boundaries banded in bright colours—blues and greens and salmon pink; in their fair spaces and exquisite lettering, their gracefully wrought borders, corner-pieces of quaint allegory, and heraldic devices picked out with gold. The map-maker in those days had enough time to be an artist, and his style in itself shows us something of the way in which the people lived.

Men worked as well and as hard then as they do now. Their hours were longer, but they seem notwithstanding to have had more leisure than we possess. Their diversions were less exacting than ours; there was less hurrying and scurrying, hustling and bustling, touring and migrating. They had more elbow-room, knew their neighbours to speak to and their great men by sight, if not more intimately. They held their traditional feasts, holidays and celebrations with a hearty gusto.

In one important respect European civilisation in 1727 compares unfavourably, not only with our own, but with that of a much earlier time. In communications and transport, except by sea (a significant exception truly), our ancestors in the eighteenth century were worse off than our ancestors in the first. There were no longer fine paved highways or an organised service of fleet messengers. In the reign of the Emperor Hadrian wheeled traffic could travel from London to Bath, from London to Chester, from London to York and Newcastle more quickly and probably in greater safety than it could in the reign of George the Second. It was not until the first year of George the Third that the making of canals was seriously undertaken,<sup>[36]</sup> and not until the first year of George the Fourth that Macadam began in earnest to lay those famous roads which were shortly to produce the miracle of 'flying' coaches.<sup>[37]</sup> It took the traveller not far short of a week to transport himself (unless on horseback) from Manchester to London; something more than a week (unless the winds and tides were exceptionally favourable) to make the journey between London and Paris. The correspondence of the great powers went and came at a walking pace, and men of affairs were rarely called on for undeliberate decisions.

It is this difference of pace which is the most baffling thing of all. As we read of the doings in those days, before Puck and Ariel were harnessed, we are constantly finding ourselves puzzled to understand the whys of this and the wherefores of that; and for no other reason than that our minds tend instinctively to set a measured tune to quick time. We know of course that there were then no railway-trains, no steam-ships, motor-cars, air-planes, telegraphs, telephones, broadcasting; but so used are we ourselves to these conveniences that a continuous effort of memory is necessary if we would keep touch with a world in which they played no part. If for a moment we relax, we find ourselves wondering at things which need cause no wonder, condemning without justice, drawing conclusions which on reflection are seen to be absurd.

The very patience of our ancestors frets us with impatience. We marvel how they kept their sanity, how they could endure the slow progress of public events and of their own affairs, how they remained good citizens, caring a great deal for the common welfare (as they undoubtedly did), when they knew so little and learned it so late. For notwithstanding



that to-day there is a multitude of journals—prompt, copious and well-informed—whose main business every morning and every evening is to spread the truth and stamp out error, we of this later generation find it none too easy to judge coolly and to keep abreast with the times. But in the days of Walpole even Londoners were dependent on the tittle-tattle of the coffee-houses, on a few wretched and mendacious news-sheets, and on an occasional gazette, when the government saw fit to publish one; while countrymen and provincials, unable to afford a lavish expenditure on postage, clubbed together and paid gossip-writers in the metropolis to send them fortnightly letters for circulation among the subscribers.

In those days men grappled single-handed with great affairs. Merchants, lawyers and ministers-of-state did much of their own drudgery. Few of them employed private secretaries, and short-hand writers were unknown. We, who have grown up under a different system, wonder how our ancestors in the eighteenth century ever managed to get through even the merely mechanical part of their daily business. And yet somehow they did manage to get through it, and a great deal more besides, in a sufficiently creditable manner.

Walpole wrote with his own hand all his dispatches, minutes and most of his letters, and he would not trust even the copying of them (if they were of a delicate nature) to any subordinate. His work, though it was done at a great pace, shows no signs of having been hurried. His decisions, when he took them, were of a less tentative character than those which our modern statesmen so frequently allow themselves to be badgered into putting forward. Nor were Walpole's proposals submitted in such a way as to invite amendment, or to suggest any likelihood of their being withdrawn. Occasionally he was balked, but he was never of half a mind.

When we contrast our day with his, we are apt to plead the greater complexity of our affairs as an excuse for a falling off in firmness and precision. The complexity, however, is not wholly in the things themselves. There is surely something wrong with this overworked world, when the chiefs of trade and politics cause so many fruitless labours to be done or undertaken. Their abandoned projects lie so thickly on the ground that progress is as difficult as in a blown plantation, where a man has to axe his way among the windfalls.

To-day, when a man of business or a cabinet minister is in doubt, or is at issue with his colleagues, he calls for a report. A host of technical advisers stands at his beck and call. A vast machinery lies ready to his hand. While his able subordinates are working overtime to furnish what is required, he himself gains a breathing space, a respite from decision. There is at least a hope that in the interval the problem may solve itself or pass into the limbo of superannuation.

The first bright light of the great man's interest is soon quenched. Without this illumination to aid him, he will not easily grasp the veritable meaning of the report when it is laid at last upon his desk. For he sees dimly, owing to the filmy cataract of ignorance which clouds his brain. Had he acted as his own investigator and draftsman, he might have escaped from a twilight region of drifting shapes and shadows into a workaday world of flesh and blood, of hard facts and solid proportions. But nearly everything he learns is learned at second hand, so that the true nature of the problem is rarely visible to his eyes. When his colleagues ask him questions—sometimes pertinent and sometimes foolish—he can neither satisfy them out of hand with sound reasons, nor can he answer them according to their folly. He promises a supplementary report; and so the game goes on.

There is much virtue in drudgery. We may sometimes suspect that our men of great affairs occupy themselves so exclusively with the higher departments of business as to lose touch with the underlying realities. Looked at from one standpoint, our superman seems to be fading more and more into a metaphysical abstraction, into a hypothetical nexus between a number of highly gifted specialists. Looked at from another, he is as concrete a thing as Christopher Sly, the translated tinker, and seems to have been uplifted over the heads of his fellow-creatures, not by any superiority of natural buoyancy, but by mechanical levitation, like a pantomime fairy.

Our ancestors of the eighteenth century had their feet planted very firmly on the ground. Could we step back into their world, we might not feel altogether at our ease, but assuredly our embarrassment would not arise from finding ourselves in the company of our inferiors. We should be disgusted with their disregard of drainage, shocked by their prisons and their penal code; but if we had imagined beforehand that, man for man, we could lay them out like ninepins, we should speedily be undeceived. Their best society in every walk of life was as little tainted as our own with barbarism, provincialism, or even with insularity. Their merchants would not yield place to ours,<sup>[38]</sup> any more than their statesmen would, or their great lawyers, or their wits and scholars. On the whole, Grub Street, the learned universities, the City, and the aristocrats who governed England pulled very well together. Statecraft and taste, the love of letters and the spirit of adventure, were as prevalent then as they are now. We cannot even be certain that people of culture and education are

a larger fraction of the total population in the days of George the Fifth than they were in those of George the Second.

In a single department—that of discovery and invention—we can claim a vast superiority over our ancestors who lived two hundred years ago. A modern man of science, who could speak as Thomas Huxley used to speak, so as to be listened to with delight both by learned academicians and by intelligent men of the world, would have set Sir Hans Sloane and his fellow-members of the Royal Society agape with amazement and admiration.

But what sort of figure would the average man among us have cut in that august assembly, or even among the more frivolous frequenters of *White's* or *Boodle's*? He might have bragged vaguely about the advance of civilisation, about the lighting of his house by electricity, about his wireless conversations with persons on the other side of the Atlantic, and he might have told how he is whisked and whirled at a great pace over the earth's surface, through and under the ocean and in the upper air; but he would soon have been out of countenance and credit had he been asked to explain the agencies whereby these marvels have been brought about. His ingenuous catalogue of modern conveniences would have won no more belief than a traveller's or an angler's tale.

To make use of inventions which we buy, so to speak, 'off the peg,' does not in itself establish our superiority over other persons who had no opportunity of making similar purchases. Had there been turbine steamers in the days of George the Second, he might have travelled from Harwich into the Scheldt without understanding any more than most of our modern tourists do why his vessel rushed at such speed against wind and tide. Had there been telephones, Newcastle (though possibly not his colleagues) would certainly have been a happier man, but he would have been no wiser a man than he was. One of the chief objects of invention is to save men from overtaxing their brains. The ambition of the inventor is to contrive something which shall be fool-proof. It requires less skill to push a lawn-mower than it does to use a scythe.

We may justly honour the genius and patience of scientific discoverers, and also the skill and energy of the practical inventors who have followed in their train. But it is only a very small minority of us who are either discoverers or inventors. The fact that we live in the same world with these superior beings does not shed upon us, save in our own eyes, any of their lustre. That we condescend to avail ourselves, for the most part in an incurious spirit, of the appliances with which they have been good enough to provide us, does not add a single cubit to our moral and intellectual stature, or a single drachm to the weight of our characters.

Some people have maintained that the users of tools stand on a higher plane than the users of machines, and that, although subdivision of labour increases output, it stunts the mind. Be these things as they may, it is not inconceivable that in 1727 the daily round, the common task, made heavier demands upon the human intelligence than they do to-day.

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## II.—*Concerning the comedy of Europe between 1726 and 1740.*

Not only the common reader but the philosophical writer<sup>[39]</sup> has been apt to cry out against the confusion, triviality and apparent purposelessness of European statecraft between midsummer 1726, when Cardinal Fleury became prime minister of France, and December 1740, when young Frederick of Prussia marched into Silesia. The relations of the Great Powers during those fourteen years have seemed, even to serious students of history, to be tiresome beyond description, to possess no reality in themselves, to be things, like the tables of weights and measures, which have to be learned painfully in order that we may understand other things. According to this view there was at that time a lull in national aspirations; the great passions had gone underground; and kings and statesmen without vision or foresight talked in their own fussy little voices, instead of acting as mediums for the elements.

It must be admitted that there was nothing tremendous in that epoch. There were no great ferments, social, political or religious; no devastating conquests or revolutions; no surprising changes in the boundaries of states or in the habits and morals of the human race. The idols stood securely on their pedestals unchallenged by ideals. There was nothing cataclysmic for people to gape at, or to flee from in panic, or which could encourage an enthusiastic hope that the world was suddenly changing for the better. It was a period of comparative calm, of light inconstant breezes, of waters that never rose above the seasonal averages.

Even wars were then somewhat formal affairs, and were waged with an almost pedantic regard for rules and conventions. The age of the great captains was past. Their innovations had become classics; had been explained and petrified in innumerable treatises; while their spirit of audacious enterprise had gone off in a vapour.

An army commander who should have allowed the brutal motive of winning a campaign to override his sense of artistry, decorum and tradition might have received the punishment he feared most, in being ill-thought of throughout Europe in the highest circles of military society. The troops went into winter quarters at the appropriate season, and, at dates almost as rigorously fixed by custom as those for the slaying of grouse, partridges and pheasants are now fixed by law, they came out again in all their panoply and began marching and counter-marching. Armies were of a moderate size, and they were composed of professional soldiers who, knowing the inconstancy of fortune, dealt with their prisoners as they themselves hoped to be treated if victory went over to the other side. And as wars in those days were waged neither for the love of God nor from philanthropy, they were carried on without needless ferocity. The old religious virus was nearly exhausted, while the new humanitarian virus was not yet spawned.

It was not an era of faith or of extravagant hopefulness. There was not much ardour of worship of any kind. And yet it shows no signs of despondency or reaction. People went about their private businesses and pleasures without concerning themselves to any great extent with the principles on which their various governments were founded. Their minds were untroubled by phantasmagorias of proselytism or crusade.

For all that, it was a period of progress both in national prosperity and in thought. There were then great energy and ingenuity of manufacture and a strong spirit of oversea adventure. The conditions of life for the industrious classes, both for rich and for poor, were slowly but steadily improving, not only in France and England but on the whole north-western seaboard of Europe. Administration was also improving, and fostered enterprise. Privation, and discontent its frequent companion, were less prevalent at the end of this period of comparative peace than they were at its beginning.

It is true that ‘intellectuals,’ more especially in France, were already speculating busily on economics, on the nature of property, of government and of man; but their great efflorescence did not occur until Fleury and Walpole were both in their graves.<sup>[40]</sup> The cults of ‘the noble savage,’ of ‘the state of nature’ and of ‘the social contract’ had not yet begun to muddy and excite the popular imagination. Things had been much worse when Louis the Fourteenth was king and in the years of exhaustion which followed his reign. People were content with small mercies. They could endure the inconveniences and hardships which still pressed upon them, and showed no eagerness in the quest for a perfect society.

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It is generally assumed (though the proofs are not altogether convincing) that great convulsions are brought about by great men, that they also produce great men, and that they are followed by great and lasting consequences. According to this theory a period like Walpole’s, when people kept by the established rules and traditions, and when no one broke bounds, must necessarily be less interesting than an age of conquest or revolution. This is certainly true in the case of a reader or

a writer who cares for nothing but epics, tragedies and melodramas; but it is untrue of anyone who finds entertainment in a comedy. And, after all, there is as much to be learned about the art of governing men from a comedy as from a melodrama, a tragedy or an epic.

A man may gaze in awe and astonishment upon a flood without precedent, a muddy submersion of well-known landmarks; but the first excitement of the onlooker will soon give place to an intolerable weariness, and his interest will revive only as the waters begin to abate. For long afterwards the story of the catastrophe will be told among neighbours—how that family at the mill was drowned, how that other family at Bottom Farm saved itself on a raft, how valuable live stock were swept down to the sea, where their carcasses broke the fishermen's nets. But these memories soon fade into legend, leaving customs unchanged. It is taken for granted that there can never be such another flood, and almost at once the inhabitants begin to lead the same lives as those they led before. By next summer there are few things to be seen which remind them of the disaster—some red scaurs, perhaps, where the waters have bitten savagely into the banks; but bridges and buildings are for the most part repaired; dykes and embankments are re-established; the meadows are as green as they ever were, and other herds, unconscious of the fate of their predecessors, graze there in peaceful security. Many people have suffered losses, a few perhaps, by some accident, have gained; but neither the habits nor the motives of anyone have been changed by a single iota.

Political catastrophes are not so very different from these others. They destroy a great deal, but they change very little. So soon as the extent of their destruction is perceived, mankind applies its unreflective energy to building up again, as ants do when their heaps are trodden on. Old traditions guide the work and new theories count for very little. After a conquest or a revolution the names of things may be altered, but the things themselves are restored, and are made as like as possible to those which have been swept away. A despotic king is replaced by a lord protector, by a committee of public safety, by a dictator or by an emperor. The *Marseillaise* becomes the anthem of imperialism. And so with religion, laws, habits, fashions, fast-days, holidays, days of the week and months of the year. Especially so with regard to certain clusters of adhering particles which we call the family, and which, if separated by force, will tend always by some law of nature to seek reunion. The instinct of possession is also ineradicable. Mankind, although its ideal has been obstructed in countless ways and in every form of human society, has never yet been cured of its longing to reap where it has sown and to garner the grain that it has threshed. It was the same in the earliest civilisations of which we have records or the faintest traces; in Babylon, Egypt, Crete ten thousand years ago; and doubtless it was not otherwise in the lost Atlantis ten thousand years before that. *Quod semper, quod ubique, et quod ab omnibus.*

Things that have lasted for a long time (like Roman law, the Roman state, or the Roman church) have usually been made very slowly and amidst endless contention. Blundering reformations and no less blundering reactions have been of frequent occurrence; but generations of stout-hearted and reasonable men, working by the light of experience, have contrived to keep the upper hand. These have not sought perfection, but have been content to deal with things as things occurred. It would be hard to find a single instance of an enduring human institution that was built or even founded during a paroxysm of enthusiasm.

The worst of great convulsions is that stout-hearted and reasonable men, working by the light of experience, find little or no employment. For the time being their places are taken by panic-stricken and unreasonable men in a prodigious hurry, who work by the light of flares and bonfires.

It is in periods when the world is neither sunk in lethargy nor shaken by upheavals that statesmen of constructive ability are most likely to obtain power and most able to use it for the advantage of their fellows. At such times there is sympathy enough to encourage their efforts and stability enough to sustain the fabrics which they build. Behind the screen of tortuous diplomacy, sham-fights and conventional warfare there was a calm in which the administrations of Walpole, of Fleury and of others besides these were busily at work. And the results of their labours were lasting and fruitful and great, although they came so evenly along that people noticed them no more than we notice the growth of a forest.

In all ages nations have been liable to go suddenly mad, just as heaps of dry brushwood are liable to catch fire. The man who drops a lighted match heedlessly or maliciously may set the whole countryside in a blaze; but his connection with the subsequent course of the disaster is fortuitous and remote. He is not to be regarded as a dæmonic character merely because he happens to have been the trivial cause of a great combustion. And yet how many names familiar to us in history are those of persons of no intrinsic importance, of little force of character, of third-rate abilities, occasionally madmen, more often fools! The intensely serious person with his head full of thoughtful nonsense; the windbag whose nonsense is unrelated to any known processes of human thought; the common butcher who follows his dull trade from a liking for it rather than from principle—these and others equally undistinguished have often obtained an enduring

notoriety for no other reason than that their phrases, clamours or brutalities have happened to attract attention at some dramatic moment of a great convulsion. Men of that sort do not figure prominently in the epoch of Walpole and Fleury, when statesmen, despite the absurdity of many of their conventions, were pursuing practicable ends in a practical spirit.

Those who themselves have tried in howsoever humble a way to govern or to manage their fellow-creatures, will find more to interest them in the chapter of endeavours than in the chapter of accidents; in the sight of men grappling with and, to some extent, controlling events, than in the other sight of events, in a senseless torrent, sweeping men away.

During the reign of George the Second the peoples of Europe had very little direct control over the foreign policies which kings and their ministers saw fit to pursue. In theory Britain and Holland were exceptions; but in practice their respective citizens had only a dim notion of what was happening. It is customary to blame dynastic ambitions for most of the bickering and bargaining that went on during this period; but it is doubtful if wars would have been either fewer or less troublesome (though they might have been waged on other pretexts) had every nation lived under free institutions.

Whatever may be the form of a government, and no matter whether it has been chosen voluntarily or forcibly imposed, there soon comes to be a subtle identity of sentiment between peoples and their executives with regard to the outside world. Even the least fettered and most wilful despot bears less resemblance to a lonely speculator, than he does to the captain of a cricket eleven. His master-motive is that his own side should win, and his own side is usually at one with its ruler, despite the fact that he, and not it, has arranged the match.

It is characteristic of most human agglomerations that, so soon as they develop a corporate feeling, they begin to be concerned for their safety and independence. After a time, if they survive, they aim at an equality with their more powerful neighbours. In the end we find them seeking predominance, or at least pre-eminence. This irrepressible instinct seems to assert itself with equal force whether a nation be governed by an autocrat, by an oligarchy or under democratic institutions. The last of these systems is not less jealous, quarrelsome or insatiable than the first.

National antagonism can nourish itself on very little. In 1727, the potential causes of conflicts seemed to be fewer and slighter than they had been for some time past. The desire for peace and quietness was widely spread.

The mercantile adventures of Britain and Holland seemed to have passed, temporarily at least, out of the stage of bellicose rivalry. The bankers of Amsterdam, who were then at the height of their prosperity, lent money busily to kings and governments, while the merchants of London and Bristol held the first place in oversea trade.

A section of English men of business, though not a very large one, nourished a grievance against Spain for checking their commerce with the New World. As yet, however, the mass of their fellow-countrymen was unmoved by their complaints.

There was an anti-English party in France and an anti-French party in England. Not a few Frenchmen still cherished in their hearts the ambitious projects of Louis the Fourteenth, and many Englishmen stood on their guard to frustrate any such attempts. But it was some years before either public opinion or the relations of the two governments were much affected by these under-currents of sentiment and suspicion.

The spirit of nationalism being what it is, there were seeds of future trouble not only in the exclusiveness of Spain but also in the increase of French prosperity under Fleury's administration. Ever since the treaty of Utrecht there had been a robust and, latterly, a very rapid growth of competition between France and England in manufactures, foreign commerce, merchant shipping, colonies and 'factories.' Until 1737 or thereabouts these enterprises were left mainly to the energy of traders and sea-captains. The governments had not yet begun to take an active part or to entertain anxieties. Fleury, from motives of economy, had neglected the French navy. So long as the two nations continued to prosper, they paid little heed to the occasional wranglings between their merchants and mariners; but it might have been foreseen that the first period of depression in either country would be certain to give a more serious colour to their rivalry.

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If this period is not marked by any resounding explosions of international hatred, neither is it the scene of any duel between giants. No tragedy; no melodrama; no heroes! How then can it be otherwise than tiresome? . . . The interest of it lies in its likeness to ordinary human life; in a lively opportunism and ceaseless striving after objects which the melodramatist, the tragedian and the epic poet find no use for; in the endeavours of certain men to do certain things, which are incompatible with certain other things which certain other men are endeavouring to do. There are no 'acts of God,' as lawyers call them, to interfere with the carrying on of business as usual. There are no storms so violent as to

confound everybody's calculations, or to make any of the busy schemers give up their schemings in despair. The wills of all are free, and no one is predestined. The actors continue their acting, full of zest and gusto, to the ends of their lives or of their careers. And for us the interest is to watch them hard at work, plotting and counter-plotting, failing and succeeding. Their activities were often misdirected and sometimes their methods seem to us to have been absurd; but purposelessness is certainly not a charge which can be proved against them.

If some writer of genius would give us the great comedy of Europe during this period of comparative calm, we should be grateful to him, not merely for a rich entertainment, but for light thrown on an exceedingly important aspect of the art of government. We should learn how kings, governments and statesmen attend to our relations with our neighbours when there is nothing out of the common to disturb them, and how the international business of mankind is done during those long stretches of time when the attention of private persons is occupied mainly with their own affairs. Such knowledge should be valuable, seeing that by far the greater number of the years which make up most centuries are years of this kind.

Popular ferments, on the other hand, great conquests, annexations and subversions are phenomena which, for brief spaces, derange the settled order of things, set people gaping, and let loose torrents of rhapsody and execration. They are certainly not unworthy to be studied, and they run but little risk of being neglected.

It is different with the calmer epochs. These are often neglected, even when they are better worth studying than the stormy ones. The great writers of history appear to be very shy of themes that are suitable for comedy. They are right of course to follow their natural bent, but we may regret that so many of them are bent the same way. If the drama of Europe during the period of Walpole and Fleury is ever to be set forth fitly, it must find a historian who believes in it, whose sympathy is not quenched by his laughter, and whose genius is not smothered in the vastness of his knowledge.<sup>[41]</sup>

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### III.—Concerning some of the characters in the European comedy.

The summer of 1727, when George the First died, is a half-way period.

It was then some thirteen years, more or less, since the treaties of Utrecht and Rastadt had been signed, since the Hanoverian accession, since the death of Louis the Fourteenth, since the marriage of Philip the Fifth to Elisabeth Farnese, and since the first bringing forward by the Emperor of his famous Pragmatic Sanction, by which he thought to secure the succession of his daughter, Maria Theresa, to his undivided dominions.

Thirteen years later, more or less, Europe was in a welter; Britain was at war with Spain and drifting towards war with France; the Emperor was dead, and states which had sworn to uphold the Pragmatic Sanction were scrambling for the Habsburg inheritance.

Some new characters are about to come upon the stage—Charles Emmanuel of Savoy, Patiño, Biron, Chauvelin, Chavigny and, somewhat later, William Pitt and Henry Fox. Not a few of the old characters have made their final exits by death or exile—the regent Orleans, Dubois, Alberoni, Ripperda, Stanhope, Sunderland. Of those who still remain, some have gained force with years and wisdom from experience; others again, like the Emperor, are unchanged. Walpole has been for seven years chief minister in Britain, and Fleury, for rather more than a year, prime minister of France.

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A historian who adopted the method of *The Ring and the Book* would not necessarily choose as his spokesmen persons who filled the most conspicuous places; for only a few of these were the efficient causes of anything, while fewer still were either accurate or shrewd observers. There would be little to learn from the confidences of the two Bourbon kings or of the Old Pretender, whose faces gaze on us so blankly out of the past. George the Second might be a voluble witness, but grains of worth would be hard to find in his bushel of chaff; there is a certain continuity in his prejudices, but hardly any in his policy; had he been left to himself, his inconsistencies and his lack of purpose would have reduced him to a cipher. Caroline, his queen, belongs rather to the insular than to the continental comedy. She would do nothing to weaken Walpole's hands, and if she could not prevail with him in private, she carried her opposition no further. Her special department of public affairs was the guardianship of her husband from his own folly, and no cabinet office required more constant attention. Nor, until eleven years later, would the confidences of the Opposition leaders throw much light on the European drama.

There are a few oases in our political history where foreign policy has been kept outside party controversy; and there are patches, rather more numerous, where we may discover a genuine difference of principle between the one side and the other; but by far the greater part is mere desert, where faction has been the only rule for a high-spirited Opposition. It is hardly too much to say that, during the whole of Walpole's administration, the single purpose of his opponents was to make as much trouble for him as possible, both at home and abroad. Their correspondence<sup>[42]</sup> shows that their views on foreign affairs were seldom clear; that they hardly ever agreed among themselves; that, when they did so, their want of courage prevented them from taking a strong line against the government. They blew hot and cold. It was safe to denounce in general terms the desertion of an old ally, for such a theme is often popular; but it would have been dangerous to insist on helping him, for at that time the idea of making war was universally disliked. So they fell back rather lamely on abuse of Walpole for the betrayal of British interests and British honour, while their organ—*The Craftsman*—hinted that his treachery had been paid for in French gold.

Their great opponent had put fear into their hearts and his astuteness kept them in a panic. He thoroughly understood the timidity of their two chief leaders, Bolingbroke and Pulteney, and how much they dreaded his gift for fixing odium upon an incautious enemy. They would never walk boldly except amid applause, would never launch an attack—still less a definite rival policy—unless, from the beginning, they were assured of public favour. That way rarely leads to success, and is not of much account in the unfolding of a drama. When they come into the main story, as they do from time to time, it is merely as instruments, and not very effective instruments, of foreign powers.

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Among royal personages, the Emperor Charles the Sixth, and Elisabeth Farnese, the termagant Queen of Spain, are of most account. To these must be added Charles Emmanuel, duke of Savoy and King of Sardinia, though he played no part until three years later.<sup>[43]</sup>

Elisabeth, though still wilful and in many things unwise, was no longer a girl, but a matron of five-and-thirty, the mother of sons and daughters. The cruel repression and neglect from which she suffered before her marriage had cut her off from many of those accomplishments which are of use to princes; but they had not succeeded in dimming her intelligence or in daunting her force of character. She had worked hard to make good the deficiencies of her early education, but temper, the worst of all her faults, remained incurable. Her understanding of men's characters had improved; she was no longer so ready as she had been at first to believe the promises of boastful or plausible adventurers. Henceforth the statesmen, generals and ambassadors in whom she placed her trust were in most cases worthy of it. Patiño was a minister of first-rate ability, Montemar a fine soldier. They were also loyal servants, as well as lovers of their country.

Elisabeth's domestic difficulties, however, were greater than they had been in earlier years. Since Philip's resumption of the crown, he had grown madder than ever, and one of his delusions was to imagine himself an autocrat whose word was law. He held councils and granted audiences at which he talked unceasingly, but rarely to any purpose. At these times he became so jealous of his wife's interference in public affairs that he would not suffer her to be out of his sight. Occasionally, at the most critical junctures, things were brought to a standstill because Elisabeth had no means of communicating with ministers, save by signs when the King's back was turned as he paced to and fro in the cabinet delivering himself of meaningless instructions.

Elisabeth's tact and patience as a wife are to be admired as much as our own Queen Caroline's; but with counsellors, who could not adapt themselves at once to her quickly changing projects, her customary methods were brusque commands and an intolerable arrogance. When she chose, on rare occasions, to use gentler means, it is said to have been even harder to resist her will. For she had charm of voice and manner. The plainness of her features was forgotten in the vivacity and brightness of her eyes, which were more prevalent when they looked kindly than when they blazed with wrath. Her broad little figure was not wanting in dignity and grace, and showed those pleasant roundnesses of shoulders, arms and neck to which, even in ascetic ages, men have not been wholly insensible and which only in the most decadent they have affected to despise.

Spain under Elisabeth occupied a unique position and was the plague of Europe. Not that she was any greedier or more deceitful than her brother monarchs; but she was incalculable. Everyone was shy of dealing with her, especially the timid Fleury, despite his hankerings after a Bourbon alliance. She was a terror to diplomatists, ministers and rulers, because they could never reckon on what she would do next.

With all their manœuvres and deceptions they seldom imposed on one another very thoroughly. Indeed they seemed hardly to aim at doing so, for they diplomatized in very much the same fashion as they made war—by set rules. Every move had its appropriate counter-move, and the cleverest foreign minister was he who had the readiest recollection of the classic precedents best suited to his case. Each could depend on his antagonist to follow the conventional track of duplicity. Elisabeth had never learned their elaborate game and was much too impulsive to be bound by its traditions. Her chief trouble was her temper. When she lost it, she invariably blundered; but often she discomfited her opponents by the unexpectedness of her blunders, and so profited more by their bewilderment than they did by her mistakes.

Though her expedients varied from year to year—sometimes from day to day—her general objective never changed. From the beginning it had been her ambition to provide principalities for her prospective sons, whose succession to the throne of Spain seemed to be effectively barred by the primogeniture of two half-brothers. She also wished to secure for herself a dignified retreat in the not improbable event of her husband's early death. Her policy from first to last was dominated by these aims to the exclusion of all others. Unlike Alberoni and Patiño, she was but little interested in fostering the resources of Spain or in raising the spirit of the Spanish people. Her heart was never moved to enthusiasm by efforts to develop the vast and rich estates which lay west of the Atlantic. These objects were well enough in their way, but they were all subsidiary.

Elisabeth lived to see all things won that she had schemed or hoped for.<sup>[44]</sup> She could hardly have come off better had she been as cool a player as Bismarck or Cavour.

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The master idea that directed all the Emperor's activities was of a different and more shadowy sort. He sought to persuade his subjects to accept, and the powers of Europe to guarantee, the succession of his daughter, Maria Theresa, to the Habsburg thrones. In a sense this was a European interest; for, if the Dual Monarchy began to crumble, there could not fail to be a sanguinary scramble for its widely flung possessions. Moreover, the national interests of Austria and Hungary (though not to the same extent those of the Italian dependencies) lay in keeping the crowns united.

Neither the peace of Europe, however, nor even a particular patriotism, was the motive which inspired the tireless industry of Charles the Sixth. His main concern was that, when he died, a descendant from his own loins should continue to possess his dominions undivided. What stood in his way was the Salic law, which confined succession to the male line. This obstacle he sought to overcome by means of a Pragmatic Sanction which the other nations should acknowledge and promise to uphold. All his policies were subordinated to this end. For this he bargained, for this he went to war, for this he granted alliances and bartered territories, for this he made peace and entered into treaties. By the time he had been reigning for ten years the governments of Europe had begun to understand the fancy value he attached to their various consents. They made their market accordingly, and gained material benefits in exchange for written promises which few of them had any serious intentions of fulfilling. Those of them who held out longest received the highest prices.

By the summer of 1727 the Emperor had made considerable progress with his scheme. His own states had assented to the Pragmatic Sanction and several important princes of the Empire had done likewise. Frederick William of Prussia, beguiled by a vague promise that he should succeed to the duchies of Berg and Julich, had come into the arrangement. The Spanish sovereigns had given the guarantee that was asked of them, their price being the Emperor's undertaking to support Spanish claims against Britain; an undertaking that was never implemented. And Russia also had agreed. France, England, Holland, Poland, Saxony, Savoy and the German Diet were still unpledged. So matters stood at the accession of George the Second. The next eight years of European history is largely concerned with the various inducements by which Charles the Sixth won the formal adherence of the powers that still stood out.

Knowing what the Emperor did know of international agreements and of the slender trust that can be placed in the promises of princes, these efforts of his, spread over so long a period of years, offer a most pathetic spectacle. Never has any monarch been more constant in his pursuit of an illusion. Had Charles studied the archives of Austro-Hungary, or even the annals of his own reign, he would have learned from them the true value of seals and parchments, and how rarely, when opportunity beckons, the rapacity of states ever allows itself to be restrained by honour.

It is one of the ironies of public life that the most inveterate deceivers are so apt to believe implicitly in the probity of others, and to rely on pledges that would never bind their own ambition. As each power in turn adhered to the Pragmatic Sanction, the Emperor seems to have taken it for granted that no bygones would be remembered against him by the signatory, that his own previous shufflings, evasions and deceptions would be sponged off the slate, and that even Prussia would stand by her bargain, although she had been cheated of the consideration.

Having attained in 1735 the summit of his earthly ambition, Charles the Sixth was spared for five years longer to admire the triumph of his diplomacy. He had secured his daughter's heritage over the signature of every sovereign in Europe. She was married happily to a prince who might hope, in due course, to receive the imperial diadem. But, as the Emperor's greatest subject and most faithful counsellor made free to tell him, there were only two securities capable of upholding the Pragmatic Sanction—a strong army and a full treasury; without these all the rest was waste paper.

Prince Eugene's warning passed unheeded. In October 1740, when the Emperor died, his army had not yet recovered from a series of disastrous campaigns. His treasury was empty, save for a few thousand crowns which were claimed by his widow.

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Charles Emmanuel of Savoy and Sardinia was a practical fellow over whom illusions held no sway. His temper was well under control. He aimed at things which were feasible and kept within the bounds of moderation. His foreign policy, like that of Victor Amadeus his father, was directed to extending his dominions by little and little; his domestic policy to fostering the prosperity of his realm by good government. The House of Savoy prospered under these two princes, who never missed an opportunity to go fishing when the waters of Europe were troubled.<sup>[45]</sup>

Courage, both of the military and the political sort, common sense, constant vigilance, and a complete immunity from



sentiment were characteristics of Charles Emmanuel as they had been of his father before him. When any of the great powers were at loggerheads he entered busily into negotiations with both sides. His first concern was to discover if his alliance with the one or with the other would turn the scales. If he came to the conclusion that it would, he then sold himself to the highest bidder. But if, on the contrary, he decided that one side was pretty certain of victory whatever he might do, he then directed his diplomacy to making the best terms he could with the stronger. It does not appear that he ever troubled his head with moral considerations, ever asked if a war was just or the reverse, but only whether or not Savoy could hope to make anything out of it.

The attempts of those whose plans he upset, to depict him as an exceptionally horrid monster of duplicity are not to be taken too seriously. Truly he was no pedant when it came to interpreting his treaty obligations; but his ways were perhaps not more tortuous than the intricacies of the maze in which he found himself seemed to require. Savoy was not one of the great powers. It might easily be crushed in a collision between its eastern and its western neighbours. Can he be blamed justly because his policy was never frank, simple and steadfast?

In some ways Charles Emmanuel's story, if well told, would give more entertainment than those of the Emperor and the Termagant, not only because he stood in a position of much greater danger, but also because no film of illusion or fury covered his watchful eyes.

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Frederick William of Prussia exercised no more influence upon the course of events than did various other German princes whose importance, never very vivid, has now entirely faded. If he appears to us more interesting than they do, it is by reason of his most strange character, and also because he spent his life in fashioning two weapons—a system of administration and an army—which his successor used to change the balance of Europe.

Frederick William coveted the succession to the duchies of Berg and Julich. For this he intrigued and changed sides, but would not fight; for he loved his army too passionately ever to risk the inevitable wastage of war. He received promises from both sides, but in the end was cozened by the Emperor. His hope was turned to bitter disappointment; his dream became a nightmare; his thwarted and suppressed ambitions, acting on a temper not less violent than the Termagant's, reduced him at times to a condition bordering on madness.

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The Empress Anne of Russia,<sup>[46]</sup> weak, indolent and sensual, was a cipher in politics. Biron,<sup>[47]</sup> who ruled in her name, was her lover and a man of blood.

Through Biron's influence, expansion to the east and south ceased to be the main object of policy. China and Persia were left in peace, while the unsuccessful war with Turkey was not of his choosing, but was forced on him by the Porte. He aimed at bringing his royal mistress into the European family, and the method he adopted was to engage her in its quarrels. But, notwithstanding his activities, Anne ever remained in the eyes of the western courts a semi-barbarous potentate, formidable and occasionally useful, but more oriental than European. They never came to regard her as one of themselves. Where Peter the Great had failed, where indeed all the rulers of Russia have failed down to the present day, such an adventurer as Biron was hardly likely to succeed.

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Among Frenchmen the most important character in the second rank is Chauvelin, who served under Fleury as secretary-of-state from 1727 to 1737.<sup>[48]</sup> He was of the old school of Louis the Fourteenth. For him England was the eternal enemy; between her interests and those of France no reconciliation was possible. His pervasive patriotism caused him to dislike all Englishmen, so that he found it hard, being of an irascible disposition, to feign amity even when his ultimate designs would have been the better of simulation. This led occasionally to bursts of insolence, purposeless and unprovoked, which caused embarrassment to his chief; but in the main he was of more help than hindrance to Fleury. It was convenient to have someone who would work everlastingly against England, and who if need were, could be disavowed as a hot-head, but one whom it was impolitic for court reasons to dismiss.

Chauvelin held that few of the material interests of France and Austria were in conflict, and that friendly relations might be established with the Emperor, if only certain personal and dynastic jealousies could be done away. His zeal for bringing about a close intimacy and indissoluble alliance with Spain was the ultimate occasion of his disgrace. He was as enterprising, as audacious, as impatient as Fleury was the reverse. He had admirers who longed for the day when he should replace the timid old Cardinal as chief minister, and raise the prestige of France throughout the world.

Chauvelin listened too soon to their flatteries. His energy was greater than his judgement. In a game of cunning, with Fleury as antagonist, he was bound to lose. He intrigued, presumed to act independently, grew bolder, snatched headlong, over-toppled and fell never to rise again.

Chavigny,<sup>[49]</sup> the diplomatist, was a livelier character. He agreed heartily with Chauvelin's policy and spared no pains to advance it. He gibes wittily at the English, but one does not feel that he hated them in the sombre fashion of his chief.

The real success of Chavigny's career began after he had ceased to represent France at the court of St. James's, and reached its zenith only after Fleury was dead. While he remained in London as minister he was a constant annoyance to the government, but did little to advance the interests of his own country. Like so many clever foreigners, he made the mistake of thinking that he understood the English character and the working of our political institutions. The simplest disproof of his pretensions is that he believed what the leaders of the Opposition told him about public opinion. When they opened their envious hearts to him, as leaders of the Opposition so often do to quasi-enemy ambassadors, and when they did his bidding, by asking awkward questions in Parliament, and in other ways detrimental to the interests of their country, he concluded that he possessed great political power and was strong enough to give the government a fall. His attempt to do so was a failure. It was not until he had left these shores for continental employment that his activities inflicted serious damage on British interests.

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Most English politicians—the critics as well as the supporters of Walpole's foreign policy—were merely partisans. Their praise, like their abuse, sprang from the barren soil of tactics and drew no nourishment from ideas or opinions.

Of those few statesmen who took a serious though subordinate part in European politics Horatio Walpole was the most industrious, the most persevering, the most definite in his views, the shrewdest and the most disinterested. To the close of his long life (which extended far beyond the period now under consideration) he was always ready with his advice to kings and governments, whether they asked for it or not. His official and private letters are honourably distinguished among contemporary correspondence by their regard for international good faith. He was a friend to the Dutch, and remained on kindly terms with Fleury—though this was partly from policy—for long after the British cabinet had become suspicious of the Cardinal's hostility. His narrative would need the historian's shears—for he was very prolix—but it would present a dramatic sequence of causes and events told vividly and illuminated by common sense.

The interest of Newcastle's story (could he ever have found an unflustered hour in which to tell it) would be of an opposite character. His policy was neither the result of personal observation nor far-seeing. It was probably built up for him to a large extent by his official subordinates upon a substratum of Whig traditions and prejudices. It was not altogether unsound and it possessed a certain consistency; but its articulation worked stiffly, like a thing only half alive. Its implications went far beyond his powers of comprehension. Imagination gave him no aid. His mind fell into confusion so often as he was taken to task. His habitual manner of talking produced the impression that he had no fixed opinions; but this was far from the truth.

If Newcastle feared that he might lose the King's favour by expressing certain views, or if he hoped that he might gain it by expressing others—if Walpole spoke roughly to him, as he often did, or even if some minister much less formidable than Walpole contradicted him in council—he was apt to lose his head, and would in a panic give up what he had started the discussion by advocating. But, to the annoyance, and sometimes to the discomfiture, of his colleagues as well as his sovereign, he seemed to forget in a few hours that he had surrendered anything, and when he went back to his office he would set to work once more upon the old lines, as if nothing had happened to derange them.

