

21

HE GATHERS IT ALL IN HORACE WALPOLE (1717-1797)

(I) THE EARLIER YEARS



Horace Walpole gives exaggerated praise to Thomas Gray when he says of his late friend, "Nobody yet ever wrote letters so well." In their youth, the two of them set out together to explore France and Italy, and it is Gray who sends home the finer account of their travels: he is a serious scholar, Walpole a collector of art and historical curiosities. Gray remains an outstanding letter-writer till he dies at the age of fifty-four having led a very sheltered existence. Walpole lives a long life and has many activities and achievements to his credit. He sits in the House of Commons for twenty-seven years, develops into a respected antiquarian, invents the British Gothic novel, builds a house that draws sightseers from home and abroad, runs an esteemed private press, saves a nephew from a madhouse, and composes the greatest body of letters in the English language. His correspondence is like a rich landscape with a satisfying fullness of hill and plain, forest and savannah, foliage and blossom. It displays his country's politics and society from the fall of his father, Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole, to the time of Napoleon's Italian campaign and portrays himself from early manhood to painful decrepitude.

While Horace Walpole is still a student, his gift for letter-writing becomes apparent as he complains about the transition from studying Classical literature at Eton to being tormented by philosophy and mathematics at Cambridge. Both Cambridge and Oxford he stigmatizes as "two barbarous towns o'er-run with rusticity and mathematics," and he makes it clear that his taste runs to old monuments, fine pictures, and rural landscapes. In 1737, his much loved mother dies, and he has to suffer his father's remarriage to his longstanding mistress, Maria Skerret.

On the Grand Tour with Gray that follows his time of study, he sends back to Britain letters as well written as his companion's, but less informative. Although he can quote Roman poetry, his imagination, unlike Gray's, has not entered deeply into the ancient world: he only sees what is before his eyes—a succession of masterly paintings, imposing buildings, and splendid ceremonies. He complains that at the funeral of the Duc de Tresmes, Governor of Paris and Marshal of France, there are "no plumes, trophies, banners, led horses, scutcheons, or open chariots." In Florence, he revels in the way that "all the morn one makes parties in masque to the shops and coffee-houses, and all the evening to the operas and balls." From Rome, however, he writes to his beloved cousin Henry Conway, "I am far gone in medals, lamps, idols, prints, &c.... I would buy the Coliseum if I could."

After landing at Dover in September 1741, Walpole is glad to reside in London, much preferring it to Houghton, his father's palatial house in Norfolk. His frequent letters to his expatriate friend Horace Mann in Florence give an impression of the England he finds and of the balls, masquerades, and ridottos he attends. Mann enthusiastically accepts commissions to make further purchases for his friend's collections. "You can't think what a closet I have fitted up," Walpole boasts, "such a mixture of French gaiety and Roman virtù," but his assertion to Conway soon after—"For virtù ... it is my sole pleasure"—hardly rings true in the face of his accounts of Sir Thomas Robinson's balls.

In Parliament, Horace's father, Sir Robert, who has been Prime Minister for two decades, is under siege. It gives the son no pleasure to sit in the Chamber till four in the morning, wearied to the point of exhaustion, while his parent, who is forty years older, speaks "with as much spirit as ever." Horace writes animated, partisan letters recording the unrelenting attacks on the administration, which could culminate in impeachment, and is glad his deceased mother is spared the prospect of the family's ruin. At this time, he can declare, "Trust me, if we fall, all the grandeur, the envied grandeur of our house, will not cost me a sigh ... liberty, my ease, and choice of my own friends and company, will sufficiently counterbalance the crowds of Downing Street."

In February 1742, after an election, the administration no longer has a clear majority; Sir Robert resigns and is immediately created Earl of Orford. "When," Mann is told, "he kissed the King's hand to take his first leave, the King fell on his neck, wept and kissed him, and begged to see him frequently." During the coming months, Horace writes of the formidable Secret Committee set up by the Commons to investigate his father. After describing how its members are chosen, he adds, "Lord Orford returns tomorrow from Houghton to Chelsea, from whence my uncle went in

a great fright to fetch him." In July, Parliament is prorogued, and the Secret Committee dies harmlessly.

As the twenty-seven-year-old son of a statesman with an overpowering personality, Horace Walpole needs to establish an independent identity; it is not surprising that he wants to move into his own accommodation. His father wishes otherwise: "he is for my living with him; but then I shall be cooped—and besides, I never found that people loved one another the less for living asunder."

