



**PROBLEMS IN EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION**

# GEORGE III

*Tyrant or Constitutional Monarch?*

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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## THE PRINCIPAL PROPER NAMES

### *Appearing in the Readings*

- AUGUSTA OF SAXE-GOTHA, PRINCESS OF WALES:** wife of Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales; mother of George III.
- BATH, EARL OF:** see William Pulteney.
- BEDFORD, JOHN RUSSELL, 4TH DUKE OF:** great nobleman with a small but important party in the house of commons; ambassador to negotiate peace, 1762-63.
- BLACKSTONE, SIR WILLIAM:** jurist famous for his Commentaries on the Laws of England.
- BOLINGBROKE, HENRY SAINT-JOHN, 1ST VISCOUNT:** a Tory leader under Queen Anne; opponent of Robert Walpole; author of *The Patriot King* and other political works.
- BUTE, JOHN STUART, 3RD EARL OF:** tutor and confidant of George III; Secretary of State, 1761-62; First Lord of the Treasury, 1762-63; after his resignation in 1763 was increasingly excluded from influence by the jealousy of ministers; by 1766 his influence with George III had ended.
- CAROLINE OF ANSBACH, QUEEN OF GEORGE II:** an intelligent, forceful queen who exercised important influence over George II; a strong supporter of Robert Walpole.
- CARTERET, JOHN, EARL GRANVILLE:** favorite of George I and George II; rival and opponent of Robert Walpole; failed to form a ministry with Bath in 1746, after which his influence waned.
- CHARLOTTE OF MECKLENBURG-STRELITZ, QUEEN OF GEORGE III:** a submissive queen who did not interfere in political matters; absorbed in her household and large family.
- CHATHAM, EARL OF:** see William Pitt.
- CONWAY, HENRY SEYMOUR:** soldier and politician; friend of Horace Walpole; dismissed from office in 1764 for opposing the Grenville ministry; held various offices in subsequent ministries.
- CUMBERLAND, WILLIAM AUGUSTUS, DUKE OF:** second and favorite son of George II; followed a military career; instrumental in forming the first Rockingham ministry, 1765-66.
- DEVONSHIRE, WILLIAM CAVENDISH, 4TH DUKE OF:** head of a great landed family; nominal head of the ministry in alliance with Pitt, 1756-57; his connection with Newcastle after Newcastle's resignation led to dismissal from his office as Lord Chamberlain in 1762.
- DODINGTON, GEORGE BUBB, BARON MELCOMBE:** friend and adviser of Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales and the Princess Augusta; noted for his Diary.
- FOX, CHARLES JAMES:** son of Henry Fox; a leader of the opposition to Lord North and the American war; Secretary of State in the Rockingham (1782) and Portland (1783) ministries; after 1783 leader of opposition to the younger Pitt.
- FOX, HENRY, 1ST BARON HOLLAND:** rival of the elder William Pitt; leader of the house of commons under Bute, 1762-63.
- FREDERICK LOUIS, PRINCE OF WALES:** eldest son of George II and father of George III; usually a center of opposition to George II and his ministers.
- GERMAIN, LORD GEORGE SACKVILLE:** disgraced in 1759 for insubordination at the battle of Minden; Colonial Secretary, 1775-82; held principal responsibility for management of the American war.
- GRAFTON, AUGUSTUS HENRY FITZROY, 3RD DUKE OF:** Secretary of State in Rockingham ministry, 1765-66; nominal head of Chatham administration, 1766-68; headed the ministry, 1768-70; resigned office in 1775 in opposition to the American war; member of Rockingham ministry, 1782.
- GRANVILLE, EARL:** see Carteret.
- GRENVILLE, GEORGE:** First Lord of the Treasury, 1763-65; alienated George III

- by his jealousy of Bute and his insistence on full and open support; principal events of his ministry were the prosecution of Wilkes and the Stamp Act.
- HARDWICKE, PHILIP YORKE, 1ST EARL OF:** Lord Chancellor, 1737-1756; adviser and close friend of Newcastle.
- HOLLAND, LORD:** see Henry Fox.
- JOHNSON, SAMUEL:** literary leader of his time; best known for his English Dictionary; a staunch Tory and strong supporter of George III.
- JUNIUS:** pen name of a pamphleteer who attacked George III and his ministers in a brilliant series of letters, 1769-72; usually identified as Philip Francis, then a clerk in the War Office.
- MANSFIELD, WILLIAM MURRAY, 1ST EARL OF:** Scottish lawyer and politician; Lord Chief Justice, 1756-88; supported the court and the American war.
- MELCOMBE, BARON:** see George Bubb Dodington.
- NEWCASTLE, THOMAS PELHAM-HOLLES, 1ST DUKE OF:** with his brother (Henry Pelham) dominated politics from the fall of Walpole to 1756; joined with Pitt in 1757 in a ministry which won great successes in the Seven Years War; after the accession of George III the jealousies and rivalries of Bute, Newcastle and Pitt led to Newcastle's resignation in 1762.
- NORTH, FREDERICK:** First Lord of the Treasury, 1770-82; lack of success in the American war brought his downfall in 1782; offended George III in 1783 by returning to office under Portland in coalition with Charles James Fox.
- PELHAM, HENRY:** brother of Duke of Newcastle; First Lord of the Treasury from 1743 until his death in 1754.
- PORTLAND, WILLIAM HENRY CAVENDISH BENTINCK, 3RD DUKE OF:** head of a great landed family; politically and socially connected with the Rockingham group; headed the ministry in 1783 and 1807-09.
- PITT, WILLIAM, EARL OF CHATHAM:** great leader during the Seven Years War; resigned in 1761 and opposed the peace treaty of 1763; as Lord Chatham headed an unsuccessful ministry from 1766-68; opposed the American policy of North.
- PITT, WILLIAM, "THE YOUNGER":** son of Chatham; First Lord of the Treasury, 1783-1801 and 1804-06.
- PULTENEY, WILLIAM, EARL OF BATH:** a leading opponent of Robert Walpole; his influence waned after 1746.
- ROCKINGHAM, CHARLES WATSON-WENTWORTH, 2ND MARQUIS OF:** headed ministry (1765-66) which repealed the Stamp Act; a leader of opposition to Lord North and the American war; formed second ministry in 1782 which opened negotiations for peace; ministry terminated after three months by his death.
- SANDWICH, JOHN MONTAGU, 4TH EARL OF:** Secretary of State in Grenville ministry, 1763-65; First Lord of the Admiralty under North, 1771-82; retired from public life after fall of North ministry in 1782.
- SECKER, THOMAS:** archbishop of Canterbury, 1758-1768.
- STONE, ANDREW:** secretary to Duke of Newcastle; became Treasurer to Queen Charlotte in 1761 and attached himself to the court.
- WALDEGRAVE, JAMES, 2ND EARL WALDEGRAVE:** trusted friend and confidant of George II; governor of the Prince of Wales (later George III); noted for his memoirs.
- WALPOLE, SIR ROBERT:** First Lord of the Treasury, 1721-42; support of George II and Queen Caroline and his parliamentary and administrative ability enabled him to dominate politics until his fall in 1742.
- WILKES, JOHN:** political adventurer who came to prominence by his attacks on Bute in 1762-63; in exile from 1763-68; elected to parliament in 1768 but rejected by the house of commons; elected and took his seat in 1774; made his career by appealing to London radicalism.

through these impediments. But pleasure of every kind, in the common acceptation of the term, as meaning dissipation, presented scarcely any attractions for him even previous to his marriage. Stories were indeed generally circulated of his attachment to a young woman, a Quaker, about this time of his life, just as scandal many years afterwards whispered that he distinguished Lady Bridget Tollemache by particular attentions. The former report was probably well founded, and the latter assertion was unquestionably true, but those persons who have enjoyed most opportunities for studying the King's character will most in-

cline to believe that in neither instance did he pass the limits of innocent gallantry or occasional familiarity. Little was he to be seduced by the gratifications of the table, of wine, or of festivity. To all these allurements he seemed disinclined from natural constitution, moral and physical. His brother, Edward, Duke of York, plunged, on the contrary, very early into every sort of excess; but the example produced no effect on a prince modest, reserved, continent, capable of great self-command, and seeking almost all his amusements within a narrow domestic circle.

## The Constitutional King

JOHN ADOLPHUS

John Adolphus (1768—1845) was a barrister whose principal interest was the writing of history. His historical apprenticeship was served under one of the great figures in eighteenth century historiography, Archdeacon William Coxe (1747—1828), and his own works followed the sober, thorough, carefully documented style of Coxe. Adolphus' works are temperate and judicious in tone, although marked by a conservative outlook and strong anti-Jacobin feeling. His major work is his *The History of England from the Accession to the Decease of King George the Third*, which, despite the title, he was able to bring only to the year 1804.

I HAVE never been able, nor has the course of my reading given me the inclination, to coincide with those authors or orators who are pleased to inveigh, with almost indiscriminate severity, against the foreign and domestic government of Great Britain. These highly seasoned invectives may be gratifying to some readers; and to them the more plain, tranquil narrative of undisguised fact may seem insipid: but reputation derived from such sources has never been the object of my desire; I con-

fine myself, with strict forbearance, to the paths where I expect to find certain truth, and do not, in order to be thought courageous, attack where I am sure not to be encountered, nor calumniate those who by station, circumstances, time, or death, are rendered undesirous or incapable of resentment. Far from envying the applauses obtained by those disciples of Thersites, who claim the merit of wit and courage by rancorous abuse on the sovereign, government, and constitution of the country, I can with-

out hesitation declare my opinion, that, in the period on which I have written, the throne has been filled by a monarch who has sought the love of his subjects through the means of public spirit and private virtue; and who has tempered a noble desire to preserve from degradation the authority he inherits, with a firm and just regard to the constitution and liberties which conducted him to the throne, and which will ever form its best supports. Far from thinking that the aims of successive administrations have been directed to overthrow the liberties and constitution of the country, I am persuaded that liberty has been better understood, and more effectually and practically promoted during this period, than in any which preceded; and that the affairs of government have been always honestly, though sometimes imprudently, and in the conspicuous instance of the American war, unsuccessfully, administered.

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George the Second was succeeded by his grandson, the son of Frederick Prince of Wales, and of Augusta Princess of Saxe Gotha, who had recently completed his twenty-second year.

Since the death of his father (20th March, 1751), the Heir Apparent had resided entirely with the Princess Dowager, who attended to his education with maternal solicitude. The party, which, during the life of Prince Frederick, had been considered as devoted to his interest, was, since his death, entirely dissolved. The Princess herself did not encourage any opposition to government; and the individuals, whom hope or affection attached to the late Prince, had retired from the field of politics, or formed new connexions.

Yet the education of a Prince, who was in time to govern a mighty kingdom, was not regarded with indifference by those whose interests might be affected by the ascendancy of rivals, or who feared that, if the Princess herself retained the influence which might be naturally expected,

new arrangements would be made, unfavourable to their views and adverse to their opinions.

Unfortunately, George II entertained a constant jealousy and suspicion of the Princess, which, long cherished, had grown into dislike, and made those who were desirous of his favour, carefully avoid all apparent intercourse with his daughter-in-law; consequently, the young Prince was wholly unacquainted with the sentiments and manners of those who formed his grandfather's court. This neglect extended even to the royal family; and the Duke of Cumberland and Princess Amelia shewed no marks of attention and respect to the Heir Apparent and his mother.

Encouraged by these circumstances, and actuated by views of ambition, Lord Harcourt, who had been appointed governor to the young Prince, and Dr. Hayter, Bishop of Norwich, who filled the post of preceptor, not only exerted their influence to detach his affections from all who had enjoyed the favour of his deceased parent, but also, by their example and discourse, imparted sentiments of disrespect toward the Princess Dowager; for which, at a subsequent period, the Prince acknowledged his error with honest contrition, and suitable apologies. In consequence of these efforts, divisions arose among those to whom the instruction of the Heir Apparent was confided, and a representation was made to the King, that Mr. Stone, sub-governor of His Royal Highness, was an improper person to be intrusted with his education; he was stated to be a Jacobite, and accused of having, in company with Dr. Johnson, Bishop of Gloucester, and Mr. Murray, the solicitor-general, afterward Earl of Mansfield, drunk the health of the Pretender and Lord Dunbar. The matter was referred by the King to the cabinet council. Fawcett was examined; but the charge was so frivolous, and the prevarications of Fawcett so gross and evident, the denials of Mr. Murray and Dr. Johnson so clear, precise, and satisfactory, that the lords unanimously represented to

the King, that there was no foundation for any part of the charge.

Upon this decision, Lord Harcourt and the Bishop of Norwich declared their resolution to resign, unless Mr. Stone, Mr. Scott, sub-preceptor to the Prince, and Mr. Cresset, secretary to the Princess Dowager, were dismissed; for they, it was said, cherished Jacobite principles, and instilled arbitrary notions into the Prince. The King received this unfounded complaint with due indifference, the proffered resignations were accepted, and, not without some hesitation on his part, Lord Waldegrave was appointed governor; the Bishop of Peterborough was nominated preceptor.

To interest the public in this dispute, an anonymous letter was transmitted by the penny post to a popular preacher, advising him to notice in the pulpit the Prince's dangerous education; and to Lord Ravensworth, General Hawley, and a few other persons, purporting to be a representation or remonstrance from the Whig nobility and gentry, containing many injurious reflections on the education of the Prince, and the principles of his attendants. This paper was fabricated by Horace Walpole, afterward Earl of Oxford; the apparent motive for sending it was, a hope that it would be given to the Duke of Cumberland to lay before the King, and make impressions favourable to the views of the supposed writers.

The accusation against the Bishop of Gloucester, Mr. Murray, and Mr. Stone, was subsequently discussed in the House of Lords, on a motion for an address, praying His Majesty to submit to the House the whole proceeding before the privy council. The business was fully and freely investigated, as the King had granted to the members of the cabinet dispensations from the obligation of their oath as privy-counsellors; but, after a long and heavy debate, the House coincided in opinion with the council so entirely, that only three peers and one bishop offered to divide with the Duke of Bedford, who made the motion.

The public, whom this discussion was principally intended to alarm, easily discerned that the chief object was to remove the Pelham ministry, and to separate the Prince from the person and care of his parent; but all good men were satisfied that he should continue under her direction, and that she should preserve that influence over him which nature and policy equally declared to be her due.

From the satisfaction with which the Prince received the instructions of his new preceptor, the Bishop of Peterborough, sanguine hopes were entertained that he would derive much advantage from his tuition. To impart a knowledge of books was not the difficulty; in that particular no deficiency was complained of; but it was necessary to imbue the mind of the future sovereign with just notions of the British constitution and jurisprudence, and enable him to estimate correctly the national wealth and resources, and the means of preserving and increasing them. It was a great object of the Princess's care to educate her son in the principles and constant practice of religion; and with this view she invited the learned and pious Dr. Stephen Hales into her family, and appointed him clerk of the closet. Her good intentions were greatly favoured by the disposition of the Prince, who was affectionate, gentle, and exempt from every appearance of vicious inclination. The dread which the Princess constantly entertained, that his morals would be contaminated by the example of the young nobility, prevented his mixing with them in familiar intercourse, and his acquaintance was almost confined to the social circle of Leicester House; which was select, cheerful, and unrestrained.

On attaining his majority, the Prince took his seat in the House of Peers; but there was no debate in that session.