Carteret's account of these years would make better reading than either the humdrum common sense of Horatio or Newcastle's exposition of his inanimate policy. The competitions of kings and emperors were his favourite study. He had great knowledge and a sympathetic insight. He saw clear views over a wide field. He was hampered, however, in two ways.

In the first place, even after Carteret's expulsion from office in 1730, he still hoped that he might be taken back. A succession of violent attacks upon the government's foreign policy would alarm and antagonise those persons whom it was necessary for him to conciliate. On the other hand, by aiming at accommodation, he must sacrifice the consistency of his ideas and the vigour of his opposition. But opportunism failed to bring about his reinstatement, despite the fact that the Queen favoured his return.

In the second place, Carteret suffered from his association with the leaders of Opposition, to whom foreign affairs were no more than a stick with which to beat the government, whereas his own main interest lay in the matter itself. He soon wearied of party intrigues; but he also soon wearied of his own projects, if circumstances prevented him from carrying them into immediate execution. For these reasons he was an uncomfortable ally. His interventions were spasmodic and inconstant. What he said in the House of Lords and at meetings of the party leaders showed too little consideration for the general strategy of his confederates. At any moment he might fly off at a tangent or sink into inactivity. Even Pulteney with his inveterate malice, his chicken-heartedness and his inexhaustible good reasons for doing nothing, was hardly a heavier handicap than Carteret to this brilliant but distracted Opposition.

Horatio Walpole, after his confidence in Fleury was weakened, proceeded on the assumption that France was treacherous, Spain hostile, and that it was impossible to bind the Emperor by any treaty to uphold the interests of an ally. It therefore became necessary to look elsewhere for assistance in keeping the balance of Europe. He believed that, with proper treatment, the Dutch might be won, and in later years he worked hard to bring about an understanding with Prussia.

Newcastle's views were of a more negative cast. He would not quarrel with the Emperor; he would not become his cat's-paw; he would not give in to Spain; he would not trust the assurances of France.

Carteret saw things in a more imaginative light and entertained grandiose schemes. He would have brought all the Germanic powers into a firm union against France, and so, by keeping the military and diplomatic resources of Louis the Fifteenth fully employed, would have gained a free hand for British policy.

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#### ***IV.—How Walpole and Cardinal Fleury differed in their characters, aims and methods; with some remarks on the community of Europe, on prestige, and on so-called friendships between nations.***

The main characters in this European drama are Walpole and Fleury. They speak for the most part without raised voices, without gesture or grimace; but what they say holds our attention more than the emphatic chatterings of subordinate statesmen, more even than the sublime resonances of crowned heads. We watch their exits and their entrances, and when either of them is on the stage our eyes are drawn to follow his movements in the throng of actors.

By all the ordinary tokens Walpole was, and Fleury was not, a great man. And yet in the long game they played together, Fleury came off the winner.

In the game they played against circumstances fortune remained favourable to both men, until close on the ending of their careers. Each of them, however, lost the final rubber; for, in little more than a year after Walpole's web of policy had been torn to tatters, Fleury's also was in rags.

It is hard to trace any, even the faintest, resemblance between these two antagonists, save that both were incorruptible. They differed no less in the inner workings of their minds than they did in their habits, manners and appearance.

The first portrait is the florid presentment of a fox-hunting squire—bold, shrewd, sanguine and hearty—whose jokes are broad and whose laughter is loud; a loose liver; a hard drinker and valiant trencher-man, in witness whereof his waistcoat and breeches, somewhat wine-soiled, are strained in untidy creases across his great paunch.

The contrasting picture shows a spare ascetic; a figure of almost quaker-like simplicity, decorum and cleanliness; an ecclesiastic without sensual vices, self-disciplined against every form of excess; an excellent talker in his own quiet way, with a swift fine wit and well-stored memory; insinuating, deprecatory, effusive, but uplifted by the dignity of an immutable patience; fortunate, as few men have ever been, in this—that his cunning enabled him to draw a profit even from his timidity.

The primary aims of Walpole and Fleury had more in common than their diverse characters would lead one to expect. With each the preservation of his own power was the prime consideration; each guarded his king with an extreme jealousy; neither would brook a rival.

They were both lovers of peace, partly by instinct and partly from rational motives. War, like any other violent commotion, was an incalculable force that might upset the most firmly settled government. But it was also to be feared on personal grounds; for neither Walpole nor Fleury was by temperament a war minister, and, in event of a long and serious conflict, supreme power would be apt to pass into the hands of other men whose qualities were better suited to such an emergency. And finally war was a foe to the policies of both. For Fleury's administration practised an economy so stringent as to be at times indistinguishable from parsimony. He dreaded war as a hoarding father dreads the importunities of a spendthrift son. Walpole, on the other hand, sought to foster enterprise and prosperity, and he dreaded war as a bad investment which would consume the wealth and energies of the British people without bringing any return. But what the moralists have told us about pleasure is also true to some extent of peace: the best way to secure it is not by deliberate pursuit. A nation that would enjoy peace must show the world that it is at all times ready to sacrifice the very thing it most desires to keep.

Fleury was a foreign minister to his finger-tips and prestige was the god of his idolatry. He sought this object with ever-increasing ardour during his long period of power. Walpole, on the contrary, regarded prestige in a somewhat sceptical spirit and without enthusiasm. Those negotiations with foreign powers which he undertook, not because he liked the work, but because he would not trust any of his colleagues with matters on which peace depended, Fleury delighted in for their own sakes.

Walpole was perhaps over anxious to settle each fresh imbroglio as soon as possible and have done with it. He considered the present rather than the future, and if he saw his way to any reasonable accommodation, he was ready to close the bargain.

Fleury regarded such occurrences in a different light. He took long views, and, though his policy was hampered and delayed by lack of courage, he succeeded in the end; for time was on his side and his adversary became less wary as years went by. The ultimate aims of the mild and pacific Cardinal were really not very different from those of Louis the

Fourteenth; for both these men spent their lives in the endeavour to establish a system which would give France the hegemony of Europe.

Walpole was the sagacious opportunist who deals promptly and resolutely with the troubles of to-day; Fleury was the politic schemer, never impatient, never in a hurry, who is thinking of the day after to-morrow. They are representatives of two schools of diplomacy that have always existed, and since they spring from a fundamental difference in human temperaments, must always continue to exist. It is impossible to say that true wisdom lies in the one rather than in the other; because either way will succeed, as either way will fail, according as it is suited or unsuited to the peculiar circumstances of the epoch. There are dangers both ways. Walpole's policy was wrecked at last largely because he had taken too little thought for the future. A few months later, after a brilliant appearance of triumph, Fleury's policy was also wrecked, not because he had neglected the future, but because no human foresight was capable of devising safeguards against the unexpected.

Fleury pursued prestige as his first aim, peace as his second, and believed that, if these were secured, a reasonable measure of prosperity would follow of itself. Walpole placed these objects in a different order. With him prosperity was the first aim and peace the second; while he seems to have assumed that the intangible benefit of prestige was not likely to be denied to a nation which had gained those other two.

Walpole's constant endeavour to keep his own country at peace, no matter how fiercely war might be raging on the Continent, his unconcealed disgust when he was called upon to give the greater part of his energies to foreign affairs, his occasional negligences, and a few chance phrases misconstrued, have led some people to place him in that school of politicians which, at one time or another, has held the view that Britain can honourably and safely pursue a policy of isolation and lead a life apart from the rest of Europe. It would be more true, however, to say of Walpole, that no other statesman has ever shown a livelier appreciation of the fact that the well-being and security of Britain are bound up with the well-being and security of her neighbours. The illusion that things can continue for long to prosper in our own country while Europe is the scene of turmoils and disasters found no place in his philosophy. His aim was a lasting peace—not an insular peace, but a European peace—and, as a means to this end, he preferred negotiation to the sword; but he waged his pacific diplomacy as vigorously, as vigilantly and, it must be added, as unscrupulously, as any minister has ever waged war. In serving England, Walpole, consciously or unconsciously, was serving the unacknowledged commonwealth of Europe.

What is meant here by Europe are those lands that lie westward of a line drawn from Odessa on the Black Sea to Königsberg on the Baltic, and stretch out to the farthest Hebrides and to the Rock of Gibraltar; the richest humus that is anywhere to be found in the still living and waking world; fertile from the strivings of a hundred generations. What lies eastward of that line is, and always has been, outside the European circle; no sharer in the common heritage, but a thing apart; the possessor, in art and letters, of a fervid genius all its own, which it is easier for the western mind to admire in discontinuous flashes and by uncertain guess-work than to apprehend in a clear and steady light. In practical affairs there is a gap of centuries; for the eastward peoples are unproved, undisciplined, and even yet unprenticed. Most of those ideas and habits that are the warp of social and political understanding throughout the rest of Europe appear to be clean cut off at the Russian frontier by influences not so much hostile as merely alien.

At the Atlantic seaboard many threads in the warp are also cut, though with different shears. Some half-century after Walpole died, the revolted North American colonies made a compact of union. In a constitutional sense they have now been united for a hundred and forty years. They have what Europe lacks, the federal tie. But Europe, despite the absence of any formal bond, despite the independence of its various nations, despite their babel of tongues and their bloody and interminable quarrels, is a vital and organic unity in a sense that American writers have sometimes been slow to understand. The American union lacks what Europe has—an ancient inheritance held in common; the riches of long-suffering, of baulked endeavours, of age-old traditions that still move the hearts of men. America, with its system of national law, its vast and habitable territories within a ring fence, appears to stand upon the threshold of a glorious opportunity; but history is concerned with long stretches of time and even the crossing of the threshold may be a journey of several generations.

The toughness of steel is partly the result of much and heavy hammering. European unity, after more than three thousand years, is still on the anvil; but even the unfinished product is a stubborn and infrangible thing. Its knotted filaments and intertwined fibres are the legacies of tribes and peoples who have lived as neighbours, quarrelsome or kindly, since the days of Homer. The injuries they have done one another in the past as well as the benefits, their conquests and reconquests, groupings and regroupings, revolutions and reactions, rivalries and alliances, the occasional fierce



antagonism of their idols or ideals, have welded them into union—a union which as yet is jealous and unincorporate, but which contains dæmonic possibilities.



*From a line engraving by P. Drevet after the portrait by H Rigaud.*

When we speak of the future of the English-speaking nations or of the Anglo-Saxon race throughout the world, the theme soars upon the wings of poetry and sentiment. And most certainly there are other affinities besides those of propinquity. A common mother-tongue counts for something, and blood is thicker than water. But people whose home is Britain cannot escape from their own particular environment. They are forced, not merely by material, but also by spiritual causes, to be Europeans first and Anglo-Saxons afterwards. Isolation is the bubble of a distempered imagination. Wearied with an apparently insoluble confusion, teased by endless provocations, haunted by the memory of a thousand blunders in the past, British statesmen have sometimes been tempted to bid the other nations of Europe go their ways, and to let us go ours, in peace. But the very essence of the matter is that no one of us can go his own way. Individual men may go, as the Pilgrim Fathers went; but the nations cannot go; and it is not the worst of humankind who choose to stay where they were born. And since we are forced to stay, we must play our various parts manfully, or be borne under. If we allow our prestige to become impaired, if we shirk responsibility and let things of moment go by default—in other words, if we cease to care whether our strength is recognised or not, whether our voice is audible or not, in the councils of Europe—we lose the chief security for our independence. We risk thereby our own ruin and at the same time we injure the whole continental fabric. Confusion and disaster will follow as certainly as if one of the planets in the solar

system should cease to pull its weight. If aloofness is inconsistent with our own safety, it is equally inconsistent with public morality. To be a good European is no mean patriotism.

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The opposition between Walpole and Fleury began somewhere about 1730, and continued for ten years. It was of an indirect or slanting kind.

The Cardinal was soon in difficulties; but he went his way with careful steps, saying smooth things, keeping his wars against the Emperor within bounds, seeking friends for France even among her enemies, tying up assurances with this power and with that one, and incidentally weakening the diplomatic connections of Britain with the rest of Europe. All this he did without encountering much effective resistance from the English government.

Walpole refused to be frightened by the French bogey. It was enough for him, at each succeeding crisis, if the nations of Europe could be induced to stop their fighting. The good government and commercial prosperity of Britain were his chief concerns, and with them Fleury showed no disposition to interfere.

In the whole of these ten years there was no occasion when these two men stood face to face and encountered one another in a duel. Fleury was working sedulously to strengthen the position of France in Europe and incidentally to weaken the position of England; but Walpole paid almost as little attention to this covert attack as Fleury did to Walpole's administrative reforms. Each statesman was engrossed in the set of problems which appealed most strongly to his natural interests. But as we approach the end of this period, we become aware that the foreign relationships of France are in a much more prosperous condition than those of Britain. Fleury has gained the prestige he sought, and France, for the time being, is the most courted and the most influential state in Europe. Fleury is friends with all the world; while Walpole, unsupported by a single ally or by the sympathy of a single neutral, is drifting into war with Spain. Walpole, by neglecting prestige, has brought his country into complete isolation. The diplomatic weakness of Britain is so manifest that even Fleury, who always shrank from violence, is tempted to declare war. The lamentable condition to which his economies have reduced the French navy alone restrains him.

Towards the end of the decade the most vexatious thing of all and, to English eyes, the most surprising, was the falling off of trade. This misfortune produced a general despondency throughout the country, and loud expressions of discontent that were eagerly fomented by the leaders of Opposition. On the other hand, the position of French manufactures and commerce, especially in the oversea markets, was more hopeful and prosperous than it had ever been. Despite the fact that Walpole had made prosperity his chief end, while Fleury had aimed only at economy, France appeared to be gaining on England and stealing its customers. This was partly due to the natural exuberance of an industrious and inventive people responding to the change from universal war to comparative peace, from insupportable taxation to more moderate imposts. During the wars of Louis the Fourteenth British commerce had drawn great advantage from the suppression of French competition in sea-borne trade. During that period it had gained more than it could keep by its own intrinsic superiority. But in addition to this factor, which was undoubtedly of the first importance, another influence tended to the depression of Britain and the recovery of France. It would be hard to prove, but still harder not to believe, that the rapid growth of French prosperity owed a great deal to the prestige which Fleury had lately won for his country among the nations of Europe.

What prestige is, it would be hard to describe precisely. It may be nothing more substantial than an effect produced upon the international imagination—in other words, an illusion. It is, however, far from being a mere bubble of vanity; for the nation that possesses great prestige is thereby enabled to have its way, and to bring things to pass which it could never hope to achieve by its own forces. Prestige draws material benefits mysteriously in its train. Political wisdom will never despise it. Usually it is gained slowly and lost quickly. The unexpected happens. Some upstart minor power commits the sin of impudence without being crushed forthwith by the falling skies. Or a single battle is lost, as at Tours, or Granson, or Valmy. Thereupon the nation that has been predominant becomes suddenly aware that its counsels, admonitions and threats are no longer heeded, and that the awe in which it was so lately held, is being transferred rapidly to another.

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Fleury has been reproached with duplicity and feigning. He was no worse than most of his contemporaries, but only more successful. France had an exclusive right to his devotion. For that reason, if for no other, he could never be the



friend of England. If Englishmen, confounding private feelings with public policy, chose to believe that he was a friend to England, their credulity helped his diplomacy, and it was none of his business to set them right.

Friendship between nations, or governments, or foreign ministers acting in their official capacities is impossible, unless we so alter the meaning of the word as to deprive it of the very essence of what we understand by friendship in the case of individual men. A man, from no motive save affection, will incur danger, loss, ruin or death itself, in order to save his friend. But with nations, as with hives, self-preservation is the paramount consideration; it permeates the most expansive enthusiasm and qualifies every engagement. Good-temper, patience, willingness to understand an ally's point of view, fidelity to specific engagements, a general agreement in its nature temporary about common aims—these are the actual substance of international cordiality. Everything beyond this is illusion, and, like most illusions, dangerous.

Co-operation between two governments at a particular time and for special purposes may bring great benefits to the high contracting parties. But what passes so often for a warmer feeling is only an evanescent excitement and hardly ever springs from a true understanding of the facts. When two nations are carried away by one of these sudden transports of love and sympathy, their imaginations are apt to run riot. Each would be sorely puzzled to recognise its own homely features in the fancy portrait which the other insists on wearing next its heart. Sooner or later disillusion comes, reproaches rise into a clamour, and peace is menaced in the reaction.

Fleury was a friend of Horatio's, from whom he had once received a kindness that he never forgot. Sir Robert was included in his benevolence. The Cardinal was an amiable man who liked to be liked. His private attachment to the Walpoles was the object of much suspicion at Versailles, but it was a benefit to both countries, so long as their policies were in unison. When the cleavage came, Horatio hesitated no more than Fleury did to pursue the interests of his own country under the cover of private friendship. Each imagined that he was hoodwinking the other, and to a certain extent this was the case; but the Frenchman proved himself the finer artist in sentimentality. For years he kept the British ministers hovering between trust and distrust. He protested that his darling object was to deserve their good opinion, and that he was distressed and embarrassed by the Anglophobe proceedings of Chauvelin. When at last, in 1737, the Garde des Sceaux was dismissed, disgraced and sent into exile, Fleury allowed his English friends to delude themselves with the belief that it was their protests that had brought about this punishment. But when Chauvelin was gone the imposture could not be maintained much longer. Gradually and reluctantly Fleury was obliged to acknowledge his hostility. Even when Chauvelin had believed himself to be a mutineer, he had seldom acted contrary to the Cardinal's real wishes.

In the Europe of those days every nation went behind every other nation's back. From time to time there were disclosures—usually of facts with which every government was already well acquainted—and although such scandals were followed (as it was intended they should be) by a great show of official indignation and by popular clamours, no one who lived in the inner circle of statecraft was taken altogether by surprise. When it suited the purposes of an aggrieved government that there should be no disclosure, no scandal, no outburst of popular wrath, diplomacy pretended not to be aware of the deceit. So British ministers went on fondling Fleury long after they knew him for an unfriend, and were well aware that he had made a secret treaty with Spain for the recovery of Gibraltar.

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***V.—How the war with Spain dragged on after the Accession of George the Second; how Britain, with Fleury's assistance, ended it by the Treaty of Seville, and how the Emperor was left out in the cold (June 1727-November 1729).***

At the death of George the First, France and the Emperor had already gone out of the war, and Spain, by her ambassador at Vienna, had signed preliminaries of peace with Britain.

On learning of the accession of George the Second the Spanish court made the same miscalculation that had deceived the politicians in London. It concluded that Walpole's administration was doomed, and that British affairs were certain to fall into weaker hands and into confusion. King Philip was persuaded, moreover, that the Hanoverian dynasty itself was in serious danger. Hoping for more favourable terms, he refused to ratify the settlement that had been made on his behalf. The war dragged on. An attempt to blockade Gibraltar proved fruitless, but British merchants, who traded with the Spanish possessions in America, were still cut off from that profitable market.

The King's speech to the new Parliament which met in January 1728 lamented the continuance of a state of war and the need for further military expenditure. By this time the advisers of Philip the Fifth had realised that Walpole's government was as firmly seated as ever, that the United Kingdom was entirely free from political disorders and that the Hanoverian dynasty was unshaken. Three months later hostilities were stayed,<sup>[50]</sup> the original preliminaries received the royal assent, and the completion of the treaty was referred to a congress of the European powers. In June this congress met at Soissons,<sup>[51]</sup> but it was no more successful in adjusting outstanding differences than its notorious predecessor had been that met at Cambrai.<sup>[52]</sup>

It is easy to have too many people engaged in the same work of pacification. The diplomatic representatives of nations which, in a technical sense, are 'disinterested' often present the chief obstacles to a settlement. The renewal of war is not to them a matter of life or death; possibly it may be an inconvenience; but also possibly a benefit. They are intent on earning petty profits or small commissions, and seek to serve their various masters by sowing tares.

The prime issue at Soissons was to make peace between Spain and Britain, a thing not easily to be done unless Gibraltar was restored. But there were also minor issues in which some of the powers took more interest than they did in ending the war between King George and King Philip. The Emperor in particular was anxious to delay as long as possible admitting Spanish troops to the Italian duchies as security for Don Carlos' succession. In a too friendly understanding between Spain and Britain he foresaw the danger of an alliance that might force his hand and prove embarrassing to his policy. So the proceedings at Soissons were spun out in inconclusive discussions, and, after a whole year had been wasted, the congress was dissolved.

Meanwhile angry words had been spoken in London and Madrid. King George's speech to Parliament in January 1729 expressed the ominous sentiment that actual war might be preferable to a doubtful and imperfect peace.

When King Philip signed the preliminaries he was still brooding on an ambiguous correspondence with George the First which had encouraged him to hope for the recovery of Gibraltar. British merchants complained that, in spite of the armistice, they were harried on the high seas by privateers; and this not only when they were engaged in a commerce which, though technically contraband, had been hallowed by long usage and the connivance of Spanish governors, but also when they were carrying on a perfectly lawful trade with British possessions in America. Where there was so much soreness it did not require a great deal of diplomatic ingenuity to foment suspicions. Nevertheless the renewal of a war that was likely to prove both costly and inconclusive was not regarded with eagerness by either nation. Where a general congress had failed it was just possible that direct negotiation might succeed. Shortly after midsummer William Stanhope<sup>[53]</sup> was sent to Spain on a special mission. His subsequent career as a politician was not much to his credit, but in the present business he showed himself both honest and skilful. His efforts were supported by the benevolence of Cardinal Fleury, with the result that the treaty of Seville was concluded in the following November.<sup>[54]</sup>

The parties to the treaty of Seville were Britain, Spain, France and Holland. Austria was not invited to come into the arrangement, and this soon led to trouble.

The chief merit of the treaty in the eyes of the British government was that it put an end to a tiresome and expensive war; but on Fleury's part it was also a deliberate attempt to establish the relations of the two Bourbon dynasties on a friendly footing.

The main obstacle to Fleury's policy had recently been removed by the birth of a dauphin. Until that event occurred Philip, although excluded by treaties from succession to the throne of France, had been the lineal heir. Any cordial understanding between the courts of Paris and Madrid must at once have stimulated the intrigues of those who sought to secure the reversionary rights of the Orleans family and those others who were interested in passing the inheritance into the Spanish line. This danger having now vanished, Fleury was anxious to earn the gratitude and the friendship of Spain. If he could not prevail on Britain to give up Gibraltar he might at least show his benevolence towards the junior branch of the Bourbon family by bringing his old friends the Dutch and the English into an alliance that would hold the Emperor to his reluctant undertakings in the matter of Don Carlos' succession to the Italian duchies. These rights were accordingly solemnly guaranteed by all the signatories of the treaty of Seville, and it was agreed between them that a Spanish garrison should occupy the territories forthwith by way of security. Spain withdrew the special privileges of trade which she had granted to the Ostend Company; a somewhat empty formality, seeing that this company was to all intents and purposes defunct. The question of Gibraltar was left to sleep, nor, on the other hand, was any attempt made to settle the dangerous dispute as to the rights of British merchants in American seas.

The Spanish policy of Walpole and Townshend between 1726 and 1730 was criticised at the time in a fashion that made but little impression on the public mind or memory, that did but little harm to the government and sheds but little light upon the issues. Its critics were opportunists who had not as yet arrived at any clear views of their own, and who acted, more or less automatically, upon the principle that it is the duty of an Opposition to oppose.

Rather more than ten years after the accession of George the Second the opponents of the administration, who had by that time grown bold in the assurance of victory, began raking in these by-gones for proofs of their own consistency and the wickedness of their enemy. They had no need to be careful of their facts, for the country had forgotten the previous discussion. Proceedings which they now denounced for the first time they professed to have denounced from the beginning. They had a bellicose case, and sought to prove that Walpole was, and always had been, a coward.

This second bout of criticism was more specific and more vociferous than the first but, as it consisted mainly of artless inventions, it lacks authority as evidence. The matters with which historians have concerned themselves are whether Walpole's administration deserves blame or credit for the manner in which it waged war against Spain and for its conduct of the negotiations that resulted in the treaty of Seville.

When, in 1739, the Opposition leaders opened their belated attack on Walpole for his alleged misconduct of the earlier war with Spain, they then intemperately blamed him for having waged it with too little vigour. There were some particles of truth, though a great deal more injustice, in the charge. Walpole was undoubtedly right in having abstained from costly operations on land, whether in America or in Europe, and it was for this omission that he received most abuse from opponents who had made but feeble protests at the time. With better reason it may be asked why, having at his command a fleet as powerful as all the navies of Europe put together, he had not so used it during these four years as to drive every Spanish vessel off the seas. If his admirals had received encouragement they could surely have inflicted much more damage upon the enemy than they did. This languor seems to have been due partly to his temperament, partly to deliberate policy.

Nature had not made Walpole for a war minister but for something different; possibly for something better. He could never put his heart into campaigning. He would much sooner plan a budget than an expedition. He was never on terms of sympathy with his fighting men; what interested them most, interested him not at all. He drew no suggestions from them, nor they any inspiration from him. No soldier or sailor ever gained an ounce of hope or courage from an interview with Walpole. He despised the whole business as well as hated it. When he was involved in a war his chief concern was not how to win it, but how it might be soonest ended.

Walpole's policy was the offspring of his temperament. Like Bolingbroke on an earlier occasion<sup>[55]</sup> he aimed at dealing gently with the enemy. He seemed to argue that the fewer buffets Spain received the less her feelings would be hurt, and the more readily, for that reason, would she welcome proposals of peace. But this calculation runs counter to human nature. With nations as with men the will to peace is usually proportionate to the sufferings and injuries received, and to the strength of the desire that they should cease. An angry antagonist will seldom realise that the other man has struck less hard than he might have done. Magnanimity unless it is believed in earns no gratitude. To Spaniards the strength and the courage of England were measured by the weight of her blows. Had these been heavier than they were, there would probably have been an earlier peace. What is still more important, another and a more serious war, which broke out ten years later, might possibly have been avoided. For the impression these languid hostilities stamped firmly upon the Spanish mind was that Britain had been overrated as an adversary, and that it was an inconvenience rather than an actual

danger to be at war with her. Britain had made it clear that she would not attack by land; while her failure to make full use of her sea-power led to the conclusion that she was less capable of active mischief than had been supposed. Peace is best; but, if a nation is drawn into war, it should fight in such a fashion as to win respect. Half-heartedness in this matter, even when it has sprung from generosity and not merely from timidity, has been one of the most common causes of future wars.

One of the most despicable creatures that history shows us is the statesman who, from a want of courage, energy and frankness, leaves loose ends which he might have tied up; who arrives at what he calls agreement under cover of an ambiguous phrase; who earns the contempt of his adversary by affecting to be reassured by the announcement of some meaningless fine sentiment. Although Walpole's chief aim was peace, the negotiations of Seville are open to none of these charges. What he and his colleagues set out to do they did very thoroughly. Had they been able to do somewhat more than they did, great disasters might possibly have been avoided. Fair criticism will go no further than that.

It was undoubtedly wise to omit all reference to Gibraltar, for the mere mention of this matter was enough to throw public sentiment in both countries into a frenzy. Spanish opinion would not tolerate an explicit acceptance of the British occupation, while British opinion had already been expressed so vehemently against withdrawal that any government that proposed it must have fallen. No amount of frankness, energy or courage could have changed these conditions.

In the special circumstances, it was probably also wise not to attempt to settle the pretensions of British merchant-adventurers to trade with Spanish America. It is true that public sentiment was not as yet inflamed on this issue either in Spain or England. Indeed it was just such a dispute as might be thought to lie within the province of far-sighted diplomacy. But there would have been no hope of safeguarding the future unless on both sides there had been a clear perception of the danger, and a sympathetic desire to avoid it. In England there was a powerful vested interest that might very likely have been induced by a strong administration to abate its extreme demands; but in Spain there was a proud and stiff-necked government that jealously regarded the strict letter of its sovereign rights, although, in a pecuniary sense, it might have gained by a concession.

It is clear that no satisfactory arrangement of this matter could have been come to hurriedly; and time was of the first importance. Walpole and his colleagues were more concerned to smother a present war than to guard against vague future possibilities. They were heartily sick of a tiresome negotiation that had dragged on for more than two years. They would not jeopardise peace by opening up a new discussion. Walpole was probably the only statesman in Europe capable of treating on the trade issue, and his preoccupations made it impossible for him to undertake it. He was obliged to work through Townshend and William Stanhope, whose characters were ill-suited to such a task. Even supposing that he foresaw the danger as clearly as we now see it in retrospect, he could hardly, as a prudent statesman, have acted otherwise than he did.

This trade issue, which became more and more difficult to adjust as years went on, was complicated but not obscure. British merchants claimed the authority of old custom for their dealings with Spanish subjects in America. It was a very lucrative business; the buyers were eager, and Spain, owing to the backward condition of her industry and commerce, was not in a position to supply their wants. But on a strict interpretation of treaties, more than nine-tenths of this trade with England was no better than smuggling, connived at from good nature, or from indolence, or corruptly, by Spanish officials on the other side of the Atlantic. So long as the two nations remained on friendly terms, serious trouble was not likely to occur; but it could have been foreseen that, if ever their relations became strained, Spain would attempt to enforce her regulations. Thereupon a contest must at once arise between legal rights on the one side and prescriptive rights on the other.

This in fact was precisely what happened less than ten years later. The British sufferers at once raised a loud outcry, and the sense of grievance soon spread from the merchants to the press, the politicians and the people. As so often happens, a private interest produced a national sentiment, and before long, strange as it may seem, not only the honour but the religion of the English race was believed to be at stake. To Spaniards it seemed equally clear that the honour of their own country was concerned in maintaining every tittle of its sovereign rights. When popular feelings arrive at this pitch it is usually idle for statesmen to hark back to the origins of the dispute, or to seek on commercial principles a solution of what at the beginning was a purely commercial matter.

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## ***VI.—How Townshend differed from his colleagues, quarrelled with Walpole, and resigned (May 1730).***

The treaty of Seville, which put an end to war between Spain and England and which drew the two branches of the Bourbon family together, gave great offence to Charles the Sixth. It was a new grouping, an alliance of four great powers, and one of its objects was to hold him to his undertakings with regard to the Italian duchies. He was affronted, though he was not materially injured, by the withdrawal of his special privileges of trade with Spain. His dignity was wounded because he had not been asked to take part in the discussion or afterwards to come into the settlement. A more reasonable Emperor than Charles the Sixth might well have viewed the matter in the same light. His anger was much to be regretted, but it was inevitable and had been foreseen. A sufficient reason for leaving him out in the cold was that the treaty of Seville would probably never have been made had Austrian diplomatists been allowed to meddle in the negotiation.

Charles the Sixth made no secret of his displeasure. He collected a large army at Milan and began casting about him for allies in northern Europe. Townshend was only too ready to oblige him with a quarrel. Whenever the Emperor put himself in an offensive attitude, Townshend's first impulse was always to square up to him. The secretary-of-state was an honest, irascible Englishman, intensely jealous of the prestige of his own country. He chafed under the Emperor's pompous assumption of superiority, his gross egotism, his untruthfulness. George the Second, though he had the misfortune to be a German prince, was also King of England, Scotland and Ireland, and as such, he was, in Townshend's eyes, the equal of any Emperor. What advantage could there be in keeping up an obsequious friendship with Vienna? what harm in a breach?

Townshend's mind worked always on these lines whenever Austria became troublesome. His idea was that Charles the Sixth would never be really useful to British policy until he had been soundly beaten. And so the chief secretary-of-state was all for counter-plotting in northern Europe, and for making war in Italy, Germany and on the Rhine, so soon as the allies of Seville could put themselves in a posture of offence. But these were not the views of the British cabinet or of the French government, of Walpole or of Fleury.

Fleury was always opposed to brusque and violent measures. Moreover, French opinion did not at all favour the idea of engaging in a costly war in order to forward the ambitions of the Queen of Spain; a benevolent diplomacy would be a sufficient proof of Bourbon friendship.

The feeling against Townshend's policy was even stronger in Britain than in France. To end a war with Spain only to begin another upon a more extensive and expensive scale with Austria seemed an intolerable absurdity. Although the tradition of common interests between England and Austria (which dated from the wars against Louis the Fourteenth) had no sanctity for Townshend, it had a very real hold, not only upon the court, whose sympathies were naturally German, and upon politicians both Whig and Tory, but also on the popular mind. The fact that Britain, since Stanhope's treaty in 1717, had been, technically at least, the ally of France, counted for less than the older sentiment that France, by the laws of nature, was the rival and the potential enemy both of the Empire and of the United Kingdom.

Townshend was not allowed to have his way. From the treaty of Hanover in 1725 to the treaty of Seville in 1729 the guiding influence in foreign affairs had been Walpole's. Townshend, though ostensibly the manager, had been rigorously, but tactfully, controlled. To Walpole's moderation at the beginning was due the credit of preventing a widespread European conflagration.

While George the First was still alive it had been necessary to deal very patiently with Townshend, for his influence over the King and the King's mistress was one of the main props of the administration. But after the accession of George the Second, with whom Townshend had little influence or favour, it was no longer dangerous to treat the secretary-of-state in a rougher and more peremptory fashion.

Townshend could now no longer delude himself with the idea that he was the political equal of his brother-in-law. He had become a subordinate figure, and he bitterly resented this change, both on personal grounds and because he believed it to be opposed to the spirit of the constitution. By law and tradition there was no such office as that of prime minister. But if he aimed at upholding the principle of ministerial equality, his opportunity was badly chosen. He was unlikely to find his colleagues ready to support his views upon the abstract question, when, with few exceptions, they agreed with Walpole upon the practical one. It could not be maintained that in the present instance a despotic chief was bullying the cabinet and forcing its members to accept his policy against their own better judgements. On the contrary, a secretary-of-

state appeared to be insisting that he was accountable only to the King, and denying that his colleagues had any right of interference in the conduct of his department.

It is not impossible that if Walpole upon this occasion had dealt gently with his brother-in-law, as he had been used to do in the reign of George the First, Townshend, despite his ill-humour, might at last have been brought into agreement. But when men are worried by the pressure of affairs, and when there is no longer an absolute need for the exercise of tact and patience, few will be found ready to practise these virtues out of sheer goodness of heart. Walpole might have pleaded that time was precious and must not be wasted; but we may suspect that, at the back of his mind, there was a stronger motive; that he regarded Townshend's continuance in the cabinet as a needless embarrassment; that as he was no longer obliged, so he was no longer willing, to brook interference. The ill-feeling which had been smouldering for three years past between these two brothers-in-law and lifelong allies now flamed up in a violent quarrel. After a few weeks, during which Townshend made a last vain attempt to assert his lost predominance and to procure the dismissal of Newcastle, he handed in his resignation, which was at once accepted.

Whatever sentimentalists may think of Walpole's action in this matter, there can be no doubt that it was an advantage to the government to be rid of the chief secretary-of-state. The fact that his view of a certain important matter of policy differed from those of his colleagues was not the main matter. He was a man with whom it was almost impossible to work when his feelings were ruffled. His grievances were of various sorts and there was really no way of removing them.

At the beginning of his career Townshend had been a much more important person, in politics, in society and in the county of Norfolk, than the country squire whose sister he had married in second nuptials. He was a great nobleman, and it is certain that his influence and connections had been of much service in helping Walpole in his upward career. Townshend had been a staunch and honourable friend in good and bad fortune. While the acknowledged title of the firm was 'Townshend and Walpole' he made no difficulties. And even after the world had come to place these names in a different order, things went smoothly enough, so long as the instinct of self-preservation obliged Walpole to humour his friend's pretensions to equality. The death of Lady Townshend in 1726 had removed a peacemaker. In the new reign Townshend's great importance vanished. Nor was his temper improved by what history must regard as a very trumpety consideration. Walpole, finding himself in possession of ready cash and a princely income, had built a vast new house in Norfolk. The ancient dignity of Rainham was eclipsed by the upstart glories of Houghton. Here at certain seasons of the year large and boisterous companies would assemble, to enjoy the hunting of foxes and Walpole's too convivial hospitality. Although these proceedings were mainly inspired by political motives, they also excited the wonder and admiration of the whole neighbourhood. To Townshend's aristocratic eyes they were an abomination, vulgar and unseemly. It was hard to be outstripped in the political race, but to sink into the second position in his own county was, for a country gentleman, a still more bitter experience.

In spite of Townshend's defects it is impossible not to like and respect his character. Though prompt to take offence he conducted his quarrels like a man of honour. Moreover, he understood his own chief weakness and struggled hard to avoid occasions that might provoke his anger. He refused to take a hand in attacking the government he had left, although the Opposition made him flattering advances. He would not even attend Parliament, lest his warm temper might betray him into denunciations of his old colleagues. He was one of the honestest men that ever breathed; not a suspicion of corruption ever attached itself to his name. His ambitions were all of a worthy kind. He had great energy and never shrank from labour; but he saw neither clearly nor far; his gifts for administration were not on a par with his industry; there was confusion in his department, and there were also many delays. Horatio Walpole, though he stood by his brother, never ceased to treat his old chief with affection and respect. Townshend brooded on his wrongs but bore no malice. He lived, not unhappily, for eight years after his fall. Like some other exiles he disregarded the timid counsels of Montaigne and found in agriculture a sovereign balm for disappointed ambition. The farmers of England, from that day to this, have owed much to his efforts and example.

Henceforth Walpole was, in actual fact though not in name, prime minister; the first in English history since the Restoration. For the next eight years his supremacy in the administration was unchallenged. Only two of his successors ever exercised an equal power; none—not even the elder Pitt—ever possessed more. All the rest, down to the present day, have had far less. Long after Walpole's time the chiefs of governments continued to disclaim the 'premier' title; but public opinion gradually adapted itself to the innovation, and the elasticity of the constitution was stretched to accommodate a new office.

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## VII.—*How Walpole made the second treaty of Vienna, and how Fleury was left out in the cold (July 1731).*

From Townshend's resignation until the Queen's death, more than seven years later,<sup>[56]</sup> Walpole was supreme in all branches of government—in the foreign department as much as in any of the others, although in this he did not always choose to use his authority with a concentrated purpose.

The secretaries-of-state were not altogether content with their subordinate positions, but Newcastle was too timid and Harrington too lazy to set up openly as mutineers. Occasionally they were hopeful that by playing on the whims and weaknesses of the King they might thwart the policy of their chief and at the same time increase their own importance; but so long as Caroline lived their efforts in this direction were frustrated.

During this period the Opposition never ceased denouncing Walpole as 'sole' and 'despotic' minister. Their first complaint went pretty near the mark; and also their second, in so far as his treatment of rivals and opponents was concerned; but there was no trace of despotism in his attitude towards the House of Commons or in his government of the British people.

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When the duke of Parma died in January 1731, the Emperor promptly seized this opportunity to challenge the powers which had signed the treaty of Seville. With the least possible delay an imperial army occupied the duchy, which had been guaranteed to Don Carlos. This action threw Elisabeth into violent indignation, and it also placed Fleury in a position of great difficulty. Despite his desire for a Bourbon alliance, he was not prepared to pay for it by making war on Charles the Sixth in support of Spanish claims in northern Italy. Nor was he willing that France should give up anything in order to buy the Emperor off. So far as Spain was concerned, the signature of the treaty of Seville by Louis the Fifteenth appeared to have been nothing more than an amiable formality. The test of Fleury's good faith had come sooner than he expected, with the result that he found himself distrusted at Madrid.

During the six months which had passed since Townshend's resignation Walpole had given a friendly bias to the negotiations with Austria. He had no more intention of going to war than Fleury had, but he was prepared to offer a price which he thought would tempt the Emperor. Providing Don Carlos became duke of Parma, Elisabeth cared not whether it was won for him by the sword or by fine promises.

Chauvelin, whose darling project was the Bourbon alliance, scented danger when he found British diplomacy more than usually busy at Madrid, Vienna and the Hague. He was all for outbidding Walpole's offer to Spain, whatever it might be. But Fleury was in one of his most grudging moods. He would take no risks, neither would he make any sacrifices; but it occurred to him that he might put a stop to England's courtship of Spain and Austria by making her sensible of his cooling friendship. Chavigny was accordingly dispatched to London, not with the title of 'ambassador,' but—in order to call attention to French displeasure—only as 'minister.' He was instructed to make a parade of indifference, and to let it be known that he had been given no powers to negotiate on anything.