"Italy," Horace explains to Conway, "is pleasanter than London," but he declares, "Dull as London is in summer, there is always more company in it than in any one place in the country. I hate the country." At the paternal estate of Houghton, he finds himself "prisoner in a melancholy, barren province," and when he feels he cannot refuse his father's request for help in setting up a picture gallery in the great house, he exclaims, "I can't help wishing that I had never known a Guido from a Teniers."

For twenty-six years after his father's removal to the House of Lords, Walpole continues to sit in the Commons. He confesses that he "loves to write history better than to act in it," and he observes more than he participates, relishing speeches of high quality on either side of an issue. Alluding to his love of mediaeval arts, he reminds George Montagu, his friend from his schooldays, "I have another Gothic passion, which is for squabbles in the Wittenagemot." (His admission nine years later, while referring to the Court party, that "Nothing appears to me more ridiculous in my life than my having ever loved their squabbles" is made to the same correspondent.) Despite his pleasure in fine speeches, the strain of serving in the Commons while leading an active social life is considerable. In January 1744, he finds himself "every day more hooked into politics and company," and he sometimes sits in committee till midnight. The years do not make his service easier. In 1755 he writes, "I was from two at noon till ten at night at the House: I came home, dined, new-dressed myself entirely, went to a ball at Lord Holderness's, and stayed till five in the morning." Looking back three years after giving up his seat, he wonders how he endured his "former agitated and turbulent life." Meanwhile, to the great advantage of historians, he sends lively, detailed reports of the House's proceedings to Mann. Thus, he writes in February 1764, referring to William Pitt the Elder (later Lord Chatham):

Pitt, with less modesty than ever he showed, pronounced a panegyric on his own administration, and from thence broke out on the *dismissal of officers*. This increased the roar from us. Grenville replied, and very finely, very pathetically, very

animated. He painted Wilkes and faction, and, with very little truth, denied the charge of menaces to officers.

Walpole afterwards recalls, "How often, when in Parliament, did I hear questions called 'the most important that had ever come before the House,' which a twelvemonth after no mortal remembered."

While Horace is in Parliament, Britain is embroiled in the War of the Austrian succession. In 1740, on the death of Charles V, his daughter Maria Theresa, already Queen of Hungary, inherits the throne of Austria, which is promptly invaded by Prussia, Bavaria, and France. Following the fall of Sir Robert Walpole, who has kept the country out of war, Britain intervenes on the side of Austria by sending troops to Flanders in order to protect the Royal Family's territory of Hanover from Prussia and to guard against French plans to restore the Catholic House of Stuart. Merchant ships are in sufficient danger for Horace Walpole to beg Mann to dispatch the precious first century Roman eagle he is sending him in a man-of-war. In the coming months of 1744, Walpole conveys to Mann the rising anxiety and increasing suspense as France prepares an invasion of Britain to instal the Young Pretender on the throne. Though he is resigned to bear "the worst that can happen," he realizes, "I never knew how little I was a Jacobite till it was almost my interest to be one." A week later, he reports, "Attempts have been made to raise the clans in Scotland, but unsuccessfully." Though a great storm disables the French fleet, Walpole still fears conquest by the huge French army and foresees some possibility of himself and his friends becoming "refugee heretics" at his beloved Florence.

There is a respite till July of the following year, when the Young Pretender himself, Charles Edward, James II's grandson, secretly lands in Scotland and does raise the clans. By 6 September, Walpole is fearful. He warns Mann:

The confusion I have found, and the danger we are in, prevent my talking of anything else. The young Pretender, at the head of three thousand men, has got a march on General Cope, who is not eighteen hundred strong.... We have sent for ten regiments from Flanders, which may be here in a week, and we have fifteen men-of-war in the Downs. I am grieved to tell you all this; but when it is so, how can I avoid telling you?

On the 20th, no French troops having landed and English Jacobites remaining quiescent, Walpole is reassuring Mann and himself, "But, sure, banditti can never conquer a kingdom!" However, the advance south continues, Cope suffers a defeat at Prestonpans, and on the 27th Walpole admits, "we

are sadly convinced that they are not such raw ragamuffins as they were represented," and he is indignant that "my Lord Granville still buoys up the King's spirits, and persuades him it is nothing." "I have so trained myself to expect this ruin," he confides to Mann, "that I see it approach without any emotion."