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The King's friendship for the Earl of Bute led to extensive and permanent consequences. John Earl of Bute was son of

James second Earl of Bute, by Ann Campbell, daughter of Archibald first Duke of Argyle. He received his education at Eton; and at an early period of his life became a lord of the bedchamber of Frederick Prince of Wales. On the death of the Prince he retired, and took no share in political transactions, although often consulted by the Princess. On the establishment of the young Prince's household, he was appointed groom of the stole, and so continued after his accession. He had not occupied any public office; was unacquainted with the business and intrigues of state; and although he possessed an active mind, replete with elegant and abstruse learning, and was well acquainted with the theory of the British constitution, he was not competent to the task of instructing a future Sovereign in the practical science of governing a kingdom, where the component parts of the legislature were so nicely balanced, and their respective powers and operations so strictly guarded. It could not afford ground of surprise that the King, young and unacquainted with the persons of those who formed a successful and popular administration, should place among his confidential servants a nobleman whom he had long esteemed, and who possessed the confidence and good opinion of his parent: it could not be a subject of animadversion, that such a person should obtain a portion of the King's regard; nor would this circumstance have affected the course of political affairs, had not a new system followed his introduction into the cabinet.

The last two monarchs, being foreigners, and opposed by a native Prince who had numerous adherents, as well among the people as in some of the most illustrious houses, entrusted a large portion of their power to a few distinguished families, in order to secure possession of the crown. These families, strengthened by union and exclusive influence, became not only independent of, but in many respects superior to, the throne. Swayed by a predilection

for their continental dominions, the first two Sovereigns of the House of Hanover incurred severe animadversions from the members of opposition; and the necessity of frequent justifications rendering them still more dependent on the leaders of the ministerial party, reduced them almost to a state of pupillage.

But the new King, being exempt from foreign partialities, ascending the throne at a period when the claims of the exiled family were fallen into disregard, was enabled to emancipate himself from the restraint to which his predecessors had submitted. The Earl of Bute formed the plan of breaking the phalanx which constituted and supported the ministry, and of securing the independence of the crown, by a moderate exertion of constitutional prerogative. This plan in itself was well conceived, and necessary; but the Earl of Bute was not a proper person to carry it into effect. He was not connected, either by blood or by familiar intercourse, with the leading families in England; he was not versed in the arts of popularity, nor used to the struggles of parliamentary opposition; and his manners were cold, reserved, and unconciliating. He had not, as a measure preparatory to the assumption of power, secured an interest in either house of parliament, or among the people. Prejudices were easily excited against him as a native of Scotland; for it is to be recollected, that only fifteen years had elapsed since a rebellion begun in that country, had raged in the very heart of England, and he could only oppose to a popular and triumphant administration and a long established system, such friends as hope or interest might supply, and the personal esteem of the King, which was rendered less valuable by the odium attached to the name of favourite.

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At the dissolution of the first parliament called by George III the aspect of affairs presented no consolatory views to his

mind.<sup>1</sup> The King, from the beginning of his reign, had manifestly sought the advantage and honour of his people; yet such were the effects of a constant and acrimonious opposition, that not only the prudence of his measures, but the purity of his intentions was doubted. At his accession, he found a large portion of his subjects, conspicuous both for property and talent, excluded from all share in the government, and, by an affected stigma, rendered incapable of enjoying confidence, or rendering service to the crown. He relieved them from this proscription, and sought, by abolishing party and national distinctions, to reign King and protector of all his people. This measure, so wise and just in itself, was productive of endless feuds and jealousies. Every introduction of a new servant or family occasioned dissatisfaction and disgust: the disappointed formed new parties, avowed new principles, and sought by every device to distress and impede the operations of government. Thus so many successive ministries, who assumed the direction of public affairs, were all feeble and inefficient, while no single opposition was in itself strong or respectable. Every leader of a party commanded his share of influence, which, joined to that resulting from ministerial situation, was sufficient to procure a majority; but the parliament itself, delivered to so many opposite leaders, making laws in one session, repealing them in the next, affirming a principle at one period, and retracting it at another, lost much of the respect and confidence which ought to flow from the people to their representatives.

The King's benevolence was conspicuous in every act which he performed or sanctioned. He found the country at war: it was the first wish of his heart to restore the blessings of peace. In pursuit of this object he made no sacrifice of the national honour, but raised the glories of the coun-

<sup>1</sup>Reference is to the year 1768.

try by a campaign of matchless vigour and success. From this circumstance resulted much of the obloquy thrown on the peace: the prosperous progress of the British arms inspired exaggerated hopes, and many who affected to deplore the miseries of war, decried the peace because it was not founded on principles which would have furnished an unanswerable motive for future aggression.

Against the private life of the King calumny itself could not discover an objection. Vice of every kind was not only unpractised, but discountenanced, at court; and it was not possible to survey, without an accumulated sense of respect and admiration, the first personage in the realm, although in the prime of youth, the most conspicuous in the performance of every social duty, and the most happy in the interesting centre of a domestic circle.

The King was a patron and liberal encourager of the polite arts, and anxious to give them a permanent establishment in Great Britain. At an early period of the reign, Lord Bute asserted, from his own knowledge, that rewards would never be wanting, provided proper subjects occurred, worthy of the royal protection; and the institution of the Royal Academy displayed at once the King's judgment, spirit, and patriotism.

Notwithstanding, however, his blameless life, and constant exertions to deserve the affection of his subjects, the King was not happy. The unceasing efforts of opposition in every part of his dominions, and the success which attended those insidious and baleful endeavours, deprived him of a great portion of tranquillity. His firmness, fortunately, prevented him from relinquishing a mode of conduct which his judgment led him to adopt; but although he was enabled to break the established phalanx, which, while it supported, obscured the throne, the struggle was attended with many painful circumstances.



# High Prerogative and the Freedom of the Subject

HORACE WALPOLE

Horace Walpole (1717–1797) was the fourth son of Sir Robert Walpole. He sat in Parliament from 1741 to 1768, but, despite his distinguished name, he did not rise to positions of leadership or responsibility. He was, in some respects, a shallow and vindictive man, filled with anxieties and resentments, all of which are displayed in his *Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Third*. This work combines hostility to the court with contempt for the principal opposition groups, and Walpole invariably finds a discreditable motive for any act. Despite these faults, Walpole's memoirs have genuine merits. Walpole was an inveterate seeker of "inside information," and he had an insatiable desire to record what he thought and heard. Walpole's memoirs, despite obvious prejudices and special pleading, remain an important source of information for students of the reign of George III.

No British monarch has ascended the throne with so many advantages as George the Third. Being the first of his line born in England, the prejudice against his family as foreigners ceased in his person — Hanover was no longer the native soil of our Princes; consequently, attachment to the Electorate was not likely to govern our councils, as it had done in the last two reigns. This circumstance, too, of his birth, shifted the unpopularity of foreign extraction from the House of Brunswick to the Stuarts. In the flower and bloom of youth, George had a handsome, open, and honest countenance; and with the favour that attends the outward accomplishments of his age, he had none of the vices that fall under the censure of those who are past enjoying them themselves.

The moment of his accession was fortunate beyond example. The extinction of parties had not waited for, but preceded, the dawn of his reign. Thus it was not a race of factions running to offer them-

selves, as is common, to a new Prince, bidding for his favour, and ready each to be disgusted if their antagonists were received with more grace; but a natural devolution of duty from all men to the uncontroverted heir of the Crown, who had no occasion to court the love of his subjects, nor could fear interrupting established harmony but by making any change in a system so well compacted. The administration was firm, in good harmony with one another, and headed by the most successful genius that ever presided over our councils. Conquests had crowned our arms with wonderful circumstances of glory and fortune; and the young King seemed to have the option of extending our victories and acquisitions, or of giving peace to the world, by finding himself in a situation so favourable, that neither his ambition nor moderation could have been equitably reprehended. The designs and offences of France would have justified a fuller measure of revenge; moderation could want no excuse.

A passionate, domineering woman, and a

From Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Third*, ed. G. F. Russell Barker, 4 vols. (London, 1894), vol. I, pp. 3-4, 14-17, 82-83, 90-91, 95-96, 84.

Favourite, without talents, soon drew a cloud over this shining prospect.

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The views of the Court were so fully manifested afterwards, that no doubt can be entertained but a plan had been early formed of carrying the prerogative to very unusual heights. The Princess was ardently fond of power, and all its appanages of observance, rank, and wealth. The deepest secrecy and dissimulation guarded every avenue of her passions; and close retirement was adapted to these purposes. She could not appear in public (after the arrival of the Queen) as the first woman of the kingdom: her unpopularity made her pride tremble; and privacy shrouded such hours as were not calculated to draw esteem; and it contracted her expenses. After the King's marriage she appeared seldom or never at St. James's, nor deigned to accompany the ceremony of the coronation. The attendance of her ladies was dispensed with except on drawing-room days; and by degrees even her maids of honour and women of the bedchamber were removed from her palace, where she lived in a solitude that would have passed for the perfection of Christian humility in the ages of monkish ignorance. Jealousy of her credit over her son made her impose almost as strict laws of retirement on him. He was accessible to none of his Court but at the stated hours of business and ceremony; nor was any man but the Favourite, and the creatures with whom he had garrisoned the palace, allowed to converse with the King. Affection had no share in this management.

The Princess, who was never supposed to disclose her mind with freedom, but on the single topic of her own children, had often mentioned her eldest son with contempt; and during the life of her husband had given into all his partiality for the Duke of York. When her views of governing by her husband were cut off, she applied to the untutored inexperience of his heir; and the first step towards the influence she meditated was by filling his mind

with suspicions and ill impressions of all mankind. His uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, was made another instrument. The young Prince had a great appetite; he was asked if he wished to be as gross as his uncle? Every vice, every condescension was imputed to the Duke, that the Prince might be stimulated to avoid them.

The Favourite, who had notions of honour, and was ostentatious, endeavoured to give a loftier cast to the disposition of his pupil, though not to the disparagement of the vassalage in which he was to be kept. Lord Bute had a little genius, and affected learning. Men of genius, the arts and artists were to be countenanced. The arts might amuse the young King's solitary hours; authors might defend the measures of Government, and were sure to pay for their pensions with incense, both to their passive and active protectors. The pedantry and artifice of these shallow views served but to produce ridicule. Augustus fell asleep over drawings and medals, which were pushed before him every evening; and Mæcenas had so little knowledge, and so little taste, that his own letters grew a proverb for want of orthography; and the scribes he countenanced were too destitute of talents to raise his character or their own. The coins of the King were the worst that had appeared for above a century; and the revenues of the Crown were so soon squandered in purchasing dependants, that architecture, the darling art of Lord Bute, was contracted from the erection of a new palace to altering a single door-case in the drawing-room at St. James's. Yet his emissaries, the Scotch, were indefatigable in coining popular sayings and sentences for the King. It was given out that he would suffer no money to be spent on elections. Circumstances that recoiled with force, when every one of those aphorisms were contradicted by practice.

But the chief engine to conciliate favour was the King's piety. The Princess, no doubt, intended it should be real, for she lived in dread of a mistress. But mankind was not inclined to think that her morals

could have imprinted much devotion on the mind of her son; nor was any man the dupe of those professions but Secker, the Archbishop, who, for the first days of the reign, flattered himself with the idea of becoming first minister in a Court that hoisted the standard of religion. He was unwearied in attendance at St. James's, and in presenting bodies of clergy; and his assiduity was so bustling and assuming that, having pushed aside the Duke of Cumberland to get at the King, his Royal Highness reprimanded him with a bitter taunt. The prelate soon discovered his mistake. Nor were the Princess or the Favourite inclined to trust the King in the hands of a Churchman, whom they knew so well, and whose sanctity was as equivocal as their own.

As far as could be discerned of the King's natural disposition it was humane and benevolent. If flowing courtesy to all men was the habit of his dissimulation, at least it was so suited to his temper that no gust of passion, no words of bitterness, were ever known to break from him. He accepted services with grace and appearance of feeling; and if he forgot them with an unrestrained facility, yet he never marked his displeasure with harshness. Silence served him to bear with unwelcome ministers, or to part with them. His childhood was tinctured with obstinacy; it was adopted at the beginning of his reign, and called firmness, but did not prove to be his complexion. In truth, it would be difficult to draw his character in positive colours. He had neither passions nor activity. He resigned himself obsequiously to the government of his mother and Lord Bute; learned, and even entered with art into the lessons they inspired, but added nothing of his own. When the task was done, he relapsed into indifference and indolence till roused to the next day's part.

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It must, I think, appear evident, from the scope of the reign, that the Princess Dowager and Lord Bute had assumed the reins

with a fixed intention of raising the prerogative, which they called restoring it to its ancient lustre; but nothing would have induced them to specify at what period of its influence they would have been contented to have stopped. The line of Hanover having been advanced to the throne by the forfeiture of the Stuarts, could not have the confidence to demand all the power that had been claimed by that House from which they descended, whose maxims they secretly revered, and whose want of abilities they inherited. King William had been too much controlled by his parliaments to serve them for a precedent; and the beginning of this very reign had been too servilely copied from the conclusion of Queen Anne's, and too ingloriously to be fit for quotation, though the doctrines of her last Ministers were the rule on which the junto had intended to act, and did act whenever they found themselves strong enough. But, as recent provocations govern the actions of men more than maxims, it was the conduct of the later Ministers of George the Second that first inspired the Princess of Wales and her husband, Prince Frederic, with desires of emancipating themselves from such pupillage. I am persuaded that she, her husband, and her son (if the latter at first had any plan) meditated humbling the aristocracy, rather than invading liberty.

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The canker had begun in the Administration of the Pelhams and Lord Hardwicke, who, at the head of a proud aristocracy of Whig Lords, had thought of nothing but establishing their own power; and who, as it suited their occasional purposes, now depressed and insulted the Crown and Royal Family, and now raised the prerogative. Their factious usurpations and insolence were even some excuse for the maxim taken up by Frederic, Prince of Wales, by the Princess Dowager, and the reigning King, of breaking that overbearing combination; and so blinded were the Pelhams by their own ambition, that

they furnished the Princess with men whose principles and abilities were best suited to inspire arbitrary notions into her son, and to instruct him how to get rid of his tyrants, and establish a despotism that may end in tyranny in his descendants. Though the Princess and Lord Bute gave rashly in to those views, their passions, folly, and cowardice oftener defeated the plan than promoted it: and it was in this light only that Lord Bute ought to be acquitted of raising the prerogative. He rendered it contemptible; while Stone and Murray were the real sources of those discontents, which Burke sought, but never discovered. . . .<sup>1</sup> A few facts will evince that the Pelhams, Hardwicke, and their friends, were an aristocratic faction; that they insulted and provoked the Crown and Royal Family, and raised disgusts in them against the Whig party, at the same time planting the rankest Tories about the successor and his mother, and forcing them to throw themselves into the arms of even Jacobites.