Chauvelin chafed, while Chavigny bestirred himself, making as much mischief as he could with the help of the Opposition. But Walpole was not to be frightened by this somewhat childish procedure. He would much rather not offend France, but he was no longer afraid of giving umbrage. The French alliance had already served its chief purpose by dealing a heavy blow at the Pretender. The Hanoverian dynasty was now established in the second generation, and Jacobites were of less account than formerly.

In July 1731 the Second treaty of Vienna was signed by Britain, Holland, Austria and Spain.

By making this treaty Walpole won his greatest diplomatic triumph. In return for guarantees of the Pragmatic Sanction by the two Maritime Powers, Charles the Sixth finally abandoned his Ostend Company, which had been a provocation to both. He further agreed to allow Spanish troops forthwith to garrison Parma on behalf of Don Carlos. Britain was the greatest gainer by this treaty, although she reaped from it no direct material benefits. Her solidarity with Holland was re-established for a brief space; her estrangement from the Emperor was ended; she had won the goodwill of Spain, and, in so doing, had destroyed—at least so it appeared—the menace of a Bourbon alliance. Fleury's timidity had lost him the trick, and, to his despondent lieutenant, it seemed also to have lost him the game. The Second treaty of Vienna marks a



fresh grouping of the powers, and France was left out in the cold.

In transactions of this sort there is usually one nation that wins the premier position and whose superiority is acknowledged, tacitly at least, by the rest of the world. On this occasion, the last for thirty years, Britain was that fortunate nation, and Walpole found himself regarded for a brief space as the most potent statesman in Europe.

He gained this remarkable prestige without aiming directly at it. His immediate object was to prevent a war which seemed imminent and in which, if it broke out, Britain might have been forced to take part. His second and remoter object was to free Europe from the danger of war for some years to come; and this he hoped to achieve by doing away the long-standing cause of quarrel between Elisabeth and the Emperor. He succeeded in his first aim, but not in his second.

Although Fleury dissembled his chagrin, French opinion was much perturbed by the new arrangement. The Cardinal was freely blamed for a misadventure, the consequences of which no one felt so poignantly as he did himself. It wounded his professional pride as foreign minister to see Britain playing the leading part in Europe. Moreover, France had suffered an affront in not being invited to take part in an important continental settlement. No great power has ever been, or ever will be, content if it is ignored when a general adjustment is proceeding. So long as Europe remains an organic unity without any kind of central machinery capable of regulating the impulses and activities of its various members, such exclusions and the resentments they create can hardly be avoided. Nor can they ever be hidden by the side that feels itself aggrieved, any more than the other side can hide the satisfaction it takes in the humiliation of an envied neighbour. Repercussions of this sort are inimical to peace.

Walpole's nature was not vainglorious. He was the last statesman in Europe to make a parade of his triumph, but he had no choice as to his methods of negotiation. Had he been content to keep step with the slow paces of France, there must have been war between Spain and Austria, with the probability that it would soon become more than a local conflict. By taking the only way which in his opinion could lead to peace he had offended France. He had chosen the less of two evils. It is as unlikely that the Second treaty of Vienna would ever have been made if Fleury and Chauvelin had been allowed to take part in the negotiations, as that the earlier treaty of Seville would ever have been made if the Emperor had been invited to send his skilled procrastinators to a congress. In both cases there were on the one side several powers interested in coming to an agreement, while on the other there was a single power, interested only indirectly in agreement, while it was directly desirous of preventing a too great growth of friendliness among its neighbours. In these circumstances it was but common sense to aim at bringing together the powers that were disposed to enter into an agreement and at excluding the other which was moved by a divergent purpose.

In 1729, when the treaty of Seville was hatching, the Emperor had not been unwilling that the war between Spain and Britain should end; but he had judged it to be contrary to his own interests that Britain, Spain, France and Holland should have nothing left to quarrel about. On such occasions the excluded party is peculiarly liable to panic; the rifts in the supposed cordiality of the new combination are hidden from him, and he is apt to believe too readily in the predestined permanency of the agreement that has been made behind his back.

In 1731 France had very much the same reasons for being disgusted with the Second treaty of Vienna. For although Fleury desired peace, and although the treaty seemed to secure peace, a good understanding between Britain and the Empire meant that Austria, the most dreaded political rival of France, and England, her most dangerous competitor in trade and colonisation, would gain strength by putting aside their mutual distrust. For, after the disappearance of the Ostend Company, these two powers had no material interests that clashed. If goodwill grew up between them, it might lead to a renewal of the alliance that had shattered the ambition of Louis the Fourteenth.

Walpole understood very well that his success at Vienna could not fail to weaken the alliance between France and Britain which had subsisted after a fashion for fifteen years. But Fleury was known to be a lover of peace and he was also reputed to be a sensible and amiable man. It might be possible before long (as had happened in previous disagreements) to win him back to cordiality by the influences of a friendly diplomacy and by private compliments of a soothing character. But Fleury was himself too fine a master of soft words to be taken in by them. He soon appeared to be as serene, as gentle, as effusive as he had ever been, but the relations of France and Britain never became again what they had been before.

The Cardinal set to work at once in his quiet, cautious, timid, persistent way to recover what he had lost. His ambition soared, and he aimed definitely at raising the prestige of France higher than it had ever been since he first took office. His chief object now was to make friends with Austria, and not even the violent interruptions which shortly occurred were able to divert his settled policy. Spain and Savoy must also be drawn into the orbit of France, and the smaller

northern nations must be detached from Britain. Fleury's motives were not vindictive, but purely rational. He bore Walpole no malice. Undoubtedly he aimed at bringing about the isolation of Britain, but only in order that she might become dependent on France. He desired to have the assistance of King George's arms and diplomacy, yet Britain was not to figure as an equal, but only as a subordinate member of a Bourbon alliance.

We must give Fleury his due. Though valour was not one of his qualities, he had in him an admirable strain of fortitude. He was now in his seventy-ninth year and had just suffered a serious rebuff. And yet on the morrow of it he is found laying his plans for the future as if he had had half a lifetime in front of him. He had been long enough in politics to know that there is seldom finality either in victories or in defeats. He knew also that in one respect he had still an important advantage over his victorious rival. For Walpole had used up his reserves while those of Fleury remained intact. Britain, for the benefit, not of herself, but of Spain, had at last guaranteed the Pragmatic Sanction, while France alone among the great powers was still unpledged.

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## VIII.—*Concerning the war of the Polish Succession and how it divided Europe into three fresh groups (February 1733-October 1735).*

In little more than eighteen months after the Second treaty of Vienna had been signed the whole scene changed. Fleury was on the way to fortune, though he knew it not and at first regarded what was happening with blank dismay.

The great powers (save Britain and Holland) were again in a ferment of treaty-making and warlike preparations. There was a new grouping, and by the end of 1733 the war of the Polish Succession was in full blast. Russia was shaking a mailed fist at the French nominee; France, Spain and Savoy were at the Emperor's throat; the Bourbon alliance—so much dreaded on the one side, so eagerly longed for on the other—had come about, and Fleury had given a secret but solemn promise of French aid in driving the British out of Gibraltar.

Fleury was very ignorant of finance and left this department of state to his underlings; nor was the management of a fractious parliament one of his cares. Unlike Walpole, he was therefore able to give his continuous attention to foreign policy. In Chauvelin he had a pushing subordinate, whom he did not wholly trust and whom he kept at all times under strict restraint.

In London, on the other hand, two co-equal and independent secretaries-of-state divided the responsibility for foreign affairs. In a constitutional sense they were not Walpole's subordinates but his equals, and such authority as he had over them was due solely to his own qualities. Secretary Harrington was incredibly indolent and the King's sycophant. Secretary Newcastle was incredibly busy, but near-sighted and liable to causeless panics. As these two ministers were rarely in a perfect communion, the courses of their diplomatic activities tended not infrequently to diverge.

So often as things were seen to have fallen into a dangerous confusion Walpole would assert a co-ordinating authority. Upon such occasions he worked at foreign affairs in great bouts of energy; hardly anything escaped his vigilance or could ruffle his patience; his will prevailed over King, Queen and cabinet. But so soon as he had achieved his immediate ends and the secretaries-of-state had been freshly started on a fair course, his control tended to become less rigorous, with the result that such mistakes as he had chanced to make were rarely mended, while those future benefits which might have been expected from his labours were not always harvested. In the domestic sphere Walpole was a careful husbandman who left little to chance; but in the foreign department he neglected to watch over the growth and winning of his crops with the same solicitude that he had brought to the ploughing and the sowing. Moreover, his fund of patience gave out when the emergency had passed. He was apt to be short and brusque with the secretaries-of-state upon whom the continuance of his policy depended. Newcastle, with all his faults, was not a negligent minister, and from time to time, in his confused and fussy way, he would offer warnings and suggestions that were worthy of attention. As a rule, however, he was only snubbed for his pains. Walpole was an over-worked and over-worried man. Absorbed in his own administrative work, he resented distracting conferences, and, as commonly happens to people who follow this method, he often found himself forced in the end to give to uncongenial problems a vast deal more time than would have been required had he shown himself more receptive and long-suffering at an earlier stage.

Walpole had been engaged in one of these bouts of energy during the fourteen months which followed Townshend's resignation. By his own personal efforts he had then succeeded in accommodating the differences between Spain and the Emperor, in staving off the dreaded Bourbon alliance, and in preventing a European conflagration. When the Second treaty of Vienna was signed in July 1731 it seemed that for some time to come events might be expected to pursue a peaceful course, and that he might safely turn the main current of his energies into their accustomed channels. He thereupon ceased to be the masterful inspirer and director of British diplomacy and became instead the supervisor and critic of his two managers. This was by no means the same thing, and with statesmen like Harrington and Newcastle it was not enough. The difficulties which met them at the very outset were not observed and reported by them in their true perspective.

It was not many months before the Emperor was boggling over the investiture of Don Carlos in the Italian duchies. Punctilious delays that were occasioned as much by stupidity as by ill-nature, caused intense irritation at Madrid and roused the easily awakened suspicions of the Termagant. The sharp tradesman's eyes of Charles Emmanuel judged the occasion propitious for beginning to bargain with Vienna for a modest increase of his dominions. He offered in return a permanent undertaking to support the Emperor against the attacks of his enemies. Charles Emmanuel's brother princes were somewhat shy of accepting his notes of hand; but his bond was fairly good security where, as in this case, his own interest lay in meeting it. Against the encroachments of Spain the Emperor could not have found a heartier ally.

On the whole, except at Turin, the British government was well served by its ambassadors.<sup>[57]</sup> If pressure had been promptly and dexterously applied at Vienna, it seems likely that Charles the Sixth might have been induced to cease from senseless provocations of Spain, and at the same time to make himself secure against Spanish aggression by placating Savoy. But there was lassitude in British policy; things were allowed to drift, with the result that fresh troubles had become inevitable before the seriousness of the danger was clearly understood in London.

In January 1733, on receiving a personal appeal from the British sovereign, Charles the Sixth agreed to make concessions which a few months earlier would have satisfied Spain and which it still seemed possible she might accept. An unexpected stroke upset these hopeful calculations. In the following month, 'Augustus the physically strong,' Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, ended his cheerful but unedifying life.

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The election of Augustus to the Polish throne had been compassed in 1697 against the opposition of Louis the Fourteenth. Seven years later he had been expelled and forced by Charles the Twelfth of Sweden to abdicate. Stanislaus Leszczyński, a young, brave, amiable and accomplished nobleman, had then been set up in his stead.

After the Swedish defeat at Pultowa in 1709 Stanislaus in his turn had been expelled and Augustus reinstated. He did little, either good or harm, during his long reign. An abler and more energetic monarch might possibly have made a worse failure in governing a people distinguished to a remarkable degree by artistic and intellectual gifts and by the quality of charm, but in all practical affairs the most inconsequent in Europe.

When in 1725 the duke of Bourbon had been at his wits' end to find a bride for the boy-king, Louis the Fifteenth, Marie, the elder daughter of the exiled Stanislaus, was suddenly made Queen of France.<sup>[58]</sup> From the first this marriage was unfavourably regarded by French opinion. It was not in the national interest, because it brought neither dower nor any increase of weight in European affairs. It wounded the national pride, because the new Queen was not even of royal birth. It was humiliating that the father-in-law of the King of France should be living in poverty and seclusion. And should it some day be possible, without too great sacrifices, to raise Stanislaus to an illustrious position, both Louis and his subjects would have been pleased to see the slur removed.

Several years before the death of Augustus, Louis had communicated in confidence to his chief ministers his intention of attempting the reinstatement of Stanislaus when the Polish crown fell vacant. This decision was due mainly to sentiment and family feeling, and only in a small degree to policy.

If the election of Stanislaus could have been procured by diplomacy and without resort to arms, Fleury might have favoured the project, for its success would have demonstrated in a striking fashion the recovery of French influence in continental affairs. But the old Cardinal was shrewd enough to see that, in addition to diplomatic support, armies, fleets and transports would be needed to set Stanislaus on the Polish throne and keep him there. For certainly the Emperor would regard it as an outrage to have a French nominee forced upon him as his next-door neighbour. The princes of the German Empire would be likely to hold the same opinion, more especially as Augustus the Second had left a son who was ready and anxious to become Augustus the Third. Russia, for somewhat different reasons, would oppose Stanislaus and favour his rival. There was not the slightest hope that the Maritime Powers would take the French side in the dispute, and it was by no means improbable that they might be drawn in to help the Emperor owing to their obligations under the Second treaty of Vienna.

On this particular issue, however, Fleury dared not oppose the wishes of his sovereign. He could only trust that his own consummate skill in obstruction might be able to limit the evil and avoid the dangers that would be involved in sending a numerous and costly expedition to the Baltic.

France, having issued betimes a somewhat hectoring pronouncement, which gave the world to understand that she would insist upon the purity and freedom of the forthcoming election of the Polish king, proceeded to forward the candidature of Stanislaus by diplomatic pressure, by domestic intrigues and by payments in specie.

The new Elector of Saxony was neither enterprising nor courageous. He looked to be made King of Poland through the efforts of his friends.

The Emperor strongly favoured the pretensions of the Saxon prince on several grounds, but chiefly because Augustus had promised, in the event of his election, to guarantee the Pragmatic Sanction, a pledge to which his father, owing to a

supposed personal interest in the Austrian succession, could never be brought.

The Emperor was hardly less reluctant than Augustus to resort to military measures which were bound to result in war with France. Walpole saw further. He realised that an actual armed intervention by Austria was not the only danger. The British ambassador at Vienna was instructed to point out how important it was to avoid every kind of demonstration or activity that France might be justified in regarding as an unfriendly act. This wise counsel, however, the Emperor was quite incapable of following, for, by the laws of his unfortunate nature, he invariably gave offence in whatsoever circumstances he found himself. He withdrew his own troops from the western Polish border, but allowed the troops of Augustus to enter Austrian territory and take their place. He also encouraged Russia to mass an army on the eastern border so as to threaten Warsaw.

Biron, who had previously been civilly treated by the Emperor and who was not at all unwilling to keep good European company, easily allowed himself to be persuaded. Moreover, in his view it was the interest of Russia to assert her power, and to make it clear that no king should reign in Poland except with her consent.

At the beginning, French diplomacy seemed to prevail. In September, Stanislaus, having crossed Europe in a humble disguise, was duly elected King of Poland. Though bribery and intrigue both contributed to this result, it is clear that an overwhelming majority of the noblemen electors desired to have him for their king. But when, in a few days, the Russian troops advanced, he discovered, probably without surprise—for he understood his fellow-countrymen—that those nobles who had chosen him with such hearty acclamation were altogether incapable of combining for his defence. There was no army to defend his rights, nor any national organisation for creating one; only a vague and swiftly vanishing enthusiasm. The time was too short for procuring help from France, even if the government of that country had been willing to send it. Stanislaus might therefore choose between captivity and flight.

To be done once and for all with the least important part of this story:—The newly chosen King of Poland made his way to Dantzic where, for nine months, he lay besieged by a Russian army. French reinforcements arrived, but they amounted to less than two thousand men and were speedily taken prisoners. In the following July the city was forced to surrender, and Stanislaus, assuming a fresh disguise, fled across the western frontier and passed out of Polish history.

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In Chauvelin's view, of which he made no secret, the Second treaty of Vienna had been deliberately contrived for the purpose of isolating and humbling France. He professed, nevertheless, to regard it as a blessing in disguise, inasmuch as it had done away the Anglo-French alliance of 1717. There were a good many ardent patriots who strongly favoured 'a spirited foreign policy.' These persons agreed with Chauvelin in thinking that, for the last fourteen years, the energies of France had been crippled by an engagement which made her policy subservient to British interests. Even isolation was preferable to servitude. The government of Louis the Fifteenth was now free to follow its own course and the feelings of England need not be considered more tenderly than those of any other nation in Europe. Chauvelin was for war with Austria, not only because he regarded the Polish succession as a French interest, but also because he longed to make an unmistakable gesture of revolt against co-operation with Britain.

Fleury saw things in a different light. A quality much to be admired in his conduct of affairs is that, unlike lesser men, he took no delight whatsoever in dramatic gestures and definitive pronouncements. In his heart he might agree with Chauvelin that France was now freed from all her treaty obligations and from all her unwritten engagements to Britain; but why say so? Why denounce an alliance which had in fact ceased to hamper French policy, but which conceivably it might be profitable to invoke in some future, unforeseen emergency?

Fleury disliked and dreaded the Polish adventure. Being forced, nevertheless, to undertake it, he set himself resolutely to find some means of persuading the Maritime Powers to remain neutral, of gaining Spain and Savoy as allies, and of preparing in advance some plausible pretext for not sending a French fleet into the Baltic or a French army into Poland.

The Dutch at once fell into Fleury's trap. They hated the idea of war; but, as usual, they thought more of a temporary respite than of permanent security, more of keeping Holland at peace for the time being than of stifling a general conflagration. When Fleury offered them an undertaking that France would not threaten their independence by invading the Austrian Netherlands, they gave an assurance of neutrality without so much as consulting the British government.

Walpole disapproved of their precipitancy. He desired peace for his own country as much as they did for theirs; but he was wise enough to see that the only way to safety lay in stifling a general war. In his opinion the Maritime Powers

should have acted together, and should have kept their neutrality in doubt, with a view to bringing their combined and utmost pressure to bear upon Paris and Vienna.

In this first round Fleury had been too quick for Walpole. By avoiding provocation and being beforehand to remove the most patent cause of anxiety, he had done much to reassure public opinion not only in Holland but in Britain. Poland was no more to the one country than it was to the other, while the immunity of the Austrian Netherlands from French aggression was of equal importance to both. Moreover, Fleury had shaken the solidarity of the Maritime Powers by inducing Holland to act independently of Britain. Under the Second treaty of Vienna these two states had become co-guarantors of the Emperor's dominions against unprovoked attack. But the fact that Holland had been so skilfully manoeuvred into a hasty promise of neutrality amounted to an admission on the part of her statesmen that the impending struggle did not come within the category of 'unprovoked attacks.' Fleury reckoned that Walpole, from his desire to keep out of the war, would not be long in repudiating, on the part of Britain, any treaty obligation to act alone in support of the Emperor. This forecast proved to be correct.

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In September 1733 (simultaneously with the election of Stanislaus) a treaty was made at Turin between France and Savoy, to which it was hoped that Spain would shortly become a party. It was not hard to bring Charles Emmanuel into a powerful alliance which promised him as his reward the whole Milanese.

Unfortunately for Fleury's purposed combination, the treaty of Turin excited insuperable opposition in Spain. Nothing was said in it about Mantua, the north-eastern gate of Italy, on which Spanish policy had fixed its covetous eyes. Moreover, Elisabeth was of opinion that the possession of the Milanese would make Charles Emmanuel too strong. Better that these territories should remain under the Emperor than pass into the hands of Savoy, which was a growing power. Since the Termagant was determined that Charles Emmanuel should not have the whole Milanese, and since Charles Emmanuel was equally determined that the Termagant should not have Mantua, Fleury (who in his innermost soul was very much of the same opinion as Spain on the one subject and as Savoy on the other) found himself in a predicament of considerable delicacy.

In October a fresh election was held in Poland, Augustus became King, and France declared war on Austria.

Although Charles the Sixth had not actually drawn the sword against Stanislaus, it was notorious that he had favoured the rival candidate, that he had facilitated the movements of Saxon troops and that he had instigated the Russian invasion. Consequently, when he claimed support from the Maritime Powers against an unprovoked attack, he had a weak case. If they should ultimately decide to support him against France, their motive for doing so would not be his legal rights as an ally, but their own interests.

Having failed to bring Elisabeth into the alliance of Turin, Fleury set on foot and concluded a separate negotiation with Spain. The treaty of the Escorial was intended to remain secret.<sup>[59]</sup> This undertaking was of a more ambitious character than the treaty of Turin, and had both a wider and a longer range. Its immediate object was to combine the military and naval forces of the two high contracting parties against the Emperor. Its second object was to injure Britain, whose special privileges of trade with Spain were to be done away in return for French aid in recovering Gibraltar. Its final and most grandiose object was a family compact between the two reigning branches of the House of Bourbon. This compact was to be 'eternally binding'—a phrase of mockery and ill-omen.

In truth these consanguineous allies were very far from a real union of hearts and interests. It was an essential part of Fleury's tortuous policy to make and to keep Spain dependent on France, and he dreaded, hardly less than Charles Emmanuel did, the unchecked predominance of Spain in Italy. Don Carlos was already secured in Parma and Piacenza, and also in the reversion of Tuscany. Under the treaty of the Escorial Spain was to be entitled to all further conquests in Italy which the war might produce, save the Milanese, which France had already promised to Savoy. What if Mantua were taken, as was not unlikely, and the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily? In the event of a brilliantly successful war, it would need all Fleury's adroitness and duplicity to wriggle out of his inconvenient engagements. The simpler way, which accorded with the Cardinal's pacific disposition, was to steer a middle course between victory and defeat.

From the beginning Elisabeth and her ministers placed but little reliance upon the treaty of the Escorial and the good faith of France. They suspected that at any moment Fleury might seek his own advantage by a separate agreement with the Emperor, in which the ambitions of Spain would be ignored.

These mutual jealousies and suspicions were a shifting foundation for an alliance which professed to be ‘eternally binding.’

Charles Emmanuel, on the other hand, was equally distrustful of the treaty of Turin. He had little hope that Spain would come into it, and grave doubts if the French promise of Milan was seriously intended. In his simple way he set himself forthwith to discover if he could get his price out of the Emperor by changing sides.

The Termagant, who was also a realist, had already set on foot an inquiry at Vienna, with the object of finding out if the Emperor had overcome his previous objections to marrying one of his daughters to one of her sons.

Charles the Sixth was endowed with a peculiar gift for missing opportunities. He had blundered into a dangerous situation; but it seems as if, even at this stage, he might have extricated himself and turned the tables on France. It would have needed no high diplomatic genius to divide a band of enemies who so much distrusted one another. But the Emperor lacked even the modest equipment that was required for this manœuvre. He was as badly served in the council-chamber as in the field, partly because he had no skill in reading men’s characters, partly because he wanted to do too many things himself. His own judgement was almost always at fault, for the reasons that he could not observe, could not listen (except to flattery), and possessed not a particle of horse-sense. His imagination was not of the sort which penetrates and divines; it showed him only fantasies. In action he hampered himself with interminable formalities, so that he could rarely strike while the iron was hot. In spite of this, one of his worst faults was an uncontrollable impatience, which led him to insult those whom it was his purpose and his interest to conciliate, and to rush with his eyes shut into the snares of his enemies.

Since there was no means of avoiding war, Fleury determined that it should be waged in territories to which French troops could march across their own borders, rather than in remote, northern regions whither they would need to be conveyed in ships, at great cost and also at considerable risk. He availed himself, therefore, of the excuse with which history has made us familiar in cases where a nation finds it inconvenient to succour an ally in his extremity: it was explained to the beleaguered Stanislaus that France would relieve the pressure which kept him cooped up in a corner of his kingdom, by creating a diversion elsewhere. Fleury, however, knew very well that the Russian army—the only, but overwhelming, enemy which Stanislaus had to face—was not in the least likely to be diverted from Poland by a French campaign on the Rhine, or by the combined operations of the allies in northern Italy. The Cardinal’s course of conduct could be amply justified by his inability to send reinforcements to Dantzic in large enough numbers or in time to affect the result; but his credit was not strengthened by the excuse he gave.

During the autumn of 1733 French forces entered northern Italy, where they were joined by the army of Charles Emmanuel, in fulfilment of the treaty of Turin, and somewhat later, by the army of Philip the Fifth in fulfilment of the treaty of the Escorial. Perfect unison was out of the question, seeing that Savoy and Spain, although allies of France, were not in alliance with one another. For a few weeks, however, through the efforts of the French commander, a grudging co-operation was maintained, with the result that before the year ended the Austrians had lost nearly everything in northern Italy, save the city of Mantua.

A vigorous attack would soon have reduced this solitary outpost and barred the way against the re-entry of Imperial troops. The Spanish general, urged thereto by his government and his own sound military instinct, was for an immediate siege. The French general, schooled by Fleury to be as dilatory as possible, took time to consider. Charles Emmanuel, finding himself in comfortable possession of the Milanese much sooner than he had expected to be, flatly refused to help, alleging as his justification the refusal of Spain to come into the treaty of Turin. Early in the new year the Spaniards drew off indignantly and marched south against Naples. For the time being co-operation was at an end.

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Six months later—in July 1734—Dantzic had fallen; Stanislaus had disappeared and Augustus reigned in Poland under the minatory benevolence of Russia.

The Spanish army under Montemar had taken Naples, had scattered the Imperial forces in irretrievable defeat, had overrun the whole of southern Italy and of Sicily, and had proclaimed Don Carlos king of these domains. The inhabitants welcomed him with enthusiasm, believing that any change—even change to a Bourbon from a Habsburg—must be for the better.

A French army under the duke of Berwick—the ablest soldier in Europe—had occupied Lorraine, invaded the Palatinate



and, crossing the Rhine, had taken the strong place of Philippsburg<sup>[60]</sup> under the eyes of the veteran Prince Eugene, whose forces were too weak to strike a blow for its defence.

In northern Italy, however, things were going none too well with France and Savoy. The withdrawal of Montemar was less to blame for this than their own slack co-operation, their want of vigour and the absence of any plan. Even without the Spaniards, they still had a superiority in numbers, which was not counterbalanced by any brilliancy of generalship on the other side. Nevertheless, the initiative, without any serious effort on the part of the French and the Savoyards to retain it, passed to the Austrians, who, strengthened by reinforcements which poured in through the open door of Mantua, engaged in an offensive which was strategically successful. Charles Emmanuel was not left for long in peaceful enjoyment of the Milanese. The French won some victories, but at a heavy price, and were forced to fall back on Parma. Neither ally came at all eagerly to the assistance of the other when it was attacked, or seemed to be much concerned with the success of the common cause. The French commander was hampered on the one hand by Charles Emmanuel's inexhaustible reasons for holding himself aloof, and on the other by Fleury's anxiously repeated instructions to avoid a military decision.

From the beginning Fleury had discountenanced a vigorous prosecution of the war either on the Rhine or in northern Italy. His motives remain somewhat obscure and were probably mixed. He retained all his old horror of expense. Age and natural timidity made him morbidly apprehensive of the political repercussions that might result from any serious military check. He shrank from weakening Austria too much, lest the presumption of Spain and Savoy should thereupon jeopardise his policy of making friends with the Emperor. A too easy and too brilliant success might alarm the Maritime Powers for the balance of Europe, and might even bring them in as belligerents on the other side. So far the war was unpopular in France and Fleury desired that it should remain so. He thoroughly understood his fellow-countrymen. If he allowed them to win victories they would soon get drunk on glory. Their rising temper would call for a younger and bolder minister. His own downfall could not be long delayed, and Chauvelin or some other would succeed him. The old Cardinal won his game; but it is clear that nature had not intended him for a great war minister.

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By the beginning of 1735 Montemar had consolidated his conquests in the south and was back again with his army in Lombardy. The Austrian successes of the previous year had alarmed Charles Emmanuel sufficiently to engage him for a short space of time in a combined effort against the enemy. By May the Imperial troops were again driven out of all northern Italy, except, as before, the city of Mantua. But when it was proposed to besiege this fortress, differences at once arose among the allies, and time was wasted in operations that were not seriously intended either by France or by Savoy.

Since nothing prospered, owing to an utter want of co-ordination, Montemar undertook to reduce the city with his own forces, if his two allies would only make themselves responsible for keeping off any Austrian army that might attempt to raise the siege. The last thing, however, which either France or Savoy desired was that Spain should have the honour and profit of taking Mantua by herself. Charles Emmanuel would not agree to anything, and refused point-blank to lend his siege train unless King Philip first signed the treaty of Turin. Fleury rejected on general grounds the proposal for standing on guard and leaving Montemar to conduct the siege. It would be impolitic, he urged, to abandon the principle of co-operation in so important an enterprise. It would also be well to make yet another effort to induce the Spanish government to come into the treaty of Turin. Fleury knew full well that there was no hope of Philip signing the treaty of Turin; but a further reference to Madrid might waste a few more weeks, and he had his own reasons for wishing to cause a military delay. Meanwhile the French commander received instructions from his government to leave open a road by which provisions and supplies could be sent in to the Mantuan garrison. The fact was that both Fleury and Charles Emmanuel, unbeknown to one another or to Spain, were busy with secret negotiations at Vienna. The Termagant herself, encouraged by Walpole, was playing with the same idea. Again the old Cardinal won; for Elisabeth was too late, Charles Emmanuel too suspect, nor had he enough to offer.

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In October 1735 the military commanders were still in a deadlock. Just two years had passed since war began. The Emperor had given up all hope of a crowning victory, while the allies were too suspicious of one another to desire one.

Suddenly and without warning, news came that France and Austria had agreed upon the preliminaries of a general peace, and their respective generals were ordered to conclude an armistice. As, however, no mention was made of Savoy or of Spain in connection with this armistice the imperial forces, with an unusual and suspicious promptitude, pushed into the Milanese and at the same time drove Montemar before them into Parma. It was now clearly hopeless for either of these states to continue the struggle. Charles Emmanuel, with his habitual philosophy, made the best of a bargain that had been concluded behind his back; but it took six months to procure from the Termagant a sullen acquiescence in the terms that had been arranged for Spain.

Such are the main facts concerning the war of the Polish Succession. The diplomacy of this period is a much less simple matter.

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## IX.—*How Walpole dealt with the Dutch and with the Emperor, and how he overcame his difficulties at home (Midsummer 1733-August 1735).*

The busyness of chanceries and ambassadors during this two years' war would provide material for a long and entertaining volume; but it is much too delicate a thing to bear compression into a couple of chapters. The episode is one of those that must be told at length in order to be fully understood.

There are doubtless many epochs of history that gain in dramatic force by condensation; but others, of a different nature, are incomprehensible unless we are let into the secrets and can watch the movements of a crowd of characters. It needs not only an unconfined discretion, but a quick eye and a light touch, to bring the spirit of life into such a narrative. If some well-meaning epitomist should undertake to give us the actual substance of *Figaro's* achievements—separating these from the hundred or so of hazards, checks, shifts, counterplots and stratagems, and from all the bustle and activity which lead up to a fortunate ending—he would have but little difficulty in carrying out his purpose; for the tangible residues of the *Barbier de Séville* and of the *Mariage* are capable of being stated accurately on the same half-sheet of note-paper. And yet the reader might yawn over the digest, who would have read the plays themselves with delight. Unfortunately, almost every writer who concerns himself with history is obliged at times to engage in the thankless task of simplifying things that do not lend themselves at all readily to simplification. In order that he may be free to follow his main theme he must be prepared to ignore the comedy and be content with an abstract.

These two years are filled with fuss and agitation. Mysterious agents, sometimes sauntering and sometimes hurrying, carry proposals from court to court. Everything is confidential, but the curtain of secrecy which pretends to cover their comings and goings has many large rents in it. Personages, the gravest and the most crafty, lose their sleep, their heads, their tempers and their games. Statesmen, whose brows are furrowed with politic cogitation, commit the most amazing blunders. The absurdest things happen, just as they do in a farce.

Fleury, opening a private letter (at arm's length, according to his custom), lets an enclosure fall into the fire. This enclosure turns out to have been a still more private letter from the Emperor himself, who refuses to believe a word of the explanation that is offered for the loss of it; and so a promising negotiation is nipped in the bud.

British statesmen keep returning, with a pathetic constancy, to their superstition that Fleury, though a very weak man, is really their friend. In Chauvelin, on the other hand, they see not only their own enemy but the Cardinal's, whose policy and authority they conceive him to be for ever engaged in undermining. Horatio, at an interview with his old friend, presumes to warn him of his danger, and Fleury, quite equal to the occasion, feigns both gratitude and alarm. Chauvelin in fact has merely been following his chief's instructions.

The British cabinet, being anxiously concerned to remove the suspicions of the Dutch, to bring them into a common line of policy, to persuade them to put in order their neglected land and sea forces, keeps on sending Horatio backwards and forwards between London and the Hague for more than a year. Horatio, plying all his arts of persuasion, gradually overcomes the difficulties that beset him. The terms that the Maritime Powers shall propose jointly to the belligerents are almost agreed and are sent over to London for final revision. But the British cabinet, in order to curry favour with the Emperor, or else from pure carelessness, sends an outline of those proposals to Vienna, without so much as a word either to the Grand Pensionary or to Horatio. By ill-luck the King's messenger, staying overnight at the Hague, blabs of his errand; the Dutch take alarm, suspecting, not unreasonably, that they are being cozened, and Horatio, after all his pains, is made to look a fool.

At another time Fleury has on foot simultaneously three separate and conflicting sets of confidential negotiations with the British government. One of these, which is known to Chauvelin and the French council, passes through Chavigny to the secretaries-of-state. Another, which is known to Chauvelin, but neither to the French council nor to Chavigny, is entrusted to a secret agent named Jeannel, who holds mysterious interviews with Horatio and the Grand Pensionary at the Hague. The third, which is unknown even to Chauvelin, is a holograph correspondence between Fleury and Horatio, who is authorised to show it, under the seal of secrecy, to the Grand Pensionary. Dispatches in one sense are fetched and carried between St. James's and Versailles; the unsuspecting Jeannel, who looks to make his career, journeys backwards and forwards on the Paris road with proposals and amendments in a different sense; while letters in still another sense and of an affectionate character are interchanged between Fleury and his old friend Horatio. Then suddenly there is an outburst of fictitious indignation in France; the council talks high and mighty stuff about the King's honour; Chauvelin becomes outrageous by order; Fleury pours forth a torrent of accusation, which would be altogether perplexing were it not that one of his chief objects, in all these negotiations, has been to gain time; and this he has succeeded in doing.

Again Fleury, more in sorrow than in anger, loads his old friend Horatio with reproaches; but agrees, nevertheless, to talk things over with him in Paris. The two meet, and at first the atmosphere seems favourable; then, when Horatio suggests that a signature would help matters, Fleury breaks off in dudgeon; Chauvelin is instructed to be rude; the one old friend indicates to the other old friend that his presence in France is no longer desired; but on the same day by a later messenger Fleury writes again to embrace Horatio and to invite a reopening of the correspondence when he shall have reached his destination.

Even Chauvelin, so contemptuous of blunderers, contributes to the farce by handing to Lord Waldegrave, the British ambassador, among some official papers, a compromising letter from the Pretender. This Waldegrave, after having had it copied, returns with a polite message. For once the professional fire-eater is thoroughly upset and begs Waldegrave, whom he has so often insulted, to stand his friend and let the Cardinal know nothing of the incident.

These are only a few of the odd things that happened, while the cleverest politicians in Europe were racking their brains to find some way of ending a torpid, grotesque and inglorious war.

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Neither in Austria nor in Savoy was policy hampered in the smallest degree by internal differences. The Emperor in the one case and Charles Emmanuel in the other was his own minister; nor was there in these two countries anything which can be described as public opinion, or even as an independent court opinion.

The policy of Spain had an equally free course, though not for precisely the same reasons. Spanish opinion was capable of making itself heard and needed at times to be considered; but on the present occasion it was entirely at one with its government. Patiño, who was a minister of remarkable ability and force of character, saw eye to eye with his sovereigns.

It was different, however, with France, Holland and Britain. Public opinion, which no French minister could altogether disregard, and which every Dutch and English minister was obliged to conciliate as a condition of retaining his power, was at this time in a state of perplexity and nervous apprehension in all three countries.

For these reasons the Emperor, Charles Emmanuel and Patiño had easier games to play, assuming that the cards were at all evenly divided, than had Fleury, the Grand Pensionary and Walpole.

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Walpole's first troubles were with the Dutch. When Horatio arrived at the Hague in the autumn of 1733 he was shocked to find that the aims and motives of his country were everywhere regarded with suspicion. Popular opinion was thoroughly disaffected and the elder statesmen were in the same mood. Fleury's diplomacy might claim a trifle of the credit for this state of things, but the chief cause of it was the failure of the British government, during the preceding nine months of anxiety, to keep touch with its ally. It had not seemed to invite an exchange of views, and the flow of information from London to the Hague had been inadequate and inconstant. Though this unfortunate procedure had been due in most cases either to confused counsels in the cabinet or to the delays, obscurities and negligence of Harrington, the secretary-of-state, it had been imputed by the Dutch to a deliberate want of candour. They suspected that Britain was determined, or even already pledged, to enter the war on the Emperor's side, so soon as Holland could be manoeuvred into a position in which it would be impossible for her to stand aloof. It was also firmly believed by the Republican party that King George was scheming to bring the Dutch into the war in order that his son-in-law, the Prince of Orange, might find a favourable opportunity for regaining political ascendancy by his military services. The fact that British diplomacy, being ignorant of these apprehensions, had taken no steps to remove them had led to the precipitate declaration of neutrality that was so serious an obstacle to Walpole's policy.

Charles the Sixth's fatal gift for queering his own pitch had created additional difficulties for British diplomacy. For some time past the Dutch had considered themselves ill-used; so that, apart from general considerations of policy, they were less inclined to do the Emperor a good turn than a bad one. They surveyed their obligations under the Second treaty of Vienna in a grudging spirit and concluded that, as the Emperor had brought the war on his own head and, as he had broken his treaty obligations by stripping the 'barrier' towns of troops, ammunition and supplies, Holland was amply justified in coming to an agreement of neutrality with France, in return for an undertaking that there should be no invasion

of the Austrian Netherlands. The prevalence of these suspicions and discontents temporarily obscured the traditional policy of the Dutch, which, ever since the days of William the Third, had recognised the advantage of co-operation between the two Maritime Powers, and the danger of weakening Austria for the aggrandisement of France.

After some months the indefatigable Horatio succeeded in putting Anglo-Dutch relations on a more satisfactory footing. The Grand Pensionary and the elder statesmen were slowly made to understand that there was no real opposition between the views of Robert Walpole, the director of British policy, and their own. He was as anxious as they were to keep out of the war, but he saw more clearly than they did that the only way of keeping out of it was to bring it to an end. There was this difference, however, between them, that, while Walpole favoured energetic mediation, they would have been well enough content to wait and see.

At the outbreak of war Walpole took once more an active control of foreign affairs. The secretaries-of-state—Newcastle and Harrington—shrank into subordinate figures. They made his task more difficult than it need have been by their frequent blunders and occasional disobedience; but the policy of Great Britain from that time forward until the war ended was not their policy, or even the King's, but wholly Walpole's.

From first to last Walpole's energies were engaged in three separate lines of effort. The first of these consisted in dexterously evading or in bluntly refusing the Emperor's reiterated appeals for succour. The second aimed at keeping Fleury in constant fear lest the Maritime Powers might go to the aid of Austria if France pressed that country too hard. The third was devoted to framing terms, and encouraging a secret diplomacy which might lead the Emperor to make peace with France or, failing that, with Spain—to Walpole it mattered little with which, for the success of either set of negotiations would end the war.

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The ceaseless importunities of Charles the Sixth that England should come to his assistance raised questions of Expediency, of strict Legality and of Good Faith.

To allow the Emperor to be ruined would certainly be inexpedient; but Walpole disbelieved that any such catastrophe was likely to occur. Serious danger might be averted by other than military means. Participation in a European war—especially if the Dutch stood out of it—would inflict a grievous blow on British prosperity; nothing short of a supreme emergency could justify so great a sacrifice.