In December, the rebels reach Derby, but then start to retreat. Walpole declares, "We dread them no longer"; in his eyes, the rebel troops are again "banditti," and with unaccustomed harshness he hopes that the Duke of Cumberland will lead his army into Scotland not "with that sword of mercy with which the present family have governed those people." Cumberland's treatment of the Highlanders is to earn him the sobriquet of "Butcher," and Walpole's accounts of the trials of the rebel lords and the executions of some are among the most famous passages in his letters.

About a year and a half after his fears subside, a new passion enters the life of Horace Walpole. This confirmed city-lover informs Mann that he has discovered a "little rural *bijou*," a small farm outside Twickenham, and is delighted to take over the lease from its present occupant, Mrs. Chevenix. (The actual owners are three minors, and about a year later he is able to have the necessary private Act of Parliament passed so that he can buy it.)

The house [he reports] is so small, that I can send it you in a letter to look at: the prospect is as delightful as possible, commanding the river, the town, and Richmond Park; and being situated on a hill descends to the Thames through two or three little meadows, where I have some Turkish sheep and two cows, all studed in their colours for becoming the view.

A year further on, he finds that the old name for the property is Strawberry Hill.

In his country residence, Walpole discovers the pleasures of planting and begins to add the eighteenth century art of landscape gardening to his pursuits. The lilacs and nightingales have a special appeal for him. In July 1755, he writes to Montagu, "Having done with building and planting, I have taken to farming," and in a few months he sends him detailed information on the selection and cultivation of trees. Complaints about rain interfering with haymaking start to appear in his letters—and the parsons make matters more difficult by stopping Sunday work.

Walpole also begins to travel extensively in England to scrutinize ancient buildings within and without, and though he has protested to Sir Charles Williams, "I hate writing travels," he sends several friends superb accounts of his journeys. In these he mingles descriptions of castles, great houses, and pictures with details of people he meets and such hardships as

bad roads, being thrown from an overturned chaise into the mud, and inns so full that he has to drive on through the darkness. When he becomes too old for such expeditions, he recalls how "It was always death to me, when I did travel England, to have lords and ladies receive me and show me their castles, instead of turning me over to their housekeeper: it hindered my seeing anything, and I was the whole time meditating my escape."

Two and a half years after taking over the lease of his property, Walpole casually informs Mann of an undertaking that will loom large in his life and correspondence and add a dimension to his lasting fame. "I am going," he states, "to build a little gothic castle at Strawberry Hill." In the mid-eighteenth century, aesthetic taste is expanding: in architecture, an appreciation of Gothic intricacy with its mediaeval pinnacles and tracery is beginning to complement the well-established esteem for neo-classical elegance with its domes, pediments, and Grecian columns. Over close to two decades, always delaying the next stage till he has saved enough to avoid going into debt, Walpole adds successively to the initial building a chapel, a gallery, and a tower of fourteenth century design, as well as instalments of stained glass and interior ornament. So many visitors clamour for a tour that, like some other owners of renowned homes, he takes to issuing tickets of admission. Royalty from home and abroad are among the admirers of what he refers to as "my child Strawberry" and "my little Jerusalem." On one occasion, the Kingston Fencibles pass by on a barge, and next day he writes, "They saluted my castle with three guns—unluckily I had no cannon mounted on my battlements to return it." Since the dampness at Twickenham frequently drives him into temporary refuge in the healthier climate of London, it is pleasant to see that so many of his letters are written at Strawberry Hill.

In his travels, Walpole is able to collect historical portraits and antique treasures to enlarge the collection at his Gothic castle. He is an enthusiastic purchaser of engraved portraits of historical figures, both English and French. For years, he tries to complete a set of prints of all the persons mentioned in his favourite letter-writer, Mme de Sévigné, whom he calls "my divinity" and "my saint." In 1786, a lady who has "seen a good half century" exclaims, "Well, I must live another *forty* years to have time to see all the curiosities of this house." Nine years later, he complains to the Rev. Daniel Lysons that the latter's *Environs of London* discloses the existence of too many of the articles in his collection, including "several that are never shown to miscellaneous customers."