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Let it be observed, however, that, when I impute to the King and his mother little more than a formed design of reducing the usurped authority of the great Lords, I am far from meaning that there were no deeper designs at bottom. Lord Mansfield was by principle a tyrant; Lord Holland was bred in a monarchic school, was cruel, revengeful, daring, and subtle. Grenville, though in principle a republican, was bold, proud,

<sup>1</sup> A scornful reference to Burke's *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents*.

dictatorial, and so self-willed that he would have expected Liberty herself should be his first slave. The Bedford faction, except the Duke himself, were void of honour, honesty, and virtue; and the Scotch were whatever their masters wished them to be, and too envious of the English, and became too much provoked by them, not to lend all their mischievous abilities towards the ruin of a constitution, whose benefits the English had imparted to them, but did not like they should engross. All these individuals or factions, I do not doubt, accepted and fomented the disposition they found predominant in the Cabinet, as they had severally access to it; and the contradictions which the King suffered in his ill-advised measures, riveted in him a thirst of delivering himself from control, and to be above control he must be absolute. Thus on the innate desire of unbounded power in all princes, was engrafted a hate to the freedom of the subject, and therefore, whether the King set out with a plan of extending his prerogative, or adopted it, his subsequent measures, as often as he had an opportunity of directing them himself, tended to the sole object of acting by his own will. Frequent convulsions did that pursuit occasion, and heavy mortifications to himself. On the nation it heaped disgrace, and brought it to the brink of ruin; and should the event be consonant to the King's wishes of establishing the royal authority at home, it is more sure that the country will be so lowered, that the Sovereign will become as subject to the mandates of France, as any little potentate in Europe.

# The Obstinate King

W. E. H. LECKY

W. E. H. Lecky (1838-1903) was born and educated in Ireland, and throughout his life he maintained a strong interest in Ireland. His early works were studies of the origin and decline of traditional Christian morality, and near the end of his life he surveyed the growth of democracy, viewing with concern the threat which it posed to his ideals of personal liberty and representative government. He served in Parliament from 1895 to 1902, where he showed special interest in Irish affairs. He died in 1903, old and full of honors, after a long, active, and productive life.

Lecky's greatest work is his *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, which he worked on for nineteen years. The work was mainly political, but Lecky included long sections on society, religion, and manners. He gave much attention to imperial questions, especially Ireland, to which he gave full and sympathetic treatment. American historians praised the fairness of his treatment of the American Revolution. In its amplitude, its leisureed pace, its rich detail, its elegant style, its lofty (and often sententious) spirit and its assured tone, Lecky's *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* is a splendid example of the Victorian mind and a work which has found a place among the classics of English historiography.

WHEN George II died, on October 25, 1760, his grandson and successor had but just completed his twenty-second year. The life of the young Prince had hitherto been very unsuitable for the task he was to fulfil. Since his thirteenth year, when his father died, he had lived entirely with his mother, and he exhibited during his whole career the characteristic merits and defects of a female education. His mother was a woman of a somewhat hard, reserved, and tortuous character; with few friendships and several bitter enmities; with a power of concealing her true sentiments which baffled even those who came in closest connection with her; strict in the observance of her religious duties, and in her care of her nine children; eminently discreet in her dealings with a bad husband and a jealous father-in-law; deeply imbued with the narrow prejudices of a small German Court, fond of power, unamiable, and somewhat soured by adversity. The early

death of her husband had deprived her of the prospect of a crown, and although after his death Leicester House<sup>1</sup> ceased to be a centre of active opposition, the old King looked upon both the Princess and his grandchild with jealousy, and they had in consequence little intercourse with the Court circle, with the Whig ministers, and even with the other members of the royal family. The education of the young Prince was feebly and fitfully conducted; and it is remarkable that among his preceptors Scott had been recommended by Bolingbroke, while Stone had been suspected of Jacobitism. They appear to have discharged their functions very ill; for George III was always singularly deficient in literary culture. Lord Waldegrave, who was much the ablest of his governors, described him as a

<sup>1</sup> Leicester House was the residence of the Prince of Wales. The name was applied to the opposition groups which often gathered around the heir to the throne.

From William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols. (London, 1883), vol. III, pp. 10-23.

boy of respectable abilities, but great constitutional indolence; scrupulous, dutiful, ignorant of evil, and sincerely pious, but neither generous nor frank; harsh in his judgments of others, with strong prejudices, indomitable obstinacy, and great command over his passions, exceedingly tenacious of his resentments, and exhibiting them chiefly by prolonged fits of sullenness. His indolence he succeeded in completely overcoming, but the other lines of this not very pleasing picture continued during his whole life. He mixed very little in the world—scarcely at all with the young nobility. His mother said that their lax manners would probably corrupt her son. Her enemies declared that the real explanation of this strange seclusion was her own insatiable avarice of power, which made her wish beyond all things to establish a complete ascendancy over his mind, and to withdraw him from every influence that could rival her own. Like most members of German royal families, she exaggerated the prerogative of monarchy to the highest degree, and her favourite exhortation, "George, be a king!" is said to have left a deep impression on the mind of her son. The most important figure in the small circle was John, Earl of Bute, a Scotch nobleman who had held an office in the household of Frederick, Prince of Wales, had lived after his death for some years a life of more than common retirement in Scotland, and, on the establishment of the household of the young Prince, had been placed at the head of it as Groom of the Stole. He was a man of some literary and artistic taste, but of very limited talents, entirely inexperienced in public business, arrogant, reserved, and unpopular in his temper, and with extreme views of the legitimate powers of royalty. The very confidential relations of Bute with the Princess gave rise to a scandal which was widely spread and generally believed. He became the chief adviser or instructor of her son, and strengthened in his mind those plans for the emancipation of the royal authority

which George III pursued steadily throughout his whole life.

The new sovereign came to the throne amid an enthusiasm such as England had hardly seen since Charles II restored the monarchy. By the common consent of all parties the dynastic contest was regarded as closed, and after two generations of foreign and unsympathetic rulers, the nation, which has always been peculiarly intolerant of strangers, accepted with delight an English king. The favourable impression was still further confirmed when the more salient points of the private character of the King became generally understood. Simple, regular, and abstemious in all his tastes and habits, deeply religious without affectation or enthusiasm, a good son, a faithful husband, a kind master, and (except when he had met with gross ingratitude) an affectionate father, he exhibited through his whole reign, and in a rare perfection, that type of decorous and domestic virtue which the English middle classes most highly prize. The proclamation against immorality with which he began his reign; the touching piety with which, at his coronation, he insisted on putting aside his crown when receiving the sacrament; his rebuke to a Court preacher who had praised him in a sermon; his suppression of Sunday levees; his discouragement of gambling at Court; his letter of remonstrance to an Archbishop of Canterbury who had allowed balls in his palace; his constant attendance and reverential manner at religious services; his solemn and pious resignation under great private misfortunes, contrasted admirably with the open immorality of his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather, and with the outrageous licentiousness of his own brothers and of his own sons. He never sought for popularity; but he had many of the kingly graces, and many of the national tastes that are most fitted to obtain it. He went through public ceremonies with much dignity, and although his manner in private was hurried and confused, it was kind and homely, and not without a certain unaf-

fectured grace. Unlike his two predecessors, he was emphatically a gentleman, and he possessed to a rare degree the royal art of enhancing small favours by a gracious manner and a few well-chosen words. His country tastes, his love of field-sports, his keen interest in the great public schools, endeared him to large classes of his subjects; and, though he was neither brilliant nor witty, several of his terse and happy sayings are still remembered. He was also a very brave man. In the Wilkes riots, in 1769, when his palace was attacked; in the Lord George Gordon riots, in 1780, when his presence of mind contributed largely to save London; in 1786, when a poor mad-woman attempted to stab him at the entrance of St. James's Palace; in 1795, when he was assailed on his way to Parliament; in 1800, when he was fired at in a theatre, he exhibited the most perfect composure amid danger. His habit in dating his letters, of marking, not only the day, but the hour and the minute in which he wrote, illustrates not unhappily the microscopic attention which he paid to every detail of public business, and which was the more admirable because his natural tendency was towards sloth. In matters that were not connected with his political prejudices, his sincere appreciation of piety and his desire to do good sometimes overcame his religious bigotry and his hatred of change. Thus he always spoke with respect of the Methodists, and especially of Lady Huntingdon; he supported Howard, and subscribed to a statue in his honour; he supported the Lancaster system of education, though Lancaster was a Dissenter, and was looked upon with disfavour by the bishops; he encouraged the movement for Sunday-schools. He was sincerely desirous of doing his duty, and deeply attached to his country, although stronger feelings often interfered both with his conscientiousness and with his patriotism.

It is not surprising that a sovereign of whom all this may be truly said should have obtained much respect and admira-

tion; and it must be added that, in his hatred of innovation and in his vehement anti-American, anti-Catholic, and anti-Gallican feelings, he represented the sentiments of large sections — perhaps of the majority — of his people. The party which he drew from its depression has naturally revered his memory, and old age, and blindness, and deafness, and deprivation of reason, and the base ingratitude of two sons, have cast a deep pathos over his closing years.

All these things have contributed very naturally to throw a delusive veil over the political errors of a sovereign of whom it may be said without exaggeration, that he inflicted more profound and enduring injuries upon his country than any other modern English king. Ignorant, narrow-minded, and arbitrary, with an unbounded confidence in his own judgment and an extravagant estimate of his prerogative, resolved at all hazards to compel his ministers to adopt his own views, or to undermine them if they refused, he spent a long life in obstinately resisting measures which are now almost universally admitted to have been good, and in supporting measures which are as universally admitted to have been bad. He espoused with passionate eagerness the American quarrel; resisted obstinately the measures of conciliation by which at one time it might easily have been stifled; envenomed it by his glaring partisanship, and protracted it for several years, in opposition to the wish and to the advice even of his own favourite and responsible minister. He took the warmest personal interest in the attempts that were made, in the matter of general warrants, to menace the liberty of the subject, and in the case of the Middlesex election to abridge the electoral rights of constituencies, and in the other paltry, violent, and arbitrary measures by which the country was inflamed and Wilkes was converted into a hero. The last instance of an English officer deprived of his regiment for his vote in Parliament was due to the personal

intervention of the King; and the ministers whom he most warmly favoured were guilty of an amount and audacity of corruption which is probably unequalled in the parliamentary history of England. All the measures that were carried or attempted with the object of purifying the representative body — the publication of debates, the alteration of the mode of trying contested elections, the reduction of sinecures and pensions, the enlargement of the constituencies — were contrary to the wishes of the King. Although his income during the greater part of his reign was little less than a million a year, although his Court was parsimonious to a fault, and his hospitality exceedingly restricted, and although he succeeded to a considerable sum that had been saved by his predecessor, he accumulated in the course of his reign debts to the amount of no less than 3,398,061l.; and there can be little doubt that contemporary public opinion was right in attributing a great part of these debts to his expenditure in parliamentary or electoral corruption.

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The root, however, of his great errors lay in his determination to restore the royal power to a position wholly different from that which it occupied in the reign of his predecessor; and this design was in many respects more plausible than is now generally admitted. Every functionary has a natural tendency to magnify his office, and when George III ascended the throne he found his position as an hereditary constitutional sovereign almost unique in the world. In France, in Spain, in Austria, in the smallest principality in Germany, the sovereign was hardly less absolute than in Russia or Turkey. And the power of the English sovereign had for many years been steadily declining, and the limitations to which he was practically subject went far beyond the mere letter of the law. The time had indeed long passed when Elizabeth directed her Parliaments to abstain from discussing matters of state, and when

James I declared that, "as it is atheism and blasphemy in a creature to dispute what the Deity may do, so it is presumption and sedition in a subject to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power;" but even after the Revolution, William III had been a great political power, and Anne, though a weak and foolish woman, had exercised no small amount of personal influence. What the position of the English sovereign was in the eyes of the English Church was sufficiently shown by the long series of theologians who proclaimed in the most emphatic terms that he possessed a Divine right, different, not only in degree but in kind, from that of every other power in the State; that he was the representative or vicegerent of the Deity; that resistance to him was in all cases a sin. The language of English law was less unqualified, but still it painted his authority in very different colours from those which an historian of George I or of George II would have used. The "Commentaries" of Blackstone were not published till George III had been for some time on the throne; but Bute had obtained a considerable portion of them in manuscript from the author, for the purpose of instructing the Prince in the principles of the Constitution. "The King of England," in the words of Blackstone, "is not only the chief, but properly the sole magistrate of the nation, all others acting by commission from and in due subordination to him." "He may reject what bills, may make what treaties . . . may pardon what offences he pleases, unless when the Constitution hath expressly, or by evident consequence, laid down some exception or boundary." He has the sole power of regulating fleets and armies, of manning all forts and other places of strength within the realm, of making war and peace, of conferring honours, offices, and privileges. He governs the kingdom: statesmen, who administer affairs, are only his ministers.

It is not surprising that the contrast between such language and the actual position of George II during the greater part



of his reign should have vividly impressed a young sovereign surrounded by Tory followers, and naturally extremely tenacious of power, or that he should have early resolved to bend all his faculties to the task of emancipating his office from the restrictions that surrounded it. The period of his accession was in some respects exceedingly propitious to his design. Among the causes of the depression of royalty one of the most obvious and important had been the long exclusion from office of that great Tory party which naturally exalts most highly the royal prerogative.

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The propriety of breaking down the system of exclusion seemed manifest. The Tory sentiment of the country had long found no adequate expression in the Government. The party which carried with it the genuine sympathies both of the country gentry and of the country clergy had been so discouraged that after the death of Bolingbroke and of the Prince of Wales it was scarcely represented in Parliament, and its political eclipse had been followed by a great increase both of oligarchical influence and of corruption. There was something manifestly unhealthy in the continuance during many years, of a Government like that of Walpole, which was supported chiefly by a majority of members of nomination boroughs in opposition to the large majority of the county votes; and nothing but the wisdom and moderation with which the Whig party used their ascendancy could have repressed serious discontent in the country. Bolingbroke, in works which seem to have suggested the policy of George III, had strongly urged the necessity of disregarding the old party distinctions, and building up the royal authority on their decay. Carteret, after the fall of Walpole, had designed a mixed ministry, in which Tories as well as Whigs could be admitted largely to power. Pitt had long chafed bitterly against the system of government by connection, and it was noticed that although the higher offices in the Gov-

ernment were still occupied exclusively by Whigs, the country party, who had remained sullenly indifferent to preceding Governments, rallied warmly around him, and that in his militia appointments he entirely overlooked the distinction of Whig and Tory.

The object of Pitt was to check the corruption that prevailed and to extend the area of patriotic feeling. The object of George III and of the little group of politicians who surrounded and counselled him was very different, but their means were in some respects the same. In order to estimate their policy it is necessary in the first place to form a clear conception of their aims and methods. It is probable that Burke, in the famous pamphlet in which he described the condition of English politics in the first years of George III, considerably exaggerated the systematic and elaborate character of the plan that was adopted, but its leading features are sufficiently plain. "Prerogative," as Horace Walpole said, had once more "become a fashionable word," the Divine right of kings was once again continually preached from the pulpit, and the Court party never concealed their conviction that the monarchy in the preceding reign had fallen into an essentially false position, and that it should be the first object of the new sovereign to restore it to vigour. They had, however, no wish to restrict or override the authority of Parliament, or to adopt any means which were not legal and parliamentary. Their favourite cries were abolition of government by party or connection, abolition of corruption at elections, emancipation of the sovereign from ministerial tyranny. No class of politicians were to be henceforth absolutely excluded, but at the same time no class or connection were to be allowed to dictate their policy to the King. The aristocracy, it was said, had obtained an exaggerated place in the Constitution. A few great families, who had been the leading supporters of the Revolution, who were closely connected by family relationships, by friendship, by long and

systematic political co-operation, had come to form a single coherent body possessing so large an amount of borough patronage and such vast and various ramifications of influence, that they were practically the rulers of the country. This phalanx was beyond all things to be broken up. If a great nobleman consented to detach himself from it and to enter into new combinations; if on a change of ministry subordinate officials were content to abandon their leaders and to retain their places, such conduct was to be warmly encouraged. The system of divided administrations which had existed under William and Anne was to be revived. The ministers were to be as much as possible confined to their several departments; they were to be drawn from many different connections and schools of policy, and they were not to be suffered to form a coherent and homogeneous whole. The relations of the Crown to the ministry were to be changed. For a considerable time the Treasury, the Ecclesiastical patronage, the Cornish boroughs, and all the other sources of influence which belonged nominally to the Crown had been, with few exceptions, at the disposal of the minister, and were employed to strengthen his administration. They were now to be in a great degree withdrawn from his influence, and to be employed in maintaining in Parliament a body of men whose political attachment centred in the King alone, who looked to him alone for promotion, who, though often holding places in the Government, were expected rather to control than to support it, and, if it diverged from the policy which was personally acceptable to the King, to conspire against it and overthrow it. A Crown influence was thus to be established in Parliament as well as a ministerial influence, and it was hoped that it would turn the balance of parties and accelerate the downfall of any administration which was not favoured by the King.