That Walpole sincerely believed in the wisdom of his policy is certain; but was it in fact wise? Taking a long and a broad view of British interests, was it prudent to allow Austria to be bled and weakened for the benefit of the allies in general, and in particular, of France, the perennial and jealous rival of Britain? The contrary view was strongly held at the time by a good many sensible people who were neither faction-leaders nor office-seekers, and six years later their warnings seemed in a measure to be justified by the disasters which befell the Empire under Charles the Sixth's successor. Nor are historians agreed even at the present time.

The answer to a question of this sort can never be more than an opinion. Walpole has been freely charged with having taken short views; but supposing the Emperor to have been upheld by Britain, is it certain that, when Maria Theresa came to the throne, the Austrian treasury would have been any fuller than it was, or the Austrian army in any better case? Charles the Sixth was not a prince of whom it would have been safe to predict that his resources would be better husbanded after victory than after defeat. Where the future is so obscure and the factors so incalculable as they were in this case it is usually safer to take short views than long ones. Even had Walpole been able to foresee the future, he might well have doubted if the armed intervention of Britain between 1733 and 1735 would have changed the course of events between 1740 and 1748.

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Walpole and the Emperor considering, each from his own standpoint, the question of strict Legality, not unnaturally came to opposite conclusions. When the unexpected happens, treaty obligations are apt to become a field for casuistry. A lawyer, defending his client in a criminal court, is bound to take advantage of every technical loophole or flaw in the indictment. The duty of a statesman, responsible for the safety of his country, is not less imperative. Unlike the lawyer, however, he is subject to no tribunal and is himself the judge of the validity of his own argument.

The Emperor was certain that the Second treaty of Vienna gave him the right to claim assistance from each of his allies, since he had been wantonly attacked by the French.

Walpole argued in a contrary sense, that, by the terms of the treaty, Britain was not pledged to act alone; that Holland had definitely refused to help; and moreover that the Emperor's recent proceedings had been of such a character as to release the Maritime Powers from all military obligations. The refusal of Holland, however, did not debar Britain, though in a technical view it might excuse her, from fulfilling the terms of the alliance.

The plea that the Emperor had forfeited his claim to armed assistance by offering provocation to France is not wholly convincing. An honest tradesman dealing with his own affairs would hesitate to avail himself of so thin a pretext. For Charles the Sixth had neither planned nor threatened any attack on France. He had done no more than use all the influence, other than military, which he possessed, in order to defeat the re-election of a monarch who had been dethroned twenty-four years earlier, who had been living quietly in exile ever since, and who had no hereditary claims whatsoever on the Polish crown. What might happen in Poland was none of France's business; she had no interests there; was not even a neighbour. Louis the Fifteenth was promoting a ridiculous candidature merely in order to make provision for his father-in-law. The original provocation, therefore, came from Versailles, not from Vienna.

On the whole, however, the question of strict Legality must be answered in Walpole's favour. He had a good enough case for standing out, though he might easily have found an even better one for joining in the war had he desired to do so.<sup>[61]</sup>

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An opposite method of inquiry is applicable to the question of Good Faith. Here technicalities are brushed aside; we are urged to take broad views, and are reminded that it is unprofitable to examine a treaty as if it were an ordinary civil contract. The mere fact that a treaty cannot be enforced by any court, and that each of the parties to it is free to interpret his obligations according to his own judgement, gives it something of an optional character, and, by doing so, places it in a different category.

The validity of treaties, the worth or worthlessness of the various obligations which they have attempted, at one time or another, to impose, are too vast a subject to be dealt with here. We are now concerned only with a single aspect of this problem—with the undertaking so frequently given by the high contracting parties to make war, in certain contingencies, on behalf of one another. Clauses in this sense are mutually agreed to at a time when the negotiating governments believe themselves to have a common interest that is, or may be, menaced by a common enemy.

If, when the emergency arises, they are still of the same mind, the treaty provision for military assistance serves a useful purpose, because it dispenses with the need for further negotiation and provides ready-made a general plan of co-operation. Time, however, often brings about changes swiftly though insensibly: changes of beliefs and fears, of interests and enmities. If one of the nations, finding itself attacked, sends out a call for help, it may be shocked to find that the other is now no longer conscious either of a common interest or a common enemy.

Up to a point—but only up to a point far short of ruin—every nation desires to keep its self-respect and its good name with the world. But this is only a moral sanction and a weak one at that. For self-respect can be fostered artificially by refining oratory, while skilful propaganda can do much to preserve the good name. And besides, the thing that in the long run earns most respect and self-respect is the maintenance of a nation's strength.

War is among the most terrible calamities that can befall a country, and to no one ought it to appear so terrible as to the statesman on whom lies the awful responsibility of making the final decision. If he is worthy of his trust he will never let a vague or dubious point of honour determine the issue. He dare not give the other party to the argument the benefit of a doubt. If he allows himself to be influenced by chivalry or pity, he is indulging his own Quixotry at the expense of his country. The question of good faith does not present itself to his mind as it would were he considering an agreement between himself and another private person. Agitators may enunciate the obligation in that crude form, in order to inflame opinion; but the initiated, whose business it is to make and interpret treaties, are well aware that there is a real, and not merely a specious, difference between an engagement to fight and every other kind of undertaking. They are also aware that no nation, whose affairs are in wise and patriotic hands, can ever be surely relied on to make war on another's behalf, unless its own safety or advantage—directly or indirectly, in the present or in the future—is concerned in doing so. Every foreign office suspects every other foreign office of having made this mental reservation at the time of



signing—‘providing the essential conditions remain the same as they now are.’ Moreover, every foreign office is aware that it almost passes the wit of man to draft a clause of obligation so specific as to rule out a large variety of considerations—all more or less relevant, more or less truthful—which would justify a refusal to fight.



*Vanto Pinx. 1739*

*I. Simon fec. 1741*

***The Right Hon.<sup>ble</sup> Horatio Walpole Esq.***

The reasons that are given, on the one side for asking assistance, on the other side for refusing it, rarely meet in a frank impact; rather are they like ships which pass one another on opposite courses.

Was not the danger in 1733 one of that very kind which the Emperor had aimed at guarding against when he signed the Second treaty of Vienna? Was not Walpole in fact disappointing expectations which he had encouraged when he won his signal diplomatic victory in 1731?

On the other hand, the Dutch and English were positive that the idea of trouble arising in regard to Poland had never been present to their minds while negotiations were proceeding: the common interests of the allies at that time had been assumed to lie in the south and west, not in the north and east. Walpole also protested that in order to fulfil the spirit of the treaty he must not be bound by the letter of it; that as a mediator he could give more effective help to Charles the Sixth than as a belligerent. Moreover, the obligation to render assistance, military or otherwise, was not unconditionally

binding. The Emperor's behaviour during the critical months before war broke out was an important consideration. Had he been reasonably discreet and conciliatory? Had he shown due respect for the counsels and warnings of his allies? Or had he disregarded their representations and gone his own headstrong way into troubles that need never have arisen? It was all very well to talk of good faith, but the Emperor had no right to drag his allies into a ruinous war, unless he could show clearly that he had used ordinary common sense in order to avoid it.

A discussion on such lines as these will never lead to an agreed conclusion. Even at this distance of time, there is room for differences of opinion: my own is that Walpole acted throughout as a clear-headed, stout-hearted and patriotic minister might be expected to act, and that the charge against him of bad faith cannot be sustained.

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Walpole's difficulties in keeping Britain at peace were undoubtedly very great, but at least he had not to contend against the force of public opinion. The country was not in one of its bellicose moods. At court, in the cabinet and among the moneyed interest there were persons and cliques who favoured war; but there was no war party either in Parliament or out-of-doors. All classes cordially disliked the idea of war, especially of a war on behalf of the Emperor.<sup>[62]</sup> The reason why the Opposition leaders threw so much zeal into their taunts and entreaties was their desire to lure Walpole into a course that might destroy his administration by making him unpopular.

Nevertheless, it was not public opinion that prevented Britain from joining in the war, but only Walpole's constant vigilance. Many of the conditions were very favourable to a landslide that would have swept interest and prudence before it.

Walpole, as the Emperor soon came to understand, was the sole insuperable obstacle. Some way must, therefore, be found for getting rid of him. Charles the Sixth was simple enough to believe that his diplomacy could overthrow the British administration. Apparently he had forgotten the humiliating failure that seven years earlier had attended a somewhat similar attempt. He was informed—and his information was quite correct—that the King and Queen had strong German sympathies; also that Pulteney and other leaders of Opposition listened with eager sympathy when the Austrian ambassador denounced Walpole to them as an enemy. Why then should George the Second hesitate to dismiss a minister whose policy he disliked, when a cabinet of a more accommodating complexion could be formed in a twinkling?

The Emperor could not understand why matters of this sort could not be arranged in England as they were in Austria. Neither could he realise that Walpole's good sense was more than a match for the sentiments of the King and Queen; or that the leaders of Opposition, who had no fixed principles, and were ready to intrigue against the government with the Devil himself, had already committed themselves more deeply to the French minister Chavigny than to the Imperial ambassador.

No one could have been less suited to his delicate task than Kinski, the Austrian ambassador in London, a man as stiff and overbearing as his Imperial master. He made no headway.

To Kinski's assistance came shortly Wassenaar, a high official travelling into Portugal on some diplomatic errand. Wassenaar made leeway rather than headway; for, being a sensible fellow, he was soon convinced by Walpole that the Emperor's true interest lay in making peace as soon as possible through the mediation of the Maritime Powers. He even went the length of regretting that Charles the Sixth was not privileged himself to listen to the wise words of the British minister.

To the immeasurable disgust of Kinski, Wassenaar was followed soon afterwards by an agent of a different type. Strickland, bishop of Namur, was a drunken and dissolute ecclesiastic. An Englishman by birth, he had formerly been an exile and a professed Jacobite, who had earned money wages and sundry favours from the British government as a reward for spying on the Pretender. The Emperor, who distrusted all his servants, was at the same time the most gullible of men. Strickland bragged successfully at Vienna of his great influence at St. James's, and at St. James's, when he arrived there, of his great influence at Vienna. As bearer of letters from the Emperor and Empress he was admitted to private interviews with the King and Queen, who at first were favourably impressed. Walpole, however, who knew a good deal about Strickland's past, saw at once that he had to deal with a clever and plausible old rogue, who might make considerable mischief if he were suffered to remain in England. The envoy had nothing to urge which had not been already urged and answered a hundred times. Walpole caused him to be closely watched. When it was discovered that

he held secret communications with the leaders of Opposition, his credit with the court dropped at once below zero. When it was further discovered that he went forth on foot, late at night, wrapped in a red rug riding-cloak, to disreputable haunts, he fell into utter contempt, was exposed to the Emperor and promptly recalled. Kinski's wounded heart overflowed with gratitude to Walpole, who reaped on this occasion, as he had done on others, his reward for not doing things by halves.

There was no cessation, however, of the Emperor's efforts to bring Britain into the war; but all his arguments and entreaties failed to shake either Walpole's resolution or his power. There were threats that Austria would make peace without considering the interests of the Maritime Powers; would withdraw all her garrisons from the Netherlands (which were pretty well stripped already); would cede these territories to France, thereby menacing the safety of England and the independence of Holland; while an over-zealous underling talked passionately of burning Amsterdam by the way. But it was all in vain; neither Walpole nor the Grand Pensionary would budge from his determination to mediate if possible, but on no account to fight.

Although Walpole's policy was in no sense opposed to the views of his fellow-countrymen, many of them regarded his proceedings with distrust. His administration, owing to its domestic policy, had recently come very near foundering in a storm of unpopularity, and the skipper, having been forced suddenly to change his course, was suspected by some of a want of judgement and by others of a want of firmness. Politicians, country gentlemen and men of business, being themselves sorely puzzled by the obscurities of the European situation, assumed that the chief minister's mind must be in a similar state of confusion. They were ready to blame the government for having allowed the country to drift into a very dangerous dilemma.

Something might have been said for this view, had there been anyone capable of saying it; but the leaders of Opposition made a very poor hand of their opportunities. Their eloquence was incoherent and their action inconsequent. Bolingbroke, Pulteney, Wyndham and Carteret were for ever exchanging private confidences with the French minister, while in Parliament they were for ever prating about the debt of honour due to Austria. They did Chavigny's bidding by asking questions and pressing for papers, the only object of these activities being to embarrass the government by fanning the Emperor's suspicions in one way and those of the Dutch in another. When Chavigny pulled, they danced like puppets on a string. Kinski, nevertheless, who was no shrewd observer, continued to regard them as the Emperor's friends.

They may be acquitted of any real concern either for France or for Austria; and they were equally regardless of British interests. Theirs was a party game from first to last. When they denounced the chief minister for deserting the ancient ally they stopped short, as Oppositions so often do, of clearly stating the alternative and boldly advocating war. They hoped to goad or manœuvre Walpole into joining forces with Austria, because they foresaw that such a course would set the country against him.

From this babel of doubt and recrimination the truth of the situation gradually emerged, as it has a way of doing. The failures of the government were buried in the irremediable past. As for the present emergency, no man in England, save Walpole, was fit to face it.

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Walpole's most formidable difficulties were due to the King and Queen. George the Second and Caroline dreaded the effects which the abasement of Austria and the aggrandisement of France might produce in the balance of power. Newcastle shared these apprehensions, and not a few of the Old Whigs were of the same way of thinking. Caroline indeed held her views more firmly than did her husband, and was never a sincere convert to Walpole's policy. But, looking at things in her matter-of-fact way, she reached the conclusion that it was more in the interest of the Hanoverian dynasty for Walpole to remain unshaken at the head of the British ministry than it was for the Emperor to be maintained in all his powers and possessions. She suppressed her opinions in loyalty to her purpose, and served as the channel through which Walpole's arguments were reported to the King and overcame his objections.

George the Second's notions of policy were, as usual, strongly affected by his personal feelings. His sympathies as a German prince were with the Emperor. He disliked the French. Believing himself to possess a warlike genius he had a burning desire to lead the British and Hanoverian armies in a continental campaign. When the Emperor offered him in addition command of the Imperial forces on the Rhine his eyes were dazzled by the prospect. What had Walpole to oppose to this combination of prejudices and ambitions? Only the assurance that by remaining neutral the King of Great Britain might aspire to be the mediator, nay, the arbiter, of Europe. It was but a drab alternative with which to tempt a

fiery little gentleman who thirsted for military renown, and it seems little short of a miracle that he was eventually persuaded into the wiser choice.

It must not, however, be supposed that the King's choice was made once and for all, after a single, sharp, conclusive crisis. His decisions on matters of high policy were rarely irrevocable. So long as the war lasted, there was always a danger of his breaking back. Had the Emperor played on his brother monarch's feelings less clumsily, had he avoided giving dire offence at the same time as he was appealing to sentiment, Walpole could hardly have kept his country at peace. The whole of London society, including ministers and courtiers, knew which way the King leant, and many persons were willing to encourage his inclination. Others besides Newcastle and Harrington were hopeful of promotion if Walpole should fall into disgrace. The two secretaries-of-state, however, were his most dangerous opponents, because all the regular diplomatic correspondence passed through their hands. Again and again their scheming or their blunders came within an ace of undoing his work.

Fortunately for Walpole the King could not bear the thought of parting with him, nor could he think of any alternative chief minister. George the Second distrusted and detested the leaders of Opposition more violently than Walpole did, and he knew, from personal intercourse, the unfitness of all Walpole's colleagues for the first position. Though he was never brought to the point of saying that in no circumstance would he help the Emperor, he allowed his final decision to be postponed, on one pretext or another, from day to day and from month to month.

Walpole's first argument for delay was the discredit into which the government had fallen during the spring of 1733 through the failure of its Excise Bill. It lacked the moral strength necessary for embarking in a war that was certain to be unpopular.

A little later Walpole urged with success that it would be very impolitic to join the Emperor until the general election that was due in 1734 had taken place; and this election when it came was not altogether satisfactory.

The refusal of the Dutch to render armed support to Austria was not only a legal justification for British neutrality, but something more; for if the English were to come in and the Dutch were to stand out, Holland would at once capture all our trade with France, with Spain and with the Spanish possessions.

From the autumn of 1734 onwards Walpole had another reason to urge—a little more patience and the Maritime Powers would bring the allies by negotiation into a peace more favourable to the Emperor than any he could expect even if a British army were sent to his assistance.

And behind everything was the dynastic danger. Walpole was prepared, as he had already shown, to risk the cooling friendship of France; but war with France was another matter. He believed, and believed rightly, that war with France would produce a Jacobite invasion. His sincerity upon this theme might well have persuaded a mind less apprehensive than the King's.

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## ***X.—Of the war party in France, and how Fleury's difficulties differed from Walpole's.***

There was a party in France, though not a large one, which welcomed the breach with Austria and which looked to Chauvelin as its natural leader; but the Garde des Sceaux was shrewd enough to see that as yet the Cardinal was much too powerful to be supplanted.

Chauvelin was all in favour of a vigorous prosecution of the war. There are few things, however, that a subordinate minister oppressed by the deadly discouragement of a doubting and procrastinating superior will find it harder to bring about. Nor was Chauvelin quite sure of his ground. He had certainly longed for war as a part of his general policy; but he soon came to see that this particular struggle, in its first phase at all events, was inconvenient to the verge of impracticability, and that, so long as Poland should continue to figure as the main object, it was bound to be unpopular with the French nation.

The war party did not represent the main trend of public opinion in France. Although people were ready enough to blame Fleury for his want of vigour, they were inclined to blame him even more for having allowed the nation to be dragged into a quarrel in which they took no interest. If discretion had not obliged him to keep his own counsel they would have realised that his sentiments on the main matter were not very different from their own. They made too little allowance for his difficulties with the King and Queen. They imagined that he was drifting helplessly, when in reality he was patiently obstructing. The Polish succession made no stronger appeal to his patriotism than it did to theirs. They resented no more than he did the waste of French lives and treasure in an attempt to regild with a Brummagem elective royalty their king's none too illustrious family-in-law. If any means could be found for being quit of the unfortunate Stanislaus without the scandal of a too flagrant desertion, they would welcome such an opportunity with great heartiness. Moreover, there was not a single Frenchman who cared in the least what might happen to Savoy, provided only that Austria did not gain strength. Projects for the aggrandisement of Spain were viewed with jealousy and not with enthusiasm, while the idea of a Bourbon family alliance, of which Chauvelin was so warmly enamoured, the Cardinal and the nation both suspected to be little better than a brightly coloured bubble.

French opinion was also displeased with the terms on which war had been declared. If it should prove successful, Stanislaus might hope to receive a crown, Charles Emmanuel and the King of Spain to gain new territories; but no matter what sacrifices France might make, no matter what victories she might win, she was pledged in advance not to seek any material advantages for herself. For Fleury, incautious from over-caution, had hastened at the outset to declare in solemn form that French policy was disinterested. Had Fleury's fellow-countrymen understood the workings of his mind they would have been spared considerable anxiety; for hostilities had hardly begun before he was looking for a way round his self-denying ordinance.

In disliking the war and in wishing it ended upon comfortable and, if possible, honourable terms Fleury and the general mass of French opinion were therefore entirely at one. The Cardinal, however, had other aims which taxed his vigilance and cunning to their uttermost. Of these, which were high mysteries of state, his fellow-countrymen had no inkling.

There can be no question as to the tenacity of this timid and procrastinating old man, nor as to the essential clearness of his vision. If occasionally he saw somewhat dimly the objects which were near at hand, stumbled over little unexpected obstacles and broke his shins, it is still true that none of these mischances ever caused him to lose sight of his ultimate aims. Yet even when his own thoughts were clear he would rarely express them clearly to others. He was one of those men who never empty their minds into any ear. And why should he be blamed for using methods that served him very well, simply because they often drove those who had dealings with him almost frantic? Viewed from his own standpoint his methods worked satisfactorily. What is equally important, they were true to his own peculiar nature. Every man should play his game in his own way, and it is one of Fleury's chief merits that he insisted upon doing this from first to last. He had an unusually exact understanding of his own capacities and limitations. Had he allowed himself to be hustled into a course of action that might have suited the genius of Chauvelin (or of Richelieu, for that matter), he must soon have been utterly ruined. Clarity was not one of his weapons, nor swiftness, nor audacity. If a man be not naturally frank, prompt and bold, only folly or dire necessity will engage him in enterprises that require these qualities to make them succeed.

No item in Fleury's diplomacy was likely to clash with the prejudices of Louis the Fifteenth if only his father-in-law could be decently disposed of. Since the fall of Dantzic and the flight of Stanislaus it was clearly hopeless to think of setting him up again in Poland, where he would be exposed to the irresistible opposition of Russia. To his son-in-law

the task of providing for him otherwise had by this time become an irksome perplexity. Something, of course, must be done, but it need not be on the heroic scale. Fleury was satisfied with these signs and portents, and saw no need for expounding to his King the intricacies of a policy that might have puzzled a monarch who applied himself to business with brighter intelligence and greater industry than did Louis the Fifteenth. He had equally good reasons for feeling assured that his ideas, as they developed, were unlikely to conflict with those of Chauvelin except in regard to Spain.

Chauvelin's constant suspicions of his chief were the cause of some annoyance, and if he had been taken fully into confidence he might perhaps have ceased to be suspicious; but this was a step which Fleury would never take. It was contrary to his nature. He enjoyed too much the mysteries of his craft. No subordinate, no human creature, should ever know the whole content of his mind. And besides this, he distrusted both the loyalty and the discretion of the Garde des Sceaux. Chauvelin would probably blab to the King and to other persons in order to swell his own importance. If he knew what was going forward he might press on too fast. In either event he was capable of playing havoc with the fine web of policy. Fleury was a believer in the old adage that a secret ceases to be a secret when it is told to anyone. Had he died suddenly in his arm-chair there was not a man in France who could have unravelled his designs and carried on his policy.

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## ***XI.—How Fleury made the Third Treaty of Vienna, and how Walpole was left out in the cold (1735).***

When, in the early part of 1735, Fleury, with a great show of indignation, broke off negotiations with Horatio and the Grand Pensionary, the Maritime Powers nevertheless felt sure enough of their ground to suggest terms of peace. These were, that Don Carlos, becoming King of Naples and Sicily, should retain the Spanish conquests in southern Italy; that he should restore the duchies of Parma and Piacenza, and also the reversion of Tuscany, to the Emperor; that Charles Emmanuel should be granted a modest expansion in the Milanese; that Stanislaus should abandon his claims to the Polish crown, and that France should guarantee the Pragmatic Sanction.

France, after all her efforts and successes, stood to gain nothing by these proposals—nothing even in return for her guarantee, which Charles the Sixth was now more anxious than he had ever been to secure. Spain was to receive a showy little kingdom, which she had already conquered, in exchange for three rich and solid duchies.<sup>[63]</sup> Savoy was only offered a fraction of the reward for which she had stipulated. Austria continuing to hold Mantua, and having regained Parma, Piacenza and Tuscany, would be both richer and stronger than when hostilities began. These terms went so far beyond what the Emperor, after a disastrous war, had any right to expect that neutrals were inclined to regard them as absurd and as showing the bias of the Maritime Powers against the allies. In Britain they were received with amusement, except by the straitest sect of ministerialists. Bolingbroke, almost alone, took a different view: he knew Walpole to be no fool, and therefore concluded that he was keeping a card up his sleeve. The Emperor of course neither showed nor felt any gratitude or any enthusiasm; but he was good enough to say that he might accept the plan if Britain and Holland would undertake to join him in the event of France refusing it.

The mysterious and complicated negotiations that occupied the autumn of 1734 and the following winter had led Walpole to the conclusion that Fleury would ultimately accept the proposals of the Maritime Powers, if only he could win for France one particular thing on which his heart was set. It seemed to Walpole that secret diplomacy, having explored the way, might not find it hopeless to bridge the remaining gulf. This was likewise Fleury's opinion. Nor was he by any means displeased to see the claims of his allies whittled down by would-be mediators who professed to be impartial. The one particular thing he wanted for France was Lorraine.

The difficulty, however, was that none of these cautious bargainers wished to be the first who should pronounce the magic word 'Lorraine.' Austria could not reasonably be expected to do so, and, although Walpole knew very well what was in the Cardinal's mind, he dared not put forward the suggestion lest he should make an enemy of the Emperor. Moreover, he was unwilling that, at this stage, Fleury should be relieved of all anxiety as to the effect this contemplated aggrandisement of France might produce in Britain. And how could Fleury himself put forward the proposal in view of his pronouncement at the outset that France was determined to act disinterestedly? The more prudent course would be to wait until the matter was brought forward by some other, when he would endeavour to conceal his delight and pretend to be taken unawares.

Fleury accordingly allowed French indignation to take a free course with regard to the terms that had been suggested by Britain and Holland. Spain joined heartily in the chorus. Charles Emmanuel, as usual, said little, not being of a loudly complaining nature; but possibly he saw more deeply into the plot than people supposed. The general opinion throughout Europe was that the Maritime Powers had made a mess of things, and that their long-looked-for mediation was in fact a fiasco. The leaders of the Opposition, however, drew no profit from the apparent embarrassment of the government, being too downcast by their recent and altogether unexpected defeat at the polls to respond to Chavigny's whip and spur, when, by Chauvelin's orders, he urged them on to the attack.

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It was none of Walpole's business to prevent France, Spain and Savoy from acting shabbily to one another. He was ready to aid and abet any of these powers in making peace, no matter how unfavourably its action might be regarded by the other two. By fostering their mutual suspicions he endeavoured to egg one or other of them on to a secret and independent accommodation with the Emperor.

It does not appear that Fleury's policy was much affected by Walpole's machinations. These might add a few loops and bends to his naturally deliberate and winding course, but they could not deflect him from his goal. Nor was Elisabeth any

more amenable. So long as Spanish troops were winning or expecting victories in Italy, she was in no hurry to ask for peace. Being a much less deft diplomatist than Fleury she mistook her time and delayed too long.

Elisabeth none the less had a sufficiently definite policy. When she judged the moment to be favourable, she intended to treat for peace on the basis of a marriage between her son and a daughter of the Emperor. So tender a parent might be expected to furnish an adequate dowry. Mantua was not beyond hoping for, together with the newly conquered kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, and a solemn confirmation of the northern duchies, which had never yet been on so secure a footing as she desired.

Fleury's aims and those of Elisabeth were both opposed, though in different ways, to the traditional policy of the Whigs. The balance of power would be disturbed by any diminution of Germany for the aggrandisement of France, while it might be placed in yet more serious danger by the union at some future date of the Austrian and Spanish crowns. It is characteristic of Walpole that traditional policy weighed lightly in his mind when it conflicted with present expediency. A choice of evils confronted him, but he was prepared to accept either of them, providing he could get his price: his price was the ending of the war.

So early as the middle of 1734 Walpole had allowed Elisabeth to conjecture that he would not oppose an Austro-Spanish marriage, and somewhat later his views on this subject were made known to the Emperor. By the early summer of 1735 Waldegrave had dropped hints in Paris from which Fleury was quite shrewd enough to guess that, though Britain might bargain, she was not likely to offer serious objections to the cession of Lorraine. As between these two solutions Walpole had no decided preference. What irked him was delay. He therefore sought to speed the pace by warning France and Spain in turn against the secret machinations of the other.

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The terms of the Maritime Powers were communicated to the belligerents on the last day of February (1735). It was in the following April that Horatio and Fleury had their lovers' quarrel in Paris. About the same time—a little sooner or a little later—secret negotiations began between France and Austria. It seems fairly certain that it was Fleury who took the initiative.<sup>[64]</sup> The Cardinal was growing nervous about the intentions of Spain, and found cold comfort in the news that a Russian army of ten thousand men was on its way to join the Imperial forces in western Germany. He had lately become apprehensive lest his secret confabulations with Horatio should leak out, and this was an additional reason for brisking his pace. Having fenced and delayed for so long, he now addressed himself in earnest to the Emperor. His confidential agent reached Vienna in June and continued for many weeks to hold private interviews with the Austrian ministers in a secluded suburb. All the world, including Robinson, the British ambassador, was kept completely in the dark.

It was not until the beginning of August that Waldegrave in Paris learned of these negotiations through the treachery of a French civil servant. He reported at once to Newcastle, his official chief; but September was well advanced before Harrington passed on these important tidings to the British ambassador at Vienna. This extraordinary delay was probably due in some measure to the fact that our embassy at Paris was responsible to one secretary-of-state and our embassy at Vienna to the other; but beyond this, Newcastle was apt to impart information to his colleagues in a confused and gobbling kind of fashion, mixing things of moment with inconsiderable trifles. Harrington, on the other hand, was a man of excessive indolence. It must be assumed that neither Walpole nor the cabinet was fully persuaded of the seriousness or fully alive to the consequences of Fleury's efforts to come to an understanding with the Emperor without invoking the good offices of the British government.

This want of vigilance is not inexplicable, seeing that, for several months past, the attention of the British government had been focussed upon a somewhat different aspect of the problem. The majority of the cabinet was now convinced that the time had come to make a final choice between the Austro-French and the Austro-Spanish roads to peace. The French way was favoured by Harrington and the King, who were in Hanover; the Spanish way, by most of the ministers who remained in London. As this difference of opinion led to no serious cleavage, it may be assumed that Walpole did not regard it as an issue of the first importance. Possibly he was well enough pleased to let it continue; for, so long as no final decision was taken, he might still travel either or both ways, as he pleased, and at his own pace.

The minister who felt most strongly about these alternatives was Newcastle. He remained faithful to the Old Whig policy of conserving the Empire and checking the growth of France. Moreover, he saw advantages in a thorough understanding with Spain which should be founded on good offices and benefits conferred by Britain. It might have been better for both countries had his views prevailed, but the fates were against him. His colleagues listened to him with but a languid

interest, and when he tried to alarm the Dutch he met with no better success.

Unfortunately for Newcastle, Keene, our ambassador at Madrid, was out of favour with the Spanish court and people during all this spring and summer. A ridiculous dispute having arisen between Spain and Portugal, the Spaniards threatened invasion; whereupon the Portuguese called on England as their ally, to send assistance. The presence of a British fleet at Lisbon outraged Spanish sentiment, and made Keene an object of distrust at the very moment when his services might have been most useful.

Fleury, who suspected the game that Walpole had been playing at Madrid, welcomed this misunderstanding and pressed his negotiations at Vienna with unwearied patience. None the less, he found it far from an easy task to win Lorraine. For Lorraine was no recent acquisition, no alien Italian principality, but German flesh and blood, the patrimony of the Emperor's intended son-in-law, an age-old duchy of the Empire.

In August Charles the Sixth made a despairing effort to escape from Fleury's humiliating terms. None of his previous appeals for succour had been so vehement, and when succour was refused by the Maritime Powers, he put no limit to his threats. But his struggle was only that last rush and splashing which the angler knows so well; the final tense excitement of his craft. The Emperor's forces were soon spent. Fleury, keen-sighted old fisherman that he was, drew his victim on a tight but gentle line downwards across the stream, and, before September ended, Charles lay gasping in his net.

Fleury's difficulties, however, did not begin and end with the Emperor. His skill compels our admiration when we remember how various were his aims, how easily they might have lured him into hopeless entanglements, how complete notwithstanding was his success. His first object was to win Lorraine for France—to win it now, at the present opportunity: for who could foretell what convulsions might shortly shake the Empire when Charles the Sixth was dead? Fleury's second object—hardly less important than the first—was to make a friend of the monarch whom he was engaged in despoiling. The Emperor should be led to regard the Maritime Powers as deserters and betrayers of his cause; he should be taught to hate them more than he hated France, the open and declared enemy. His third object was to secure peace by a secret negotiation between France and Austria, and not to allow it to be brought about in any other way. No one, beside these two, should have a hand in it, or any knowledge of what was going forward, until all was concluded. His greedy and unfaithful allies were to be kept out of it; likewise the self-important Maritime Powers; even his own council, so far as that was possible. The negotiation was to be conducted and the settlement devised in the strictest privacy between Charles the Sixth and himself. Under no provocation would he utter a harsh or a discourteous word. If at times the Emperor should lose his temper and speak outrageously the Cardinal would oppose his anger only with the shield of forbearance and the sword of patience.

Clearly a discussion which was to proceed on these lines could not be hurried, and, as it continued from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, the parties to it were drawn insensibly into a kind of intimacy; before it ended they were in a league together to keep mischief-makers and all self-interested persons at a distance. The result at which Fleury aimed was virtually an alliance between France and Austria to support their terms of peace against the world. If he succeeded there would be a new grouping of Europe, and round these two newly contracted friends the stronger group would cluster.

It was Fleury's fixed motive not to allow the Maritime Powers to found any claims upon the facts that he had used them to bring the Emperor into the peace and was proposing to use them further for winning the signatures of Spain and Savoy. Neither their services nor their complaisance should give them a right of entry into the grand negotiation. Britain more particularly was to be kept out in the cold, as rigorously as she herself had kept France out in the cold four years earlier. His determination was not inspired by motives of revenge, but by the desire to wean the Emperor from his traditional allies, and to turn him from an enemy into the peculiar and intimate friend of France. And for general reasons Fleury wished the Maritime Powers to figure before the eyes of Europe as selfish and futile busybodies, and not as mediators to whom gratitude was due. He was quite content, however, to allow the latter opinion to make its way gradually by the light of his subsequent achievements in the fields of diplomacy.

All this, however, it was much easier to project than to achieve. It was necessary in the first place that Elisabeth and Charles Emmanuel should be blindfolded, and this was difficult; for both had grown restive and suspicious. The Maritime Powers required still more delicate handling; for during the recent negotiations with Horatio and the Grand Pensionary, Fleury had not been able altogether to conceal the workings of his mind. Then there was Waldegrave's unlucky discovery that a French emissary had been lurking in a Viennese suburb since June: this would be denied as a matter of course, but Fleury was diplomatist enough to know that the denial would not be believed. The utmost he could hope to do against the Maritime Powers was to keep them puzzled as to the progress of his negotiations, to lead them to

surmise that nothing more was taking place than a tentative and somewhat tedious exploration. They were used to such proceedings on his part, and had experienced in their own cases how seldom they came to anything in the end.

Waldegrave, who was a shrewd diplomatist, cannot possibly have believed all the contradictions and inconsistencies that were told him during these eight critical weeks. He may have taken comfort, however, in the thought that if things were moving at all they were moving towards peace and not away from it. If Fleury would not take the Maritime Powers into his confidence, they might at least be sure that he had no more wish than they had to prolong the war. Was there any need to worry because the secretive Frenchman, according to his wont, had been lacking in candour? The mystery they could not penetrate might be no such great matter after all.

Waldegrave was certainly puzzled. Sometimes he was assured that nothing at all was happening at Vienna; at others that nothing worth talking of was happening; at others again that nothing of importance could ever possibly happen without the friendly offices of the Maritime Powers being invoked. Fleury practised all the arts of deception in which he excelled—open-eyed candour, affectionate cajoleries, deprecations, disavowals. Sometimes, however, by way of contrast, he was inaccessible for days together; sometimes he was almost brusque; while Chauvelin was usually dumb and often rude.

In Vienna the same game was being played, though with less art and variety. Robinson was led to believe that nothing definitive would be settled until the Emperor had consulted the Maritime Powers. Nine days after the preliminaries had actually been signed he was allowed to surmise that all talk of an immediate settlement was merely moonshine; that in fact there was a serious hitch, and but little likelihood of there being anything to consult about in the near future.

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The preliminaries of peace were signed at Vienna on the 3rd of October and were forthwith communicated to the French and Austrian commanders. Fighting had ceased and war was over before the news reached Madrid. A courier arrived in Paris on the 11th of October, but it was not until the 2nd of November that Fleury made known the tidings to Waldegrave. Neither the Maritime Powers nor the allies of France had been consulted, and they were now left to make the best they could of an accomplished fact. It was a high-handed proceeding, and some of those sermons that had been preached in former days against the treaty of Utrecht and the shame of leaving friends in the lurch would have fitted the case of Fleury as well as they had done that of Bolingbroke.

The terms did not depart very far, except at one point, from those which Britain and Holland had put forward early in the year. Don Carlos gained a little more and Charles Emmanuel a little less than had then been proposed. In northern Italy the Emperor was slightly better off; but the Empire was shorn of Lorraine, and the future husband of Maria Theresa was obliged to surrender his patrimony and content himself with the reversion of Tuscany. The exiled Stanislaus (with the title of king) was to rule over Lorraine under French suzerainty so long as he lived, and at his death this noble territory was to be formally incorporated with France. Thus the feelings of Stanislaus were soothed, the honour of Louis was saved, and the ambition of the French nation was gratified.

Savoy and Spain could not do otherwise than submit, nor were they deserving of much sympathy. Charles Emmanuel had been neither a loyal nor an energetic ally, while the Spanish government had prevented co-operation from the beginning by playing a purely selfish game.

The Maritime Powers had somewhat better grounds of complaint: they had been treated cavalierly and kept in the dark. But they would have found it hard to maintain that they had suffered any substantial injury. They could raise no objections to the terms of peace. Their sole grievance was that they had been deprived of the glory and affection due to peacemakers. They felt vaguely that they were regarded with suspicion, with aloofness, even with hostility, by those from whom they had hoped to win gratitude.

Walpole, seeing that peace was secured and that a good deal of the credit for this was likely to come his way, was much too shrewd a politician to make an outcry that would only have served to call the attention of his own people and of the world in general to the fact that he had been outmanœuvred. Even King George maintained a discreet silence, although he had been cheated of the glory he had hoped to gain as arbiter and mediator of Europe.

So far things had gone as well as Fleury could wish. He foresaw, however, that Spain, hoping to gain more than the preliminaries had given her, would shortly appeal to Britain for diplomatic assistance in shaping the definitive treaty, and that, in return, she would offer friendship, or even an alliance, together with a settlement of some very troublesome

commercial disputes. This would give Walpole just such an opening as Fleury himself would have loved. For Walpole, if he backed Spain, could still bring about a general congress in which Britain might hope to play the most illustrious part. Or, if he feared the delay and prolonged uncertainty that such a course would entail, he might still cause much embarrassment to French diplomacy by his interference. Without demanding any drastic revision of the terms he might seek to conciliate Spain and to embitter her against France by supporting various minor concessions and readjustments. What Fleury now feared most was that Britain and Spain would draw together before Elisabeth had recovered from her first paroxysm of disappointment. He aimed at keeping these two countries apart, in the firm belief that sooner or later Spain would drift back into the French connection.

Things fell out precisely as the Cardinal foresaw they would. Spain did appeal to Britain, and had Walpole been interested in playing a subtle diplomatic game he might conceivably have gained some advantages. But Fleury knew his Walpole. Walpole was tired of diplomatic games, and was eager, above all things, to be relieved of foreign distractions, in order that he might return to his favourite pursuit of governing Britain and augmenting her prosperity.

At this juncture Fleury worked successfully both upon the fears and the friendship of the Walpole brothers. It was not very difficult to keep their anxieties alive. Peace was not yet fully secured. There were perils in delay. The effects might well be fatal of trying to patch or alter a provisional agreement that had actually been signed by the two chief belligerents. Moreover, the notion that Fleury was well disposed towards England still flickered in the Walpoles' minds.

Fleury was as lavish as usual in amiable urbanities and effusive no-confidences. He hinted to Horatio that the most hopeful guarantee for European peace would be a firm alliance between France and Britain. His words fell on receptive ears. A good understanding, if not an actual alliance, with France seemed to Walpole to be the surest means of preventing a renewal of the war. The Cardinal, who had ulterior motives, was only half sincere in his suggestion, and he took good care that Walpole should not underrate the difficulties of gaining French goodwill. Chauvelin, presumably by order, alarmed by his brusqueness. The gist of Fleury's communications, direct and indirect, amounted to this—that many of his colleagues were in a suspicious and unfriendly mood, and that any act of the British government which might be construed as hostile or provocative would at once set up a serious inflammation. His object in all this was to discourage English interference; but there was a measure of truth in his covert warnings, for French opinion at this time was indeed in a highly sensitive condition, owing to the mistaken belief that Walpole, not Fleury, had won the recent rubber. Fleury probably succeeded beyond his hopes; for Walpole not only abstained from giving the least encouragement to Spain, but even used his best endeavours to induce her to accept the treaty. He went even further: the easiest moralist will find it hard to forgive him for his betrayal of Spanish confidences in order to ingratiate himself with France.