Although Walpole keeps protesting that printed references to himself as "the learned gentleman" are unjustified, his letters show that he does have a scholarly concern about the provenance and attribution of artworks and the authenticity of supposed facts. Ancient authors, he notes, were not

very critical in assessing their sources and are especially unreliable when writing about countries other than their own. Of county histories he observes, "It is unpardonable to be inaccurate in a work in which one nor expects nor demands anything but fidelity." His researching fascinates him, and by 1749 his skill in genealogy impresses some. "I am the first antiquary of my race," he tells the Rev. William Cole, a fellow devotee:

People don't know how entertaining a study it is. Who begot whom is a most amusing kind of hunting; one recovers a grandfather instead of breaking one's own neck—and then one grows so pious to the memory of a thousand persons one never heard of before.

Walpole's antiquarianism leads him into authorship, but as the decades pass he becomes weary of public attention, and recollects with sorrow what induced him to publish: "Youth, great spirits, vanity, some flattery (for I was a Prime Minister's son) had made me believe I had some parts, and perhaps I had some, and on that rock I split; for how vast the difference between some parts and genius." His major antiquarian works, *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England* (1758) and *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (1762-63), figure largely in his correspondence, along with the operation of his Press. He does not expect his writings to last, and he fears that his darling Strawberry Hill will "probably be condemned and pulled to pieces by whomever I shall give it to," but he thinks the products of another of his undertakings, the books from his famous private press, may perhaps preserve his memory.

Dr. Johnson remarks to Boswell that Horace Walpole "got together a great many curious little things and told them in an elegant manner." This praise should have pleased Walpole, who complains to Cole, who does not publish his own researches, "I love antiquities; but I scarce ever knew an antiquary who knew how to write upon them." His reputation in this field is sufficient to earn him the sobriquet "Time-honoured Lancaster" and a pleasing compliment in an anonymous poem:

What means (O! for a Walpole's antique skill!)
What means the milk-white cross on yonder hill!

The Bishop of Ely seeks his help in planning the painted glass for the east window of his Cathedral, Lord Rochester asks him for a design for an altarpiece for Westminster Abbey, and the Earl of Leicester consults him on the repair of Tamworth Castle.

Better known today than his antiquarian books, is his mediaeval horror story *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Inspired by an image left behind by an otherwise forgotten dream, this tale, which Walpole describes to the scholar Joseph Warton as "an attempt to blend the marvellous of old story with the natural of modern novels," marks the invention of the Gothic novel. He is diffident about publishing the book and initially withholds his name from it, but is happily surprised by its popularity. He tells his friend Mme du Deffand that of all his works it is the only one that really pleases him, and later relates how, two or three years after its composition, he visits a Cambridge College and finds he must have retained an unconscious memory of it from a previous visit since it is the Castle of Otranto in every detail.

His letters, however, also show that Walpole has serious limitations as a mediaevalist and a student of literature and history. Offered an early black letter edition of Chaucer, he confesses to the poet William Mason, "I am, too, though a Goth, so modern a Goth that I hate the black letter, and I love Chaucer better in Dryden and Baskerville than in his own language and dress." He also refers to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as "a lump of mineral from which Dryden [in his retellings] extracted all the gold." Dante he amazingly rejects as "extravagant, absurd, disgusting, in short a Methodist Parson in Bedlam," and he obstinately persists in his defence of Richard III against the well-founded charge of having the little sons of Edward IV murdered.

For all his love of mediaeval arts, there is a narrowness in Walpole's total lack of interest in Roman Britain and in the Anglo-Saxons, whom he stigmatizes as a people "who never invented anything but a barbarous mode of corrupting language." He will not buy Captain Cook's *Travels* because he is repulsed by pictures of ugly savages, and though he admires the achievements of the Spanish Moors and abhors "the knave Ferdinand and his bigoted Queen for destroying them," he despises Indian and Byzantine art and dismisses on totally inadequate grounds Sanskrit literature and Arabic poetry.

When his discovery of Strawberry Hill dissolves his distaste for the country, the War of the Austrian Succession is not yet ended, and Walpole is still reporting news of its progress to Mann. A year and a half after the defeat of the Young Pretender and his Highland army, he informs Mann that the country is still in a war mood. A few months later, when peace comes, he is able to reassure the expatriate that the terms include, on France's part, "The Pretender to be renounced with all his descendants, male and female."

Despite the peace sealed by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, Britain and France remain competitors for colonial territory in North America, the West Indies, and India. Friction mounts, and by the summer

of 1754, along with news of British politics and personalities, Walpole is alerting Mann to the possibility of another war. As fear mounts, he declares the following March, that he was frightened enough in '45 and he refuses to be frightened again. He notes the *rapprochement* with a former enemy, Protestant Prussia, and in January 1756 announces to Mann, "Fight we must, France says; but when she said so last, she knew nothing of our cordiality with the court of Berlin."