There were many sources from which "the King's friends," as this interest was very invidiously called, might be recruited. Crown and Court patronage was extrava-

gantly redundant, and it was certain in the corrupt condition of Parliament that many politicians would prefer to attach themselves to the permanent source of power rather than to transitory administrations. The popularity of the King strengthened the party. The Tories, who resented their long exclusion from power, and who recognised in the young sovereign a Tory king, supported it in a body; the divisions and jealousies among the Whig nobles made it tolerably certain that some would be soon detached from their old connections and would gather round the new standard, and the personal influence of the sovereign over the leading politicians was sufficient to secure in most ministries at least one member who was content to draw his inspiration from him alone.

It must be remembered, too, that the conception of the Cabinet as a body of statesmen who were in thorough political agreement, and were jointly responsible for all the measures they proposed, was still in its early stage, and was by no means fully or universally recognised. A great step had been taken towards its attainment on the accession of George I., when the principle was adopted of admitting only the members of a single party into the Government. The administration of Walpole, in unity, discipline, and power, was surpassed by few of the present century. After the downfall of that administration the Whigs defeated the attempt of the King's favourite statesman to mix the Government with Tories, and a joint resignation of the Government in 1746 obliged the King to break finally with Bath and Granville, and admit Pitt to his councils. But on the other hand, the lax policy of Pelham and the personal weakness of Newcastle had led to great latitude and violent divergences of policy in the Cabinet which they formed. Fox and Hardwicke, in the debates on the Marriage Act, inveighed against one another with the utmost bitterness, though the one was Secretary of State and the other Chancellor in the same Government. Fox and Pitt made their colleagues, Murray, New-

castle, and Robinson, the objects of their constant attacks, and these examples rendered it more easy for the King to carry out his favourite policy of a divided Cabinet.

A very remarkable pamphlet, called "Seasonable Hints from an Honest Man on the new Reign and the new Parliament," appeared in 1761, defending the new system of government, and it soon attracted much attention from the fact that it was understood to be the composition of no less a person than Lord Bath, the old rival of Walpole and the old colleague of Carteret.<sup>2</sup> The question, the writer said, for the sovereign to determine was, "Whether he is to content himself with the shadow of royalty while a set of undertakers for his business intercept his immediate communication with his people, and make use of the legal prerogatives of their master to establish the illegal claims of factitious oligarchy." He complains that "a cabal of ministers had been allowed to erect themselves into a fourth estate, to check, to control, to influence, nay, to enslave the others;" that it had become usual "to urge the necessity of the King submitting to give up the management of his affairs and the exclusive disposal of all his employments to some ministers, or set of ministers, who, by uniting together, and backed by their numerous dependents, may be able to carry on the measures of Government;" that "ministerial combinations to engross power and invade the closet," were nothing less than a "scheme of putting the sovereign in lead-

ing-strings," and that their result had been the monstrous corruption of Parliament and the strange spectacle of "a King of England unable to confer the smallest employment unless on the recommendation and with the consent of his ministers." He trusts that the new King will put an end to this system by showing "his resolution to break all factious connections and confederacies." Already he has "placed in the most honourable stations near his own person, some who have not surely owed their place to ministerial importunity, because they have always opposed ministerial influence," and by steadily pursuing this course, the true ideal of the Constitution will be attained, "in which the ministers will depend on the Crown, not the Crown on the ministers." But to attain this end it was necessary that the basis of the Government should be widened, the proscription of the Tories abolished, and the sovereign enabled to select his servants from all sections of politicians. "Does any candid and intelligent man seriously believe that at this time there subsists any party distinction amongst us that is not merely nominal? Are not the Tories friends of the royal family? Have they not long ago laid aside their aversion to the Dissenters? Do they not think the Toleration and Establishment both necessary parts of the Constitution? and can a Whig distinguish these from his own principles?" One glorious result of the new system of government the writer confidently predicts. With the destruction of oligarchical power the reign of corruption would terminate, and undue influence in Parliament was never likely to be revived.

<sup>2</sup> Written by John Douglas, later Bishop of Salisbury, but expressing the ideas of the Earl of Bath (William Pulteney).

### III. THE NAMIER SCHOOL

## A Much Maligned Ruler

SIR LEWIS NAMIER

Sir Lewis Namier (1888–1960) was born of a Polish-Jewish family, and received his university education at Oxford. He made it his task to sweep away the uncriticized assumptions and unevaluated opinions which had become the basis of the accepted interpretation of the reign of George III. His first major work, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* appeared in 1929, to be followed in 1930 by *England in the Age of the American Revolution*. The former was a rigorous examination of the House of Commons and the operations of parliamentary politics, while the latter, despite its broad title, was a detailed study of politics from 1760 to 1762, centering on the personalities of George III, Bute, Newcastle and Pitt.

With the rise of Hitlerism, Namier became passionately absorbed in the fate of European Jewry and the coming cataclysm in central Europe. Not until after the war did he return to his studies of eighteenth century England. The two essays reprinted here are a product of this period of his life. The major work of his later years was the great *History of Parliament*, which is intended to give biographical information concerning every member of Parliament, together with analyses of parliamentary groups and connections. When, if ever, this vast project is completed, it will be a fitting memorial to this most influential of modern historians of eighteenth century England.

**T**HERE were three large pictures of George III at the exhibition of Royal Portraits arranged by the Academy of Arts in the spring of 1953. Looking at the first, by Reynolds, painted when the King was 41, I was struck by the immaturity of expression. The second, by Lawrence, painted in 1792 at the age of 54, depicts him in Garter robes; face and posture seem to attempt in a naive, ineffective, and almost engaging manner to live up to a grandeur which the sitter feels incumbent on him. The third, by Strochling, painted in November 1807 at the age of nearly 70, shows a sad old man, looking dimly at a

world in which he has no pleasure, and which he soon will not be able to see or comprehend.

A picture in a different medium of the King and his story presents itself to the student when in the Royal Archives at Windsor he surveys the papers of George III. They stand on the shelves in boxes, each marked on a white label with the year or years which it covers. The eye runs over that array, and crucial dates recall events: 1760, '65 and '67, '74 and '75, '82 and '83, 1789, '93, '96, 1802, 1805 — the series breaks off in 1810; and brown-backed volumes follow, unlabelled: they contain

Reprinted with permission of The Macmillan Company and Hamish Hamilton Ltd. from "King George III: A Study of Personality," in *Crossroads of Power* by Sir Lewis Namier (London, 1962), pp. 124–127, 130–140. Copyright 1962 by Lady Namier. Sir Lewis Namier's two major works on the period are *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (2nd ed., London, 1957) and *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (2nd ed., London, 1961).

the medical reports on a man shut off from time, which means the world and its life.

Fate had made George III ruler when kings were still expected to govern; and his active reign covered half a century during which the American conflict posed the problem of Imperial relations, while at home political practice constantly ran up against the contradiction inherent in the then much belauded "mixed form of government:" personal monarchy served by Ministers whose tenure of office was contested in Parliament. Neither the Imperial nor the constitutional problem could have been solved in the terms in which the overwhelming majority of the politically minded public in this country considered them at the time; but George III has been blamed ever since for not having thought of Dominion status and parliamentary government when constitutional theory and the facts of the situation as yet admitted of neither.

In the catalogue, *Kings and Queens*, on sale at the exhibition, the introduction dealing with the reign of George III gave the traditional view of his reign:

Conscientious and ambitious, he tried to restore the political influence of the Crown, but his intervention ended with the humiliating American War of Independence.

Conscientious he certainly was, painstakingly, almost painfully, conscientious. But was he ambitious? Did he try to exercise powers which his predecessors had relinquished, or claim an influence which was not universally conceded to him? And was it the assertion of Royal, and not of Parliamentary, authority over America which brought on the conflict and disrupted the First British Empire?

Let us place ourselves in March 1782. Dismal, humiliating failure has turned public opinion, and the House of Commons is resolved to cut losses and abandon the struggle; it is all over; Lord North's government has fallen; and the King is contemplating abdication. He has drafted

a message to Parliament (which was never sent); here are its first two paragraphs:

His Majesty during the twenty-one years he has sate on the throne of Great Britain, has had no object so much at heart as the maintenance of the British Constitution, of which the difficulties he has at times met with from his scrupulous attachment to the rights of Parliament are sufficient proofs.

His Majesty is convinced that the sudden change of sentiments of one branch of the legislature has totally incapacitated him from either conducting the war with effect, or from obtaining any peace but on conditions which would prove destructive to the commerce as well as essential rights of the British nation.

In the first paragraph the King declares his unswerving devotion to the British Constitution, and shows himself conscious of his difficulties in America having arisen through "his scrupulous attachment to the rights of Parliament"; the second paragraph pointedly refers to the Commons as "one branch of the legislature," and gives the King's view of the American war; he is defending there the vital interests and essential rights of the British nation.

A year later, in March 1783, when faced by the necessity of accepting a Government formed by the Fox-North coalition, George III once more contemplated abdication; and in a letter (which again was never sent) he wrote to the Prince of Wales:

The situation of the times are such that I must, if I attempt to carry on the business of the nation, give up every political principle on which I have acted, which I should think very unjustifiable, as I have always attempted to act agreeable to my duty; and must form a Ministry from among men who know I cannot trust them and therefore who will not accept office without making me a kind of slave; this undoubtedly is a cruel dilemma, and leaves me but one step to take without the destruction of my principles and honour; the resigning my Crown, my dear Son to you, quitting this my native country for ever and returning to the dominions of my forefathers.

Your difficulties will not be the same. You

have never been in a situation to form any political system, therefore, are open to adopt what the times may make necessary; and no set of men can ever have offended you or made it impossible for you to employ them.

Alongside this consider the following passage from a letter which George III wrote on 26 December 1783, after having dismissed the Coalition and while he was trying to rally support for the newly formed Administration of the younger Pitt:

The times are of the most serious nature, the political struggle is not as formerly between two factions for power; but it is no less than whether a desperate faction shall not reduce the Sovereign to a mere tool in its hands: though I have too much principle ever to infringe the rights of others, yet that must ever equally prevent my submitting to the Executive power being in any other hands, than where the Constitution has placed it. I therefore must call on the assistance of every honest man . . . to support Government on the present most critical occasion.

Note in these two passages the King's honest conviction that he has always attempted to do his duty; that he has been mindful not to infringe the rights of others; but that it would be equally wrong in him to submit "to the Executive power being in any other hands, than where the Constitution has placed it." And while I do not for a moment suggest that these things could not have been done in a happier manner, I contend that the King's statements quoted above are substantially correct.

In the eighteenth century, a proper balance between King, Lords, and Commons, that is, the monarchical, aristocratic, and representative elements of the Constitution acting as checks on each other, was supposed to safeguard the property and privileges, the lives and liberty of the subjects. Single-Chamber government would have been no less abhorrent to the century than Royal autocracy. The Executive was the King's as truly as it is now of the President in the United States; he, too, had to choose

his Ministers: but from among Parliamentary leaders. And while aspirants to office swore by the "independency" of the Crown and disclaimed all wish to force themselves on the King, if left out they did their level best to embarrass and upset their successful rivals. The technique of Parliamentary opposition was fully established long before its most essential aim, which is to force a change of government, was recognized as legitimate; and because that aim could not be avowed in its innocent purity, deadly dangers threatening the Constitution, nay the life of the country, had to be alleged for justification. Robert Walpole as "sole Minister" was accused of arrogating to himself the powers of both King and Parliament; the very tame Pelhams of keeping George II "in fetters;" Bute, who bore the name of Stuart, of "raising the standard of Royal prerogative;" and George III of ruling not through the Ministers of his own choice whom he avowed in public, but through a hidden gang of obscure and sinister "King's friends." It is obviously impossible here to trace the origin and growth of that story, or to disprove it by establishing the true facts of the transactions to which it has become attached — it was a figment so beautifully elaborated by Burke's fertile imagination that the Rockinghams themselves finished by believing it, and it grew into an obsession with them. In reality the constitutional practice of George III differed little from that of George I and George II. William Wyndham was proscribed by the first two Georges as a dangerous Jacobite, and C. J. Fox by the third as a dangerous Jacobin; while the elder Pitt was long kept out by both George II and George III on personal grounds. But for some the Royal veto and Royal influence in politics lose their sting if exercised in favour of successful monopolists in Whiggery.

I go one step further: in the eighteenth century the King had to intervene in politics and was bound to exercise his political influence, for the party system, which is the basis of Parliamentary government,

did not exist. Of the House of Commons itself probably less than half thought and acted in party terms. About one-third of the House consisted of Members who looked to the King for guidance and for permanency of employment: epigoni of earlier Courts or forerunners of the modern Civil Service; and if they thus pursued their own interest, there is no reason to treat them as more corrupt than if they had done so by attaching themselves to a group of politicians. Another one-fifth of the House consisted of independent country gentlemen, ready to support the King's Government so long as this was compatible with their conscience, but averse to tying themselves up with political groups: they did not desire office, honours, or profits, but prided themselves on the disinterested and independent line they were pursuing; and they rightly claimed to be the authentic voice of the nation. In the centre of the arena stood the politicians, their orators and leaders fighting for the highest prizes of Parliamentary life. They alone could supply the façade of governments: the front benches in Parliament. But to achieve stability a Government required the active support of the Crown and the good opinion of the country. On matters about which public opinion felt strongly, its will would prevail; but with the House constituted as it was, with the electoral structure of the unreformed Parliament, and an electorate which neither thought nor voted on party lines, it is idle to assume that modern Parliamentary government was possible.

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Lord Waldegrave, who had been Governor to the Prince of Wales 1752-6, wrote in 1758 a character sketch of him so penetrating and just that it deserves quoting almost in full.

The Prince of Wales is entering into his 21st year, and it would be unfair to decide upon his character in the early stages of life, when there is so much time for improvement.

A wise preamble; yet a long and eventful life was to change him very little. Every feature singled out by Waldegrave finds copious illustration in the fifty years that followed (in one case in a superficially inverted form).

His parts, though not excellent, will be found very tolerable, if ever they are properly exercised.

He is strictly honest, but wants that frank and open behaviour which makes honesty appear amiable. . . .

His religion is free from all hypocrisy, but is not of the most charitable sort; he has rather too much attention to the sins of his neighbour.

He has spirit, but not of the active kind; and does not want resolution, but it is mixed with too much obstinacy.