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It may be presumed that Walpole would have preferred not to be left out in the cold. As to prestige, however, he was something of a sceptic and cared much less about showing off his own importance than he did about ending the war. It may be doubted if, in his heart of hearts, he favoured a full-dress congress any more than Fleury did; for it would have opened the door to second-thoughts, intrigues, misunderstandings and quarrels which he was most anxious to avoid. He wished of course to save England's face, and he found ready to his hand a means of doing so. The word went forth, accordingly, that the British government was delighted with the results of the Franco-Austrian negotiations: how indeed could it be otherwise, seeing that the terms agreed upon so closely followed those which, earlier in the year, Walpole had induced the Dutch to concur in putting forward? He had little difficulty in convincing his fellow-countrymen that this was the true reading of the situation. Even the Opposition was outfaced and silenced. It is somewhat more remarkable that practically the whole of Europe—not excepting France—should have jumped spontaneously to the conclusion that the Third treaty of Vienna was the crowning triumph of Walpole's diplomacy.

In the prevailing superficial view this treaty seemed to be something of a humiliation for Fleury. He was a meek winner, and attempted no defence when people charged him with timidity and hesitations. In France he was scoffed at as the dupe of Walpole, in England as the puppet of Chauvelin. Neither his timidity nor his hesitations can be denied, but, and in their despite, he had won everything he aimed at. For the first time since 1717 France had pursued successfully a forward policy without requiring England's help. Fleury had considered his king's honour and his queen's filial piety, and had kept the trust of both. He had prevented Spain from gaining strength and England from gaining friends. He had reduced the Emperor's power, but had entered into his confidence. It was natural that he should not boast of his triumph,

for he regarded the Third treaty of Vienna as merely the first-fruits of a policy that would shortly change the face of Europe. Old statesmen, like old country gentlemen, are often readier than young ones to engage in projects that need long time for their achievement.

Fleury was now eighty-two. During his past nine years of office he had provoked much impatience in certain quarters and not a little ridicule; but his authority had grown steadily from the beginning. It was his destiny to remain prime minister of France until he died eight years later. Six of those years passed without any diminution of his power, and, during this period, his diplomacy moved quietly forward from success to success. His design for the regrouping of Europe was achieved. France became the centre of an overwhelming combination. So long as the Emperor lived, Austria was firmly held; Russia and Turkey adhered from motives of gratitude and self-interest; Sweden and Denmark were seduced from the British connection and knit up with France; even Spain, forgetting her grievances against King Louis, drifted back into the Bourbon compact, and became more and more estranged from England; the Dutch were artfully encouraged in their growing coldness towards the Walpole administration; while the rising power of Prussia, which had common interests with Britain and with Hanover, was kept on bad terms with both, not so much by Fleury's cajoleries, as by the personal animosity of George the Second and Frederick William the First.

At the ending of the war Walpole was only fifty-nine. He had been chief minister for fifteen years, and remained so for six years longer. His authority was still supreme, although, in his own department of finance, he had suffered a severe defeat, which only a prudent and timely withdrawal had prevented from becoming a rout. At the general election which took place in the following year (1734) his House of Commons' majority had been considerably reduced and, what was still more disquieting, his losses had been most marked in the counties and in the populous urban constituencies, which in former times had been his own peculiar strongholds. He may have hoped that the Third treaty of Vienna would aid the restoration of his strength; but he chiefly valued it as a lucky escape from a position of danger and embarrassment. The real securities for his power were the unswerving loyalty of the Queen and the futility of an opposition that was honeycombed with jealousies.

Like Fleury, Walpole had overcome successfully his sovereigns' opposition to his policy. He had baulked the warlike propensities of the King and he had soothed the Queen's pro-German prejudices. He had undoubtedly done something towards bringing the war to an end; how much it is difficult to say; less certainly than he received credit for at home and abroad. On the other hand, the position in which he had placed his country was not one that would tend to improve itself by a natural evolution. The Dutch, who had gone with him grudgingly and suspiciously, acknowledged no debt of gratitude or bond of comradeship. He had made a bitter enemy of the Emperor. Spain owed him nothing: was it not he who had been the first to propose that she should give up Parma, Piacenza and Tuscany? She resented his indifference to her appeals after the preliminaries were signed and, if she had known the whole truth, might have resented still more and with better reason his betrayal to Fleury of her confidences. Nor had he placed France under any obligations. To Chauvelin's undisguised glee, to Fleury's more dissembled satisfaction, France had shown herself independent of British intervention. Britain had gained nothing by the war, and was cold-shouldered in the negotiations.

The judgement that claims the Third treaty of Vienna as a triumph for Walpole, and at the same time censures the methods employed by him in achieving it, appears to go beyond the truth in both particulars. Walpole indeed had won his main object, but the real triumph was Fleury's; and, if deception is to be reckoned a fault, at a time when every government in Europe was engaged in masking its motives, Fleury, not Walpole, must be blamed as the arch-deceiver. Fleury deceived everybody concerned—except possibly the Emperor—and Walpole was one of his dupes.

Whether Walpole deserves more praise or blame for his management of foreign policy during those three years<sup>[65]</sup> is to some extent a matter of opinion, like many of the most interesting problems of history. The circumstances that surrounded him were complicated and bewildering; the gleams that guided him were intermittent and often of a twilight dimness. A statesman so situated must do much by guess-work. He must be ready always to sacrifice the smaller to the greater interests, and, as he cannot be for ever on the alert, so he will sometimes miss advantages he might have gained without endangering his policy. Prophetic statesmen are a fairly common variety of the species, but those who not only foresee things but foresee them truly are among the rarest of human products. Walpole made no pretensions to the gift of prophecy. Man of genius though he was, he owed little to his imagination. He excelled his colleagues, and opponents, and indeed every statesman in Europe, not in penetration of the hidden future, but in the clearness with which he saw things present, and in the accuracy with which he could judge by the lights or darkness of the horizon what weather might be looked for on the morrow. And he excelled them most of all in the rapidity with which his mind arranged in their true proportions the most diverse and unexpected events. His master-motive was to prevent Britain from being dragged into a war in which she had no immediate or direct concern. If he was right in this, he was right also in refusing to be



distracted by side issues; and he may be pardoned for giving away at times more than was actually necessary for his purpose, and for missing some fair opportunities of advantage.

Such blame as may be his due attaches to his conduct after peace was made. In order to gain his end he had incurred certain losses, and these should have been made good without delay. It is a fair criticism that he failed to throw himself with vigour into the task of rebuilding the diplomatic position of Britain which his policy had weakened. There still remained two years before his power began to wane, and yet another year before it was seriously undermined. But he had grown very weary of the uncongenial occupation of 'knocking the heads of kings and emperors together.' His interests lay nearer home, and he could not resist their appeal. He returned too precipitately to his preferred employment, leaving the conduct of foreign affairs to his unvigorous colleagues, Newcastle and Harrington, whom he hindered rather than helped by his caustic interventions. The success of Walpole's diplomacy was confined to a single harvest. The prestige, as distinguished from the material benefit, which Britain gained was largely an illusion and proved to be a quickly wasting asset. By 1739 it was painfully clear that she had not kept a single friend in Europe.

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**BOOK SEVEN**

**A DOMESTIC REVERSE AND  
A RECOVERY**

**(1730-1735)**

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## ***I.—Why Carteret was dismissed from the Irish viceroyalty, how he became an Opposition leader and what he made of it (1730-1742).***

After Walpole's quarrel with Townshend in the early spring of 1730<sup>[66]</sup> it was clearly impossible that the two brothers-in-law could remain members of the same cabinet. The doomed secretary-of-state was probably the only man in England who seriously entertained the notion that Walpole would be the one to go.

For some weeks Townshend worked energetically at court to bring about the dismissal of Newcastle as a preliminary to making himself chief minister. Meanwhile Walpole occupied himself quietly in strengthening his parliamentary position. He had no reason to fear that Townshend's efforts to replace him would meet with the slightest encouragement from the King or Queen.

The duke of Dorset was a nobleman of no importance, save that a considerable number of members were returned to the House of Commons through his influence. His ambition aimed at an exchange of his present office of Lord Steward for the viceroyalty of Ireland. Carteret was accordingly called on to resign the post he had now held for six years and was offered, as a contemptuous consolation, the court appointment which the duke was about to vacate. He at once refused what he regarded as an empty dignity, believing, with good reason, that it had been proposed to him with the double object of preventing his opposition, and of marking clearly, so that all men might note it, the fact that he had suffered a second degradation. So Carteret took his seat on the Opposition bench in the House of Lords, and Swift's prayer for Ireland—'God send us our boobies again!'—was duly answered.

In 1724 it had been the cordial co-operation of Walpole and Townshend that deprived Carteret of his secretaryship-of-state and banished him to Ireland. Now, in 1730, a quarrel between the same two men was the indirect cause of his second mishap. But in reality his dismissal was an act of unintended kindness.

So long as George the First lived, Carteret had been able to find plausible reasons for clinging to his post. He undoubtedly had cherished a hope that, sooner or later, the whirligig of politics and the friendship of the King would offer him an opportunity for returning to one of the higher departments of state. This hope, however, had grown fainter year by year, and with the accession of George the Second, it vanished altogether. Nevertheless Carteret continued to serve for three years in the new reign. He had gone to Ireland upon a miscalculation; but it seems to have been a kind of indolence, against which his ambition struggled vainly, that kept him there so long. By dallying at Dublin he won no favour from the new sovereigns, but only distrust and cold looks. Walpole and Townshend were both of them his enemies. He had not a single powerful friend in the administration; nor had he any security of tenure in an office which, while it gave him no influence whatsoever on cabinet decisions, deprived him, so long as he continued to hold it, of that freedom of action by which alone he could hope to recover his position.

It is not inconceivable that Carteret might have accepted the lord stewardship had it been proposed to him in the previous reign; for although this post was inferior in status to the viceroyalty, it would have kept him in familiar touch with a sovereign who took great pleasure in his society and who had also a considerable respect for his opinion. The very fact, however, that he might thus have gained the King's ear would have prevented the chief minister from making this offer while George the First was still alive. Now the situation was entirely changed. Walpole had stuffed the minds of the King and Queen so full of prejudice against Carteret that his acceptance of a court appointment seemed more likely to result in his having to endure vexations than in his gaining power. The accuracy of this calculation was never tested; but it appears by no means certain, in the light of after events, that Walpole was safe in reckoning as he did, or that his rival was really wise in refusing a post that would have brought him into frequent contact with their majesties, and would have enabled him to use that personal persuasiveness which was the most powerful weapon in his armoury.

Walpole may not have known that Townshend, if he were defeated, intended to retire altogether from political life; but Walpole did know that there was no likelihood of Townshend ever joining Carteret in opposition. For the old quarrel between these two men had never been made up or even assuaged. Carteret seems to have regarded the secretary-of-state as the chief contriver of his downfall, Walpole as only an accessory. Carteret had suffered injuries from Townshend which even the most placable person would have found it very hard to forgive. Townshend, on the other hand, found it quite impossible to forgive the enemy whom he had injured. Townshend's nature was proud and honourable, and yet he had done things, in order to get rid of his rival, which no gentleman could look back upon with an easy conscience. It was only by nursing his animosity that he was able to keep his self-respect. It was only by pretending to himself that Carteret's character put him beyond the pale and classed him among the vermin of politics, that Townshend could justify

the intrigues he had used to pull his colleague down.

On his return from Ireland Carteret vented his private wrongs, as usual, in laughter. He bore no malice. He was neither unwilling nor afraid to take office again under Walpole if an occasion offered. His overtures to the chief minister on the accession of George the Second, and subsequently, had certainly not been wanting either in frankness or friendliness. He had admitted that he was beaten and had sued for peace. But Walpole would never listen. 'I had some difficulty,' he told Hervey, 'to get Carteret out; but he shall find much more to get in again.'

Carteret was now in his forty-first year, a handsome gentleman, of a fair and ruddy complexion, whose spirits were in a continual flow. The fastidious and not too friendly Chesterfield forgave him even the deadly sin of laughter, and acknowledged him to be 'an agreeable, good-humoured and instructive companion, a great but entertaining talker.' But he was too careless in his choice of those to whom he talked. In general conversation he was given to ranting and boasting, between jest and earnest, of the great things he would do were he in power. These indiscretions, reported solemnly without their accompaniment of laughter, earned him the reputation of a liar and a braggart. He drank too much wine of Burgundy, and although this indulgence seldom ruffled his temper, it was apt to make him intolerably arrogant, especially in the expression of his opinions on public affairs. During his Irish exile he had not kept his body in hard condition by outdoor exercise, nor his mind by political activities; he had grown somewhat unwieldy; his portrait resembles the impression of a seal, the centre of it showing his finely cut features and humorous lively eyes, the rim, his redundant chops—as it were, the superfluous wax. He had lost touch with the parliamentarians. His administrative duties had been much too easy to extend a man of his mettle. His ample leisure had been occupied only with social intercourse and in studies that to most other men would have been arduous tasks, but to him were merely enjoyment.

For eleven years past Carteret had been a prominent figure in public life, though, for the last six, his influence on policy had been negligible. His career had still thirty-three years to run. Of these, nineteen were spent in Opposition and fourteen in high office. When he died at the age of seventy-three he had been Lord President of the Council for twelve years.<sup>[67]</sup>

Carteret was now entering upon the stormiest period of his political life. For the next twelve years he was a leader of Opposition, and for the two that followed, chief minister of state. But he achieved nothing great in either capacity, and, unlike Bolingbroke, he could not lay the blame upon lack of opportunities, for few politicians have ever had so many. The fault lay in himself. Not that he was wanting in high capacity, or even in industry; but only in character. Nor would his character have been inadequate to a subordinate post; for it was richly endowed with many virtues—with equanimity, courage, hopefulness and gaiety. During this period of fourteen years circumstances, rather than his own will, forced him into leadership, and his character lacked that kind of rough holdfast strength that is required for the adventure of governing men. The vigour of his system had been in a slow decline ever since he returned from the Swedish embassy, and the enervating influences of Ireland had hastened this deterioration. He neglected the most obvious advantages, worked at high pressure only by fits and starts, while his course of action was misguided by a wavering judgement. Yet, though he showed a want of thoroughness, of seriousness in practical affairs, and also of constancy, he was a formidable leader in opposition, and a brilliant, if unsuccessful, minister.

When Carteret came back to London he found the Opposition in a poor way. In the Commons, Walpole's opponents were as strong as ever in numbers and in oratory; but they had not yet recovered from their extreme depression on finding that the enemy, whose dismissal they had counted on so surely, was not only retained in office by George the Second, but had gained considerably in power. In the Lords, things were still worse, for there not a single peer of any eminence engaged in consistent criticism of the administration. No man can do much in a parliamentary assembly unless he has lieutenants who will support his efforts. Carteret's failure to achieve anything of importance cannot, so far, be imputed to him as a fault.

In 1732, however, there was a startling change, and in the following year the hopes of the Opposition rose, at a sudden bound, higher than they had been since the beginning. Walpole was forced to make a humiliating retreat; his ranks were broken and his Excise Bill withdrawn. For some months he was the most unpopular and the best-abused man in England.

Walpole turned sharply upon the foes of his own household and there was a purge of government which cheered Carteret's loneliness. Chesterfield and several others were dismissed for mutinous behaviour, and at once ranged themselves with the Opposition. In both Houses there were violent and persistent attacks on the administration; for a general election was close at hand, and Walpole's enemies felt certain that his majority would be swept away, if only they continued to press their advantage.

When the result of the appeal to the country became known, great were the surprise and mortification of these hopeful malcontents. Walpole's majority was not reduced so far as to do him serious hurt. The issue of the election, indeed, proved more harmful to the Opposition than to the government; for, as the result of it, Pulteney's Whigs and Wyndham's Tories engaged in mutual recriminations, while Bolingbroke, the head and heart of their combination, was forced at last to retire from political business.

After Bolingbroke's withdrawal to France in 1734 things went rather better with the Opposition. This improvement was due mainly to Frederick, Prince of Wales, who, during the next three years, became more and more the rallying-point and, in a sense, the leader of those who aimed at ruining the government. Towards the end of this period there were signs that the security of the administration was threatened by a shifting of allegiance. The King's serious and protracted illness caused many politicians to consider the importance of standing well with his successor. George the Second, however, confounded these calculations by making a perfect recovery: it was Queen Caroline who died. And though this event, which occurred at the end of autumn 1737, was a heavy blow to the chief minister, its full and fatal effects were not felt by him until more than four years later.

For so long as Queen Caroline lived, Carteret's opposition was bad opposition. It should have been inveterate, but it was only critical and trimming. It should have been a settled business, instead of which it varied from day to day, and on some occasions was even changed or abandoned after the action had begun. He could not bring himself to make a final decision as to which of two courses would serve best his purpose of returning to high office—out-and-out hostility, or accommodation with the court. His motives were suspected by those with whom he acted and forfeited their confidence. His play was weak, because it did not exact, as all great party leaders must exact, the rigour of the game.

The Queen knew through intermediaries that Carteret aimed at being taken back, and Carteret knew through the same channels that the Queen was now not unfavourable to his reinstatement. After the Porteous riots in 1735, partly to please the court, partly perhaps because he disliked to figure as Chesterfield's lieutenant, he refused to go all lengths with the Opposition in denouncing the panic legislation of the government. During the session of 1737, when it seemed not unlikely that Parliament might side with the Prince of Wales against the King, Carteret offered his good offices to bring about a settlement. In each of these instances there were particular and personal reasons why Caroline was disposed to welcome his assistance; but there was also a general reason, in her wish to strengthen the government by drawing off the most commanding figure among its opponents.

Walpole had lately been losing illustrious adherents at a somewhat startling rate, and although the qualities of those whom he retained were good enough for the ordinary routine of business, their characters were none too favourably regarded by the world. If he should die, there was not a man among them fit to be entrusted with the headship of government. Moreover, in his overweening confidence, Walpole might even be overrating his own security in splendid isolation. Perhaps the Queen was wiser than her favourite. She seems to have thought that, as Carteret had been soundly beaten in his bid for the first position, and as he had suffered the punishment of a long exclusion, it might now be safe to trust him as a subordinate. But her suggestions, renewed from time to time, broke vainly against the minister's unchangeable determination. 'Is your son to be bought?' Walpole asked on the occasion of the royal quarrel. 'If you will buy him, I will get him cheaper than Carteret.'<sup>[68]</sup> Walpole admitted frankly that it was indecency in a servant of the crown to say that there was anyone with whom he would not act if the King's interest required it; but, having made this admission, he reiterated his refusal with a force and precision that left no doubt as to his intentions.<sup>[69]</sup>

On the Queen's death Carteret's hopes of office vanished and with them his reasons for moderation. The King, whose animosity had not abated, continued to refer to him with anger and contempt as 'a puppy,' 'a rascal' and 'a great liar.' Before long, however, friction with Spain turned public attention on foreign affairs, and provided Carteret with a more congenial theme than the grievances of the heir-apparent and the woes of Edinburgh bailies. He had a good popular case and he made the most of it. The King himself inclined to listen, and the cabinet was divided.

Thenceforward Carteret's attacks were not lacking so much in persistency as in concert with his fellow-leaders. In the Commons, since Bolingbroke's departure, there had been a loosening of co-operation between Pulteney on the one side, Wyndham and Polwarth<sup>[70]</sup> on the other. In the Lords, Carteret and Chesterfield, each of whom disdained to be subordinate to the other, engaged in battle against the administration whenever they thought fit to do so, but without troubling themselves to agree beforehand upon a common plan of attack. What the Opposition needed at this time more than anything else was a leader capable of exercising a general authority. Bolingbroke, owing to his exclusion from Parliament, had never succeeded in winning this position. But Carteret suffered from no such disability, and it is sufficient proof of his incapacity for the highest department of statecraft that he did not seize, did not seem even to aspire

to fill, the conspicuous vacancy. His coadjutors, though men of shining talents, were no more than a loosely cohering group. Their occasional meetings and dinner-parties produced no firm alliance. As they never looked beyond the need of the moment, and were honeycombed with mutual jealousy and distrust, joint action for any length of time was impossible. In the long-distance race these princely charioteers were no match for the pedestrian Pelhams, who were already trudging far ahead of all their rivals along the road to power.

With his fellow-leader, Pulteney, Carteret shows a striking contrast in the free exuberance of his nature, in a freshness of heart which no adversity or defeat could sour, in his careless contempt for money, in his readiness for responsibility and fearlessness in action. Like Pulteney he was an orator, and regarded merely as an orator he was inferior in artistry. His speeches lacked the passion, variety and lightness that made it a joy to listen to the Opposition leader in the Commons. Carteret had not the same purity of taste; at times he was pompous, bombastical and even absurd; when he soared, his audience might sometimes complain that his eloquence resembled the uneven, heavy circlings of the plover, and that they could hear the creaking of his wings. But if he often failed to delight those who listened to him, he possessed the gift of getting at the very heart of the matter and of bringing people round to his opinions. However rhetorical he might be, he was never vague; each step in the argument was as clear and definite as his conclusion. In the graces his speaking left something to be desired, but the force of what he said would hardly have gained by any refinement.

There is great difficulty in measuring a man like Carteret. The reason is not merely that he lived two hundred years ago, not merely that no illustrious achievements stand to his credit, but even more that he has not left behind him a legacy of sayings or writings in which it is possible to discern strong and settled principles of statecraft. Unlike Bolingbroke, he was never moved to formulate a political philosophy in order to justify his course of action. He was not an idealist, or a theorist, or one whose opinions, so far as we can comprehend them, were in advance of his time. He was as much a workaday politician as Walpole, and as such he must be judged. It is not at all hard to see why he failed. It is much less easy to understand why, being what in our eyes he seems to have been, he should have bulked so large in those of his contemporaries.

The most careful study of his career will not satisfy our curiosity. It is clear that he was one of those people whose full powers are only made manifest in personal contact, and this kind of potency is inexplicable by hearsay. The opinions that men of his own time have expressed are sufficiently emphatic, but they leave the secret of his influence undisclosed. It would be unwise to reject these estimates, for two whole generations were watching while he played his long and conspicuous part in public life. Moreover, it is not from devoted admirers that we have received these testimonies; for it was one of Carteret's greatest weaknesses that he had no devoted admirers. They are the opinions of people who were hostile to him from the beginning, or of critics with an unfriendly bias, or of others again who had been his enemies at one time, his allies at another. 'Thinly, very thinly, were great men sown in my remembrance,' wrote Horace Walpole.<sup>[71]</sup> 'I can pretend to have seen but five: the duke of Cumberland, Sir Robert Walpole, Lord Granville,<sup>[72]</sup> Lord Mansfield and Pitt . . . Lord Granville was most a genius of the five.' And though the drawing of Carteret's character shows no mercy, it leaves the simple quality of his 'greatness' unchallenged. Chesterfield, writing to his son during Carteret's last illness, makes the brief comment: 'When he dies, the ablest head in England dies too, take it for all in all.'<sup>[73]</sup> And seven years after his death, when the dust of controversy had settled and the heats had cooled, Chatham told the House of Lords that Carteret, 'in the upper departments of government, had not his equal; and I find a pride in declaring that, to his patronage, to his friendship and instructions, I owe whatever I am.' So soon as Carteret was brought into personal contact with George the Second<sup>[74]</sup> he became the favourite minister, and, after Walpole's death,<sup>[75]</sup> he remained, whether in or out of office, the King's most trusted counsellor until the reign ended.<sup>[76]</sup>

In weighing these various judgements it must not be forgotten that, for at least fifteen years before Carteret became chief minister, his sovereign had heaped abuse upon his name so often as it was mentioned; that Pitt, before Carteret became his colleague in 1751, had attacked him with as savage a violence as he had ever directed against Walpole. Although it must be admitted that the judgements of George the Second were notoriously unstable, and that the elder Pitt was apt to speak in strains of exaggeration, whether he was engaged in invective or laudation, the same cannot be said either of Chesterfield or Horace Walpole. Chesterfield had always been a very cool and grudging critic, while Horace's natural malice and love of gossip would have tempted him to disparagement, quite irrespective of his lifelong loyalty to his father's memory.

It is right to judge both Walpole and Carteret as practical politicians, for neither of them pretended to be anything else. And it is quite certain that Walpole succeeded as a practical politician and that Carteret failed. At the same time it is interesting to note that the things these two men aimed at were not the same things.





*Sir Joshua Reynolds. pinxit*

*Emery Walker Ltd. ph.sc.*

*William Pulteney created Earl of Bath 1742*  
*from the picture in the National Portrait Gallery*

Walpole's first concern was the preservation of order and the fostering of national prosperity. His chief title to fame is that he governed the United Kingdom for over twenty years and governed it very well. Not law-making, but administration, was his peculiar excellence. He so much feared and hated every form of disturbance, that he engaged in legislation only when the need was very pressing and when his proposals seemed unlikely to meet with serious opposition. The conduct of foreign affairs was even more irksome to him than legislation. All he asked of the outside world was that it would leave him alone; but as his prayer was seldom granted he had to sacrifice much of his time to keeping England out of European quarrels. It went against the grain with Walpole to busy himself in diplomacy, and what a man does reluctantly is not often done supremely well. In the end the failure of his foreign policy was the cause of his fall.

With Carteret, on the other hand, the conduct of foreign affairs, the making of treaties and alliances, the waging and ending of wars were all-absorbing interests. Although the study of jurisprudence was one of his hobbies, the practical task of law-making had even fewer attractions for him than it had for Walpole; while the drudgery of governing men was utterly repugnant to his nature. The fact that he would not, or could not, govern was the reason why, after two years as chief minister, he was driven to resignation. The miscarriage of his foreign policy was not due to its inherent defects, but

to the inability of its author to maintain himself in power.



## ***II.—How far a small and exclusive electorate is able to withstand the Will of the People, and to what extent it is immune from fits of prejudice and panic.***

A common argument against giving votes to all and sundry is that it tends to make governments subservient to popular outbursts of prejudice and panic. An equally common argument in its favour is that it enables ‘the Will of the People’ to prevail.

Possibly the extent both of the evil and of the benefit has been somewhat exaggerated. According to our present notions the franchise, until about a hundred years ago, was unreasonably restricted by the high property qualification required of voters. Moreover, the electoral system was then full of anomalies and absurd survivals that allowed a few rich men to manipulate a large number of the constituencies. Despite these safeguards, however, it does not appear that prejudice and panic were any less liable to wreck a government’s policy in Walpole’s time, or in the times of the elder and the younger Pitt, than they are to-day. And despite these obstacles (looking at the matter from an opposite point of view) ‘the Will of the People’ had a surprising way of prevailing at general elections even before the Reform Bill of 1832 became law.

Prejudice and panic, blended in varying proportions, affected the action and the fate of governments at the time of the Popish Plot, of the Sacheverell agitation, of the South Sea Bubble, of Walpole’s Excise Bill, of Walpole’s struggle to keep out of the Spanish war, of Pitt’s efforts to emancipate the Irish Roman Catholics.<sup>[77]</sup> It would not be easy to find in modern times more flagrant instances than these.

The other aspect, however, should not be ignored. When popular feeling was unmistakably roused, the small, corrupt and privileged electorate of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was no better able, nor apparently any more disposed, to resist ‘the Will of the People’ than are those enfranchised multitudes who mark their ballot papers in the twentieth. It is a recent memory, how at the general election of 1906, on a wide suffrage, the Liberals won by a prodigious majority because the country was heartily sick of a nerveless government and of the divided counsels of the Unionists. But in 1784, at the worst period of ‘pocket boroughs,’ the younger Pitt won an equally overwhelming victory, because the country was heartily sick of the factious opposition of Fox and North. And in 1710 the Tories, under Harley and Bolingbroke, beat their opponents out of the field, because the country longed for peace and was heartily sick of the Whig administration that had selfishly obstructed it.<sup>[78]</sup>

If, in some inconceivable reaction, our parliamentary franchise were restricted to males over the age of thirty, who could prove that they paid super-tax, or were members of some learned profession, or graduates of a university, or gentlemen of title, should we feel confident that this small and exclusive electorate would be any less hysterical, any more exempt from prejudice and panic than our present one which includes every man and woman who has come of age? And, on the other hand, should we need to fear that on occasions when the feeling of the country was really roused, this small and exclusive electorate would differ in opinion from the mass of its fellow-countrymen? Representative institutions, be their franchises wide or narrow, would seem to be affected in moments of high excitement by the subtle percolation of some volatile essence, so that, willy-nilly, and whether for good or for evil, the majority of voters will usually share, and give expression to, the national mood.

A thoughtful Conservative, without being an inordinate admirer of modern journalism, would probably agree that the flood of light which is now thrown on passing events makes for safety and stability. Our world is much better lit than it used to be; and this is mainly due to the energy and lucidity with which the Press sets forth every variety of opinion. One of the chief dangers of Walpole’s day was born of those suspicions that are bred in darkness. The ownership of newspapers was then neither a paying nor a reputable trade. Even the most popular journals were unable to keep their heads above water without the aid of subsidies, and had little influence, owing to their notorious lack of independence. The news they provided was meagre and untrustworthy; most of it mere rumour or invention. Journalists, with but few exceptions, were bibulous and ill-paid hirelings who wrote as willingly on one side as on the other. Until much later days newspapers gave out no general illumination; they were only petty bonfires, round which bands of hard-bitten partisans clustered to warm themselves at the blaze of their own peculiar animosities.

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### III.—Concerning Walpole's first serious misadventure (1732-1733).

Walpole's reputation is due largely to his successful management of the Treasury, of Parliament and of public opinion. The defeat of his Excise Bill in 1733 was not caused by mismanagement of the Treasury, but by one of his rare lapses in the management of Parliament and public opinion. His failure on that occasion inflicted a severe and sudden check upon his hitherto unbroken course of administrative reform. It is interesting also because it illustrates one of the besetting weaknesses of party government.

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When Parliament met in February 1733 the death of Augustus, king of Poland, had been known for several days. The news caused some anxiety at court and to those ministers who dealt with foreign affairs, but it failed altogether in distracting the thoughts of politicians from a domestic controversy that had been raging with ever-increasing fury for the better part of a year.<sup>[79]</sup>

In 1733 a Customs duty was payable on all imported goods so soon as they were landed: in theory nothing escaped. This duty was charged *ad valorem*, and varied upwards, from a minimum of five per cent. For the guidance of customs officers the estimated values of several thousand articles were scheduled; but only a comparatively few items in this vast list were imported in sufficient quantities and taxed at sufficiently high rates to yield a substantial profit to the Treasury.

When the merchant's liability on a cargo ran into large figures, he was allowed to give his bond instead of making a money payment, provided that he could find two substantial sureties. If he paid cash down, a portion of his capital must lie idle—possibly for a long time—until he found customers to buy his goods, or until he re-exported them, in which case he was entitled to claim repayment of the whole amount of the customs duty. If, on the other hand, he gave his bond, he was obliged to put himself under obligations to a couple of friends, who might at some inconvenient moment ask a similar favour in return. From the merchant's point of view it was an awkward and onerous system; while from the Treasury point of view it was a risky one, because the goods remained, not in a bonded warehouse under government supervision, but in their owner's custody, and were in practice often tampered with.<sup>[80]</sup>

An excise duty was payable on four-and-twenty articles. Of these a considerable number were imports which had already paid a customs duty; the rest were commodities that had been grown or made within the United Kingdom.<sup>[81]</sup> The excise duty was levied before the commodities that were subject to it could lawfully be offered for sale in warehouses and shops.

The Customs employed officers at the seaport towns to examine all incoming and outgoing cargoes, and also a force of armed guards to prevent high-handed smuggling along the coasts.

The staff that served the Excise was employed on somewhat different lines. It was not merely a coast-wise organisation, like that of the Customs, but was established in every city, market-town and large village throughout the United Kingdom. The business of its inspectors, who were aided by armed assistants, was to see that no exciseable goods were offered for sale except on registered premises, and unless the duty to which they were liable had been paid. Excisemen had full powers, which they exercised at irregular intervals, to search all warehouses and shops, to demand to see the official receipts for payment of duty, to check these with the stock accounts and to impound anything of which a satisfactory explanation could not be given. They were not allowed, however, to enter private dwellings on mere suspicion, but only after they had sworn affidavits before a magistrate and had obtained a search warrant.

There was no effective co-operation between custom-house officers and excisemen even in cases where a commodity was subject to both sets of duties. The service of the Excise was moderately efficient, but that of the Customs, when it worked unaided, was deplorably inadequate. Frauds on the customs revenue were committed wholesale at many seaports, while the force of coast-guards was no match for the smugglers.

All along the coasts, wherever smuggling was practicable, coast-guards were sprinkled in twos and threes at observation posts five miles or so apart. These tiny garrisons communicated with one another by signals when they could. But the law-breakers also had their observation posts and signals, by means of which scores or hundreds of desperadoes could be assembled with marvellous celerity at some pre-appointed cove or estuary. A night was chosen when moon, and wind, and tide were favourable. So soon as the smuggling ship dropped anchor she was surrounded by row-boats which brought her cargo ashore. At a high speed, but in good order, the contraband was packed on ponies and



dispersed by mountain tracks and by-ways to the nearest inland towns. By daybreak the goods were usually so far away that the small and slow-moving customs force had but little chance of coming up with them, and it was no business of excisemen to interfere.

The smugglers' way of doing things extorts our admiration. Theirs was an energetic industry with well-laid plans and a rude but vigorous organisation. They concentrated at the vital point in overwhelming numbers, worked together like a highly trained football team and thought lightly of homicide.<sup>[82]</sup>

The revenue suffered even more severely at the seaport towns, although its losses there were due, not to methods of violence, but partly to flaws in the customs regulations of which importers took full advantage, partly to frauds of a large and ingenious variety. The customs duty on tobacco, for example, was charged by weight, and was subject to a discount of ten per cent for prompt payment; but if a merchant re-exported any of his bales he was entitled to have the full *gross* amount of the tax on them refunded. Human nature could hardly be expected to overlook so easy a way to profit; and where was the dishonesty in walking through an open door? But other means were widely practised which could plead no such excuse. When the bales of tobacco arrived from America they were dry and weighed light; and they paid duty accordingly. But if they were kept for a few weeks in a damp cellar, they absorbed moisture and soon became much heavier. If, after being treated in this way, they were weighed again on re-exportation, their owner often received a drawback considerably larger than the duty he had originally paid.

Cruder methods than these were used occasionally to defraud the revenue. Sometimes, though by no means so frequently as historians have been apt to assume, the insides of the bales were hollowed out and stuffed with heavy substances. Sometimes the bales were opened in the merchant's warehouse and picked over carefully; the stalks and worthless matter were then mixed with sand and sawdust, and re-baled for export; thereupon the full drawback payable on pure tobacco was claimed by and handed to the owner. With the collusion of custom-house officials light bales were chosen as samples for weighing inwards and heavy bales for weighing outwards. There were alternative sets of false weights in the warehouses, and there were false entries of description in the merchant's books. There seemed to be no end to the ingenuity of enterprising traders on the one hand and to the pliancy of the customs service on the other. The most serious smuggling and the worst frauds occurred at the Port of London under the very nose of the Customs Commission. Captains, sailors, lightermen, illicit traders and revenue officials carried on a thriving partnership. No one could be certain where corruption stopped. It was generally believed, though never proved, that some of the Commissioners themselves took a handsome share of the spoils.

In 1732 these leakages, frauds and evasions were considered by a parliamentary committee. Its disclosures justified Walpole in stating that while the gross customs duties on tobacco amounted to £750,000 per annum, the sum of £590,000 was claimed and repaid as drawbacks on re-export, so that only £160,000 reached the Treasury in the end. And in addition to this, there were all the losses due to direct smuggling. He showed conclusively that owing to these irregularities the British people paid the tobacco duty twice over: they paid it as consumers when they bought tobacco, for smuggled tobacco was no cheaper than the lawful article; and they paid it again in increased taxation, because the deficiency in the revenue had to be made good. His exposure of these evils does not seem to have seriously ruffled the serenity of Parliament. In those days speculation and corruption were looked at somewhat calmly, as frailties that were inherent in mankind: since nothing could cure or uproot them it was foolish to become excited. Members of Parliament who enjoyed their own pickings and 'gratifications' at the public expense, could hardly be expected to show an uncharitable severity towards these humbler depredators, or to have much sympathy with a purity campaign that might possibly end by disturbing the security of their own emoluments.

Walpole's Excise Bill of 1733 had no further objects than to put an end to the abuses in the tobacco trade and to somewhat similar abuses that affected the importation of foreign wines.<sup>[83]</sup> He would not have been Walpole had he aimed at a thorough cleansing and purification, or at a theoretical perfection. His plan was not made water-tight at every seam, but it was simplicity itself, and had it been accepted, it would certainly have done what he claimed that it would do. He aimed not at all at the vindication of the principles of justice, or at the discovery and punishment of evil-doers, but merely at cutting off their means of livelihood. He wished to cause as little fuss and scandal as possible, and above all to avoid giving occasion for loud outcries and demands for an investigation that might never end. He was not one of those who insist that a scheme of practical reform must be made symmetrical and complete before they will have anything to do with it. It was enough for him that his Excise Bill would have cured the worst of the existing evils.

Walpole proposed in his Bill to do away the customs duty on tobacco and to substitute for it an excise duty at a slightly lower rate. When tobacco was imported it would be stored in bonded warehouses, and no duty would be demanded until

the owner wished to remove it for purposes of sale within the United Kingdom. It would then be weighed on government scales and the duty would be assessed and exacted before its removal. Or if, on the other hand, the owner wished to re-export it, he would be allowed to do so without hindrance. In this case there would be no need to weigh the bales at all, because, as no duty had been paid, no drawback could be claimed. By this means fraudulent practices of nearly every kind would be dried up at their sources.

To starve out the smuggling industry in the same thorough fashion was impracticable, but it would have been effectively discouraged by the methods which Walpole proposed to use against it. Henceforth the whole force of excisemen throughout the country would see to it that no tobacco was anywhere offered for sale which could not prove a legitimate pedigree. The existing staff, with an addition of one hundred and twenty-five new officers, would have been sufficient for all purposes connected with tobacco and foreign wines.<sup>[84]</sup> The coast-guards and the custom-house men would still be retained, and would co-operate with the excise service in tracking down contraband.

Walpole reckoned that this arrangement would speedily reduce smuggling to a trivial scale. Tradesmen, being a timid folk and peculiarly sensitive to the danger of fines and imprisonment, would shrink from handling goods which the law might condemn. And though smugglers were bold enough and extremely efficient in their own violent and fitful enterprises, they were not the kind of cool-headed and patient people to sit down quietly and organise a widespread system of clandestine sale. The patronage of a few private clients would never repay their efforts or compensate them for their risks.

The remedy Walpole proposed deserves all the praise he claimed for it: it was simple; it was certain to be efficacious; and no one could possibly be hurt by it, except law-breakers, cheats and a certain number of cunning merchants, who had availed themselves of the laxity of the customs regulations, in order to filch a ten per cent profit which it had never been intended they should receive.

It was, of course, to be expected that the shopkeepers would grumble at any extension of the right of search. But many, probably the majority, of those shops which dealt in tobacco or foreign wines, dealt also in other goods that were subject to excise, and their owners accordingly were habituated to the unwelcome visits of revenue officers. Twenty-one articles of common consumption already paid excise duty. The addition of two more items to the existing list could not reasonably be described as an intolerable molestation. Reason, however, had little concern in this discussion.

The honest importers of tobacco stood to gain, for Walpole's proposals offered them protection, which they sorely needed, against illicit competition. Unfortunately the goodwill of honest importers was of no avail. They may not have been in a minority among men of their own class and calling, but they were certainly cowed by the demeanour of the rest. Their mild expressions of approval were drowned in a loud and hostile chorus. The fraudulent importers, who stood to lose by Walpole's proposals, had stronger lungs and a case that more readily caught the popular ear. They posed as patriots denouncing a felonious attack on the ancient liberties of England. All their self-interested and corrupt following shouted in sympathy.

Bolingbroke and his lieutenants had it in their power to make a good deal of mischief with the aid of grumbling shopkeepers and raging cheats, but they could never have won a complete victory unless they had found a stronger and more reputable ally. It was by fomenting the suspicions and prejudices of the whole nation that they were able to prevail.

The absurdity of the situation lies in this, that it was the nation as a whole, and not any particular section of it, which would have been the chief beneficiary under Walpole's proposals. And the oddest circumstance of all is that the business community—that part of the nation which during recent years had received so many proofs of Walpole's concern for its welfare, which had so many reasons for trusting his judgement, and so few for trusting that of his opponents—should have been louder than all the rest in condemnation of his policy. The truth is that at this time men of business were not thinking of their material prosperity, but, in however muddled a fashion, of their liberties as Englishmen.