In September, the Prussian King Frederick II's invasion of Saxony brings on his small country an onslaught from France, Sweden, Russia, and Austria, and the Seven Years War begins. In letters from April through June 1757, Walpole captures the suspense over the formation of a new government while the country is at war. Fears that France will try to knock out her rival for an empire by invading her island homeland persist. Walpole writes of the militias being raised—many of the officers, he tells Montagu, "have never shot anything but woodcocks"—and he informs Mann in August 1759, "Nothing is talked of here, as you may imagine, but the invasion." He rejoices, however, in October over victories in the West Indies and on the American mainland and maintains, "Poetic justice could not have been executed with more rigour than it has been on the perjury, treachery, and usurpations of the French." Yet the dread of facing foreign troops on home ground remains until Admiral Hawke wrecks the French fleet at Quiberon in November, and Walpole is able to reassure Mann, "I think our sixteen years of fears of invasion are over."

In Britain, Frederick II has become a hero. "All England," records Walpole, "has kept his birthday.... We had bonfires and processions, illuminations and French horns playing out of windows all night," and he tells how "as I was walking by the river the other night, a bargeman asked me for something to drink the King of Prussia's health." The situation of that monarch, beset as he is by such powerful foes, becomes perilous, and only the Czarina Elizabeth's death on 25 December 1761 followed by Russia's withdrawal from the war saves Prussia from collapse.

Although the Treaty of Paris in 1763 leaves Britain instead of France with an empire in North America and India, English opinion on the peace is divided. A majority in the Commons is for it, but Walpole finds "the Nation against it," and Pitt, the great leader who has led the country to victory, "says it is inadequate to our successes, and inglorious for our Allies." Pitt's dissatisfaction with the terms and his acceptance of a barony (for his wife, for the time being, so that he can stay in the House of Commons) repulses Walpole, who has hitherto bowed down before his oratory and even hailed him as Sir Robert's long awaited successor. "Am not I an old fool?" he confesses to Mann, "at my years to be a dupe to virtue and patriotism ... I adored Mr. Pitt, as if I was just come from school and reading Livy's lies

of Brutus and Camillus, and Fabius." He goes on to suggest that Pitt's aggressiveness may have conjured up a similar spirit in France, but a month later he justifies his previous admiration, claiming, "he changed, not I."

As soon as the War ends, the other pole of the age-old love-hate relationship between England and France comes alive. The English papers call the craze for visiting Paris "*the French disease*," and Walpole's friend George Selwyn comes home across the Channel with the news that "our passion for everything French is nothing to theirs for everything English."

During the Seven Years War, George II dies to be succeeded by his grandson, George III, who begins his reign by seeming anxious to please. Walpole reports to Montagu:

For the King himself, he seems all good-nature, and wishing to satisfy everybody; all his speeches are obliging. I saw him again yesterday, and was surprised to find the levee-room had lost so entirely the air of the lion's den. This sovereign don't stand in one spot, with his eyes fixed royally on the ground, and dropping bits of German news; he walks about, and speaks to everybody.

There is one ominous sign, apparently little noticed, that all may not be as it seems with "this charming young King," who makes Walpole unwilling to "forgive anybody being a Jacobite now." At the start of his reign, "It is intimated that he means to employ the same Ministers, but with reserve to himself of more authority than has lately been in fashion." Being so informed, perhaps Mann should not be surprised when this monarch, in the months following his accession in October 1760, transforms the face of government. "Here are changes enough," Walpole writes to him in March 1761, "to amount to a revolution." Power shifts from Pitt to Lord Bute (son-in-law of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu). Just over two years later, when Earl Waldegrave, the husband of a favourite niece of Walpole's, suddenly dies, and Lord Bute as suddenly resigns, Walpole is offended that the King fails to show the appropriate sorrow for the loss of the Earl, who was once his tutor, and sneers, "I suppose his childish mind is too much occupied with the loss of his last governor."

In the same month, April 1762, John Wilkes, M.P., whose periodical *The North Briton* campaigns against the increase of royal power, finds himself briefly held in the Tower of London and his papers seized. Walpole observes:

This hero is as bad a fellow as ever hero was, abominable in private life, dull in Parliament, but, they say, very entertaining in a room, and certainly no bad writer, besides having had the honour of contributing a great deal to Lord Bute's fall.