He has great command of his passions, and will seldom do wrong, except when he mistakes wrong for right; but as often as this shall happen, it will be difficult to undeceive him, because he is uncommonly indolent, and has strong prejudices.

His want of application and aversion to business would be far less dangerous, was he eager in the pursuit of pleasure; for the transition from pleasure to business is both shorter and easier than from a state of total inaction.

He has a kind of unhappiness in his temper, which, if it be not conquered before it has taken too deep a root, will be a source of frequent anxiety. Whenever he is displeased, his anger does not break out with heat and violence; but he becomes sullen and silent, and retires to his closet; not to compose his mind by study or contemplation, but merely to indulge the melancholy enjoyment of his own ill humour. Even when the fit is ended, unfavourable symptoms very frequently return, which indicate that on certain occasions his Royal Highness has too correct a memory.

Waldegrave's own endeavour was to give the Prince "true notions of common things." But these he never acquired; which is perhaps the deepest cause of his tragedy.

The defect Waldegrave dwells upon most is the Prince's "uncommon indolence," his "want of application and aversion to business." This is borne out by other evi-

dence, best of all by the Prince's own letters to Bute:

July 1st, 1756: I will throw off that indolence which if I don't soon get the better of will be my ruin.

March 25th, 1757: "I am conscious of my own indolence . . . I do here in the most solemn manner declare, that I will throw aside this my greatest enemy. . . ."

September 25th, 1758: . . . that incomprehensible indolence, inattention and heedlessness that reigns within me . . .

And he says of his good resolutions: "as many as I have made I have regularly broke"; but adds a new one: "I mean to attempt to regain the many years I have fruitlessly spent."

December 19th, 1758: . . . through the negligence, if not the wickedness of those around me in my earlier days, and since perhaps through my own indolence of temper, I have not that degree of knowledge and experience in business, one of my age might reasonably have acquir'd . . .

March 1760: . . . my natural indolence . . . has been increas'd by a kind of indifference to the world, owing to the number of bad characters I daily see. . . .

By shifting the blame on to others, he tries to relieve the bitter consciousness of failure: which is one source of that excessive "attention to the sins of his neighbour" mentioned by Waldegrave. Indeed, George III's letters, both before and after his accession, are full of it: "the great depravity of the age," "the wickedest age that ever was seen," "a degenerate age," "probity and every other virtue absorb'd into vice, and dissipation;" etc. "An ungrateful, wicked people" and individual statesmen alike receive castigation (*in absentia*) from this very young Old Testament prophet. Pitt "is the blackest of hearts," "the most dishonourable of men," and plays "an infamous and ungrateful part;" Lord Temple, an "ungrateful arrogant and self-sufficient man;" Charles Townshend is "a man void of every quality," "the worst man that lives," "vermin;" Henry Fox, a man of "bad

character," "void of principles;" Lord Mansfield is "but half a man;" the Duke of Bedford's character "contains nothing but passion and absurdity;" etc. As for George II, the Prince felt ashamed of being his grandson. And on 23 April 1760, half a year before his accession, aged twenty-two he wrote to Bute: ". . . as to honesty, I have already lived long enough to know you are the only man who possesses that quality. . . ."

In Bute he thought he had found the tutelary spirit who would enable him to live up to his future high vocation. Here are further excerpts from the Prince's letters to him:

July 1st, 1756: My friend is . . . attack'd in the most cruel and horrid manner . . . because he is my friend . . . and because he is a friend to the bless'd liberties of his country and not to arbitrary notions. . . .

By . . . your friendship . . . I have reap'd great advantage, but not the improvement I should if I had follow'd your advice. . . . I will exactly follow your advice, without which I shall inevitably sink.

March 25th, 1757: I am resolved . . . to act the man in everything, to repeat whatever I am to say with spirit and not blushing and afraid as I have hitherto . . . my conduct shall convince you that I am mortified at what I have done and that I despise myself. . . . I hope this will persuade you not to leave me when all is at stake, when nobody but you can steer me through this difficult, though glorious path.

In June 1757 Leicester House were alarmed by rumours of an alliance between the Duke of Newcastle and Henry Fox, and were ascribing fantastic schemes to the Duke of Cumberland. The Prince already saw himself compelled to meet force by force or to "yield up the Crown,"

for I would only accept it with the hopes of restoring my much beloved country to her antient state of liberty; of seeing her . . . again famous for being the residence of true piety and virtue, I say if these hopes were lost, I should with an eye of pleasure look on retiring to some uninhabited cavern as this would prevent me from seeing the sufferings



of my countrymen, and the total destruction of this Monarchy. . . .

August 20th, 1758: . . . by . . . attempting with vigour to restore religion and virtue when I mount the throne this great country will probably regain her ancient state of lustre.

Was this a Prince nurtured in "arbitrary notions," ambitious to make his own will prevail? or a man with a "mission," striving after naively visionary aims? No doubt, since early childhood it must have been rammed into him, especially when he was being reprov'd, to what high station he was born; and disparaging comparisons are said to have been drawn between him and his younger brother. He grew up with a painful consciousness of his inadequacy: "though I act wrong perhaps in most things," he wrote on one occasion. Excessive demands on a child, complete with wholesome exhortations, are fit to reduce it to a state of hebetude from which it is not easy to recover. A great deal of the pattern of George III's behaviour throughout life can be traced back to his upbringing.

He spent his young years cut off from intercourse with boys of his own age, till he himself ceased to desire it. Bubb Dodington notes in his *Diary* on 15 October 1752 that the Princess Dowager of Wales

did not observe the Prince to take very particularly to anybody about him, but to his brother Edward, and she was glad of it, for the young people of quality were so ill-educated and so vicious, that they frightened her.

And so they did him for the rest of his life. Isolation by itself would be apt to suggest to a child that there was something wrong with those he had to shun; but this he was probably told in so many words. On 18 December 1753, Dodington records another talk with the Princess:

I said, it was to be wished he could have more company. She seemed averse to the young people, from the excessive bad education they had, and from the bad examples they gave.

So the boy spent joyless years in a well-regulated nursery, the nearest approach to

a concentration camp: lonely but never alone, constantly watched and discussed, never safe from the wisdom and goodness of the grown-ups; never with anyone on terms of equality, exalted yet oppressed by deferential adults. The silent, sullen anger noted by Waldegrave was natural to one who could not hit back or speak freely his mind, as a child would among children: he could merely retire, and nurture his griefs and grievances — and this again he continued through life. On 3 May 1766, during a political crisis, he wrote to Bute: "I can neither eat nor sleep, nothing pleases me but musing on my cruel situation." Nor could he, always with adults, develop self-reliance: at nineteen he dreamt of reforming the nation, but his idea of acting the man was to repeat without blushing or fear what he had to say.

For the pious works which were "to make this great nation happy" Bute's "sagacious councils" were therefore indispensable. When in December 1758 Bute expressed doubts whether he should take office in the future reign, the Prince in a panic searched his own conscience:

Perhaps it is the fear you have I shall not speak firmly enough to my Ministers, or that I shall be stagger'd if they say anything unexpected; as to the former I can with great certainty assure that they, nor no one else shall see a want of steadiness either in my manner of acting or speaking, and as to the latter, I may give fifty sort of puts off, till I have with you thoroughly consider'd what part will be proper to be taken. . . .

George III adhered to this programme. On his grandfather's death he waited to hear from Bute what "must be done." When expecting Pitt at a critical juncture: "I would wish to know what I had best say. . . ." With regard to measures or appointments: "I have put that off till I hear my Dear Friend's opinion;" "If this [is] agreeable to my D. Friend I will order it to day . . .;" "I desire my D. Friend to consider what I have here wrote, if he is of a contrary opinion, I will with pleasure embrace it." And when in November 1762 Bute de-

clared he would retire on conclusion of peace:

I had flattered myself [wrote the King] when peace was once established that my D. Friend would have assisted me in purging out corruption . . . ; . . . now . . . the Ministry remains compos'd of the most abandon'd men that ever had those offices; thus instead of reformation the Ministers being vicious this country will grow if possible worse; let me attack the irreligious, the covetous &c. as much as I please, that will be of no effect . . . Ministers being of that stamp. . . .

Two years on the throne had worked little if any change in his ideas and language; nor did the next twenty. The same high claims on himself, and the same incapacity to meet real situations he was faced with: hence his continued dependence on others. By 1765 he saw that Bute could not help him, by the summer of 1766 he had written off Bute altogether. In the spring of 1765 he turned to the Duke of Cumberland, the bugbear of his young years: "Dear Uncle, the very friendly and warm part you have taken has given me real satisfaction. . . ." And to Pitt, "the blackest of hearts": "My friend for so the part you have acted deserves of me. . . ." In July 1765 Cumberland formed for him the Rockingham Administration and presided over it a quasi-Viceroy; but a few months later Cumberland was dead. In July 1766 Chatham formed his Administration; but a few months later his health broke down completely. Still George III clung to him like a mollusc (a mollusc who never found his rock). "Under a health so broken," wrote Chatham, "as renders at present application of mind totally impossible . . ." After nearly two years of waiting for his recovery, the King still wrote: "I think I have a right to insist on your remaining in my service." Next he clung to the ineffective Grafton who longed to be relieved of office; and when Grafton resigned, the King wrote to him on 27 January 1770:

My heart is so full at the thought of your retiring from your situation that I think it

best not to say more as I know the expressing it would give you pain.

Then came North. Totally unequal to the difficulties of the American crisis, in letter after letter he begged the King to let him resign. Thus in March 1778:

Lord North cannot conceive what can induce His Majesty, after so many proofs of Lord North's unfitness for his situation to determine at all events to keep him at the head of the Administration, though the almost certain consequences of His Majesty's resolution will be the ruin of his affairs, and though it can not ward off for a month that arrangement which His Majesty seems to apprehend.

But the King would not hear of it. 2 July, 1779: "no man has a right to talk of leaving me at this hour. . . ." 25 October, 1780: he expects North "will show that zeal for which he has been conspicuous from the hour of the Duke of Grafton's desertion."

George III's attitude to North conformed to the regular pattern of his behaviour. So did also the way in which after a while he turned against North in bitter disappointment. By the '70s the King spoke disparagingly of Bute and Chatham; and in time his imagination enabled him to remember how on the day of his accession he had given the slip to them both. A month after Grafton had resigned, George III wrote to him: "I . . . see anew that the sincere regard and friendship I have for you is properly placed. . . ." Somewhat later his resignation changed into "desertion." When North resigned: "I ever did and ever shall look on you as a friend as well as a faithful servant. . . ." But incensed at the new situation he soon started attacking North, and treated him niggardly and unfairly over his secret-service accounts. George III's attachment was never deep: it was that of a drunken man to railings—mechanical rather than emotional. Ego-centric and rigid, stunted in feelings, unable to adjust himself to events, flustered by sudden change, he could meet situations only in a negative manner, clinging to men

and measures with disastrous obstinacy. But he himself mistook that defensive apparatus for courage, drive, and vigour, from which it was as far removed as anything could be. Of his own mental processes he sometimes gave discerning though embellished accounts. Thus to Bute in 1762: "I . . . am apt to despise what I am not accustomed to. . . ." And on 2 March 1797, to the younger Pitt when criticizing the way measures were weakened in passing through Parliament:

My nature is quite different I never assent till I am convinced what is proposed is right, and then. . . . I never allow that to be destroyed by after-thoughts which on all subjects tend to weaken never to strengthen the original proposal.

In short: no after-thoughts, no reconsideration — only desperate, clinging perseverance.

Still it might be said: at least he broke through his indolence. Yes, indeed: from pathologically indolent he turned pathologically industrious — and never again could let off working; but there was little sense of values, no perspective, no detachment. There is a legend about a homunculus whose maker, not knowing what to do with him, bid him count poppy-seed in a bag. That George III was doing with his own busy self. His innumerable letters which he copied in his own hand, or the long documents transcribed by him (he never employed an amanuensis till his eyesight began to fail) contain some shrewd perceptions or remarks, evidence of "very tolerable parts if . . . properly exercised." But most of his letters merely repeat approvingly what some Minister, big or small, has suggested. "Lord A. is very right . . . ;" "General B. has acted very properly . . . ;" "the minute of Cabinet meets with my fullest concurrence . . . ;" "Nothing can more deserve my approbation than" — whatever it was. But if a basic change is suggested, his obstinacy and prejudices appear. On 15 March 1778, in a letter to Lord North, he makes an unusual and startling admission:

I will only add to put before your eyes my most inmost thoughts, that no advantage to this country nor personal danger can ever make me address myself for assistance either to Lord Chatham or any other branch of the Opposition. . . .

As a rule he would sincerely assert, perhaps with somewhat excessive ostentation, that first and foremost he considered the good of the country. When told by Bute that it would be improper for him to marry Lady Sarah Lennox, he replied: "the interest of my country ever shall be my first care, my own inclinations shall ever submit to it" (and he added: "I should wish we could next summer . . . get some account of the various Princesses in Germany" — and he settled down to "looking in the New Berlin Almanack for Princesses"). When considering withdrawal from the German war, he wrote (with a sidelong glance at the late King) about the superiority of his love "to this my native country over any private interest of my own. . . ." He was "a King of a free people;" "I rely on the hearts of my subjects, the only true support of the Crown," he wrote in November 1760. They will not desert him —

if they could be so ungrateful to me who love them beyond anything else in life, I should then I really believe fall into the deepest melancholy which would soon deprive me of the vexations of this life.

The same note, of love for this country and trust that his subjects would therefore stand by him, continues for almost twenty years. But gradually other overtones begin to mix with it. He had become the target of virulent attacks and unjust suspicions which he deeply resented. Thus to Lord North on 7 March 1780: ". . . however I am treated I must love this country." And to the Prince of Wales on 14 August 1780:

The numberless trials and constant torments I meet with in public life, must certainly affect any man, and more poignantly me, as I have no other wish but to fulfill my various duties; the experience of now twenty years has convinced me that however long

it may please the Almighty to extend my days, yet I have no reason to expect any diminution of my public anxiety; where am I therefore to turn for comfort, but into the bosom of my own family?

And he appealed to his son, the future George IV, to connect himself only with young men of respectable character, and by his example help "to restore this country to its former lustre" — the old tune once more. And in another letter:

From your childhood I have ever said that I can only try to save my country, but it must be by the co-operation of my children only that I can effect it.

In the 1780s there is a more than usually heavy crop of bitter complaints about the age by one "righteous overmuch:" "it has been my lot to reign in the most profligate age," "depravity of such times as we live in," "knavery and indolence perhaps I might add the timidity of the times. . . ." And then:

I thank Heaven my morals and course of life have but little resembled those too prevalent in the present age, and certainly of all objects in this life the one I have most at heart, is to form my children that they may be useful examples and worthy of imitation . . .

With the King's disappointments in country and son another note enters his letters. He warns the Prince —

in other countries national pride makes the inhabitants wish to paint their Princes in the most favourable light, and consequently be silent on any indiscretion; but here most persons if not concerned in laying ungrounded blame, are ready to trumpet any speck they can find out.

And he writes of the "unalterable attachment" which his Electoral subjects have shown to their Princes. When George III went mad in 1788, he wanted to go back to Hanover. Deep down there was a good deal of the Hanoverian in him.

His insanity was a form of manic-depression. The first recorded fit in March 1765 was of short duration, though there may

have been a slight relapse in May; and a year later he wrote to Bute —

if I am to continue the life of agitation I have these three years, the next year there will be a Council [of] Regency to assist in that undertaking.