At a first glance, as we look back upon the scene, we are utterly bewildered:—the country surging with anger and fear; the huge ministerial majority over-awed by the popular outcry; the Opposition wild, fierce and triumphant, certain at last, after long years of fruitless endeavour, that its enemy was doomed, and that the spoils of victory were within its grasp. And the cause of all this hubbub and perturbation was nothing but a sensible little bill, that added not a penny to taxation, that introduced no novel methods of collection, but merely proposed that the duty on tobacco should henceforth be levied in the same way as the duties on tea, coffee, beer, malt and a number of other articles had been levied without complaint for a large number of years. The change suggested was not a matter of principle, but merely one of



convenience. From this distance it seems as if everyone except Walpole had gone crazy. The story reads like one of those old trials for witchcraft, where the minds of judge and jury were spell-bound and solely possessed by the horrible nature of the accusation, so that the clearest evidence for the prisoner counted for nothing, and common sense was completely out of court.

The agitation against Walpole's Excise Bill, like many another occurrence of the same sort, cannot be understood unless something more is known about it than the intrinsic merits or demerits of a certain set of proposals. This famous political contest was but a single chapter, and not the last, in a history that had its beginning more than a hundred years earlier.



#### IV.—*Why taxes of Excise bore a bad name (1626-1732).*

Every fresh tax is odious to those who have to pay it, and, merely because it is an innovation, it is liable to be unpopular also with the people at large whom it is designed to benefit. One of the discomforts of living in a progressive society is that new fiscal methods are constantly required in order to cover the rising expenditure. The taxes that people have grown accustomed to from long usage cannot be indefinitely increased without laying an intolerable burden on certain classes of consumers, on certain manufacturing and trading interests, and on the owners of certain kinds of property. What weigh most, however, with Treasury officials, when they are seeking to balance a budget, are not so much considerations of abstract justice, as the knowledge that the old sources will dry up if an attempt is made to draw too much from them.

During the first quarter of the seventeenth century taxes of excise were freely levied in Holland; from there they spread into France and other adjacent countries; but it was not until 1626 that the government of Charles the First sought to introduce them into England. This attempt was greeted with such a clamour of indignation that it had to be abandoned. The King was already at loggerheads with his Parliament, and no fiscal innovations that he might recommend had the slightest chance of being considered on their merits. The system of excise was accordingly denounced by the popular party as an instrument of tyranny and a badge of servitude. Two years later Pym and his friends forced Charles to assent to the Petition of Right, and in that famous Charter Excise was assumed to be unconstitutional and incompatible with liberty. In 1641, on the eve of the civil war, when it was rumoured that Parliament intended to levy an excise, the accusation was branded as a royalist calumny.

Nevertheless, in 1643, within a year of the outbreak of war, the Parliament party found it necessary to impose an excise. It is interesting to note that Pym, who fifteen years earlier had taken such a high line against this particular tax, was the man chiefly responsible for its introduction and for its enforcement. After Pym's death, the Parliament party began to be suspected of a design to set up what afterwards came to be known as a 'general' or 'universal' excise—a system under which everything, or nearly everything, would have had to pay tax before it could lawfully have been offered for sale. In pursuance of this project they proceeded in 1647 to make a wider cast of their net. At this provocation London itself, their own peculiar stronghold, broke out in riots and burnings. Their fiscal policy thereupon received a check, and they were forced to abandon the duties on meat and salt.

At first the parliamentary leaders excused their action in regard to excise on the ground that it was the only way of meeting military expenses, and assurances were given readily enough that these taxes should not outlast the war. But when the war ended, the odious system, tainted with tyranny and servitude, was not repealed. In the last year of the Protectorate it even received the blessing of Parliament as a sound method of raising revenue. But unpopularity still clung to it; the tax was inquisitorial; the premises of free-born Englishmen were sacred and should be immune from the intrusion of government extortioners. But the chief thing against the excise was its tradition, and you cannot conjure away a bad name by a resolution of the House of Commons.

After the Restoration, Charles the Second, aiming at popularity, reduced the excise, and during the next decade drew no more from it than £300,000 a year. But his expenses were ill-regulated and he was always short of money. Before the end of his reign he was forced to increase and extend the obnoxious duties. The first enthusiasm of loyalty had by this time evaporated, and his enemies gladly seized the opportunity of raising the same cries that had served Pym so well in his earlier days against Charles the First. When James the Second made further demands of a similar sort the cries grew louder. The quarrel between the King and his subjects was then coming rapidly to a head, and it was only natural that the old hateful association of excise with tyranny should recur to people's minds.

The Revolution, when it came, settled the general dispute, but left the tax untouched. Indeed the efforts of Louis the Fourteenth to restore the Stewarts made it necessary almost at once to raise more revenue by increasing the excise.

War budgets are notoriously hard to balance. Even though in fact the land tax of four shillings in the pound averaged out at only two shillings, or thereabouts, owing to aged and inadequate assessments, it was a heavy burden, and any attempt to increase it might have sapped the loyalty of the great Whig landowners, whose goodwill had become more than ever necessary to William the Third since Queen Mary's death in 1694. At this time the excise duties produced only a million per annum. It was rumoured that Godolphin, like Pym half a century earlier, inclined towards a 'general' or 'universal' system. This rumour does not seem to have caused any popular ferment. The war with France was a war of independence. The nation was of one mind as to the need for waging it; and if it were waged, it must obviously be paid for in some more or less unpleasant way. It was the business of statesmen to consider behind the scenes how the

expenses of a temporary emergency should be met. The rival theories of taxation put forward by Locke and Davenant attracted a certain amount of attention; but there were not many people who cared to follow a discussion that never emerged from the academic phase into full and practical publicity.

Locke<sup>[85]</sup> was the most eminent political philosopher of his day; the oracle of the Whigs when his conclusions supported their policy, as in most things they did. Davenant<sup>[86]</sup> wrote as a Tory who had accepted the consequences of the Revolution. He was at times an abusive pamphleteer, but he was also a sensible, industrious fellow with practical experience. On this particular matter of taxation he came nearer than Locke did to the truth.

Locke had propounded a theory that every tax worked its way back, by more or less irritating processes, to the land, which, in the long last, had to bear all the fiscal burdens of her children. It was therefore the simpler and the wiser plan to raise directly from the land all the revenue that was needed, for in this way intermediate disturbances of society would be avoided. Philosophers are liable to make mistakes when they offer their advice in practical affairs. The worst of great thinkers, as Bright said of Stuart Mill, is that they so often think wrong.

Davenant was less of a theorist than Locke, but he was a century in advance of his time. His ideal was an equal tax on the earnings of all capital whether it was invested in land that produced rents or in businesses that produced profits. Why should traders, manufacturers, bankers, shipowners and the rest pay nothing on the earnings of their capital, when landlords were groaning under a land tax of four shillings in the pound? The fairest and also the most productive tax would be one that was levied equally on all incomes alike. But Davenant soon realised that an income tax was impracticable, for the reason that the government of William the Third was not strong enough to face the storm of opposition that such an innovation would certainly have raised.

Davenant therefore fell back upon a reform and extension of the excise. It was true that a 'general' or 'universal' excise would be less simple, less far-reaching and less productive than an income tax; but it would not necessarily be either unfair or oppressive, for the needs of the poor and the ability of the rich to pay would be taken into account in any thorough-going readjustment. He believed at first that this project was practicable, and he seems to have made some way in bringing Godolphin round to his views. He recognised, however, that the new system, in order to succeed, must be accepted heartily, must commend itself to an undoubted preponderance of public opinion, otherwise, even if Parliament could be persuaded to pass the needful legislation, every attempt to enforce it would certainly fail. It seems likely that the reason why Davenant's excise proposals were never brought forward is that Godolphin and the politicians, possibly even Davenant himself, came to the conclusion that this fundamental condition could not be fulfilled.

Seeing that an income tax and a general excise were alike impracticable, the additional revenue that was needed for waging war continued to be levied piecemeal, on no sound and consistent principles, and without concern for the hindrance or injury that the various imposts might inflict upon the national prosperity. An extension of the excise was resorted to among other expedients; but no attempt was made to reform it. Under Godolphin this tax was excused and justified, as it had been excused and justified under Pym, on the ground that it was a war measure that would be repealed when peace was won. But when the treaty of Utrecht brought peace, these assurances were forgotten as they had been forgotten in the days of Cromwell.

When Walpole became head of government in 1721 the excise was yielding three millions a year, and no one seemed to be grumbling. In retaining these duties he acted as any other prudent Chancellor of the Exchequer would have done. But he was mistaken if he thought that the old unreasoning hatred of excise was dead; it was only slumbering. The Petition of Right and the encroachments of the Stewarts had given the tax a bad name which it had not yet lived down. At any moment a rash act might revive all these ancient memories and prejudices. It is true that the intrusions of government inspectors annoyed, not the community as a whole, but only a section of it that was neither very numerous nor very powerful. The mass of the people did not object to the principle of excise, for they did not understand what the principle was. They did not stop to consider how much greater their security against royal tyranny was in 1733 than their ancestors' in 1628. They merely hated a word, as people so often do. And the Opposition, looking at nothing but its own immediate interests, encouraged this hatred, as Oppositions have so often done in the history of party government.

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## V.—*How Walpole, by a slip of the tongue, produced a violent agitation (1732).*

When Walpole in 1728 took off the excise on salt, he earned, as he meant to do, a modest popularity. When four years later he laid it on again, he was angrily attacked. He had then determined to reduce the land tax to a shilling in the pound, and an increase in the excise seemed the least objectionable way of finding an equivalent revenue. It was no doubt more prudent to reimpose a duty that people had been used so recently to pay, than to have recourse to another that would be clothed in the vague horrors of novelty. The salt tax had pressed very hardly on the poor; but at least it was familiar. A new tax, even though it had affected only the luxuries of the rich, would have been a more dangerous weapon to place in the hands of the Opposition.

It seems likely that in 1732 Walpole could have reimposed the salt excise without raising more than a short-lived storm, had he been content to confine his argument to this particular commodity. But it is one of the hardest things in the world for a man, in whose mind some grand project is gestating, to speak on any kindred topic without giving his audience some inkling of his hopes and expectations. The interesting condition of Walpole's mind was betrayed to his enemies by a few chance phrases which he let fall during the debate.

We shall never know for certain the details or even the main features of Walpole's project, nor the methods and stages by which he hoped to achieve it. For twelve years past he had been steadily increasing the national prosperity; but the belief that he intended now to crown his previous successes with a thorough-going reform of the whole system of taxation rests more on inferences than on direct evidence. Conjecture and guess-work, however, lead us to the following conclusions:—That he aimed, first and foremost, at the total abolition of the land tax; that he proposed to stop the enormous leakage in the collection of customs by amalgamating the two services of customs and excise, as had already been done, more or less effectively, with regard to tea, coffee, chocolate and various other articles of common consumption; that he saw clearly the advantages which would accrue, both to the revenue and to all honest traders, from establishing bonded warehouses; that he meant to sweep away the *ad valorem* customs duties on some thousands of articles which were of so trivial a nature that the tax on them was merely a hindrance to trade and did not cover the costs of collection; that the fundamental principle of his fiscal reforms would have been the exemption, so far as possible, of the necessities of the poor, and the laying of the chief burden upon luxuries, especially upon the luxuries of the rich.

These guesses and conjectures rest on foundations of a varying surety; but taken as a whole they are consistent not only with Walpole's general policy on fiscal matters, but also with his political opportunism and with the temper of his mind. They are characteristic of him alike in their virtues and in their faults. For example, it would certainly have been wise to repeal nine-tenths or more of the existing customs duties, seeing that they were both irksome and unremunerative; but would it have been equally wise, or just, to abolish the land tax? Possibly not; but to have done so would have been exceedingly useful as a means of conciliating the country gentlemen, who had a standing grievance because their incomes were taxed, while those of the trading community went scot-free.

If Walpole was really considering such a scheme of reform as has been set forth here, a 'general' excise—a 'general' excise in a favourable and statesmanlike sense of the term—must almost certainly have formed part of his project.

During the debate on the salt tax in the session of 1732 Walpole let it be understood that he proposed to introduce next year a fiscal measure of wider scope. His opponents guessed at once that what he had in view could be nothing else than a 'general' excise. Thereupon their intended attack against the peculiarly oppressive nature of the salt tax became of secondary importance. An unreflecting instinct led them to denounce a 'general' excise in set terms and to charge Walpole with a conspiracy against the liberties of the people. From the party point of view their instinct was entirely sound. They spoke foolishly according to their wont; but they were helped even by their foolishness, which proved to be a highly infectious complaint.

These provocations, instead of warning Walpole that he was on dangerous ground, lured him into a very quagmire. He forgot his own maxim that reason is seldom an effective weapon against folly. A peck of dust thrown good-humouredly in his opponents' eyes might possibly have saved him, and certainly mere silence would have been safer than argument. His ill-timed candour, when he came to reply on the debate, was not disarming, but the very reverse. 'If,' said he, 'it be found by experience, that the present method of raising our taxes is more burthensome upon our trade, and more inconvenient and expensive than the excise, I see no manner of reason why we should be frightened by these two words, *General Excise*, from changing the method of collecting the taxes we now pay, and choosing that which is most convenient for the trading part of the nation.'<sup>[87]</sup> The issue could hardly have been stated more reasonably or more unwisely. When Walpole sat down, mischief had been done that could never be mended.

What Walpole's enemies said and did on this occasion was said and done on the spur of the moment. The critical debate was the affair of a single night. The parliamentary leaders were taken by surprise, while Bolingbroke, their great extra-mural chieftain, knew nothing of what had happened until the following day. The ever-failing Opposition had blundered on to a good thing at last, and the credit for this was due to the rank-and-file rather than to the captains.

During seven long years<sup>[88]</sup> Bolingbroke, Wyndham and Pulteney had scored not a single success against the government. The utmost they could boast of was that they had usually been able to preserve a decent semblance of union between their Whig and Tory followers. We do not look for either statesmanship or patriotism in a hungry and disappointed Opposition, but we expect to find it skilful in parliamentary tactics and shrewd in judging of party interests. The leaders, however, had hitherto shown themselves lacking even in these lower qualities. Their generalship had been a series of brilliant but unbroken failures. Here at last was an opportunity so easy that they could hardly miss it. The outburst in the Commons must be made to echo throughout the country. Walpole must be pinned down to his fatal admission, and the horrors of a general excise must be painted in the most lurid colours.

What followed would be described to-day as 'a whirlwind campaign.' The methods employed were somewhat different from those which a modern Opposition would use, but they were certainly no less effective. While the session lasted the House of Commons was a serviceable sounding-board. During the long recess incendiary articles appeared in every number of the *Craftsman*, while denunciatory pamphlets followed one another in a quick succession. Representatives of important business interests, delegates from municipal and other corporations were in constant communication with busy politicians. The whole country was seething with excitement. At church doors after the services were over, at boards and councils, in drawing-rooms and ale-houses there was talk of Walpole's wickedness and of a conspiracy against freedom. It is true that there were no platform orators, no smart newspaper articles for the breakfast table; but for all that the agitation was conducted every bit as successfully as it could have been with the most up-to-date appliances. The Opposition was in the exceptionally favourable position of having an eager audience and a dumb adversary.

A general excise, as it was depicted by Walpole's enemies, would have added grievously to the cost of living, would have violated the privacy of every Englishman's home, and would have swamped the electorate with hireling wretches whose votes would turn the scale in favour of the government. Bolingbroke and his friends were now armed with two weapons which even blundering tacticians can use with fatal effect:—they had found a word of odious significance which they could tie like a label round the necks of their opponents; and they had also found a cry that would appeal directly to the bellies and backs of the whole population. People were told, and soon came to believe, that their food would cost them more; and their drink; and their clothes; and all their other necessities, comforts and luxuries. Broadly speaking, these statements were untrue, and even if they had been true, it might still have been an excellent bargain to secure better trade, with the reasonable prospect of higher wages and more regular employment, at the price of some slight addition to the cost of living. But it was the interest of the Opposition to keep the eyes of the people fixed upon an immediate danger and to hide away the hope of an ultimate benefit. These tactics were completely successful. By midsummer the country was as much perturbed about a general excise as it might have been about the approach of a pestilence. During the autumn, perturbation became a panic. When Parliament met in the following February petitions came pouring in upon it from public and semi-public bodies of every description, protesting against a measure that had no real existence, but was merely a phantom of Bolingbroke's ingenious imagination. Members of Parliament were overwhelmed by correspondence from their constituents—those of the Opposition with letters of gratitude and encouragement; those on the government side with threats and abuse.

It is just conceivable that Walpole had spoken deliberately in the salt tax debate, thinking that opportunity a favourable one for testing public opinion and preparing people's minds. He may have been flying a kite, as even the least communicative politicians occasionally do, in order to ascertain the force and direction of the wind. But if this were so, his subsequent course of action shows that he drew a wrong conclusion from his observations. Moreover the flown kite disclosed his own position, which at once became a mark for all the enemy batteries. On the whole it seems more likely that what Walpole said so ill-advisedly was merely the bubbling over of a mind preoccupied with ideas of reform, and that the disaster which overtook him was due entirely to an inadvertency.

For some months Walpole let the Opposition go unanswered. He may have thought that, if he provided no fresh fuel in the shape of arguments and explanations, the agitation would burn itself out. But it did not burn itself out; on the contrary, the whole country was soon in a blaze. Looking back, one sees no way in which he could have stopped the fire from spreading or have beaten it out.

In the autumn he began to have misgivings. Although it was obviously impossible for him to advocate a measure the

contents of which he was not yet in a position to disclose, something might perhaps be achieved by means of a counter-attack. Pamphlets accordingly appeared in which the grosser absurdities of the agitation were exposed. Unfortunately the country was by that time in one of those insanely sombre moods where nothing seems absurd and the most fantastic bogey becomes a shape of terror.

The worst of having made a half-confidence was that it gave Walpole nothing definite to defend, while it provided his opponents with just the kind of vagueness that was most favourable to their attack. He had raised one small corner of the napkin, and people thereupon indulged their fancies in guessing at the horrors which lay under the unlifted remainder. A full disclosure at that stage would not have mended matters, but would have worsened them; and, for a variety of reasons, Walpole could not make a disclosure, either full or partial. His plan was not yet hatched, but only incubating. To have given a general idea of it would have tied his own hands without stopping the tongues of his enemies. But even if the plan had been complete, no minister in his senses would have published it until the day when he stood up to explain it from his place in Parliament. To have made it known in advance would have been like offering a bound victim for every carrion crow to peck at. Each clause would have been misrepresented and tortured out of its straightforward meaning by pamphleteers writing with all the advantages of a leisurely collaboration, and without any danger of instantaneous exposure.

Then there was the cabinet difficulty. Walpole did not trust either the loyalty or the secrecy of his colleagues. He was probably right; he should have known his men, for they were of his own choosing. He had not chosen them for their characters, but for the use he could make of their abilities or their parliamentary followings. A lack of independence had always been a fundamental condition of his choosing anyone, except under the compulsion of circumstances. But the fact that most members of his administration conformed to these standards was no guarantee against their turning traitors or intriguers, if they were frightened or flattered by the other side. Had his government consisted of loyal and discreet ministers he might have shown them the outlines of his project at the beginning, invited their opinions and brought them round to his own. Their openly proclaimed confidence in their chief would then have had the effect of allaying the anxieties and perturbations of his humbler followers; and this easement would have had the further effect of depriving the Opposition of its main hope. For the Opposition was drawing great encouragement from the glum faces and despondent croakings of the ministerial rank-and-file, and it was also greatly cheered by the disloyal utterances of several members of the government, who in general conversation made no secret of their hostility. The Opposition surmised quite correctly that more than half Walpole's customary adherents looked either with doubt or disfavour upon the policy that was attributed to him.

Walpole was the astutest politician in England; but even the astutest politician will sometimes blunder. He had already made two blunders, and he had not yet come to the end of his predestined list. It would have needed more than his own efforts to extricate him from his present embarrassment, and the help that might conceivably have saved him was not forthcoming. For although Walpole was not only the astutest politician in England, but also by far the greatest parliamentary leader of his generation, the character of his leadership was not without flaws. The colleagues whom he had chosen so carefully were not the sort of persons to put loyalty before prudence; nor had he ever won the passionate, unreasoning and unflinching devotion of his party.

And yet it would have been hard to find anyone living at that time who was abler than he at choosing good men and at gaining the hearts of his subordinates. No statesman was ever served with more affectionate loyalty by his permanent officials. After his fall some of them risked impeachment sooner than give evidence against him. It was not merely that they respected his judgement in affairs, his courage and skill in handling them, and the discriminating quality of his praise and favours; they also loved him as their chief. He never hid his gratitude when their efforts deserved it; they worked by his encouragement, were sure that he would never throw them over, and received constant proofs of his infinite patience and consideration. There was no tinge of jealousy in his relations with members of the civil service; he showed them the warm, human side of his nature as frankly as he showed it to his private friends.

This, however, was not his way with politicians. A politician in his opinion always needed watching. He must not be allowed to gain so much credit at court or with Parliament as might enable him to encroach upon his leader's power or prestige. Every politician of ability was a potential rival, to be trashed for overtopping and kept as much as possible in the dark as to the future course of policy. Therefore it is not surprising that although ambitious people followed Walpole's victorious banner and took his generous wages, they were unwilling, when his luck appeared to be changing, to burn their fingers or wet their feet in his behalf.

Long before Parliament met, it must have been clear to Walpole that no comprehensive scheme of fiscal reform could



any longer be thought of in the near future. Had he been perfectly free to choose, he would probably have preferred to leave the whole matter over until some subsequent session. But he had already gone so far that he could not help going a few steps farther.

The salt tax debate had given rise to a belief that he intended to call in the aid of the excise in order to protect the revenue. The committee he had appointed to inquire into the frauds on the customs had reported that these were of a serious nature. If he did nothing to stop these abuses his prestige would suffer; for the Opposition leaders would boast that he had been terrified by their agitation. And even if he did nothing, this would not put an end to the agitation; for the Opposition would then assuredly maintain that he had not finally abandoned his felonious design against English liberties, but was craftily biding his time until after the general election that came due in the following year. And Walpole knew that he would almost certainly be beaten, if he had to fight that election with such a millstone of suspicion hanging at his neck.

On the eve of the session he held a meeting of his friends at which he showed every sign of confidence. He knew the Opposition to be weak in character, in courage and in unity. He gave it as his opinion that the gravity of the existing frauds upon the revenue and the innocence of his proposals for bringing them to an end only needed to be set before Parliament by his own vigorous advocacy, in order that his opponents should appear fools, and that their whole structure of exaggeration and mendacity should be pulled about their ears. For he did not purpose making any change whatsoever in the substance of the taxes already levied on tobacco and foreign wines, but only what might justly be described as a very trifling change in the method of their collection.

Walpole's confidence would have been well founded had the conditions been normal, but unfortunately they were not. Until he was actually engaged in bringing in his bill he failed to realise the full force of unreason by which he was opposed, or to grasp the fact that even the mildest and most sensible measure would have been doomed to failure had it contained the fatal word 'excise.' For once he misread the signs. He had to deal now, not with a few hundred members of Parliament, but with an excited, ill-informed and panic-stricken people.

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## VI.—*How Walpole was beaten in the House of Commons (1733).*

The opening day of session showed the House of Commons in a state of irrepressible excitement. During the weeks of February and early March, Opposition speakers rode roughshod over the rules of parliamentary procedure, in order to force on a premature discussion. The fact that they knew but little of Walpole's general ideas and nothing at all of his concrete plans was no obstacle to the flow of their vituperation. There were taunts and skirmishes on the Address, and afterwards on various resolutions. But Walpole refused to be drawn into their trap.

He introduced his measure on the 15th of March, and the first fateful division took place before the House rose. To posterity Walpole's speech appears unanswerable,<sup>[89]</sup> but it produced little or no effect on those to whom it was addressed. It failed to revive the courage of his friends, and it neither shamed nor silenced his opponents. Moreover, despite its great merits, it both began and ended badly.

It began with an uncompromising denunciation of a 'general excise' as not only impracticable but unjust. Walpole informed his astonished audience that he should consider himself guilty of a crime if he proposed anything of this nature, and that they would be no less guilty if they accepted it. He could 'unequivocally assert' that no such scheme had ever entered his head.

There was no mistaking the meaning of what he said, and it is not altogether surprising that his words should have aroused suspicion of his good faith. For no one had forgotten that barely a year ago he had seemed to bestow his blessing upon the principle of a general excise, when he advised his fellow-members not to be frightened by 'those two words.' And now he was asking them to believe that it was a criminal idea and contrary to justice.

This was hardly the best way to silence his enemies and win back the confidence of his friends. If he had said all these hard things of the caricature of a general excise that the Opposition had lately been engaged in painting, no one would have had any reason to suspect his sincerity.<sup>[90]</sup> But this wholesale and unlimited condemnation, not of the caricature, but of the thing itself, seemed altogether inconsistent with the favourable opinion of it which he had so recently expressed. The Opposition was quite justified in arguing, either that he had been frightened by the success of their agitation into abandoning his project, or else that he had changed his tactics and was now approaching his goal by little and little. In the former case it would be good business to keep him on the run, in the latter to expose his cunning; and like shrewd politicians they aimed at doing both.

Walpole then came to the substantive part of his speech, and with this no fault can be found. Leakages, frauds and smuggling were at present making away with five-sixths of the annual revenue which the tobacco tax ought to have produced.<sup>[91]</sup> Between three and four hundred thousand pounds would be added to the national income if these evils could be checked. The obvious and simple remedy was for the customs to invoke the aid of the excise. The staffs and organisations of these two departments could end the trouble if they worked together.<sup>[92]</sup> He did not propose to add a single penny to the existing duty, but on the contrary to make a slight reduction. He offered to importers the use of bonded warehouses where their bales might be stored at a trifling charge, and without any payment of duty until the tobacco was required by its owners for inland sale. If it was re-exported it would pay nothing at all. This arrangement would be a boon to all honest traders and would hamper nobody, except those who lived upon fraudulent drawbacks. And now there would be no drawbacks of any kind.

Walpole next proceeded to examine the objections to excise with which, for a year past, the Opposition had been filling the ears of the public. Taking them one by one he showed their fatuity.

It had been urged that any extension of the excise would be a far greater national evil than any of those that it might cure; for it would turn a constitutional king into a tyrant and would debase the people. 'That monster of excise, that plan of arbitrary power,' as Pulteney had called it, was not likely to debase the English people or to make slaves of them; for, as Walpole reminded the House, a number of important commodities had for many years past been subject to excise duties that brought in annually about three and a quarter millions sterling. The brewers and maltsters, for example, could hardly be described as slaves, although they bore their grievous burden very placidly and with no more than an occasional grumble.

The intolerable intrusions of government officers into private premises, the intolerable injustice of allowing special commissioners of excise to adjudicate in cases of dispute, the intolerable expense which the new system would entail and the intolerable danger to free government in creating an army of excisemen, whose votes would always be at the disposal of the administration that employed them, were shown in turn to be nothing more than the phantasms of hysteria.

For the increase of excisemen would not amount to more than one hundred and fifty; there was to be a right of appeal from the commissioners to judges of the High Court; and there was no right of intrusion into any but registered premises (that is, into warehouses and shops) without a magistrate's warrant of search.

The final and most offensive charge had been that the main motive of Walpole's proposals was to increase the King's private income. This was disposed of by two simple considerations: if the King was being cheated of his due, he had as much right to redress as any of his subjects would have had in similar circumstances; and as the King's share of the duties only amounted to one-eighth of the total, the country would benefit to the extent of seven-eighths of whatever gain might result from a just collection.

Even the most matter-of-fact speaker is liable to be carried away, if he happens to be very much in earnest; especially so when he feels that he is beginning to move his audience. Walpole must have been aware that he was showing much of his old skill and, watching the faces opposite, may have felt that he was winning the day, as he had so often done before. His system of bonded warehouses, when fully understood, offered so many practical advantages that the Opposition had gone gingerly in attacking it. The apparent embarrassment of his enemies was Walpole's undoing. He pressed his claim too far and ended on a disastrous note of triumph:—not only would the institution of bonded warehouses be of great benefit to the revenue, but it would 'tend to make London a free port, and by consequence the market of the world.'

Had Walpole been advocating an extended or a general excise this claim would have been admirably well founded; but he had loudly forsworn any such intention, and professed to be dealing only with tobacco and imported wines. But as regards tobacco, Britain was already 'the market of the world'; for the American colonies enjoyed a virtual monopoly of its production, while the Navigation Acts provided that the whole of their exports must come to Britain for distribution to foreign countries. If Europe wished to snuff or smoke it must buy from London, Bristol or Glasgow; for there was nowhere else to buy from. And as for imported wines, was it reasonable to suppose that foreign growers of a commodity so awkward and hazardous to handle, so bulky in proportion to its value, would be tempted by any system of bonded warehouses to relinquish their existing practice of direct consignments to their European customers, and to incur, as it seemed without one single compensating advantage, the extra cost and risk of unloading at a London wharf, storage in some adjacent bonded warehouse and reshipment? For the purposes of his particular argument Walpole could hardly have found two worse examples.

The Opposition was not slow in pointing out that his boast contained a damaging admission. He was not dealing frankly with the House of Commons. Clearly tobacco and foreign wines were only a beginning, the thin end of the wedge. His ultimate aim, as they had so often assured the country, was a general excise.

By his opening Walpole had thickened the atmosphere of suspicion; by the main body of his speech he had perhaps done something to clear the air; but by his maladroit conclusion he must have lost nearly everything he had gained by his general arguments.

So soon as Walpole sat down, common sense ceased to play any part in the discussion. Wyndham, in a speech that seems to have impressed his contemporaries as 'most able and vehement,' gave the go-by to all fiscal, all practical considerations and thundered in general terms against a mine ready to be sprung under English liberties. He compared the author of the Finance Bill to Empson and Dudley, the extortioners of Henry the Seventh, who were hanged amid universal applause so soon as their master was dead. Their fate should be a warning for all time to those who robbed and cheated the people in order to win favour with an avaricious king. So far was this correct and rather solemn person carried by the current of his own violence, that his innuendoes glanced at royalty itself.

Sir John Barnard, a sober city merchant, an opponent whom Walpole greatly respected, insisted on sending for the Commissioners of Customs, who were asked if the frauds in the tobacco trade would cease, providing their staff did its duty diligently and faithfully. We need not wonder that they replied in the affirmative, though one of them, who lacked the proper regimental spirit, confirmed Walpole's estimate that the revenue was cheated of more than half of what it should have received.

Pulteney did not condescend to argument, but talked with moving eloquence about the ruin of commerce and the slavery of the people that would be inevitable if Walpole's proposals were accepted. He indulged his brilliant wit to the delight of the House by comparing the unhappy people of England to Sir Epicure Mammon in the *Alchymist*, who was gulled of his money by fine promises of mountains of gold, and got nothing for it in the end 'but some little thing to cure the itch.'

For once Bolingbroke had been able to keep his pack together upon the same scent. During the past year he had worked almost with his old energy. By articles in the *Craftsman*, by hundreds of private conversations and flattering

confidences, he had infused into both wings of his party the hope of victory, of Walpole's downfall and of a division of the spoils. Bolingbroke's phrases were echoed in every speech, and the simple dogma, that excise was the weapon of tyrants and that a people which submitted to it must become slaves, was announced and repeated as if it had been an incontrovertible axiom or law of nature. Strafford had been beheaded a hundred years earlier for his attack on popular liberties; and Walpole, his modern successor, was now engaged in a conspiracy no less black and no less criminal. In all these fireworks there was never a glow of reason. The practical merits and demerits of the Excise Bill were not touched on by its opponents. The terrors of ignorant people had conjured up a Cock Lane Ghost, and the great Bolingbroke, with his friends' assistance, was determined to prevent an exposure of the fraud. In some respects, and on peculiar occasions, Bolingbroke was an exceedingly sagacious leader. He knew from his own experiences, both fair and foul,<sup>[93]</sup> that there are times when no one will listen to arguments and when the surest summons to fortune is a blatant cry.

Walpole, as he confessed in his reply, knew nothing of Empson and Dudley. It is unlikely that he had ever read the *Alchymist*, or given much thought to the tragic career of Strafford. And although the House of Commons had uproariously cheered these literary and historical allusions, the great majority of its members were probably in the same state of ignorance as the minister himself. But wit and rhetoric, to an enthusiastic accompaniment of shouting, are not easy things to answer effectively.

There being no arguments to confute, Walpole denounced the methods of his opponents; but ill-luck still clung to him, and he slipped again into a blunder.

A mob by this time surrounded the House of Commons and filled all the avenues that led to it. The beadles of London and Westminster had carried round inflammatory summonses. Agents of the Opposition had shepherded the crowds to Palace Yard and were engaged in exciting them while the debate proceeded. Members coming in late reported that there was a great deal of noise, and that people seemed to be in a very violent temper. This was confirmed by other members who went out of doors to see for themselves. The sole object of the Opposition in collecting and inflaming this multitude had been to overawe ministers and Parliament. Walpole had good reason for his indignation. It was much easier, he said, to bring men together and make them angry than it was to pacify them before they took to mischief. His opponents excused and justified the demonstration on the hypocritical plea that the crowd had come there 'as humble supplicants'; but, continued Walpole, 'I know whom the law calls *sturdy beggars*<sup>[94]</sup>; and those who brought them hither could not be certain but that they might have behaved in the same manner.'

There are few things that give more delight, and at times bring more profit, to an Opposition than some incautious phrase that can be twisted out of its intended meaning into a brutal taunt. The expression 'sturdy beggars,' was a godsend; next day all London rang with it; and soon the whole country learned that Walpole, not content with grinding the faces of the poor, had insulted their poverty and distress.

The division showed the government majority reduced by abstentions to little more than half its normal figure. The Opposition cheered uproariously, and Walpole was persuaded by his friends to leave by a back-way, in order to escape the violence of the mob.

During the next few weeks divisions on minor matters showed a further decline, until, on the 10th of April, the government majority was only seventeen. As the House emptied Walpole sat with his hat drawn over his eyes: then as he rose to leave, said quietly to the friends beside him, 'this dance must no further go.'

He called a meeting of his most trusted supporters and invited them to state their views. They urged him to persevere; the recent divisions had not been taken on points of principle; if he showed that the government was resolute the numbers would become more favourable. It was known that the King's support could be relied on. But Walpole looked on the matter in a different light. Parliament was not the chief difficulty. Like Davenant, he saw clearly that such a change as he proposed could only succeed if the country was prepared to welcome it. 'I am conscious of having meant well; but in the present inflamed temper of the people, the act could not be carried into execution without an armed force; and there will be an end of the liberty of England, if supplies are to be raised by the sword. . . . I will not be the minister to enforce taxes at the expense of blood.'

Next day had been fixed for the second reading; but when Walpole rose, it was to move the adjournment.

The news that the government had given way spread like wildfire. London at once became delirious; the streets were thronged with jubilant crowds; joy-bells pealed all through the night; windows were lit up and effigies of a fat man and a fat woman—Walpole and Queen Caroline—were thrown on bonfires. As the news spread there were similar rejoicings throughout the country. No victory over a foreign enemy had ever been received with louder acclamations. And was not

this also a victory, more illustrious perhaps than any other, seeing that it had been won by a freedom-loving people against the tyrannical schemings of a servile minister and an avaricious king?

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## VII.—*How the opposition of Barnard differed from that of Bolingbroke (1732-1733).*

The opposition to the Excise bill followed the ordinary lines of party politics. The remarkable thing about it is not any peculiar wickedness, but its success. Walpole was defeated; but he had no substantial grievance against his opponents, for they played the game according to the rules. They used against him the same weapons he had himself used fifteen years earlier against Stanhope and Sunderland. He was not given to homilies or whining. When his chance came, as it soon did, he hit back with all his might.

Every member of the Opposition had two desires—to wreck the Excise Bill and to defeat the government. But this unanimity was not inspired by a single, simple motive. Personal ambition, party spirit and patriotism were mixed in varying proportions in different minds. At the one extreme was Sir John Barnard, a sound Tory; but a man with whom purely party considerations had much less weight than the interests, as he saw them, of the nation and of the trading community that trusted him. At the other extreme was Bolingbroke, who regarded the agitation solely as a means to victory and power.

It is worth while trying to see this controversy as Barnard saw it, for his view was shared by a very large number of shrewd and energetic business men whose party allegiance sat lightly on them. A great part of his following on this occasion called themselves Whigs, and many of them had hitherto been numbered among Walpole's most staunch supporters. Barnard was not one of those fine-gentlemen adventurers who engaged in politics sometimes as a sport and sometimes as a trade. He was merely a sensible, practical, honest and very able man, active in debate, but indifferent to office. His advice in civic affairs was much valued in the city of London, where he had made his fortune; but it was many years before his friends could persuade him to enter Parliament for that constituency. During his long career he received all the proofs of confidence which it was in the power of his fellow-citizens to give him, including a statue in the Royal Exchange against which he protested strongly. Walpole acknowledged him as his most formidable financial critic and paid more than one emphatic tribute to his character and abilities.<sup>[95]</sup>

Historians and moralists have assumed that Barnard sinned against the light; for, being what he was, he must have known that the losses sustained by the customs were very serious; that Walpole's proposals would have provided a complete and simple cure; that all the talk about tyranny and inquisitorial methods was merely rant; and that the opposition to the Excise Bill was nothing but factiousness and fanaticism. This facile explanation is misleading.

Barnard undoubtedly knew that the revenue was suffering severely from the depredations of cheats and smugglers, and, being a man of high public spirit and scrupulous integrity, he must have wished to see these evils ended. On the other hand, he probably believed, and possibly was justified in believing, that Walpole had deliberately exaggerated the extent of these depredations in order to strengthen his case. Barnard held, as did many other people, that the frauds and covert smuggling at the seaports could be stopped effectively by a reform of the customs regulations as to weighing and drawbacks, and by the enforcement of diligence and honesty among the departmental staff; nor was he wrong in this, although he made too light of the difficulties. The alternative which he recommended would not have put a stop to overt coast-wise smuggling; but that was not a matter of the first importance. There is nothing to show that he would have opposed the setting up of bonded warehouses had this proposal not been associated with an extension of the excise: they might as easily have been associated with the customs, as they are at the present day.

It was the proposed *extension* of the excise that occupied the first place in Barnard's mind. Like many others, he quite sincerely regarded the existing duties of excise as blots on the fiscal system—blots that all men of patriotic feeling must wish to see removed as soon as possible. For the excise was based upon a principle that violated the spirit of the constitution, and had been denounced, deplored or deprecated, ever since the Petition of Right, by all upholders of popular liberties. Loss of freedom was too high a price to pay for adding some three hundred thousand a year to the revenue. Those who agreed with Barnard had welcomed the repeal of the duty on salt and had opposed its reinstatement. To bring tobacco and foreign wines under the excise, as Walpole was now endeavouring to do, would extend the evil on new soil, and at the same time would tend to root it more firmly. A still greater danger loomed in the future; for clearly Walpole was contemplating a 'general excise' which, if it was accepted, would fix the yoke of an odious system for ever on the necks of the British people.

If, however, Barnard was really a man of high character, why, it may be asked, did he not dissociate himself from the follies, exaggerations and falsehoods of an agitation which must inevitably discredit his case so soon as the temporary



excitement had cooled down? This question is best answered by another: has a practical politician ever thought it desirable to rebuke the excesses of rascal agents and ebullient groundlings, when by these means public sentiment could be fanned into a favourable blaze? Is it usual for a popular leader of to-day to disavow the activities of popular journals when they are engaged in hunting and vilifying his opponents in ways no less discreditable than those which Bolingbroke and *The Craftsman* used against Walpole? Allies of this sort might spoil Barnard's case for posterity, but they were undoubtedly helping it very materially in the year 1733.

We are at a totally different point of view from Barnard, and must make large allowances when we judge his conduct. He was mistaken; but he was entirely honest and no fool; and the same may be said of that particular section of the community which looked on him as its leader. The heads of the commercial and the moneyed interests, not only in London but in all the great towns, were practically unanimous; nor can it be said truly that more than a handful of these men hoped to draw any personal benefit from the frauds and smuggling, while as tax-payers they would suffer injury by the continuance of a vicious system.