He here sides with Wilkes because he fears the King is enlarging his authority and undoing the Revolution of 1688-89, which divided power between the monarch and the parliament. In letters to his cousin the Earl of Hertford and to Mann, Walpole records, with comments, the subsequent career of Wilkes, which involves his unsavoury support by a London mob, a duel with an opponent, flight to France, return, and re-election. Neither Mann nor Hertford shares Walpole's enthusiasm for the rebellious gentleman's cause, though Hertford's younger brother Lieutenant-General Conway does.

Wilkes's imprisonment gives rise to a fierce debate in Parliament on the legality of general warrants, which allow people to be arrested without the issue of a warrant bearing their names. When the King not only dismisses Conway from his court post, but viciously deprives him of his regiment for voting in the House of Commons against the legality of general warrants, Walpole offers to share his savings with him. Happily, this seems to prove unnecessary, but Walpole continues to fear the extinction of liberty in England. "You see I write in despair," he laments to Conway in October 1764, and speaks of going into exile in "a pleasant corner" of Europe: "while there is a free spot of earth upon the globe, that shall be my country. I am sorry it will not be this." Eight months later, when Count Schuwalof visits Britain, he concedes, "As we have still liberty enough left to dazzle a Russian, he seems charmed with England."

Instead of going into melancholy exile, Walpole retreats from long days in the House of Commons, too much whirling in the social dance, and a protracted attack of gout by paying his first visit to France in twenty-four years. The Paris of 1765 welcomes him. "I receive the greatest civilities," he writes to his old friend Lady Suffolk, and he assures Conway, "I avoid all politics." His visit is marred by a further attack of gout, during which Wilkes visits him and is "very civil," but talks "the grossest bawdy." Walpole finds most of the Frenchmen "disagreeable enough" but strikes up a friendship with the English Lord Ossory, whom he describes as "the man I have liked the best in Paris." Many Frenchwomen please him, and in one of his most vivid letters, which is written to Gray, he brings a parade of them before his reader's inner eye and ear. Despite his imperfect French, he enjoys much social life, but is disturbed by the way so much of the conversation is full of earnest irreligion:

Good folks, they have no time to laugh. There is God and the King to be pulled down first; and men and women, one and all, are devoutly employed in the demolition. They think me quite profane, for having any belief left.

He is also uncomfortable at the indelicate talk even in mixed company and at table. He tells how it was announced that the Dauphin "had had *une évacuation foetide*," whereupon, "The old lady of the house (who by the way is quite blind, was the Regent's mistress for a fortnight, and is very agreeable) called out, 'Oh! they have forgot to mention that he threw down his chamber-pot, and was forced to change his bed."

The lady of the house is Mme du Deffand, who, blind since 1752, conducts a literary life with the aid of her secretary, and hosts a salon. In spite of her occasionally coarse speech, Walpole soon finds this woman, twenty years older than himself, "charming." Being closely familiar with modern French history, literature and theatre, he discovers that her memory, when he can pry it open, is a gateway to an enchanted past. She conceives an unassuageable passion for this foreigner, whose French is the worst she has heard any Englishman speak. He develops an intense attachment to her, and about a year after they have met, he describes her to Montagu as "this best and sincerest of friends, who loves me as much as my mother did!"

Walpole arrives back in England in April 1766 and starts to correspond in French with Mme du Deffand. Afterwards he becomes extremely anxious to recover his letters to her, and he ensures that all the later ones are destroyed. This may be because of his self-consciousness about his imperfect French or because they contain intimate remarks like the one about his mother's love. Enough of them survive, however, to illuminate the relationship.

Walpole does have sufficient French to enable him to write to Mme du Deffand on many topics: his family members; Strawberry Hill; his printing ventures; his gout; news of mutual acquaintances; British politics; liberty of the press; the wickedness of Catherine II of Russia, Frederick II of Prussia, and Joseph II of Austria; the vanity and paranoia of Rousseau; Voltaire's wrongheaded attack on Shakespeare; the badness of human nature; and her religious doubts. Frequently they argue about people and books, and he observes that *The Castle of Otranto*, in which he removed the curb of reason from his imagination, is alien to her cast of mind. He scolds her for her over passionate letters and complaints of boredom. He urges her by no means to visit the exiled Duc de Choiseul (she does) and not to seek refuge from her monotonous life in a convent (she does not). She wants to make him her heir, and only with great difficulty does the horrified Walpole, fearful of having his strange attachment thought mercenary, dissuade her. Sometimes they quarrel, and once she briefly loses all desire to continue the correspondence. He successfully solicits her help for an English single mother in danger of losing her residence at Calais, and when her pension is halved, he strives in vain to let him replace the loss. His eagerness to see his "dear old woman," as he repeatedly calls her, takes