During the next twenty-three years he preserved his normal personality. The attack in 1788 lasted about half a year: the King was over fifty, and age rendered complete recovery more difficult. His self-control weakened and his irritability increased. He was conscious of a growing weakness. Yet there was something about him which more and more endeared him to the people. He was never popular with London society or the London mob; he was much beloved in the provinces — perhaps it was his deeper kindness, his real piety, and sincere wish to do good which evoked those feelings. These appear strikingly, for instance, in his own account of his journey to Portsmouth in 1788, and in Fanny Burney's account of his progress through Wiltshire in 1789. He was not a politician, and certainly not a statesman. But in things which he could judge without passion or preconceived ideas, there appears basic honesty and the will to do the right thing. I shall limit myself to two examples. When in 1781 a new Provost was to be appointed at Eton, George III insisted on choosing a man "whose literary talents might make the appointment respectable . . . for Eton should not be bestowed by favour, but merit." And when in 1787 a new Lord Lieutenant had to be chosen for Ireland, the King wrote to the younger Pitt about the necessity

of looking out for the person most likely to conduct himself with temper, judgement, and an avowed resolution to avoid partiality and employ the favours he has to recommend to with the justice due to my service and to the public. . . . When I have stated this Mr. Pitt must understand that I do not lean to any particular person . . . when I state that a Lord Lieutenant should have no predelection but to advance the public good I should be ashamed to act in a contrary manner.

I have given here a picture of George III as seen in his letters, "warts and all." What I have never been able to find is the man arrogating power to himself, the ambitious schemer out to dominate, the intriguer dealing in an underhand fashion with his Ministers; in short, any evidence for the stories circulated about him by very clever and eloquent contemporaries. He had a high, indeed an exaggerated, notion of royalty but in terms of mission and duties rather than of power; and trying to live up to this idealized concept, he made unreasonable demands on himself. Setting himself unattainable standards, he could never truly come to grips with reality: which condemned him to remain immature, permanency of inner conflict precluding growth. Aware of his inadequacy, he turned to others and expected them to enable him to realize his visionary program (this appears clearest in his relations with Bute); and he bitterly reproached them in

his own mind, and blamed the age in which he lived, for his own inevitable failure. The tension between his notions and reality, and the resulting frustration, account to a high degree for his irritability, his deep-seated resentments, and his suppressed anger — for situations intolerable and disastrous for himself and others; and it may have been a contributory factor in his mental breakdowns. The desire to escape from that unbearable conflict repeatedly shows itself in thoughts of abdication which must not be deemed insincere because never acted upon (men of his type cannot renounce their treadmill). He himself did not understand the nature and depth of his tragedy; still less could others. There was therefore room for the growth of an injurious legend which made that heavy-burdened man a much maligned ruler; and which has long been accepted as history.

## The Independence of the Crown and the Responsibility of Ministers

SIR LEWIS NAMIER

**W**ILLIAM BLACKSTONE in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (published 1764-9) describes the King as

not only the chief, but properly the sole magistrate of the nation; all others acting by commission from, and in due subordination to him. . . .

The passage, of which this sentence forms the kernel, is singled out for criticism by Dicey in his lectures on the *Law of the*

*Constitution* (published 1886) as an example of Blackstone's habit

of applying old and unapplicable terms to new institutions, and especially of ascribing in words to a modern and constitutional King, the whole and perhaps more than the whole of the powers actually possessed and exercised by William the Conqueror.

Dicey goes on to say,

The language of this passage is impressive. . . . It has but one fault . . . the state-

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# Infringement of Practical Realities Rather than Legal Prescriptions

W. R. FRYER

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**T**HE interpretation of the political ideas and behaviour of George III which holds the field today is that which derives from the work of the late Sir Lewis Namier and of other writers who make up what the Master of Peterhouse has called "the Namier school." It is sometimes described as a Tory interpretation. This adjective is certainly appropriate in at least one sense, for the view of these matters presented by Namier and the others involved a conscious repudiation of the conclusions earlier offered by historians who based their analysis of the subject on opinions derived from the "pure" Whig opponents of George III, and on Victorian-liberal ideas of what constitutional orthodoxy must have been a hundred years before the Victorian prime. The modern Tory interpretation of the King's ideas and conduct is, in many respects, far superior to the old Whig conception against which it reacts. This is almost too obvious to require formal admission, even by one who proposes to

attempt something in the nature of a counter-reaction. The old Whig historians were obviously guilty of extreme partiality, and of anachronistic misconceptions too. The present paper embodies no intention to plead for a rehabilitation of any of the old Whig views of the subject *in extenso*.

I propose, however, to bring together a number of facts and suggestions which may indicate the existence of serious grounds for supposing that the modern Tory interpretation of the earlier part of the King's record also suffers from one-sidedness. It is meant to express the view that, when all necessary deductions are made, and all anachronisms avoided, there still remains a Whig interpretation which rests upon objective facts and serious valuation of their meaning. It is not pretended that this Whig restatement renders the Tory case completely bankrupt. But it will be argued that, even though George III was not the dark reactionary who figures under his name in the pages of Erskine May and Sir

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G. O. Trevelyan, neither was he the injured innocent who appears in the pages of Sir Lewis Namier; that George's contemporary opponents had a real case against the King, even though it was not, in some important respects, at all as strong as they wished it to be.

In undertaking this task, I would like to say that I do not think I am attempting anything in principle original. A number of distinguished English historians, in works published over the past ten years, have emphasized facts, and suggested interpretations, which indicate that they have differed seriously in opinion with Sir Lewis Namier over certain parts or aspects of the period. One of those historians, the Master of Peterhouse, has explicitly raised distinct and specific criticism against some of the methods and conclusions of "the Namier school." To a large extent, what I am doing in this essay is to quarry among the facts and ideas presented by Dr. Butterfield, by the late Richard Pares, and by Miss Betty Kemp<sup>1</sup> and (with grateful acknowledgments to each of these) to employ them in a general review of the King's part in the politics of this whole quarter of a century; in the process, I shall be building these facts and ideas into shapes which are, in one sense at least, very much my own, for I fully realize that no one of those distinguished scholars is in any degree responsible for the conclusions to which their writings have helped to bring me.

It must also be said that this essay makes no claim to the finality which it is so anxious to deny to the Tory interpretation of the subject. It adduces a number of facts, which, as facts, will be disputed by no one. But it attaches to them a weight and significance which, though (of course) entirely appropriate in my judgment, may perhaps seem less cogent to others. The paper therefore appeals in a proper spirit of modesty; its objects are tentative and ex-

perimental, even if its tone may appear decided.

## I

The most hostile of the old Whig interpretations of the King's principles and conduct did not hesitate to suggest that George III derived his political views from circles which cherished a partiality for pre-Revolution conceptions of Kingship, and that when the King ascended the throne he brought with him a serious intention, not to abolish party distinctions (as was proclaimed), but, under this pretext, to destroy the Whig interest and clear the way for a revival of Toryism, as being the party more favourable to "high" views of the Royal prerogative. No intention to rehabilitate this aspect of the old Whig case against George III is involved in this paper. The whole subject of these accusations is mentioned here chiefly to rule them out from the beginning. There seems to be no evidence worth serious consideration to support the idea that Leicester House ever provided a home for ambitions of this sort; and, whether or not the future George III was directly influenced by Bolingbroke's famous pamphlet on the "Patriot King," at all events it seems gratuitous to associate either the pamphlet or its author with principles of a pro-absolutist character. The King himself has left on record very full and evidently unstudied illustrations of the political ideas which he cherished in adolescence and early manhood. The samples of these, presented by Sir Lewis Namier, like the larger range of evidence offered in Mr. Sedgwick's collection of the King's letters to Lord Bute, are clearly incompatible with the notion that the King grew up with any conscious animus against the constitutional order. The King's subsequent correspondence, and all his utterances of whatever kind, show just as clearly that he was marked throughout his long life by this same innocence of any dark ambitions towards the polity over which he presided.

<sup>1</sup> A reference to Betty Kemp, *King and Commons, 1660-1832* (London, 1959).

If we turn from the King's recorded opinions about the established constitutional order to his practical political conduct, we shall certainly find it equally innocent of disrespect for established *law* and established *legal forms*. Neither the double persecution of Wilkes, nor the long history of the efforts to tax or otherwise coerce the American colonists, provides any valid exception to this statement. The persecution of Wilkes may have been an error (in which, however, many — and they not all slavish dependents of the Court — were involved); but at all events it would be grotesque to regard it as involving a deliberate defiance of clear legal principles. In America, whatever may be thought of the constitutional issues involved, there can at least be no doubt that the authority with which the King's sympathies were identified was not the prerogative of the Crown alone, but the power of the Crown in Parliament; so that George III was able to claim that in this, as in other contingencies, he was "fighting the battles of the legislature."

We can, and indeed must, go thus far with the modern Tory interpretation. But Sir Lewis Namier and others have not been content to dispose of the baseless suppositions that George III had absolutist sympathies, or was somewhat high-handed with the law. They have gone on to make out that it is also impossible to maintain the far more cautious sort of complaint, which accused the King of traversing, not the *law*, but the then established constitutional *usages and proprieties*. The "Namier school" repudiates the view that this period witnessed an effort by the Crown to release itself from certain practical conditions and customs, which in the two preceding reigns had confined the King's political freedom more narrowly than formal law. The "school" argues, in effect, that there had hardly been any such regal confinement as the Whig historians suggested; that the apparent monopolizing of the powers of the Crown by certain politicians in the

later years of George II, and the consequent apparent relegation of the King to the position of a Venetian doge, were untypical and, moreover, misleading phenomena, encouraging Whig historians to imagine the existence of almost Victorian constitutional conditions a century before they really arose. Sir Lewis Namier has suggested that, in so far as this capture of George II by certain politicians really occurred at all, it was the product of special and temporary circumstances. We are invited to put away the notion that George II was at any stage obliged to accept a quasi-Victorian interpretation of his duties as a constitutional monarch, and consequently to put away also the thought that George III could possibly have infringed the spirit of the constitution by attempting to escape from that interpretation. Such thoughts, it is inferred, involve an anachronistic misreading of the state of constitutional usages in the mid-eighteenth century; and this misreading, in so far as it is not a gratuitous mistake, can appeal to nothing more substantial in the contemporary setting than the tendentious theorizings of the Rockingham Whigs, who persisted in an unfortunate attempt to caricature Victorian conditions before they had come into being.

As against all these unfortunate misunderstandings, the modern Tory interpretation insists that, in the absence of organized parties dominating the House of Commons, the Hanoverian Kings from 1714 to 1830 were and indeed had to be, not only in a legal fiction but in fact, the real working heads of the political system: they chose and replaced the Ministers, their choice determined also the direction which policy was to take, and the knowledge that the Ministers of their choice enjoyed their confidence provided the chief grounds upon which those Ministers enjoyed a majority in the Commons and gained success in their efforts to "chuse a Parliament." According to the "Namier school," the only real novelty which affected political conditions in 1760 and the following years



was that "George III was young and had no competing heir;" so that politicians who wished, improperly, to contest the King's lawful, and necessary, part in politics could henceforward for a long period not do this in the name of loyalty to "the King of to-morrow," and were tempted to invent new fangled anti-monarchical theories to make opposition appear respectable, despite the want of a "shadow" King. George III, we are given to understand, quite properly ignored, or resisted, these ambitions. It was his opponents, not himself, who innovated. "The constitutional practice of George III differed little from that of George I or George II."

It follows from this that, if neither of the two German Kings was a mere Venetian doge, George III on his side cherished ambitions no more exorbitant than theirs. Mr. Romney Sedgwick in recent years took to task a learned publication, not only for appearing to suggest that George III favoured pre-Revolution conceptions of Kingship, but also for hinting the more modest alternative that he aspired to a political activity comparable to that of William III.

Now it is on all this part of the ground, all this which has to do with constitutional custom in the eighteenth century, that serious criticism of the modern Tory interpretation arises, and that battle is to be joined. But, before proceeding to join it, let us follow the modern Tory view of the subject into some detail in its assessment of political events in the first twenty years of the reign.

All the way through, we are presented with a consistent picture of a King who is loyal, not only to the existing law of the constitution, but just as much so to its accepted contemporary spirit and usage; of a King who, so far from being in any sense politically aggressive, is rather an almost pathetic victim of evil circumstances and of lying legend. To begin, it is implicitly denied that the preferment of the mere courtier, Lord Bute, above, and eventually to the exclusion of, the leading Ministers

of 1760, involved any constitutional impropriety, or justly involved the King in any blame for the political difficulties which it caused. After Bute's premature retirement come seven years of ministerial instability and weakness. Of these an explanation is given which, so far from invoking the sinister manipulations of a clique of nameless intriguers at Court (as Burke did), practically acquits the Court of any responsibility at all. The onus is placed upon the recalcitrance, or ineptitude, of the politicians to whom the young King successively, but vainly, transferred his confidence; and transferred it with a lack of reserve which makes him remarkable among monarchs.

Thus it is pointed out that in 1763 George Grenville assumed the place of Bute on the proposal of Bute himself and with the King's entire consent; but that Grenville himself carries the chief responsibility for the unhappy history of strained relations which ensued between King and Minister. Grenville made so much unpleasantness in his efforts to escape the odium and (as he thought) the secret intervention of his predecessor and patron, that his relations with the King were hopelessly vitiated. The obvious and much-longed-for next expedient was Pitt; but Pitt made difficult conditions, and withheld his final acceptance, until George III decided that Rockingham and Newcastle were at least better than a prolongation of the Grenville-Bedford regime. The King was then "loyal to the Rockinghams, until in January 1766 they themselves practically admitted that they could not carry on unless reinforced;" and it was Pitt, rather than the King, who was responsible for their destruction, for he persistently refused them the reinforcement, which they sought for from him in especial. In another sense, responsibility for their final downfall rests also on the Rockinghams themselves; for despite their weakness in Parliament, they flatly refused the second-best of an alliance with the party now led by Bute, which the King earnestly wished them to make. In

the summer of 1766, however, Pitt finally consented to serve, though not in the framework of the Rockingham system; and re-constructed the ministry around himself, with the enthusiastic backing of the King. But Chatham's "own previous actions" had robbed him of valuable allies; and the breakdown of his health left his feeble entourage to confusion and to disintegration. The King, so far from planning to embarrass this ministry, waited patiently for the recovery of its head, and loyally supported his lieutenant Grafton in an effort to hold it together, until the retirement of the latter in 1770 inaugurated the long partnership between the King and Lord North.

If this view of the first decade of the reign be accepted, it follows that its troubles were mainly due, therefore, to the wayward nature and the tottering health of Pitt; and to the same causes must chiefly be assigned the "fatal" developments of the next ten years also; for it was Chatham's indignant repudiation, following his recovery, of his own former administration and its doings, together with his persistence in opposition for the remainder of his life, which placed and kept the government in the "incompetent" hands of North and his colleagues. The King, at least, loyally supported the North regime for many years; and he did so "with better grace than George II had supported the Pelhams."

The policy of coercion in America, with which Lord North, and, much more firmly, the King himself, became identified, was what chiefly rendered these years "fatal;" but on the King's behalf Sir Lewis insists that "of the measures which brought on the American conflict, none was of the King's making; neither George Grenville's Stamp Act, nor the Declaratory Act of the Rockinghams, nor the Townshend Duties." The most that can be said against the King in this respect, is that, after the initiatives of others had provoked the conflict, he stubbornly identified himself with what was, after all, the apparently obvious interest of England. It is as unjust to blame

him for mismanaging Imperial relations as to blame him for unconstitutional conduct at home; for in neither sphere was "responsible government" as yet possible.