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Our own present view of this controversy differs no more from Barnard's than Barnard's did from Bolingbroke's. The vision of Bolingbroke, Pulteney and a few others was unclouded either by prejudice or principle; but they were very willing to use the prejudices and principles of others to serve their own purposes. When Marlborough fought the French at Blenheim his mind was not more concentrated on a single problem than Bolingbroke's when he fought the Excise Bill. Both thought of victory and, for the time being, they thought of nothing else. The army leader admitted no considerations that were not concerned with the art of war, just as the Opposition leader, looking out from his windmill behind the fighting line, admitted no considerations that were not concerned with the art of party politics. Neither saw anything but the battle: the one thing that mattered to both was to break the enemy's line. It is therefore quite irrelevant to say that Bolingbroke, being a man of great intelligence, must have known that the Excise Bill was a sound proposal, that all his talk about tyranny and liberty was without meaning, that the war-cries he used were mostly falsehoods, and that his weapons were unworthy of a gentleman. If the war-cries would stimulate the courage of his troops, if the weapons would kill his enemies, it was all he cared about. What matter if the people were gulled and the minister calumniated? Was this in any way contrary to established custom? And as for the country, surely the greatest of all its interests was that a stale, corrupt and discredited administration should be replaced by one of which Bolingbroke himself would be the head.

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Among educated people who used or misused their brains there was an immense preponderance, but also a great diversity, of opinion against Walpole's policy. On the other hand, among the uneducated, who made no attempt at reasoning, everything was prejudice and panic. If Walpole had his way, they did not doubt that their food and clothes would cost them more. The common soldiers believed that the Excise bill would raise the price of their tobacco. Lord Scarborough is an honest witness:—'I will answer for my regiment against the Pretender, but not against the opposers of the excise.'

It is easy for modern historians and moralists to win acceptance for their sweeping condemnation of the Opposition; but they would be hard put to it to show a single instance in more recent times where a party leader, suddenly confronted with a dazzling opportunity, has ever acted differently from Bolingbroke. The Opposition did on this occasion what Oppositions have always done, whether they were called Whigs, or Tories, or by more modern names. The only influence capable of stilling party conflict was lacking in 1733, for the country was not then threatened by a foreign enemy. Walpole was the only enemy visible to the Opposition. He made a wrong move; and, being in a run of ill-luck, he made another wrong move; and another; and another; and yet another—to the number of five at least. And Bolingbroke acted precisely as Marlborough did against the French: fell upon him at each mistake and would not let him off his punishment.

As the result of these energetic proceedings the Opposition soon commanded the whole ministerial position. It had two cries, either of which would have brought victory. It had succeeded in identifying ministers with one of the most odious terms in the English vocabulary—'the Excise'—and it had proved against them, to the satisfaction of the common jury, a

conspiracy against the bellies, the backs and the liberties of the people. For the first time since Pulteney's Whigs and Wyndham's Tories had become a nominally united Opposition, they shouted as one man.

Walpole is one of the most distinguished victims of the party system; but in no other sense is his case exceptional. The practice of politicians has not changed fundamentally since his day. The rule still holds good that it is the duty of an Opposition to oppose, to find fault, to take advantage of every ingrained popular prejudice, of every verbal slip, of every tactical blunder. Forgetting this, we may easily go too far in reprobation of Bolingbroke and those who followed him. Having no part in this ancient quarrel we think too much of the merits of the argument, too little of the exigencies of the campaign. Walpole, we are sure, was right and his opponents wrong. He was justified in all he tried to do, and they did their country an ill turn in thwarting him. Whether he aimed at the larger thing—the amalgamation of customs with excise and a revision of the whole system of taxation on humane, equitable and productive principles—or whether he intended nothing more than a transference of the duties on tobacco and foreign wines from the customs to the excise, we—considering these things two centuries later—can have no doubt whatever that his proposals were inspired solely by patriotic motives, and that the country would have reaped a substantial benefit even from the less extensive reform. Had the greater scheme been offered and accepted, national prosperity would have been placed upon a sounder and broader basis, and Walpole's successors would have been saved more than half a century of fiscal blundering, with all its concomitant evils of hampered development, injustice and discontent.

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### VIII.—*Concerning party politics and private conduct.*

History has given a bias to our judgements, and we are now all on Walpole's side. We are not justified, however, in assuming that the Opposition saw things so clearly as we do, or that it was without excuse in acting as it did. Politicians, like soldiers, are often obliged to guess at the motives, intentions and movements of the enemy. As they often guess wrongly, their own tactics are apt to appear purposeless and foolish, or altogether evil and malevolent, to a later generation which looks wonderingly, after 'the fog of war' has lifted, at the hooks and bends of the ancient controversy.



*J. Faber Fuit 1740*

***S<sup>r</sup>. William Wyndham Bar<sup>t</sup>.***

***Done for T. Crohatt in Cornhill, and sold by C. Corbell ag<sup>nt</sup> S.<sup>t</sup> Dunstons  
Church in High Street***

Walpole, his friends and enemies were struggling in a mellay; and no one of them could see far and wide, for the tallest stood no more than a few inches above the rest. The bustle is now stilled; the crowd dispersed, all but a few important, lonely figures; and these our leisured fancy pictures as having gone about their business circumspectly and with deliberation, which is not at all how they behaved while still alive.

If the actors themselves saw less clearly than we do, it is partly because there are now far fewer things to be seen. Much has long ago fallen through the sieves of memory and written records, while the historian, of set purpose, has eliminated much of what remained. For the aim of the historian is to write a narrative which shall reduce a complicated confusion to its simplest elements, and he wisely discards all that is not essential for his purpose.

The student of politics is in a different position. One of his chief concerns is to watch how the interplay of personal forces and popular susceptibilities works, or clogs, the wheels of government; and for his purpose it is sometimes needful to recover what has been lost, or deliberately set aside. He must condescend to interest himself in the likes and dislikes of individual men, in the moods and fancies of the people, and in other evanescent things which it is particularly easy to forget.

The course taken by the Opposition in this Excise Bill agitation was not so much a matter of choice as of necessity. It was the natural outcome of the British system of politics which is a blend of *Representative* and *Party* government. By arguments that are the same, but from motives that are different, idealists and statesmen of more than common ambition (like Bolingbroke and Chatham) have sometimes maintained that parties are an evil which ought to be done away; but as this abolition has never yet been brought about, the theory remains unproved and very doubtful.

It is beyond the purpose of this book to discuss at length the workings of the British system. No one can doubt, however, that the unceasing warfare that Oppositions wage on Governments has much to its credit. By this means legislation and policy are subjected to a searching scrutiny; the bridges on the road of progress are well tested; administration is not allowed to become slack, slipshod or spendthrift; popular liberties are safeguarded against the insidious encroachments of the Executive; and when a government grows stale, or has become involved in some hopeless tangle, there is little difficulty in making a clean sweep, and creating a new atmosphere. And the last of these is one of the greatest merits of party politics; for there are times when the paramount need is a fresh and vigorous government, uncommitted by pledges and unencumbered with weary statesmen who have earned their rest.

On the other hand, where there is a clever Opposition always on the alert to discredit the Government, both policy and legislation are apt to suffer. For most governments will shrink from doing things that ought to be done—especially things that promise a future rather than a present benefit—if they are of a kind that the Opposition can easily misrepresent, so as to raise a storm of unpopularity. A minister has to consider two things at the same time—the safety of the nation and the safety of the government. This makes for timidity, procrastination and unthoroughness. Foresight is at too heavy a discount. Legislation is not presented in the form best fitted to meet the needs of the case, but in that which is least likely to provoke a violent attack. The path of the would-be law-maker is ambushed by fears at every turn; by his own fears, by the greater fears of his colleagues, and by the fears of his supporters in the House of Commons, which are the greatest of all. In the constant search for compromise, his grand aim is apt to fade out of sight, and only a few of his minor aims are achieved. Under the party system it is difficult for legislation and policy to keep pace with the rapidly changing conditions of the world, and prophets of evil foretell the ultimate impotence of the British form of government. Should we ever break with our ancient institutions it will probably be because we feel that we are being strangled by them.

The British blend of representative and party government was regarded by our grandfathers with a complacency that to-day excites our wonder. They believed in all sincerity that the spread of education and bold extensions of the franchise would rapidly purge the system of its grosser faults. No limits were put to its ultimate dominion. Differences of race and tradition were regarded only as temporary obstacles that could be removed in most cases by a short apprenticeship. Our grandfathers were surprisingly hopeful and perhaps not very modest; but there can be no doubt that they truly believed in these doctrines and that in 1850 most persons of 'liberal' views throughout the world agreed with them.

We who live three-quarters of a century later are less confident. We have made the discovery that our system can never be purged of several of its grossest faults, for the reason that these are inherent in its nature. When a nation is divided into parties, these parties, by the law of their being, will fight one another for power. The People, in whose gift power lies, will not be told the whole truth, and may never be told anything like the truth, by either side. It does not seem likely that, after a trial conducted on these lines, the verdict of the people will be equivalent to the voice of God. Nevertheless, the method has virtues which appear to most of us to outweigh its faults. We consider ourselves fortunate in possessing it, though we no longer engage, like our grandfathers, in crusades and missionary efforts. We should be unwilling to spend a penny of English money or a drop of English blood in bestowing, or in forcing, the boon on other nations. Nor is this because we have turned skinflints or cowards. Our present caution has the quality of mercy. We realise, what the grandfathers of many of us did not, that there are races whose thoughts move on a different plane from our own and whose traditions, as venerable and as noble as our own, can never be forced into Anglo-Saxon moulds. Few of us now

believe representative institutions and the party system to be a panacea for misgovernment, an infallible scourge for tyrants and corruption, an elixir of freedom and peace.

This peculiar system has evolved maxims and a procedure of its own. We cannot judge the public actions of our politicians by the standards of private conduct. The censures of moralists and historians are apt to leave out of account the fact that there is a technique of party politics; that if a politician will not use the methods appropriate to his craft, his enemies, having no such compunctions, will beat down his defence.

If we accept 'the duty of an Opposition to oppose' as a basic principle, we must also accept the inevitable consequences that flow from it. It would be impossible, for example, to eliminate the use of misrepresentation from British politics without bringing the whole thing to a standstill; and misrepresentation is only a gentler word for untruthfulness.

On the other hand the reproach of hypocrisy so often brought against the politician is for the most part unmerited. If at one time he appears to treat the nation with affection, at another with awe, at another again with contempt, this is not because he is a hypocrite, but because the nation consists of persons whom he sees under three different aspects—as his fellow-countrymen, as his masters and as his dupes.

It is the system itself, not the exceptional depravity of those who do their best to make it work, that we must blame for such discreditable episodes as the Excise Bill agitation. We know enough about the characters of politicians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to be certain that their standards of private conduct were at least as high as those of their contemporaries in other walks of life; as high as those of men-of-business, country-gentlemen, soldiers, sailors and the clergy; as high indeed as our own. And we also know enough about the working of this system, now so widely spread throughout the world, to be fairly confident that it is nowhere less opposed to morals, nowhere more politically efficient, than it is in Britain.

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## ***IX.—How in eight weeks Walpole regained mastery of the House of Commons (April-June 1733).***

An historian might well be excused for dismissing in a single sentence all the political events that happened between the withdrawal of the Excise Bill and the prorogation of Parliament. It would be enough if he recorded that during these eight weeks Walpole, with consummate skill, turned to his own advantage all the efforts of the Opposition to dislodge him or to lessen his authority. A student of the art of politics, however, is in a position somewhat different from the historian's. He is entitled to be inquisitive about details and trifles; and for his purpose it is important to discover what means of attack the Opposition employed, and how Walpole succeeded in foiling them from first to last.

A sudden change came over the fortunes both of Government and Opposition so soon as Walpole acknowledged his defeat. In his pursuit of fiscal reform he had stumbled at every step: now, at once, when his course was summarily checked, he seemed to recover his footing. His withdrawal was masterly—a series of rearguard actions which deprived his opponents of all their previous gains and re-established his predominance in Parliament.

While the Excise Bill was drifting to its fate the Opposition had sustained themselves on three assumptions which gave them ever-increasing comfort:—(1) that Walpole had ceased to stand well at Court; (2) that his supporters in both Houses were ripe for mutiny; (3) that when the General Election came, he must be overborne by the pent-up fury of the nation. A year must elapse before the wrath of the country would be able to work its will at the hustings; but the Opposition leaders believed that, by a relentless and unremitting pursuit, they could destroy the administration at a much earlier date—or even at once—through Walpole's loss of the King's favour and through the disaffection of the ministerial majorities in Lords and Commons.

Walpole's opponents had been right in regarding the failure of his fiscal project as inevitable. Though they could not foresee the precise time and manner of the catastrophe, they were determined and prepared to take advantage of it, when it came, by increasing the vigour of their attacks, and by giving neither respite nor quarter to the retreating enemy. Consequently when the withdrawal of the Bill gave them their opportunity, they came at him pell-mell and without much art, and were checked by a series of counter-strokes that took them by surprise.

Within a couple of hours after the withdrawal of the Excise Bill a cool observer might have begun to doubt if the disaffection of Walpole's followers in the Commons was really so widely spread as it had been assumed to be. Two days later it became clear to the whole world that there was no truth whatever in the report that he had fallen under the King's displeasure.

When Walpole, having moved the adjournment, sat down amidst the exultant clamour of the Opposition, Wyndham rose at once and moved 'the previous question.' The clamour increased when it became clear that Wyndham's object was to prevent ministers from slinking out of their difficulties through the formality of a postponement, and that he was determined to make them endure all the mortification of a plain and immediate rejection. But though he was urged on by the loud approval of his own side, he drew no sympathetic response from the ministerial rank-and-file. As the debate ran its course and orators declaimed in set terms to an accompaniment of cheers and counter-cheers, members of the House, coming and going, filled the corridors with the buzz of their various opinions. The Opposition leaders soon became aware, to their surprise and chagrin, that even those ministerialists who had most disliked the Excise Bill were for the moment more inclined to kneel down in thankfulness for their escape than to rise up in pursuit of vengeance upon the leader who had led them astray. Their most earnest wish was to have the dangerous measure buried and forgotten as quickly and as quietly as possible. Wyndham saw that if he pressed his motion to a division he was likely to be beaten, not by such a handful of votes as had lately saved the government from defeat, but by something more like the normal majority that had kept Walpole in power for so many years. Like a wise man he withdrew his amendment. He seems, however, to have formed the opinion that the anger of Walpole's followers against their chief was not quenched, but merely banked down, and that it might be blown into a flame at the first well-chosen opportunity.

The comparatively tame ending to this debate contrasted with a tumult out of doors—in the City, yelling crowds, and bonfires, and illuminations; in the main approaches to Parliament, a throng larger, noisier and more abusive than on the opening night. Members suspected of having supported the government were hooted and jostled as they came out. Walpole refused to leave by a back entrance, as he had done on the previous occasion, and four of his friends were injured, though none of them seriously, in guarding him to his carriage.

From Walpole's point of view there was much to be said for making light of this demonstration. Neither heads nor bones



had been broken. An embarrassed minister is more apt to gain by taking rubs of this sort good-humouredly than by solemn and angry complaints of his ill-treatment. It is seldom good policy for him to call public attention to the evidences of his own unpopularity. If he formally protests, it is open to his opponents to accuse him of exaggeration, of pusillanimity, of being a bad loser and no sportsman. And if he is overborne in the subsequent discussion he is not unlikely to end by cutting a somewhat ridiculous figure.

Walpole, nevertheless, decided on an appeal to Parliament. In choosing this course, he acted from policy and not in temper, taking precautions coolly to secure himself against being overborne in the discussion. Several of his best speakers were coached beforehand as to how it should be opened and conducted. He knew that in order to succeed he must be prompt and bold. Accordingly when the House met next day the subject was at once raised with great force and gravity, and with a good deal of artful exaggeration. It was suggested that the object of the mob had not been merely horse-play, but homicide, and that a tragedy had only been averted by good luck. The Opposition was taken aback by the suddenness and vehemence of this protest against an attempt to insult and intimidate the legislature. Mob terrorism is anathema to a free parliament. Besides, from the point of view of the Opposition, whatever purpose there might originally have been in the demonstration had already been served. They were now willing enough to condemn what, if it became a precedent, might some day be turned against themselves. Moreover, they hoped to distract attention from their recent connivance at an outrage by showing a new-born zeal for the public safety. Under the influence of these considerations, and without taking time to reflect upon the general situation, they found themselves concurring heartily and hastily in a series of resolutions which condemned outright all ‘actors, abettors, promoters, or encouragers of these violent tumultuous transactions.’ Their very good friends of yesterday—the Lord Mayor and Corporation, as well as most of the ‘commercial’ members of the House of Commons—came under one or other of these designations; but so impetuous was the repentance of the great ‘landed interest’ that this fact was disregarded. The House not only passed Walpole’s resolutions *nemine contradicente*, but it even went the length of ordering the members for the City of London to carry them at once to the Lord Mayor and require him to publish them throughout his jurisdiction.

The commercial members found themselves in a pretty pickle. They were not a numerous body, and at ordinary times were somewhat looked down upon by the land-owning majority. During the discussions on the Excise Bill, however, their technical knowledge and their fluent familiarity with the appropriate jargon (more or less incomprehensible to the average country gentleman) had brought them into prominence; while the skill and zeal they had shown in stirring up an agitation among the common people had set the crown upon their services. Of late they had, therefore, enjoyed the unusual delight of being petted and made heroes of by their supercilious associates. And now, the very day after the great victory, while the London bonfires were still smouldering, they found themselves condemned and insulted by a unanimous vote of the House of Commons, and shunned by their recent admirers as dangerous and disreputable companions. They were now cowed and silenced who so lately had swaggered self-complacently in the limelight. They could not stand against the storm that Walpole had raised so skilfully and so suddenly; but they had less reason to feel resentment against their enemy than against their own friends.

It cannot have been many hours before the leaders of Opposition realised how badly they had played their game, how completely Walpole had outwitted them, how they had allowed him to sow dissension in their ranks, how he had gained prestige by a complaint which, had his adversaries dealt with it adroitly, might have turned him into a laughing-stock.

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Great events are not always followed by the consequences that might be supposed logically to flow from them. Walpole’s project having crashed, the leaders of Opposition concluded that the principle of an Excise had become so abhorrent to Parliament that they could without difficulty add to the embarrassment of the government by abolishing the old-established excise on tea, coffee and chocolate. But no one had ever complained of these imposts, and symmetry is not a lure which readily attracts the British legislature. The result of this attempt was an immediate rebuff; for after a brief discussion the proposal was rejected by Walpole’s normal majority of a hundred.

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On the second day after the withdrawal of the Excise Bill, Lord Chesterfield, on his way to court, was stopped on the grand staircase and informed of his dismissal from the Lord Stewardship. For months past he had been talking against

Walpole's fiscal policy in all companies, and his three brothers in the Commons had lately voted with the Opposition in several critical divisions. The severity of his punishment caused less astonishment than the brusqueness with which it was inflicted. It seemed as if the King wished to mark beyond any misunderstanding his confidence in Walpole and his condemnation of those who had mutinied against him.

Chesterfield was the only brilliant member of the administration. He belonged to the generation of Carteret, and was nearly twenty years younger than Walpole. His speaking, with which he took infinite pains, was greatly admired. Already, at the Hague, he had shown himself to be a successful if not a great diplomatist. He had a handsome fortune, which he dilapidated by gambling; he was well born, a wit, an elegant writer and the chief leader of fashion. He had offended Walpole a few years earlier by refusing the Order of the Bath and by siding with Townshend; but he had subsequently been forgiven and made a Knight of the Garter. If it was Walpole's object to set the world talking, he could not have pitched on any of his colleagues, except Newcastle, whose summary dismissal would have caused so great a sensation.

On the same day Clinton, a lord of the Bedchamber, was turned out of office. His importance was inconsiderable; but, like Chesterfield, he had freely professed hostility to Walpole's measures.



The assumption that Walpole had lost the King's favour was now given up; but the leaders of Opposition still clung to their belief that the government majority was disaffected and would be glad to drive the chief minister to resignation. It was clear, however, that obedience to Walpole's will had become a habit which his followers found it hard to break, and that no matter how strongly they might dislike him or disapprove of his proceedings, they would shrink from open mutiny, dreading what he might say or do against them. The ingenuity of Bolingbroke and his friends was equal to the occasion, and a means was soon found by which the supposed malcontents might strike at the chief minister from behind a screen.

The plea for a reform of the Excise had been based mainly upon allegations of fraud and corruption in the collection of the revenue. The bill had been withdrawn; but as the imputation still stood, the case for an investigation was unanswerable. Accordingly, when the Opposition asked for a parliamentary inquiry, Pelham, who happened to be in charge, agreed to it at once. And when a further demand was made that the investigators should be chosen by a secret ballot, he agreed to that also. This was a dangerous concession; for if, as the Opposition believed, disaffection was prevalent among the government majority, open voting would have been a considerable safeguard against desertion.

It was absolutely essential to Walpole's safety to prevent the setting up of a vindictive and unscrupulous committee armed with an unlimited search-warrant. Such an inquiry would find a crowd of witnesses well suited to its purpose among the traders whom he had exposed as cheats and the civil servants whom he had accused of connivance. The government would be paralysed while the investigation was proceeding, and Walpole must have been a ruined man before it ended. Such was the dangerous situation that Pelham's indiscretion had created. Walpole had to make the best he could of it; and the Opposition, as on some previous occasions, blundered in to help him.

The Opposition hailed Pelham's concession as if it had been victory itself, proclaiming their confidence that under the secrecy of a ballot their nominees would be carried in a block. They at once published their list of candidates, a full half of whom were avowed Tories and all of whom were inveterate enemies of Walpole. The Whiggish sentiments of the ministerialists began to take alarm. There were too many Tories on the committee for it to be truly representative of the House, four-fifths of whose members were Whigs of one kind or another; nor was it altogether reassuring to note how cock-a-hoop and self-sufficient the Opposition had now become.

Walpole may not have been entirely free from doubt as to the loyalty of his habitual followers; but he was certainly much more concerned with the dangers that might arise from a confused election, where wayward or careless voting might do irreparable mischief. He saw the need for disciplined concentration, and took effective measures to secure it. He called his people together the day before the ballot, stated his view of the situation, and asked them to support his own list of candidates. It was a shining performance in the minor tactics of statecraft. Reading his speech one understands, better perhaps than from many of his more famous utterances, why Walpole was a leader of men. There was not a trace either of diffidence or of arrogance. The obligation to pursue a certain course, and no other, appeared to be dictated by an impersonal spirit of common sense. The Herveian<sup>[96]</sup> gloss on the language of the report does not hide the framework, the order and cogency of the argument, the bluff, good-humoured tact, the unshakable confidence of the speaker. He claimed

no authority, and yet, from the first word to the last, his authority was implicit and supreme.

On the following day the ministerial list was elected in a block, the highest Opposition candidate having a majority of eighty-five against him. It was impossible to reconcile this result with the assumption that the ministerial party in the Commons was mutinously inclined.

The truth of the matter is that the great mass of ministerialists in the Commons was neither estranged from Walpole nor disloyal. Few of them had either voted or spoken against the government in the Excise debates. They had merely been badly frightened by the bugbear of unpopularity, and had run away, as even the best troops will at times, in a panic. Now that the cause of their panic was removed, the deserters were disposed to steal back to their allegiance as quickly and as quietly as possible.

Walpole was not a vindictive man. It was his interest to turn a blind eye on the recent backslidings of his followers, knowing as he did that these had been due to fear, and not either to malice or intrigue. There was no one on the government side in the lower House who aspired to be his rival. His colleagues and chief supporters were docile serviceable men; but they were unfit for leadership, their characters being in some cases too weak for it and in others too disreputable. His adherents formed a powerful and compact party; but what bound that party together was chiefly a well-established habit of co-operation, of discipline, and of confidence in the skill of its leader; for there was nothing distinctive in its principles. The government Whigs and the malcontent Whigs, who formed more than half the Opposition, professed an equal reverence for the traditions of the 'Glorious Revolution.' But for more than a dozen years the government Whigs had fought shoulder to shoulder under Walpole's leadership, had won nearly all their battles, and had gradually come to take a kind of regimental pride in their solidarity. They hated the idea of breaking up, and felt by instinct that their continuance as a party depended on their having a leader of the first force. What they looked for in their leader was not an eloquent upholder of some particular set of political doctrines; for at this time nobody cared very much about doctrines, and zeal was at a discount. The crying need was a leader who would hold the party together and keep its rivals at bay. The ministerialists liked to feel that they were governing England, while many of them also desired very earnestly that their enjoyment of offices of profit and of comfortable perquisites should not be disturbed by a change in the administration. And clearly no other candidate that could be thought of for the leadership was comparable to Walpole. His defeat over the Excise Bill had been a single incident in a long record of successes. He was in the prime of life and vigour, and, despite his recent misadventure, he was still in the saddle. It was clear that the whole forces of the Opposition could not dislodge him, and that nothing but the desertion of those who needed his leadership so much could bring him down.

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## ***X.—How Walpole broke up a dangerous conspiracy in the House of Lords (May-June 1733).***

For the reasons given in the preceding chapter, Walpole's position in the House of Commons was a very strong one. It was in the House of Lords that a mutinous spirit among his nominal supporters threatened him with disaster. There were not a few of his noble colleagues who suffered his leadership anything but gladly; fretted under the domination of a country squire; thought their own abilities and services to the Whig party and to the dynasty no whit inferior to his; carried tales and complaints of him to court, and used an indecent freedom with their fellow-peers in talking down his policy and measures. There was nothing new in all this; but lately the group of disloyalists had been tending to increase and become bolder, and, with the Excise Bill agitation, it had assumed the form of a half-concealed conspiracy. The ringleaders were actually ministers, or place-men, whose offices, of a sinecure nature, were held at the King's pleasure and upon a well-understood obligation to support the King's government. They included several elder statesmen of weight and influence, such as Stair, Marchmont and Cobham, men of Walpole's own generation. The prime cause of their hostility was that Walpole engrossed the King's confidence. Their chief weaknesses were their distrust of one another, their timidity and their indecision. It was a loose conspiracy lacking in firm co-operation. The bolder spirits, like Chesterfield, were for attacking the Excise Bill in the Lords, if it ever got there, while the cowardly, like Wilmington, wished success to the enterprise, and hoped to profit by it, but shrank from active interference. It was essential to Walpole's safety that this dangerous combination should be broken up—but as its activities had hitherto been mainly underground, he had been unable to find a suitable occasion for dealing with it. Moreover, he was averse from methods of violence, and would never risk an open encounter so long as he felt confident of being able to outwit his enemies by patient vigilance.

The withdrawal of the Excise Bill deprived Walpole's enemies in the Upper House of an opportunity for striking at him. To some of them this was a disappointment, but to many it was a relief; for a rebellion on this issue would have ranged them in hostility to the court, and might well have defeated their ultimate ambitions. All, however, could take comfort in believing that Walpole's surrender showed the back of his power to have been broken, and that another well-directed blow would make an end of him. But it was of the highest importance to discover some pretext or occasion for attack which would have the appearance of being personal to Walpole and which would not place them ostensibly in opposition to the King. Chance produced just such an opportunity as they needed, and their ingenuity at once turned it to account.

A formal application by the Treasury enabled the mutinous peers to spring a surprise by demanding a parliamentary inquiry into the control and supervision which government had exercised over the South Sea Company during the twelve years that had passed since the Bubble burst. It was suggested that there had been a want of vigilance and a failure to enforce the statute which provided that the estates of the peccant original directors should be confiscated and divided up among the stock-holders. Moreover, it was commonly believed—and not without good reason—that the existing directors had been guilty of many irregularities and evasions, and had feathered their own nests to the detriment of the Company. It was confidently expected that, under a searching and hostile investigation, corruption on a grand scale would be brought to light, and that Walpole's negligence, which could hardly have been other than deliberate, could then plausibly be imputed to his participation in the frauds.

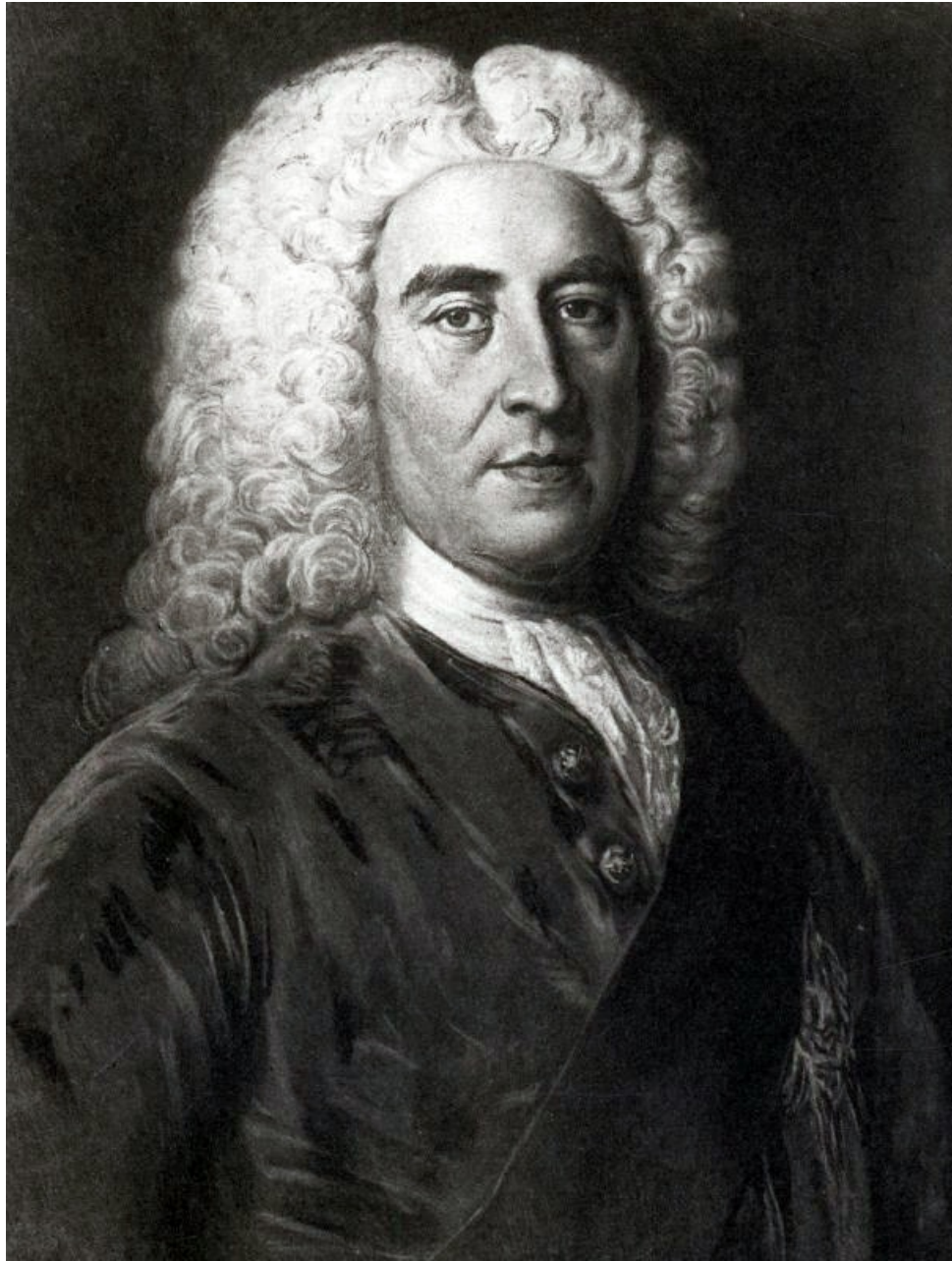
The first attack succeeded by the barest majority; but the movers of this matter in the Lords lacked cohesion; nor were they masters of the game, like Walpole, but only amateurs. Instead of improving their position in the subsequent debates and divisions, they lost ground, and in the final motion for the appointment of a parliamentary committee they were defeated by a small but sufficient majority.<sup>[97]</sup>

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The Lords have a funny custom whereby peers who have voted in the minority on any question may, if they choose, inscribe and sign their protests in the journals of the House. It is a privilege that does nobody any harm, while it gives a defeated party the consolation of scolding. Walpole's ill-wishers were bitterly disappointed at the failure of their well-laid scheme, and the fact that they had come within a few votes of victory increased their soreness. Their feelings found a vent in an insolent and pompous denunciation of a corrupt and tyrannical minister who needed not to be named. A list of noble signatures attested their indignation. It was a toothless form of worrying, and when Walpole's friends suggested

to him that the ministerial majority in the Lords should expunge the protest (which by custom they had power to do), he replied flippantly that he would rather expunge the protesters, which was taken to be merely a pleasantry.

For the moment Walpole was safe, but these recent proceedings had given him a fright. It was necessary to secure himself against similar attempts in the future. He was weak in the Upper House not merely in votes, but in speaking power and in weight of character. Newcastle thought himself a match in debate for Carteret and Chesterfield, but he stood alone in that opinion.



*William Hoare. R.A. del.*

*Emery Walker Ltd Ph.sc.*

***Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle,***  
***from the crayon drawing in the National Portrait Gallery***

Before Parliament met in the following January Walpole had made himself secure. The retirement of an eminent judge allowed a shuffle of legal offices. Talbot, an able lawyer, was made Lord Chancellor. Yorke, an equally able lawyer and a more zealous politician, became Lord Chief Justice, and was raised to the peerage as Lord Hardwicke. Hervey, the diligent and supple, was likewise promoted; to which people who were for keeping the peerage small could take no objection, seeing that he was heir to his father, the earl of Bristol. Another commoner was ennobled, and it was privately arranged between Walpole and Lord Isla, his manager for Scotland, that, at the election of Scottish peers, which was due to take place next year, Stair and Marchmont should be unseated.

These measures promised Walpole the security he needed as to numbers and debating power; but discipline could only

be restored by the punishment of conspicuous offenders. The Scottish sinecurists were roughly handled. The duke of Montrose, Keeper of the Privy Seal; Marchmont, the Lord Clerk Register; and Stair, Vice-Admiral of Scotland, lost their employments. Cobham and the duke of Bolton were deprived of their colonelcies.

In the midst of this holocaust came the King's Speech proroguing Parliament, and thereby preventing the victims and their friends from raising an immediate clamour:—‘My Lords and Gentlemen—I cannot pass by unobserved the wicked endeavours that have lately been made use of to inflame the minds of the people, and by the most unjust representations to raise tumults and disorders that almost threatened the peace of the kingdom; but I depend upon the force of truth to remove the groundless jealousies that have been raised of designs carrying on against the liberties of my people and upon your known fidelity to defeat and frustrate the expectations of such as delight in confusion.’

Hervey had drafted the speech in mild and general terms; but Walpole would have none of it. Whatever the country might be saying of him, he meant to show that he was still master of Parliament.

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## ***XI.—Concerning Newcastle's pre-eminence in the election campaign, and how much he was helped by the failure of his opponents' attempt to revive the Excise agitation.***

For nearly twelve months after the prorogation of Parliament, politicians of both parties thought of little else than how to win the general election. Newcastle, if not precisely the hero, was something much more than merely the Schnadhorst of this conflict; for besides being an indefatigable worker behind the scenes, he was himself an important part of the pageant. He was trusted by the government; he went his own way, and nobody interfered with him. It must have been one of the happiest years of his life. For he loved writing letters, holding interviews, pulling strings, issuing orders, asking favours and granting them: he was at once a lord bountiful and an importunate beggar. He also loved making princely progresses through his special spheres of influence, travelling in a coach-and-six, with richly liveried outriders, smiling and bowing to right and left, feasting his subjects in hall or barn according to their degrees.

Newcastle, so easily perturbed in a parliamentary crisis, seemed to keep his head quite naturally in the fuss and confusion of an election; while Walpole, so deft and fearless a manager of Parliament, was but a clumsy hand at vote-catching. Walpole certainly was not idle; but though he spent a great deal of energy, and of money that he could ill afford, he confined his efforts (and they were far from successful) to the county of Norfolk and his own immediate neighbourhood. He wisely left the general conduct of the English elections to the Duke, and of the Scots elections to Lord Isla, whose methods were cruder, but not less effective, than those of his southern coadjutor.

The tied Cornish boroughs, some forty in number, presented no serious difficulties. The only person who could have tampered with their allegiance was the duke of Cornwall—Frederick, Prince of Wales—and as yet he did not choose to stand forth as an enemy of his father's administration.

The mood of the Opposition, when the electoral campaign began, was one of complete confidence. It unfeignedly believed that the indignation and disgust with which the country had regarded Walpole's recent proceedings would be enough to overwhelm his government, without much assistance from the arts of politicians. And so long as government pamphleteers and journalists continued injudiciously to harp on the innocence and virtues of the deceased Excise policy, their opponents were able to keep prejudice and suspicion alive. Was it possible, they argued, that a measure whose eulogists still regarded it with so much admiration could really be dead and buried? But so soon as the defence ceased, the attack began to languish. When Walpole's adherents took the wiser course of binding themselves by a simple pledge that never again would any attempt be made to meddle with the Excise, the country gradually came to believe them, and was comforted.

By early autumn, that popular excitement, from which the Opposition hoped so much, had died down, leaving little more behind it than a sour anti-government sentiment in the chief commercial cities and in most of the larger constituencies. Had the election taken place a year earlier than it did, Walpole would certainly have been swept from power, as the Whigs were swept from power in 1710. Almost as certainly, had the Reform Act of 1832 come into force a century earlier than it did, he would have suffered defeat; for the general opinion, so far as we are able to gauge it, though no longer passionate, was on the whole unfavourable to him and his government. Walpole's victory was a fortunate thing for the country; but it is not irrelevant to point out, that the country was saved, not because the 'will of the people' prevailed, but mainly through Newcastle's skill in handling borough-mongers, and through his painstaking manipulation of the smaller constituencies.

The growth of public indifference was favourable to Newcastle's busy tactics, but exceedingly unfavourable to an Opposition which could only flourish on excitement. In those days, if the national mood was one of apathy, a government, merely because it was the government, and notwithstanding that it lacked popularity, had many more ways than its assailants of influencing votes. During the remaining six months of the contest—from October 1733 to May 1734—whirlwind and frenzy played no part. We are told that, on the whole, it was a good-tempered election.<sup>[98]</sup> The violent agitations of 1732 and 1733 had produced a natural reaction. Now that the panic had passed, prejudice and anger quickly abated, and the majority of the rebels began to drift back quietly to their old allegiance. The word 'Excise,' which had so many disagreeable associations, grated on people's ears, and they were ill-disposed towards partisans who insisted on dragging it back into the discussion. The nation in its normal mood had but little enthusiasm for party politics. It had fervently desired to be rid of an obnoxious measure, and when this wish was realised, it took only a languid interest in the struggle of the Ins and the Outs.

In these circumstances the Opposition had need of some new cry that would tickle the popular ear. Unfortunately no one could think of a novelty; and so the old bogeys were brought out, which familiarity had deprived of their terrors: the unparalleled corruption of the administration; the betrayal of national interests at home and abroad; the despotism of a sole and self-willed minister. These were only the hackneyed catchwords of the political pantomime, calls for cheers or hooting, but ineffective for producing any serious perturbation in people's minds.

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## ***XII.—How the Opposition suffered from the ill-defined and mysterious character of its leading.***

The Opposition was at a further disadvantage owing to its want of a visible chief; for the vigour of a party is commonly more dependent on the personality of its leader than on its programme. Considering how fierce the political contest had been for two years past, it must seem strange that not one of Walpole's victorious opponents had been invested by popular imagination with the attributes of a hero. There was nowhere to be found even such a fleeting illusion of a heroic figure as Pulteney succeeded in producing seven or eight years later at the height of the Spanish fever.

To the world at large Bolingbroke's position was equivocal, unprecedented and something of a mystery. Beyond any doubt he directed the manœuvres of the allied anti-Walpole forces; but he sat behind a screen; his name was seldom mentioned and his authority was never quoted by his friends, but only by his enemies, when they sought to discredit the character and motives of the Opposition. The cloud of suspicion which settled on him at the time of his attainder had never been dispersed, as it must have been, at least to some extent, had he been set free to take an open part in public life. The ministerial Whigs continued to regard him as a dangerous and devilish intriguer. The bulk of the malcontent Whigs, though ready to avail themselves of his support, held much the same opinion; and even their leaders, who acted with him and followed his counsels, and who in some cases enjoyed his friendship, never seem to have given him their confidence without reserves. And though he had warm and devoted friends among the Tories, he was no more to the rank-and-file of that party than a vague impersonality. Had they regarded him truly as their chief, or even as a martyr who had suffered for Tory principles, they would not have listened to attacks upon his honour with the equanimity they habitually displayed, but with a blazing indignation. He was in fact the master-mind and leader of the Opposition; but since he was not recognised or accepted as such either by the country, or by the mass of his own party, his personal influence was almost negligible in the electoral contest.