him across the English Channel four times more. In August 1769, he writes home to his old friend John Chute that "She and I went to the Boulevard last night after supper, and drove about there till two in the morning. We are going to sup in the country this evening, and are to go tomorrow night at eleven to the puppet-show." After Mme du Deffand's death in 1780, he does not visit France again.

(II) MATURITY

The antiquary, author, printer and parliamentarian (though he withdraws from Parliament in 1767) whom Mme du Deffand meets is very different from the young connoisseur who returned from the Continent in 1741 eager to escape from his father's shadow. In later life, he regrets that he learnt so little from Sir Robert in the remaining four years the latter had to live: "to my shame," he realizes, "I was so idle, and young, and thoughtless, that I by no means profited of his leisure as I might have done." The man who revisits France in 1765 has a well formed character and clear outlook. "I have often said," he writes to Mann, "and oftener think, *that this world is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel*—a solution of why Democritus laughed and Heraclitus wept." Thinking and feeling are both in evidence when he tells Montagu:

I desire to die when I have nobody left to laugh with me. I have never yet seen or heard anything serious, that was not ridiculous. Jesuits, Methodists, philosophers, politicians, the hypocrite Rousseau, the scoffer Voltaire, the encyclopedists, the Humes, the Lyttletons, the Grenvilles, the atheist tyrant of Prussia, and the mountebank of History, Mr. Pitt, all are to me but impostors in their various ways. Fame or interest is their object.

This Swift-like diatribe comes from one who shares Swift's commitment to the system of government based on the Revolution settlement of 1689. Walpole maintains that "the excellence of our constitution, above all others, consists in the balance established between the three powers of King, Lords, and Commons." Wisely holding that no person or body of persons is to be entrusted with absolute power, he describes himself as "neither a royalist nor a republican." When vigorous attempts are being made to eject Wilkes, elected by the voters of Middlesex, from the House of Commons, he remembers the Civil War of the previous century and exclaims, "so nearly do we tread in the steps of 1641!... What hopes has liberty, whether Charles or Oliver prevail." For years, he dreads the enlargement of the

Royal Prerogative and even regards the assassination of a king as “the least bad of all murders.” Disappointingly, he defends the execution of Charles I: a copy of the death warrant for that beheading hangs beside his bed opposite a copy of Magna Carta. Trial by jury, *habeas corpus*, and publication without prior censorship he singles out as major guarantees of British freedom.

Walpole so venerates the constitution that any suggestion of tampering with it, such as the younger Pitt’s proposal to reform the franchise, awakens the conservative element in his temperament. His liberal strain, on the other hand, is fiercely active in his loathing of slavery and colonialism: “conquest, unless by necessity,” he stigmatizes as “an odious glory.” When a cyclone devastates Barbados, he comments to Mann:

Were I a poet, I would paint hosts of Mexicans and Peruvians crowding the shores of Styx, and insulting the multitudes of the usurpers of their continent that have been sending themselves thither for these five or six years. The poor Africans, too, have no call to be merciful to European ghosts. Those miserable slaves have just now seen whole crews of men-of-war swallowed by the late hurricane.

Denouncing the depredations of Robert Clive, he finds the House of Commons “so ungenerous as to have a mind to punish him for assassination, forgery, treachery, and plunder,” and he asks, “who but Machiavel can pretend that we have a shadow of title to a foot of land in India?” He grieves that “Kings have left no ties between one another” and that “Grotius [the seventeenth century pioneer of international law] is obsolete.” When Britain takes possession of Oude in northern India, he accuses his country of acting “by the new law of nations; by the law by which Poland was divided.”

Walpole’s liberalism can conflict with his patriotism. His intense pride in his father’s having kept the kingdom at peace for twenty years does not prevent him from admitting to Mann in 1766, when a new administration is being formed:

You know I love to have the majesty of the people of England dictate to all Europe. Nothing would have diverted me more than to have been at Paris at this moment. Their panic at Mr. Pitt’s name is not to be described. Whenever they were impertinent, I used to drop, as by chance, that he would be Minister in a few days, and it never failed to occasion a dead silence.