Any interpretation of the intentions and activity of a man must finally at least involve a judgement of the character from which both proceed. Professor Namier in his Lecture before the Academy of Arts (1953) summed up his conclusions on the King's personality and psychology, as these are so fully revealed in the bulky Royal correspondence. The King's letters, Sir Lewis tells us, reveal no trace of a prince who contemplated for himself any ambitious or personally dominant role. "What I have never been able to find is the man arrogating power to himself, the ambitious schemer out to dominate." What does Sir Lewis find? A prince of very ordinary abilities, psychologically of impeded development; with a great notion of the duties rather than of the rights of his office, but deeply aware of his own inadequacy; a prince who accordingly exercised no powers which his predecessors had relinquished, claimed no influence not universally conceded to him, but rather clung with desperation to one adviser after another, and, so far from intriguing against his Ministers, for the most part passively adopted and repeated their ideas.

It is admitted that the King's attachment to ideas, as also to men, when once he had taken up with them, was marked by an obstinacy which was the product of terror; and that this obstinacy could produce even disastrous results. But only in this sense did he make any extraordinary impact on the politics of his time; and even these reactions were essentially defensive. His most strenuous acts of self-assertion came in his struggle against the Fox-North Coalition, and these were undertaken in justified self-defence against attempts to usurp his undoubted right, and duty, to wield the executive power. He was, in fact, neither big enough, nor bad enough, to have been the dominating and ambitious figure which legend has presented.

## II

An interpretation of the King's political activity and character developed along such lines as these seems to me to be open to serious basic objections, objections which are in no way dependent upon the application of anachronistic mid-nineteenth century notions of constitutional usage to an earlier age, nor upon the uncritical adoption of estimates of the King formed by his enemies and detractors. Let us grant, as fully as possible, that there is no case whatever for presenting the King as an enemy of the constitution, as embodied in law. Let us grant that we must firmly resist any temptation to judge the King's career by standards of constitutional propriety not proper to the age in which he lived. It does not follow that Sir Lewis Namier's account of his career is an adequate one. The tame and rather pathetic figure presented to our scrutiny by Sir Lewis may indeed have been quite innocent of any intention to infringe the constitutional limits of his station, as they existed in his age. But, though not consciously seeking to do so, he may nevertheless have done so. My own judgement is that he did in fact infringe them, on several occasions and in various ways. And my misgivings about the "Namier school's" interpretation amount, shortly, to this, that it ignores or glosses over these facts, and gives us to suppose that all is satisfactorily explained, when we realize how far the monarch of that time was from liability to the conditions of Victoria, or to those dreamed of by the contemporary "monopolists in Whiggery." I wish to suggest, on the contrary, that George III repeatedly acted in a manner contrary to the constitutional duties of a monarch of his own age, and that this suggestion arises directly from admitted facts, quite independent of the prejudices of later generations, or of contemporary Whig purists.

He did so, as I shall try to argue, not indeed by breaking any law; but by ignoring certain conventions of behaviour which had every claim on his respect. Some of

these conventions were imposed upon the King by sanctions grounded in objectively existent facts, which no British sovereign in that age could prudently or patriotically defy. Most of the cases which I want to discuss fall under that description.

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Sir Lewis Namier and those who follow him seem to me to come curiously near a denial that there were any limitations of constitutional *propriety*, as opposed to limitations of *law*, for the British sovereign of the eighteenth century to infringe. Of course the "school" admits that the King's government could not be carried on without the collaboration of Parliament. But these writers seem anxious to minimize the importance which might be thought to attach to the occasions when Parliamentary opposition or recalcitrance brought Ministers and policies to naught, and to concentrate on the fact that *normally*, and for the very much greater part of the time involved, the King was, in practice as well as in law, free to choose his Ministers, and to maintain them in office during his own pleasure. They lay great emphasis on the point that the efforts of Parliamentary notables to force the King to dispense with some policy, or certain advisers, and accept others instead, were — if not always, at least almost always — condemned to failure. They insist that such efforts were condemned by opinion, as well as by facts. By opinion, in that all the parliamentarians concurred, in principle, to reprobate "formed opposition" and the coercion of the Sovereign in his lawful functions. By facts, because the "influence" of the Crown played a preponderant part in the "choosing" of the Commons, as well as a very important one in their proceedings, and because party distinctions played as yet no significant part in politics.

The situation was, in fact, according to Sir Lewis Namier, such as can be described in a sentence like this: "The executive was the King's, as truly as it is now (that) of the President in the United States." This

interpretation seems to give no adequate place to the consequences of certain basic realities of the post-Revolution political system, realities which, in themselves, are questioned by no one, but which raised implications whose importance is, perhaps, still inadequately recognized. The reason for this inadequate recognition is no doubt to be found in the fact that the implications in question were not, in the normal course of eighteenth century politics, very obtrusive. But it is rash to conclude, as too many contemporary observers did and as too many subsequent students of the period have done, that because these implications were for most of the time unobtrusive, therefore they were not factors of constant importance. I wish to argue that the effect of these implications was to prescribe to the King certain objective standards of behaviour in the use of his executive prerogatives, and that these standards were applicable not only in a few rare emergencies, but regularly and continuously.

The basic realities mentioned above depend upon the admitted fact that the post-Revolution sovereigns could not carry on the government, even in peaceful times, without continuous recourse to Parliament, and that the House of Commons had the power, if it willed to exercise it, at any time to render impossible, or impotent, the policies or the advisers with which the King had identified himself.

The first and greatest implication, ignored or glossed over by too many writers both contemporary and later, is that in such conditions, there could be no stable and certain "balance" between the various branches of the polity; the "balance" so much reputed by contemporaries could have only a contingent, not a necessary, existence.

It is of course none the less true that the post-Revolution sovereigns were able to take advantage of certain favourable circumstances which allowed them, imperfectly and more or less uncertainly, to achieve a semblance of independence in the conduct of their government. Party

was weak, sometimes nearly or quite non-existent; the numerous "independent" members of the Commons could be relied on, in normal and quiet times, to display a certain disinterested forbearance towards the policies and the persons favoured by the King; finally, the conditions of society and of the representative system permitted the Court to develop the widely-ramifying resources of "influence" in order to bind a large fraction of the parliamentary personnel in some kind of allegiance to the Crown. It is no part of the intention of the present writer to question the practical importance of all this. It is sufficient to insist upon the point, which is surely undeniable, that the combined effect of all these favouring factors could never supply anything more than a precarious and unstable restoration of the balance between the King and the Commons. The King could never have any absolute assurance that a decisive negative would not be pronounced by the Commons against the Ministers and the policies with which he had identified himself. The power of the House of Commons to pronounce such a negative was armed with weapons too formidable for the post-Revolution Crown to resist.

Such a negative might be pronounced by informal, as well as by formal, means; and it might even happen that the difficulty of avoiding it, or even the fear of incurring it, would in itself be enough to drive Ministers from office, or into a sharp reversal of policy, or incline them from the beginning towards policies which they would not have chosen, had they not lived in consciousness of the need to placate the formidable body which so regularly assembled beside them. And, in any of these conjunctures, the King's "independence" in the conduct of his government incurred, to some extent, an infringement.

This was, however, not the only way in which the Royal liberty of choice was liable to interference. It might happen that the necessity to abandon one policy, or one ministerial combination, would leave the

King in practice with only one feasible alternative. In such a case, the power of the Commons to condemn would become practically identified with a power in effect to prescribe, even to dictate. Whether such a further limitation on the King's exercise of his lawful liberty of choice arose from the factious and unconstitutional machinations of "monopolists in Whiggery" matters little for our present purposes; for in the case assumed, the acts, or the anticipated acts, which really mattered would be the acts of the *House of Commons*, however arrived at; and these would be backed by its own decisive ultimate powers.

The effect of this ultimately absolute power of the Commons over the executive was, I maintain, to impose upon the King a number of constitutional prescriptions in the performance of his executive functions, over and above the limitations imposed on him by law or by ancient custom. These were imposed upon him, not because by observing them he would gratify the quaint superstitions of "the great Revolution families" and pave the way to the golden days of Victoria, but because, if he attempted to override them, the effect would at least be to damage the strength and efficiency of the government, and might involve a challenge to the reality (as opposed to the forms) of political power as it existed in his own time. Nor, to repeat what was said above, must we assume that these further limitations were merely cautions, applicable only in rare emergencies. They called for regular observance. Conduct which defied these limitations very intelligibly deserves the name of unconstitutional; and it seems to me that in this sense George III on several occasions behaved unconstitutionally.

It is open to anyone to deplore the constitutional developments which had, long before George III ascended the throne, destroyed any possibility of a real balance between King and Parliament, and imposed these further limitations upon the Crown. We can, on several grounds, sympathize deeply with Princes who found the

situation unwelcome. But there is nothing whatever to be gained by obscuring the implications of these things in our own thinking.

Among the constitutional prescriptions of this sort, which George III at one time or another infringed, we must include the following. First, the King's choice of Ministers, legally free, was practically limited by the need to include men who were able, by their personal talents (aided, preferably, by their possession of a following in the Commons, or of great repute outside) to "manage" the House. Those Ministers who did not themselves sit in the Commons, moreover, had in practice to be chosen from the ranks of those Peers who enjoyed eminence and repute in their own House; and their usefulness was much enhanced in proportion to the following which they possessed in the Commons. The King, in fact, was practically bound to choose his Ministers from among the "politicians" *par excellence*, as Sir Lewis Namier calls them.

Within this circle, the King might, for many possible reasons, be unable to find a workable group of executive servants which did not in some degree leave him dissatisfied. The extreme illustrations of this kind are provided by the rather exceptional occasions when the actual or anticipated negative of the Commons upon one ministerial "system" left the King for the time being with only one practical alternative, and that an intensely unwelcome one. Thus, just as in the closing years of George II, the retirement of Newcastle in 1756 had necessitated a Royal surrender to the claims of the elder Pitt, so, in the time of George III, did the retirement of North in 1782 and that of Shelburne in 1783 respectively make inevitable, for the time being, a Rockingham-Shelburne Ministry in the one case, and a Fox-North Ministry in the other. But, short of such exigencies as these, the King might on many other occasions find himself saddled with men or measures more or less distasteful to himself, and unable, for fear of worse evils, to liberate himself,

If, in any such circumstances, the King, instead of waiting for a clear opportunity to change a ministerial system which he disliked, attempted in the meantime to counterwork the operations of his existing Ministers or to embarrass their relations, the effect would be to weaken, perhaps even to paralyze, the functioning of what was, however unwelcome to himself personally, his own administration. Such would be the case if the King appeared to prefer the counsel of "ministers behind the curtain" to that of his official advisers, or refused to grant the Ministers those promotions and dismissals which they regarded as necessary to their Parliamentary situation. The effect in either case would be to impair the Ministers' grasp of the Parliamentary majority, without necessarily at all improving the King's chances of a feasible change of system. If the King sowed dissensions among his Ministers, for example by attracting the special intimacy of some, in a manner calculated to arouse the jealousy and mistrust of others in equal or superior station, the effect, though different, might be even more unfortunate. The King's aberration would be much graver still, if he took upon himself to dismiss Ministers and to appoint others, in conditions which indicated a probability of serious resistance by a majority of the House of Commons.

Even if the King, in any of these contingencies, "got away with it," his success would not clear him of the charge of unconstitutional conduct, in the sense in which I am now using the term. Success would not in any way affect the question, for in any of these instances what the King would be attempting would be a defiance of the existing shape and logic of the constitutional situation. Political disturbance and weakness would be at once the index and the price of such activities.

### III

It is time to come to the details of our case against George III. The King's action in conferring high, and finally the highest,

ministerial office on Lord Bute is open to criticisms, to which Richard Pares and Herbert Butterfield have done the justice which neither Sir Lewis Namier, nor Mr. Sedgwick, was willing to concede. The promotion of Bute, a man entirely without standing as a "politician," broke through a well established, even necessary, convention; it inevitably offended and irritated all the politicians, and not merely those of the "old corps;" and its effect was to disturb political relations for years to come. Sir Lewis Namier himself cited the documents which show how it was no member of the Newcastle system, but the elder Pitt, who declared that Bute's ambition for "advancement to the management of the affairs of this country" was "not for His Majesty's service," and that "favour (was) not everything in this country. . . . Favour and honours might be allowed, but not within the walls of the Treasury." The very different and hopelessly unrealistic attitude of the new Court on the question is well illustrated by Bute's own remark, that the issue at stake was whether His Majesty should not possess "the liberty that his poorest subject enjoys, of choosing his own menial servants." As Richard Pares, surely very justly, remarked, "that was no longer a sensible thing to say about a ministerial appointment; it would have been already somewhat out of date in the reign of Charles II. . . . It was one thing to defend the King's liberty of choice; quite another thing to acquiesce in a choice which meant that Court favour alone was enough to make a Minister."<sup>2</sup> [It thus seems quite

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Steven Watson in *The Reign of George III, 1760-1815* (London, 1960) has denied the view that royal favour constituted Bute's only claim to office, pointing to Bute's political influence in Scotland and his wife's great fortune. In a long footnote (p. 83) which is not included in this volume Fryer disputes this contention, arguing that Lord Bute had acquired the means "to become a great politician in course of time," but this "does not prove that he was already an acceptable politician at the time when Royal favour raised him" to high office. Fryer also points out that "at the time of his sudden rise to power, Lord Bute was practically unknown to Parliament." [Editor's note]

impossible] to escape Dr. Butterfield's contention, that those who opposed the "Favourite" had a perfectly genuine constitutional issue of opposition, which cannot be brushed aside as non-existent, any more than as illegitimate.

We pass next to the period of the Grenville-Bedford ministry, when Lord Bute was accused of playing the role of "Minister behind the curtain" and when Grenville's obsessive anxiety to be rid, both of his obligations to Bute and of Bute's secret influence, created so much trouble. Without at all defending the moral implications of Grenville's conduct in taking office from Bute's hands, and then repudiating his "maker," it is clear that at this juncture no Minister, who desired to remain in office, could afford *not* to dissociate himself from so fatal an inheritance as Bute's unpopularity; and Bute's activity, or reputed activity, as "Minister behind the curtain" must have been doubly galling to Grenville. Now Namier readily admitted the undesirability of Bute's playing this part, once he had quitted public office; and Pares was willing to give George III credit for more common sense, and more respect for the constitution, than to desire such a role for Bute. It seems, however, that Bute nevertheless aspired to play this part, and that he enjoyed such contacts with the King after his resignation, that suspicions of his playing this part must inevitably have arisen. Moreover, at the time of Lord Egremont's death, Bute certainly advised the King — whether the King asked for his advice, or not — to reintroduce Pitt into the government; and, as was inevitable, Grenville bitterly resented that advice. The King can hardly escape a large share of responsibility for the troubles caused by these developments, whether he actually willed them or only permitted them.