Pulteney and Wyndham were great House of Commons men; their oratory was much admired; but it may be doubted if either, under the most favourable circumstances, could ever have developed into an able leader. As it was, the prevalence of Bolingbroke's master-mind deprived them both of the freedom that is essential to the exercise of leadership. They were no more than the lieutenants of an invisible chief; they dared not assume a full authority, take prompt decisions, or speak in accents of command. Each was inclined to be somewhat jealous and suspicious of the other. And much stronger were the jealousies, suspicions and antipathies that kept their respective followers apart. The Whigs and Tories of the Opposition were incapable of union, and there was no hope of permanency in their alliance. Had either of their leaders soared high above the other, there must have been an immediate cleavage.

The leaders of Opposition and their chief associates cannot fairly be called lazy; but they had a great dislike of drudgery. They were interested too exclusively in the high-flying part of their profession. Those who could write were ready enough with their pens, and produced brilliant articles for the *Craftsman*, and pamphlets of varying degrees of merit. Those who could speak did not spare themselves in Parliament. And they composed many letters of encouragement to one another, and of affability and condescension to persons who had influence with public bodies. Nevertheless they looked on quiet, systematic organisation as an irksome labour, and rather derogatory, so that individual elections were left, for the most part, to the uncoördinated efforts of busybodies and local magnates, who worked without guidance from any central office or controller. The Opposition leaders made the mistake of trusting too much to the automatic assistance of the forces they had let loose; for these were now flagging. And meanwhile Newcastle's canvassers were busy over a great part of the country preparing lists of a surprising accuracy.

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### ***XIII.—How Bolingbroke planned a series of parliamentary attacks as a preparation for the election, and how his first attempt was directed against Walpole's foreign negotiations.***

On the 17th of January 1734 Parliament met for its short final session of three months. After that the dissolution.

Bolingbroke had arranged the programme in advance—a series of full-dress attacks upon the government, raising a large variety of issues. His plan was accepted by Wyndham with enthusiasm, by Pulteney not without misgivings. The forces of the Opposition were in fine feather, eager to give battle and confident of victory. High debate was a form of activity they did not consider to be beneath their dignity. A triumphant shouting at Westminster was intended to resound throughout the length and breadth of the land. If only Walpole could be beaten or humiliated in the House of Commons, the winning of the general election would be a foregone conclusion.

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Walpole's management of foreign affairs was the first object of attack. Europe was at this time threatened with a universal conflagration.<sup>[99]</sup> France, Spain and Savoy had gone to war with Austria, and, during the past few months, had driven the imperial forces out of northern Italy. A Russian army had also driven out Stanislaus, the newly elected King of Poland, and was besieging him in Danzig. The Emperor was calling on the Maritime Powers to come to his assistance, invoking not only their ancient alliance and common policy, but the specific undertakings by which, in the recent treaty,<sup>[100]</sup> Britain and Holland had pledged themselves to support him against an unprovoked attack.

The Maritime Powers were determined not to be drawn into the war. Walpole saw that the only way of keeping them out of it lay in taking energetic measures to persuade or frighten the combatants into making peace. Unfortunately the timid precipitancy of the Dutch government had already weakened his hands. Without consulting her British partner, Holland had allowed herself to be beguiled by Fleury into issuing a declaration of conditional neutrality. Before Walpole's wiser and more courageous policy could prevail, British policy had a hard row to hoe. In January 1734 his negotiations with the various belligerent powers and with the Dutch were at a stage of great difficulty and danger.

The leaders of Opposition were well aware, in a general way, of the extreme delicacy of the situation. They rejoiced in it. They were glad of so favourable an opportunity for tilting the balance, and bringing Walpole's efforts to disaster. They were hampered by no considerations of patriotism. They had no policy of their own, except to make as much mischief as they could, and to look for their own profit in the confusion. They blew hot and cold: if Walpole went to war on behalf of the Emperor, they would denounce him for sacrificing British interests to a continental adventure; if he remained at peace, they would upbraid him with the betrayal of an ancient ally who had received, only a few years earlier, renewed assurances of British support. They hob-nobbed with the Austrian ambassador, who was extremely suspicious of Walpole's attitude towards France. They were hand in glove with the French ambassador, who was no less suspicious of Walpole's attitude towards Austria. They could earn the goodwill of both these patrons simply by making trouble in Parliament and forcing inconvenient disclosures.

Bolingbroke was at once the encourager of Austria and the privy friend of France. He had recently written a confidential dissertation on the state of British parties for the information of the French government, and had received a subsidy in return.<sup>[101]</sup> He could render still more effective service to King Louis by setting on his friends to embarrass British negotiation by their persistent questionings. The obedient parliamentarians accordingly moved for papers, for copies of instructions to British ambassadors abroad, for information as to the communications that had passed between the King's government and the belligerent powers. And there is no doubt they caused considerable annoyance; but, owing to Walpole's stout-hearted way of dealing with them they inflicted but little actual injury. He refused point-blank to give any information whatsoever or to be drawn into any discussion. He had the satisfaction of finding himself supported on every occasion by exceptionally large majorities in the House of Commons.

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#### ***XIV.—How Bolingbroke failed a second time, when he tried to revive the fiscal controversy; and a third time, when he tried to make party capital out of the dismissals of Lord Cobham and the duke of Bolton.***

At the beginning of February there was a second attack. Certain persons, engaged in the sale of tea, were prompted to petition that the excise duty on that commodity should be repealed. No one, however, was seriously interested in this proposal, and no one supposed either that the government would agree to it or that it could be carried against the government. The sole object was to revive the corpse of the Excise agitation by pretending that Walpole was slyly waiting for an opportunity to reintroduce his hated reforms after the general election. The Opposition orators, in order to raise excitement, were more abusive than usual, and the insinuations of Pulteney, who took the chief part, were peculiarly offensive. Frequenters of the law courts can surely recall certain rare, but never-to-be-forgotten, occasions when a witness, badgered beyond endurance under cross-examination, suddenly, and in spite of his teeth, has blurted out something which it was quite impossible *not* to believe, and which finally settled the matter for or against him. Walpole's retort to Pulteney was of this character: 'As to the wicked scheme, as the gentleman was pleased to call it, which he would persuade gentlemen is not yet laid aside, I, for my part, assure this House *I am not so mad as ever again to engage in anything that looks like an Excise.*' Only fools would believe that so astute a minister was preparing to burn his fingers a second time. The motion for a committee was defeated by a large majority.

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Ten days later a resolution to deprive the King of his right to remove officers from their commands without a court-martial was introduced with a flourish of trumpets. This proposal was, in fact, an attempt to curtail the royal prerogative. It was contrary to long-established practice. It aimed at changing the constitution by weakening the army's dependence on the civil power. So destructive was Walpole's counter-attack that the motion was not pressed to a division.<sup>[102]</sup>

In spite of this check, the Opposition leaders considered that the grievances of those noblemen who had been so summarily dismissed from their colonelcies at the end of the previous session must in some way be turned to account. They might at least be made a pretext for embarrassing inquiries, and for denunciations of the tyranny and vindictiveness of the chief minister. Unfortunately for this endeavour, public interest in the martyrs was not very keen. It was eight long months since the duke of Bolton and Lord Cobham had been got rid of. The personal grievances of other people are apt to be forgotten quickly, except in the case of a popular hero: and neither the duke nor the lord came into this category. The attack was obviously inspired much more by hatred of Walpole than by compassion for his victims. Pulteney and others, hoping to raise an embarrassing discussion, demanded indignantly to be informed what crimes were alleged against the two peers. But their thunders left Walpole unmoved. He refused to answer. 'Sir William Wyndham in vain attempted, by reproaches and invectives, to provoke a debate; the question was again called for and, on a division, negatived by 252 against 193.'<sup>[103]</sup>

## ***XV.—How he failed a fourth time, when he played a popular card and demanded the exclusion of ‘place-men’ from the House of Commons.***

By the end of February the session was half sped. The Opposition had made three grand attacks, all of which had failed; and though, in the intervals, they had pertinaciously opposed every measure of government, the government nevertheless had always managed to get its business done. The Opposition had not gained an inch. Indeed, it had lost, and Walpole had won, a certain amount of parliamentary prestige, owing to the energy with which he had buffeted off the most ferocious onslaughts. Bolingbroke, nevertheless, believed that he still held two winning cards in reserve.

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The large number of ‘place-men’ in the House of Commons had been a scandal during four reigns. It was one of those abuses which all men of good sense and goodwill are very willing to condemn in principle, but which no practical politician, when he finds himself in office, is inclined to meddle with.

The exclusion of place-men had been a favourite topic with every Opposition since the Revolution. The idea of a reformation had never ceased to be mildly popular in the country. In the reign of William it had been embodied as an article in the Act of Settlement; but subsequently the restriction was judged to be impracticable, and had been repealed. Every government, no matter what opinions its members had expressed when they were in Opposition, had been unwilling to dispense with a prop so helpful to its own stability. When the Tories came into office in 1710 they made no change. And the Whigs in 1714 made no change. Nor did the present clamorous and patriotic Opposition make any change, when in 1742 it formed a government after Walpole’s defeat.

Public opinion nevertheless remained constant, favouring a purge, although its sentiments never rose to fever heat. The exclusion, or a drastic reduction, of parliamentary place-men was always a good cry for the hustings, and there were not a few persons on both sides in the House of Commons who wished sincerely to have the evil abated. But this eleventh-hour motion of the Opposition was merely window-dressing for the general election. The manœuvre, however, was dangerous, for some of Walpole’s followers, having the fear of their constituents before their eyes, would probably abstain from voting, while others might even vote with his enemies on this occasion. As usual, the Opposition speakers injured their case by overstating it. They were violent and abusive, alleging unparalleled corruption. They would have had people believe that Walpole was the source and origin of the plague of place-men; but this was too much for human credulity.

The chief minister spoke with quiet moderation, the fires died down, and the government obtained a majority of thirty-nine. There was but little shrinkage in the normal ministerial vote; but the Opposition gained the support of a good many who piqued themselves upon their independence. The result was not a shining victory; but it was a sensible relief.

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## ***XVI.—How Bolingbroke's greatest effort was directed against the Septennial Act, and how unexpectedly the tables were turned upon him.***

Bolingbroke's supreme and final effort was directed against the Septennial Act.

In 1694, five years after the Glorious Revolution, a Triennial Act had been passed. Before that time there had been no limit to the duration of a parliament save the King's pleasure. One of Charles the Second's parliaments had lasted for seventeen years, and many mischiefs, but especially the growth of royal tyranny, were attributed to its longevity. Unfortunately the reform of 1694 did not work so well as people had hoped. The first year was apt to be wasted in 'vindictive decisions and animosities' about the late elections; the second in doing what little business the violence of faction would allow; the third in a general paralysis—the thoughts of everyone being occupied with preparations for the next trial of strength in the ensuing year. And even if the Triennial Act had put a curb on royal tyranny, it had done nothing whatever to check corruption in high places. Some of the worst scandals that ever disgraced our legislature occurred during the reign of William and Mary.

The Triennial Act had been repealed, and the Septennial Act passed in 1716, two years after the accession of George the First. Though the government then still commanded a large parliamentary majority, it had already incurred strong public disfavour. The Jacobite rebellions of 1715, after smouldering for six months, had only just been extinguished. Their somewhat tardy suppression, and the penalties that were afterwards inflicted on the rebels, had lowered the credit of the administration. Many people, though without cause, went in terror of a French invasion. The whole country was perturbed by discontents, and by a vague feeling of insecurity. Party hatreds were at a white heat. The King had become unpopular. If a general election were held next year (1717), as the law required, it seemed not improbable that, in the prevailing mood of anger and mental confusion, a majority would be returned unfavourable to the Hanoverian dynasty. Such a result must have led to something much more serious than a Highland rising.

The Septennial Bill passed without difficulty; for the great Whig majority in Parliament was not as yet divided by any schism. Among the Bill's outstanding and most ardent supporters was Pulteney. The Tories saw that it would ruin their immediate prospects. They opposed it bitterly, but in vain, appropriating the old Whig argument that it would favour tyranny. They were out-talked, out-voted and submerged.

It was easy to justify the Septennial Act as an emergency measure; but very soon the Whig leaders (and Pulteney with the rest) divined that it was something more—an inestimable benefit, an assurance of stability, the final crown and completion of the Glorious Revolution. They ceased to regard it as a temporary safeguard, and determined to keep it permanently in the statute book. The wisdom of their second thoughts may be taken as proved, if only because the Septennial Act was not repealed or tampered with for two hundred years.

In 1734, however, the Act was only eighteen years old. It had not yet become an accepted part of the constitution, hallowed by long usage. The Tories still regarded it as a device contrived for their exclusion, while the people were easily persuaded to look on it with suspicion as a royal encroachment on their liberties. Nevertheless, Bolingbroke miscalculated the situation when he sounded the attack on March 13. It was then far too late to begin stirring up a responsive agitation in the country. There is no evidence that the debate produced any popular effect whatsoever. And though the Tories were in fierce high spirits, the Opposition Whigs were supine and their leader embarrassed: they remembered their former enthusiasm, and Pulteney's glowing eloquence was on record. Nor is there any reason to think that these Opposition Whigs had changed their original opinion about the virtues of the Septennial Act. At best they were prepared to acquiesce half-heartedly in an attack upon it, in order to injure Walpole.

The Tories took the chief part in the attack, drawing but little help or comfort from their allies. Wyndham was considered by his contemporaries to have excelled himself, but Pulteney seemed laggard and apologetic. To-day the interest of the speeches lies, not in the arguments which rolled sonorously along their well-beaten tracks, but in a violent explosion which occurred towards the end of the debate.

Wyndham's carefully polished oration bears some resemblance to a heavy, old-fashioned mahogany sideboard. Its crowning ornament was a swag in high relief—a philippic against Walpole, which did not spare the King. Following the clumsy fashion of the day, he 'imagined' an arch-traitor—a Guy Fawkes figure of Walpole—whom he pelted vigorously with invective—invective which, to our ear, sounds drearily conventional and pompously elaborate. He assured the House that this imaginary being had no present existence, but while the Septennial Act remained in force, it was impossible to feel secure about the future.

‘Let us then suppose,’ said Wyndham, ‘a man abandoned to all notions of virtue or honour, of no great family, and but of mean fortune, raised to be chief minister of state, by the concurrence of many whimsical events; . . . ignorant of the true interest of his country and consulting nothing but that of enriching and aggrandizing himself and his favourites. . . . Suppose him next possessed of great wealth, the plunder of the nation, with a parliament of his own choosing, most of their seats purchased, and their votes bought at the expense of the public treasure. . . . Let us further suppose him arrived at that degree of insolence and arrogance as to domineer over all the men of ancient families; all the men of sense, figure and fortune in the nation; and as he had no virtue of his own, ridiculing it in others, and endeavouring to destroy or corrupt it in all. . . . I am still not prophesying, I am only supposing; and the case I am going to suppose, I hope will never happen. But with such a minister, and such a parliament, let us suppose a prince upon the throne, either from want of true information, or for some other reason, ignorant and unacquainted with the inclinations and the interest of the people, weak, and hurried away by unbounded ambition and insatiable avarice. This case has never happened in this nation; I hope, I say, it never will exist. But as it is possible it may, could there be any greater curse happen to a nation, than such a prince on the throne, advised, and solely advised, by such a minister, and that minister supported by such a parliament?’<sup>[104]</sup>

Wyndham was an impressive figure with a superlative House of Commons style; but there was a vein of heavy stupidity in him. His conclusion was stupid. It angered, and at the same time it frightened, his Whig allies. These desired, like all other Whigs, that the Hanoverian dynasty should be secure, and judged that public expressions of disrespect for the King’s person were not the way to strengthen it. Moreover, they desired to hold office, and knew full well that the only way of gaining it was by the favour of their sovereign, who had an uncomfortably long memory for injuries. And though the Tories might for the moment hug themselves with delight, as insults were hurled by their leader at George the Second, they soon remembered that *they* also hoped for office, even if Wyndham were indifferent to so sordid an ambition. His reflections on the monarch were generally condemned as intemperate and as a blot upon an otherwise magnificent oration.

Walpole in his reply also ‘imagined’ a man; and that man was not Wyndham (a puppet whom he scornfully ignored) but Bolingbroke. What Walpole constructed was something more specious than a Guy Fawkes figure: Pulteney’s Whigs were startled by a living image, while even the Tories were half persuaded that they saw it twitching.

‘I hope,’ said Walpole, ‘I may be allowed to draw a picture in my turn; and I may likewise say that I do not mean to give a description of any person now in being. . . . Let us suppose in this, or in some other unfortunate country, an anti-minister, who thinks himself a person of so great and extensive parts, and of so many eminent qualifications, that he looks upon himself as the only person in the kingdom capable to conduct the public affairs of the nation, and therefore christening every other gentleman who has the honour to be employed in the administration by the name of Blunderer. Suppose this fine gentleman lucky enough to have gained over to his party some persons of really fine parts, of ancient families, and of great fortunes, and others of desperate views, arising from disappointed and malicious hearts; all these gentlemen, with respect to their political behaviour, moved by him, and by him solely; all they say either in private or public, being only a repetition of the words he has put into their mouths, and a spitting out that venom which he has infused into them; and yet we may suppose this leader not really liked by any, even of those who so blindly follow him, and hated by all the rest of mankind. We will suppose this anti-minister to be in a country where he really ought not to be, and where he could not have been, but by an effect of too much goodness and mercy; yet endeavouring, with all his might and with all his art, to destroy the fountain from whence that mercy flowed. In that country suppose him continually contracting friendships and familiarities with the ambassadors of those princes who at the time are most at enmity with his own; and if at any time it should happen to be for the interest of any of those foreign ministers to have a secret divulged to them, which might be highly prejudicial to his native country, as well as to all its friends; suppose this foreign minister applying to him, and he answering, “I will get it you, tell me but what you want, I will endeavour to procure it for you.” Upon this he puts a speech or two in the mouths of some of his creatures, or some of his new converts. What he wants is moved for in parliament, and when so very reasonable a request as this is refused, suppose him and his creatures and tools, by his advice, spreading the alarm over the whole nation, and crying out, “Gentlemen, our country is at present involved in many dangerous difficulties, all of which we would have extricated you from, but a wicked minister and a corrupt majority refused us the proper materials; and upon this scandalous victory, this minister became so insolent as to plume himself in defiance.” Let us farther suppose this anti-minister to have travelled, and at every court where he was, thinking himself the greatest minister, and making it his trade to betray the secrets of every court where he has before been,<sup>[105]</sup> void of all faith or honour, and betraying every master he has ever served. I could carry my suppositions a great deal farther, and I may say I mean no person now in being; but if we can suppose such a

one, can there be imagined a greater disgrace to human nature than such a wretch as this?’<sup>[106]</sup>

The rest of Walpole’s speech was in a different key, and consisted of arguments which it is needless to repeat. In the end the attack on the Septennial Act was defeated by a satisfactory and normal majority.

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## XVII.—*Concerning the consequences of the explosion.*

Wyndham's outburst, in so far as it touched Walpole, had been too hackneyed to produce much effect, while his reflections on the King had been a serious error of judgment. Walpole's outburst, on the other hand, was purely politic; 'the choleric gentleman was one of his parts.' He spoke without preparation, on the spur of the moment; but what he said must have been long premeditated. There was no temper in it, if by temper we mean that a man allows himself to be run away with by anger, and uses words that he afterwards regrets.

The Tories had worked themselves up to great excitement during Wyndham's speech and were triumphing indecently and foolishly. Walpole chose the occasion for his counter-attack with great tactical skill, and the fullness of his pent-up wrath overflowed in a destructive torrent. There was no pause in his energy. There could be no doubt of his meaning. His forcible but clumsy periods contrasted effectively with the polished violence of Wyndham. Wyndham had growled furiously, but Walpole bit to the bone. Walpole's accusation of intrigues with unfriendly ambassadors accorded too well with events that had happened lately in the House to be wholly disbelieved by anybody.

Whig speakers of the Opposition remembered uneasily how their questions and interpellations had been inspired from above; while the rank-and-file of that party were indignant at the thought that their own leaders were not really leaders at all, but had been taking their orders from a Tory, whose misdeeds had led to his expulsion from Parliament. Such was their inveterate suspicion of Bolingbroke that, when he was depicted as a traitor, it hardly occurred to them to doubt the accusation. And in a less degree the Tory rank-and-file were mortified at the thought that their leader, Wyndham, had been perhaps no more than the obedient henchman of a mysterious outsider to whom they had never given their confidence. As for the leaders themselves, both Whig and Tory, it was natural that they should bitterly resent the suggestion—so difficult, really impossible, to repel—that they were no more than the tools and puppets of a political outcast, of one whose shining qualities had never done away his reputation of a self-seeking intriguer.

The full effect of this episode—the blunder and the counter-stroke taken together—was not felt till somewhat later. It is unlikely that it changed a single vote in the division; though it may have accounted for there being no further attacks-in-force during the remaining four weeks of the session. Nor can it have had much effect on the general election; for there was no time for its reverberations to carry further than the City, and the clubs and drawing-rooms of St. James's. After the election, however, when the Opposition parties came to review the situation, it produced important results. It exacerbated the discontents that defeat had caused between leaders and their followers, and between the allies. It made Bolingbroke's position as director of the coalition impossible. Nay, it made any effective coalition impossible, because it drew the Whigs away from the Tories, and left the Opposition leaderless and divided.

The suggestion that Walpole's accusations were what drove Bolingbroke again into exile, can only be accepted with reservations. It was more than nine months later that he left for France, and his financial embarrassments, and also Pulteney's refusal to act any longer with him, had certainly much to do with his departure. It was not one of his weaknesses to be frightened by hard words: he had himself used this weapon too freely to overrate its terrors. He may have suspected that the government knew more about his intrigues with the ambassadors of France and Austria than had been stated in the House, and even, perhaps, something about the subsidy, for Walpole's intelligence department had a formidable reputation for efficiency; but an immediate exposure was unlikely, for it would have complicated foreign relations, which were then in a very delicate situation. Moreover, Bolingbroke not only hoped, but believed, that his friends were going to win the general election. Such a victory would change everything, and would probably reinstate him in the House of Lords. He may have felt uneasy; but all his prospects would have been ruined at once had he repeated his former error of decamping in a panic.<sup>[107]</sup>

## ***XVIII.—How the results of the election took all the leaders, except Newcastle, by surprise.***

The parliamentary attack had failed all along the line. Its success—even a partial success—would have ruined the government. Had Walpole fallen sick at the beginning of January, and had the management of the House of Commons been left to the respectable but timid Henry Pelham, with the clever but disreputable Yonge and Winnington as his chief assistants, the ministerial ranks must have been broken and everything thrown into confusion. The Opposition was defeated, and the government saved, solely by Walpole's own exertions. In this crisis, as in so many others, everything turned on the chief minister. The dubious maxim that no man is ever indispensable, finds no confirmation in Walpole's career; nor indeed in history or in common experience. It was a man—shrewd, vigilant and brave—and not any 'stream of tendency,' that kept in power for twenty years an administration so essential for the security of the dynasty, and for the prosperity and peace of England.

Though the success of the parliamentary attack must have ruined the government, its failure did not much affect the immediate fortunes of the Opposition. It disappointed, but did not discourage, Walpole's enemies. They were optimists, and believed that the Excise agitation of 1732-1733 had done its work thoroughly and had injured Walpole with the country fatally and permanently. They had good reasons for thinking as they did; but they reckoned without Newcastle and Isla.

Walpole and the Court were likewise optimists, and believed, though without any reasons whatever for their confidence, that the government majority would be maintained.

Newcastle was not an optimist, but a hard-working realist. He was convinced that, if the conduct of the election were left in his hands, he would secure a majority for the government—a diminished majority, but one that would serve their purposes. And he further believed, that under his own tactful management, this majority would tend to increase; for 'doubtfuls' and 'independents' can usually be persuaded without much difficulty to join the winning side.

Newcastle's predictions were fulfilled. When the *second* Parliament of George the Second met in January 1735, it soon became clear that nearly half of Walpole's old majority had melted away; but what was left stood staunch, and tended to add to its numbers as the months went by. It was enough to keep Walpole in *office* for another seven years, and it would possibly have been enough to keep him in *power* also for the whole of that period—instead of only for the first three years—had Queen Caroline lived to the end of 1741, instead of dying in the autumn of 1737.

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## FOOTNOTES:

See note, Vol. I. p. 167.

1694-1714.

1705.

Equivalent to something over £500,000 of our money.

*Diary* of Lady Cowper, p. 124.

The Whig Schism, Vol. I. pp. 205-206.

This misunderstanding, which culminated next April (1717) in the Whig schism, is examined at length in Lord Stanhope's *History* (vol. i. cap. 7) and in Archdeacon Coxe's *Memoirs of Sir Robert Walpole* (vol. i. caps. 15 and 16). The narrative of Lord Stanhope, who seeks to clear his ancestor from the charge of having borne any dishonourable part in these proceedings, appears to me to be more worthy of belief than the account given by the Archdeacon.

Lady Cowper's *Diary*, April 13, 1720, p. 134. The Prince and Princess of Wales had taken Leicester House as their town residence.

Lady Cowper's *Diary*. All the quotations in this and the following four pages are from the same source as well as a good deal which, having been compressed or slightly changed, is not given between inverted commas. Everyone who has read Lady Cowper's lively volume will agree that she is a witness whose evidence must be received with caution. Her descriptions, however, of the reconciliation scenes appear to bear the hall-mark of truth (pp. 141-155).

April 1720-April 1721.

The popular legend that Walpole killed two horses in carrying the news of the King's death from Chelsea to Richmond seems unworthy of belief. The distance is not much over seven miles and most of his way lay along a turnpike road. That a somewhat elderly and exceedingly corpulent statesman, noted for his strong common sense, should have engaged in such an escapade in the height of summer after a hearty midday dinner is not credible. This picturesque fable of Walpole at the gallop, followed by grooms with led-horses in case of accidents, is drawn from one of the worst authorities, Horace Walpole's *Walpoliana* (second edition, vol. i. p. 86), and, so far as I am aware, is not corroborated by any contemporary account.

At the date of their accession George II. and Queen Caroline were 44 years old; their son Frederick Louis, who came to England at the end of the following year (1728), was 20; Walpole 51; Townshend 53; Bolingbroke 49; Pulteney 43; Wyndham 40; Carteret 37; Newcastle 34; Chesterfield 33; and Spencer Compton 54.

Mrs. Howard (1681-1767), who afterwards (1731) became Countess of Suffolk by her husband's succession, was a matron of over thirty when she accepted the Prince as her lover (1715). She was in her fifty-fourth year when she was driven to resign her thankless post (1734).

The following conversation is 'imaginary' inasmuch as it puts into one interview what almost certainly was spread over several. Imagination cannot claim much credit for the substance of it, since not only the sentiments and arguments but even the actual phrases are in most cases drawn from respectable authorities. There is some contradiction as to the precise dates. It seems pretty clear, however, that the Queen opened her main attack on Sunday, after the interview with Horatio Walpole, and that the whole thing was virtually settled at latest by the Tuesday following.

This homely argument was actually used (Hervey's *Memoirs*, i. p. 46).

Cf. Hervey's *Memoirs*, i. pp. 45-46. Hervey estimates that Walpole's proposals amounted to £200,000 more than any King and double what any Queen of England had ever had before. The late King had enjoyed an income of £700,000 net, and £100,000 had been separately provided for the Prince of Wales. Hervey's statement may be to some extent an exaggeration in regard to the amount of the surplus; but there can be no doubt (1) that there *would* be a substantial surplus, (2) that George the Second had no intention of allowing his son so much as £100,000, (3) that the arrangement proposed gave the King an almost absolute control over him, and (4) that the Queen's jointure was very much larger than had ever been given before.

Horace Walpole in his *Reminiscences* states that it was on the day after the accession, but this is inconsistent with the course of events as described by more credible witnesses.

July 1743.

1733

Lord Scarborough, who liked George the Second, and Lord Hervey, who disliked him, 'agreed that the King certainly had personal courage, that he was secret and that he would not lie—though I remember, when I once said the last of these things to Sir Robert Walpole, he said, "*not often*"' (Hervey's *Memoirs*, iii. p. 156). Secrecy (*i.e.* the ability to keep his own counsel) was an acquired quality. As Prince of Wales, George Augustus was distinguished for his 'blazing indiscretions.'

An example: 'When the Queen gave Sir Robert Walpole the King's letter to read, she said, "*Do not think, because I show you this, that I am an old fool, and vain of my person and charms at this time of day. I am reasonably pleased with it, but I am not unreasonably proud of it.*"' When Sir Robert Walpole and Lord Hervey talked over this letter, they both agreed that they had a most incomprehensible master, and though neither of them were very partial to His Majesty, they also agreed that, with a woman who could be gained by writing, they had rather have any man in the world for a rival than the King. Nor, indeed, in the gift of writing love-letters do I believe any man ever surpassed him. He had the easiest, the most natural, and the warmest manner of expressing himself that I ever met with, with the prettiest words and the most agreeable turns I ever saw put together' (Hervey's *Memoirs*, iii. p. 26).

1727-1737.

1727-1760.

1714-1727.

1738-1746.

1746-1754.

July 1757.

November 1755.

October 1756.

April 1757.

1755.

June 1756.

June 1756.

August 1756.

France is the most important exception. At that time, with her 20,000,000 inhabitants, she was three times more populous than Britain. Since 1700, France has added only a little over 50 per cent, while most of her neighbours (leaving Spain out of account) have increased by more than 600 per cent.

1760.

1820.

As a rule Sir Walter Scott's pictures of society are good history. He has described in *Rob Roy* a merchant-banker's business at the beginning of George the First's reign. Scott was writing of a period more than a hundred years before his own time. We, who read his pages after another hundred years have passed, recognise without difficulty the senior partner in the firm of Osbaldistone and Tresham as the archetype of the merchant-banker for all time.

'Even the vivid genius of Carlyle could not bring to life again the European policy of the eighteenth century. Congresses without issue, campaigns without visible objective, open treaties, secret articles, public alliances, private combinations, the destruction to-day of the web laboriously woven yesterday, the union of four powers against one, of three against two, and so on in every possible variety of permutation and combination, make a vast chaos, in comparison with which even the perturbed Europe of to-day (*i.e.* 1889) is a scene of stability and order' (Morley's *Walpole*, p. 200).

Fleury died in 1743, Walpole in 1745. Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois* was not published until 1748. The first volume of the *Encyclopédie*, under Diderot's editorship, appeared in 1751. Rousseau's *L'Origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* in 1753; his *Contrat Social* in 1762. Voltaire's main attack was not delivered until after the publication of *Candide* in 1756.

I would not be thought ungrateful to those authors who have flashed their lanterns in the dark places. Much good work has been done. Dr. Paul Vaucher has recently published an admirable book (if I may presume to say so)—*Robert Walpole et la politique de Fleury (1731-1742)*—to which I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness. But the final thing, the whole thing, has not yet been done. No one, as Lord Morley truly said, has succeeded in bringing 'to life again the European policy of the eighteenth century,' or, at any rate, the policy during that portion of it which lies between the treaty of Utrecht and the war of the Austrian Succession.

Compare, for example, the *Marchmont Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 1-272. Lady Murray, writing to her 'dearest uncle' Alexander, earl of Marchmont, gives a lively estimate of the situation at the beginning of 1738: 'I think as I did, that all your consultations will come to nothing, but Sir Robert outwits you every one. If your head (*i.e.* Pulteney) yields, and gets to Bath to be out of the way, what is to be expected from others? You have a sad pack to deal with, which you are in no way cut out for,' etc., etc., p. 96.

Elisabeth of Parma was born in 1692, became Queen of Spain in 1714, and Queen-dowager in 1746 on the death of her husband, Philip V. She died in 1766. The Emperor Charles VI. was born in 1685, succeeded his brother Joseph in 1711, and died in 1740. Charles Emmanuel III., duke of Savoy and King of Sardinia, was born in 1701, succeeded on the abdication of his father Victor Amadeus II. in 1730, and died in 1773.

Her eldest son, Don Carlos, obtained the dukedom of Parma in 1731, and held it until he became King of Naples three years later. In 1759 he succeeded to the Spanish throne. By the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 her younger son, Don Philip, acquired the duchies of Parma, Piacenza and Guastalla. One daughter married the King of Portugal, another the Dauphin, a third became duchess of Savoy and Queen of Sardinia.

Victor Amadeus II. succeeded in 1675 and abdicated in 1730. Charles Emmanuel III. reigned from 1730 to 1773.

Anne, 1730-1740, niece of Peter the Great. She succeeded Peter II. (grandson of Peter the Great), who came to the throne at the age of twelve, and died three years later of small-pox. During his short reign and the still shorter reign (1725-1727) of his predecessor Catherine I. (the widow of Peter the Great) Russian policy had but little effect upon the affairs of Europe.

Biron, Biren or Buren (1690-1772), appointed Gentleman of the Household to Anne when she was duchess of Courland (1714), and Grand Chamberlain on her accession to the Russian throne (1730); created duke of Courland (1737).

G. L. Chauvelin, 1685-1762. Appointed Garde des Sceaux in 1729.

Théodore de Chavigny (?-1771) was employed on a large variety of important diplomatic missions. In 1731 he was the French representative in London.

The Convention of the Prado, March 1728.

The Congress of Soissons, June 1728-July 1729.

See *ante*, Vol. I. pp. 370-379.

He was created Lord Harrington in 1730 for his services on this occasion.

1729.

Vol. I. p. 145.

1730-1737.

Earl Waldegrave was at Paris, Sir Benjamin Keene at Madrid and Sir Thomas Robinson at Vienna. None of them was a genius, but all were shrewd, industrious and persuasive. The earl of Essex, an entirely worthless character, had been sent to Turin and was kept there by the influence of his kinsman Newcastle.

See *ante*, Vol. I. p. 379.

This treaty did not remain secret for long. Keene, the British ambassador at Madrid, and Charles Emmanuel both succeeded in learning its contents.

Berwick was killed at this siege.

Suppose for instance that Walpole had decided to join in the war and that Fleury had sought to dissuade him on the ground that no case for British intervention had arisen under the terms of the Second treaty of Vienna.

Cf. Bolingbroke to Chavigny (November 1734), quoted in Dr. Vaucher's *Robert Walpole*, p. 125.

The duchies of Parma and Piacenza are usually referred to in histories of this period as if they were two; but in fact they had been united ever since 1545 under the descendants of Pope Paul III.

Vaucher's *Walpole*, p. 148.

From the beginning of 1733 to the end of 1735.

See above, [pp. 136-140](#).

The following are the chief dates in Carteret's career: 1714-1719, court appointments; 1719-20, embassy to Sweden; 1721-1724, secretary-of-state; 1724-1730, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland; 1730-1742, a leader of the Opposition; 1742-1744, secretary-of-state and chief minister; 1744-1751, inactive opposition; 1751-1763, Lord President of the Council under Pelham, Newcastle, Pitt and Bute in turn.

Hervey, vol. iii. p. 252.

Hervey, vol. iii. p. 95.

Hugh, Lord Polwarth (1708-1794), son of the earl of Marchmont. He entered Parliament at the election of 1734. By descent he was a Whig of the Whigs; but he joined the Opposition, partly in order to avenge himself on Walpole for having compassed Lord Marchmont's expulsion from the body of Scottish representative peers, partly from his lasting friendship with Bolingbroke, who had taught him that there was now no longer any difference between the principles of a so-called Whig and those of a so-called Tory. His abilities made him at once a power in Parliament. He seems to have had a more abundant gift of common sense than any of his colleagues.

*Memoirs of George II.* (1785), vol. iii. p. 85.

Carteret succeeded to this earldom in 1744.

*Letters*, December 13, 1762.

1742.

1745.

1760.

The fanaticism of George III. has been blamed too exclusively: he well knew that he was supported by the fanaticism of Parliament and the People.

The Sacheverell agitation had lost much of its vigour by the autumn, when the election was held.

I acknowledge gratefully the help I have received in writing this chapter and the next from Mr. B. R. Leftwich, M.B.E., Librarian to the Board of Customs and Excise.

The Customs were also charged with the collection of export duties; but these had already been reduced by Walpole to unimportant dimensions, and may be ignored in the present consideration.

The chief imports subject to excise as well as customs were brandy, vinegar, coffee, tea, chocolate, calicoes and printed silks. The chief domestic products subject to excise were beer, cider, strong waters, malt, hops, candles, soap, paper and hides.

Compare *Redgauntlet*, vol. ii. caps. 6 to 9, for a description of a smuggling operation in the Solway Firth.

The Excise Bill was withdrawn before the second portion of it, which was to deal with the importation of foreign wines, had been introduced. Consequently we do not know what proposals Walpole intended to bring forward under this head.

This was probably rather an understatement. The number of a hundred and fifty was mentioned during the debate by government spokesmen. And, in addition, there were the storekeepers who would be required to look after the bonded warehouses. But making every reasonable allowance, it is clear that the additional numbers needed to work the new system would have been very trifling.

John Locke (1632-1704). His writings recommended him for public employments. From 1689 to his death he was Commissioner of Appeals, and he was a member both of the old Council of Trade (1673-1675) and of the new Council of Trade (1696-1700).

Charles Davenant (1656-1714); son of Sir William Davenant, the Cavalier poet. Member of Parliament, 1685-1700; Inspector-

General of Imports and Exports, 1705-1714. His *Essay upon the Ways and Means of supplying the War* was published in 1695.

Coxe, vol. iii. p. 68.

1726-1733.

Coxe, vol. iii. pp. 81-106.

It is impossible, owing to the meagre nature of the reports, to be absolutely certain that there *were* no such limitations. Coxe, however, who gives a very full account, makes no suggestion that there were, and it was his aim to place the matter in the light most favourable to Walpole. 'The substance of this speech,' he tells us, 'is principally taken from heads and memorandums, in the hand of Sir Robert Walpole, among the Orford Papers. A few connecting sentences have been supplied from the printed speech in the contemporary publications: *Political State*; *Historical Register*. See also *Chandler*. . . . ' None of these authorities supports the theory that there were any limitations. One of them makes no mention at all of the passage, and the other two deal with it very lightly, omitting any reference to it being a 'crime' to introduce a 'general excise,' or that such a measure would be both 'impracticable and unjust.' Like most parliamentary reports of that period they give very little illumination.

*Ante*, [pp. 238-239](#).

*Ante*, [pp. 241-242](#).

The Sacheverell agitation (1710) that brought him into power, and the defeat of his commercial treaty with France (1713).

Tudor legislation, still unrepealed in 1733, had aimed at checking the rapacity of able-bodied vagrants who demanded charity with menaces. Such persons were known as '*sturdy beggars*.'

Sir John Barnard (1685-1764); entered Parliament in 1722; served as Alderman for thirty years; was chosen Sheriff in 1735 and Lord Mayor in 1737. Not long after the general election of 1734 Walpole told a friend that when he had answered Barnard and Lord Polwarth in debate, there was no need to bother about any of the other Opposition speakers. When Walpole fell (1742) Barnard indignantly refused to have anything to do with the persecution which the Opposition instituted against him.

*Hervey*, i. p. 219.

*Hervey*, i. p. 243: Croker's footnote.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to an article in the *English Historical Review*, vol. xii. p. 448, by Mr. Basil Williams.

See above, [pp. 149-164](#).

The Second treaty of Vienna (July 1731).

My authority for this statement is Dr. Vaucher's *La Crise du Ministère Walpole*, pp. 37-38, and the same writer's *Robert Walpole et la Politique de Fleury*, p. 65.

The same motion was debated in the House of Lords and there defeated by 78 to 49.

Coxe's *Sir Robert Walpole*, vol. iii. p. 128.

Coxe's *Sir Robert Walpole*, vol. iii. pp. 143-145.

I cannot reconcile this particular accusation with the facts of Bolingbroke's career.

Coxe's *Sir Robert Walpole*, vol. iii. pp. 146-148.

March 1715, Vol. I. pp. 183-189.

### Transcriber's Note

Hyphenation has been standardised.

[Page 70](#) and [Index](#): Klosterseven changed to 'Klosterzeven'

Index: Walpole, Sir Robert—and general election 1734, 210 *n*. There is no note on page 210.

## END OF THE SECOND VOLUME

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