We will next discuss the cases where, as seems undeniable, the King attempted to deal with administrations which he disliked, but could not or would not yet replace, by forming particular contacts with certain of the Ministers, to the effect of

weakening or embarrassing others, or even the Ministry as a whole. Professor Pares has pointed out that, even though Burke was unjustified in supposing a general preference at Court for "weak, divided and dependent administrations," there are good grounds for thinking that the King preferred to push some administrations into this condition. He certainly gave George Grenville the impression that he was trying to play him off against the Bedfords, and drove Grenville to conclude "that the King had been taught that *division* was the art of government." Namier considered that George III honestly intended to commit himself to the Rockinghams in 1765. Pares thought rather that he never regarded Rockingham as much more than a *locum tenens* for Pitt. At all events it seems clear from the King's correspondence that he cultivated the particular intimacy of Northington and Egmont, among the Ministers of the first Rockingham government, in a way which can hardly have improved the efficiency of that sickly administration. In the second Rockingham government, he cultivated the intimacy of Shelburne and of Thurlow, and conducted a correspondence with the former, which promoted his ambitions as a joint Prime Minister in opposition to Rockingham.

Perhaps it is at this point that we ought to mention the Ministers' impression, in the time of the first Rockingham administration, that the King did less than he might have done to "discipline" those office-holders, "friends of Lord Bute," who refused support to the Ministers on the occasion of the repeal of the Stamp Act, and on subsequent occasions. It may be true, as Pares suggests, that "Rockingham probably credited the King with more power over these people than anyone possessed." It still seems hard to avoid the conclusion that the King's reaction to such recalcitrance among office-holders would have been very different had it occurred in North's time; he would have done much to find out exactly what were the limits of his power over them. [We need not go at

length into the relations between the King and his Ministers during the period of Lord North's ascendancy. But the King's conduct at the point of North's final decision to resign certainly merits attention.] On the immediate eve of Lord North's retirement from what had become an untenable situation, he had occasion to write to the King a well known letter, which aptly illustrates the argument I am trying to sustain about the constitutional limitations of the King's powers. I have tried to argue that these limitations were grounded in existing political realities, regardless of anyone's likes and dislikes. The substance of all that has so far been asserted in this paper is admitted in this letter of Lord North, written before his coalition with Fox was dreamed of.

Your Majesty [wrote North] is well apprized that in this country the Prince on the throne cannot, with prudence, oppose the deliberate resolution of the House of Commons. Your Majesty has graciously and steadily supported the servants you approve, as long as they could be supported. . . . The Parliament have altered their sentiments, and as their sentiments, whether just or erroneous, must ultimately prevail, Your Majesty can lose no honour if you yield at length, as some of the most renowned and most glorious of your predecessors have done, to the opinion and wishes of the House of Commons. [He concluded] Your Majesty's goodness encourages me to submit whether it will not be for Your Majesty's welfare, and even glory, to sacrifice . . . opinions, displeasures and apprehensions to . . . the public safety.

Regarding this letter in its immediate setting, what is surely most remarkable about it, is that it should have been necessary for Lord North to write it; that, even after the division of 15th March, even after the announcement by the last seven independents hitherto loyal to the government, that they could no longer support it, the Royal recipient should have required earnest efforts, and a lecture on the principles of British politics, to convince him of the impracticability of his clinging any longer

to the Minister with whom he had so long identified himself.

The King finally accepted Lord North's resignation with what Sir Lewis Namier describes as a bad grace. To all seeming, he would have been prepared even then to struggle on longer, if the Minister had been willing to face the truly agonizing situation which must have been his, had he clung to office any longer. Does the King's behaviour at this conjuncture display anything less than a profound reluctance to accept the plainest implications of his constitutional position? . . .

IV

If, in all the matters now discussed, George III acted in a manner inconsistent with the plain implications of the constitutional situation which he inherited, these are facts which deserve their due emphasis, and a commensurate effort to account for them, not only one by one, but also in their cumulative significance. We cannot afford, in our retreat from the Whig interpretation of history, to allow ourselves to be driven from positions which were perfectly valid, and which are highly relevant to an understanding of the politics of the reign.

Sir Lewis Namier believed that "the constitutional practice of George III differed little from that of George I and George II." He asserted that George III tried to exercise no powers which his predecessors had relinquished, and claimed no influence not generally conceded to him. But, if the arguments which I have tried to enforce above have any substance, these assertions of a great historian (taken in any strict sense) must be very misleading. They must, at the best, only mean something significantly different from what they say. They must mean, not that George III was as constitutionally proper as his two predecessors, but merely that they were no more guilty of constitutional improprieties than he.

There is, however, more than that to be said. We can no doubt admit, with Richard Pares, that George II claimed, or would



have liked to claim, a political latitude as great as George III. But it is, surely, a simple matter of fact that though George II claimed it, he certainly did not exercise it. It is indeed the case that he sometimes entertained "ministers behind the curtain" and distracted politics by trying to build unworkable administrations. It is also true that he successfully insisted on raising some of his personal friends to high position in 1727. But he never raised a Bute to the head of the Treasury; nor did he earn a reputation for thinking that "division was the art of government. . . ." These differences may no doubt be accounted for, in part, by reference to the inferior courage, and indeed skill, of George II. But at all events there is a difference between the records of the two monarchs in these respects; let us, at least, recognize that it exists.

The constitutional aberrations of George III can certainly be, in some measure at least, explained, and in the same process to some extent at least excused. I have already expressed the opinion, that a conviction that the King on certain occasions acted wrongly need not be in the least incompatible with a measure of sympathy for him or with doubts about the entire wisdom or goodness of his opponents. Similar conclusions could be expressed, in their proper place, of the actions and wishes of George II, where these were of like character.

So far as George III is concerned, very special allowances have to be made for the effect of his education and early environment. Baseless as the notion may be that he was reared by partisans of arbitrary rule, it is certain that those who had the chief parts in his political education, such as it was, were inspired by views of the contemporary political structure which were singularly inappropriate. Bute's views of constitutional realities were clearly ill-informed, formalistic, and naive — as his attitude towards his own claims on the Treasury would alone be enough to show. The new Court's attitude to the ruling

politicians of the latter days of George II was derived almost entirely from the tendentious propaganda of disappointed or impatient men who itched to replace them. It is not surprising if the Prince's political notions were marked by oversimplified conceptions of the real value of the King's personal will in politics, and by a similarly over-simplified belief that the real cause of opposition to the King's wishes must be found, not in the inevitable implications of the legal powers already possessed by the House of Commons, but merely in the "black hearts" of politicians who betrayed their Prince.

Further large allowances ought to be made to the King on the score of difficult circumstances. When George III "panted" to obtain the Treasury for Bute, he was a very young and politically ill-educated man, in the grip of a great personal infatuation; he should have been warned off the design by the very man who was its intended beneficiary. When he intrigued behind the backs of Grenville and of Rockingham, excuses are harder to find; but at least it may be said that neither was a man likely to capture either his affection, or his admiration. His attitude towards Chatham, between 1766 and 1768, was certainly blameless, except perhaps in the sense that he expected unrealistically too much of the great man. His reluctance to acknowledge, by accepting the resignation of North, the finality of failure in America, and the necessity of an opposition invasion of the closet, does him no credit constitutionally, but it does credit to his intense if rather simple regard for the greatness of England. [On such grounds as these] extenuation can be pleaded; but it is, after all, extenuation and not defence.

▼

Sir Lewis Namier's interpretation of the reign includes judgements not only on the King's activities and intentions, but also on the character which lay behind them. Here also the interpretation seems to me to be open to debate. And while this topic

raises issues other than those concerned with the constitutional propriety of the King's attitude on certain occasions, and is obviously a much wider question than that, nevertheless a discussion of Sir Lewis's conclusions about the King's character may incidentally throw further light on the constitutional issues debated above.

The judgements of Sir Lewis Namier on the character of George III are no doubt as accurate, in one sense, as they are learned. In all that Sir Lewis on the positive side of the question asserted, there can be no ground for dissent from him. That the King had a mind of mediocre and unoriginal quality; that he had a great and morbid sense of his own inadequacy; that he clung to opinions, once he had admitted them, with great obstinacy, and to men, whom he regarded as his shield against some menacing feature of a hostile world, with desperate but rather mechanical attachment—all this is beyond question made out. But, besides these elements of positive description, Sir Lewis's account included denials and minimizations of other features which have often been read in the King's character. It seems to me that in this respect Sir Lewis, like other notable authorities on various subjects, is much better founded in what he asserts, than in what he denies. . . . It is difficult to resist the impression that he had always been, in some ways, a more positive character than Sir Lewis seems to allow, and that for many years . . . these more positive characteristics of his had been making a considerable contribution to politics in other ways than the expression of obstinacy and fixed ideas.

Richard Pares indicated some of the evidence which points to a rather more "positive," and indeed to a rather more traditional, view of the King's character. That the young George III was painfully lacking in self-assurance, as well as in any remarkable personal talents, is indeed certain; but he displayed from the beginning a very ambitious attitude towards the personal part of the King in politics, which indicates not only an over-enlarged sense of

duty but a certain aspiration, however timid, to an active leadership of the State. If timidity leads him to seek a vicarious gratification of this urge, by placing sole power to do good in the hands of his beloved Friend, at all events he marks off by a very broad line the ground to be occupied by himself and Lord Bute from that which he destines for the other figures in the political scene. Ministers, other than Bute, are "tools," and it hardly matters which tools are employed; politicians are assumed to be ignorant, or dishonest, or both. His view of the Royal part in politics is aspiring, partly at least because he thinks so poorly of the other participants in the game. When his dreams of greatness for Bute had to be abandoned, George III tried to find a political, though not a personal, *alter ego* in Chatham; and this dream also had to be given up. Meantime, his diffidence and lack of experience still prevented him from trying to take on himself the role for which he hoped to find supermen. But, in the fifteen years which elapsed between the collapse of Chatham and the resignation of North, he blossomed out, if only in the first place from necessity, and with a great effort of self-discipline, into a very active (though no doubt very unoriginal) director of government, of patronage, even of strategy. In the process, he developed, if only artificially, a power of hard work and a self-confidence which would in themselves have made a formidable political factor of any man who occupied the throne.

During these years he continued to display that element of contempt for the other factors in political life which was the concomitant, even probably in part the cause, of his own aspiration to leadership. Pares observed how the King, though identifying himself with the official claims of the Commons, in the affairs of Wilkes and as against the Americans, always rather looked down on the House as a "talking shop," and minimized the importance of any reverses which the government incurred there.

The active leadership which the King in those days enjoyed was, as Pares surely with justice claimed, quite unlike the role which George II had played in the days of the Pelhams; and it was also, we may add, equally unlike the part which that King had occupied in the time of Walpole. In this connection it is interesting to note that both Mr. Pares and Miss Kemp have attached some importance to evidence which suggests that George III did, indeed, regard King William as a model for his imitation.

It is certainly true that, as Professor Namier says, George III gave a loyal and unflinching support to Lord North and his administration. But to embody this claim in a context urging the King's similar loyalty to Bute and to Chatham, to Grenville and to Rockingham, is surely very misleading. For the King's loyalty to those earlier Ministers (it was, as I have tried to argue, somewhat questionable in the cases of Grenville and Rockingham) was the loyalty of a young and diffident ruler, anxious to place himself in the hands of others, who were to do for him what he was unable to do for himself. But the North system became very much the King's own. It was not merely that it provided him with a body of advisers prepared to accept responsibility for, and with the King's active aid to carry on, an American policy which the King had not invented, but now obstinately defended. In its later years, the system was very much more his own than that. It was he alone who preserved it in existence, by sheer strength of will, and kept up in it some semblance of unified activity, when North himself no longer believed in the war and had lost all power of initiative or of decision, while some of his colleagues would have liked to, and some actually did, abandon the field. If, through these years, the King clung desperately to North, it was not as he had once tried to cling to Chatham — like a mollusc to a rock — but as a combatant to his covering shield.

The King who could be, and do, all this had certainly become, or perhaps we

should say revealed, a character considerably different from the estimate which Sir Lewis Namier gave us. He had revealed himself as no more a profound or an original mind than Sir Lewis represented him; perhaps not even as, at bottom, a more self-confident one. But he had shown himself a far more forceful and dominant one; as a man deserving, despite all his limitations, the description of formidable, and even, in a real sense, of ambitious.

Nothing of this bears directly upon the question, discussed above, of the constitutional correctness of some of the King's actions. So far as the period 1768–1781 is concerned, there is in any case no ground for imputing unconstitutional conduct to him. That he should, during the later years of that period, have continued to employ, in some cases against their better judgement, Ministers whose incapacity is fairly beyond question, and to identify himself as heavily as possible with a policy which proved in the end disastrous, were facts of the most unfortunate description; but, however imprudent, such a line could not, without anachronism, be described as unconstitutional. While the Ministers were prepared, however reluctantly, to accept responsibility for that policy, and could contrive, assisted of course by the influence of the Crown, to maintain their Parliamentary position, George III had every constitutional right to retain them in his service, whatever may be said of the wisdom of such a course. He had no motive to intrigue against or between them, moreover; and it is clear that, so far from doing this, he did what he could to hold them together.

There is, however, in one sense a connection between this appraisal of the King's character, judged in the light of his development and activity during that period, and the question of his constitutional improprieties at other times of his life. For, if his character was, or became, for all its limitations, as forceful and dominant as his political conduct during those years suggests; if he could propose to himself the ex-

ample of William III; if he could continue to regard the other personnel of the political scene with a low opinion which enables us to measure the greatness of the interval which he placed between himself and his political setting — these are facts which at least make it less difficult to understand how the same man could, on occasions both earlier and later, reveal the essentially

aspiring cast of his nature, in proceedings which carried one or more steps further his ever-present urge to dispose of affairs untrammelled by anything less than the law. They are facts which help to explain how, despite his sincere regard for the law of the constitution, he could still misinterpret the constitution's practical contemporary meaning, and infringe its prescriptions.

## The Framework of Ideas and Purposes

HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

Herbert Butterfield (1900— ) is Master of Peterhouse and professor of modern history at Cambridge. His *The Whig Interpretation of History* examined the distortions which arise when the historian views the past from the perspective of the present, and his *George III and the Historians* reviewed historical writing on George III from Adolphus to the present, criticizing both the Whig historians of the nineteenth century and the Namier school. The article reprinted here presents, in more compact form, the arguments advanced against the Namier school in *George III and the Historians*.

IN THE *Cambridge Review* for 31 October 1930 (pp. 73-4) D. A. Winstanley — long the leading authority in the field — applauded the researches that lay behind Professor Namier's *England in the Age of the American Revolution*. Readers, he said, would now have to "consider the necessity" of revising the views they had hitherto held about the early years of George III's reign. In regard to certain incidental matters he was prepared to concede the point that "some revision" would be found to be unavoidable. "Yet," he added, "the main outlines of the story and the characters of the actors remain very much as they were before." Winstanley, in fact, could not accept Professor Namier's leading idea, that George III, far from hav-

ing a system of his own, had continued the attitude and the practices of George II, the difference between the two kings being "merely" one of "emphasis and degree." His conclusion was that, after all, we need not "feel called upon to cast all our previous conceptions into the melting pot."

The topic on which Winstanley was prepared to differ from Professor Namier — this question of an alleged change of system in 1760 — was the one which for nearly two hundred years had been the main issue in the controversy over George III. It had now provided the first occasion for applying the methods of "the structure of politics" to general narrative, an experiment which had produced a considerable disruption in the larger lines of the story.

From Herbert Butterfield, "George III and the Constitution," *History*, XLIII (1958), pp. 14-33. Reprinted by permission of the author. Since the footnotes to this article are an important part of the argument they have been included exactly as they appeared originally. For a fuller treatment of Butterfield's ideas see his *George III and the Historians* (London, 1957).