Three years later, visiting France again, Walpole encounters a seething hatred of Britain, and, disturbed at his own reaction, makes Mann his confessor: "Paris revived in me that natural passion, the love of my country's glory; I must put it out; it is a wicked passion, and breathes war." When war does come, his conscience repeatedly smites him for wishing ill to his country's enemies. In 1781, he reports to Lady Ossory that a French and Spanish fleet supporting the Americans has withdrawn, and adds, "it is hoped they have suffered by a storm—this is war! One sits at home coolly *hoping* that five or six vessels full of many hundreds of men are gone to the bottom of the deep!" Such a well-founded scruple can detract from his pleasure in keeping Mann up to date with events: "I detest a correspondence now; it lives like a vampire upon dead bodies!"

The conservative aspect of Walpole's outlook dictates his view of the role of religion in society. From Paris, he writes to Montagu, "I dined today with a dozen *savans*, and though all the servants were waiting, the conversation was much more unrestrained, even on the Old Testament, than I would suffer at my own table in England, if a single footman was present." Among his equals, however, he feels at liberty to express his far-reaching scepticism and deeply rooted anti-clericalism. "Freethinking," he holds, "is for one's self, surely not for society." However, like many of his contemporaries, he deplores the form of religious excess known as "enthusiasm," a belief that one enjoys divine communication or revelation such as was claimed by many of the Puritans blamed for the Civil War. The supposed outbreak of enthusiasm that most provokes his hostility is Methodism. "I expect soon that I shall keep Saints' days," he teases Mann, "for enthusiasm is growing into fashion too; and while they are cancelling holidays at Rome, the Methodists are reviving them here." Christian dogma he has no use for, dismissing the Thirty-nine Articles as "that summary of impudent folly" and Athanasius as the apostle of "a jargon that means nothing." Religions, in his view, "are but graver fashions ... and some mantua-maker or priest, that wants business, invents a new mode, which takes the faster, the more it inverts its predecessor." "In physicians," he asserts, "I believe no more than in divines," and he tells the Rev. Stephen Cole, "Church and presbytery are human nonsense, invented by knaves to govern fools.... There is nothing sublime but the Divinity. Nothing is sacred but His work."

Though nominally an Anglican, Walpole, like Chesterfield, is in reality a Deist, one who believes that reason, which cannot but deduce that the universe is the work of a beneficent being, is the true source of religion. Bolingbroke's posthumously published Deist "metaphysical divinity," anathema to Christian believers, strikes him as the author's best work. Encountering at Paris the talk of militant atheists, he recoils in some horror. "Gods of stone, or kings of flesh," he affirms, "are my derision; but of all

gods that were ever invented, the most ridiculous is that old lumpish god of the Grecian sophists, whom the modern literati want to reinstate – the god Matter." When Mme du Deffand, nearer the grave than him, appeals for spiritual comfort, he offers her the reassurance that the creator of so much beauty and goodness must be pleased by virtue and cannot require perfection; he is convinced there is an afterlife – but that it is impossible to know the least detail of it. Yet he has, as he discloses to Mann, "no doubt but the real miseries of life – I mean those that are unmerited and unavoidable, – will be compensated to the sufferers. Tyrants are a proof of an hereafter. Millions of men cannot be formed for the sport of a cruel child." "I have an odd system," he confides to Lady Ossory, "that what is called *chance* is the instrument of Providence and the secret agent that counteracts what men call wisdom, and preserves order and regularity."

Theological terms, in Walpole's eyes, are not only meaningless but also dangerous. With some justice, he points out to Hannah More, a passionately devout friend of his last years, that they "set people together by the ears," and warns her, "don't muddify your charming simplicity with controversial distinctions, that will sour your sweet piety. Sects are the bane of charity, and have deluged the world with blood." Walpole likes to remember how he once shocked the republican historian Mrs. Macaulay by telling her, "that had I been Luther and could have foreseen the woes I should occasion, I should have asked myself, whether I was authorized to cause the deaths of three or four hundred thousand persons, that future millions might be advantaged." "No man," Walpole persuasively argues, "was ever yet so great as to build that system in which other men could not discover flaws. All our reasoning, therefore, is very imperfect, and this is *my* reason for being so seldom serious, and for never disputing." Knowingly or unknowingly, Walpole is following in the tracks of the philosopher John Locke, a foundational thinker of the Enlightenment, who hopes that his great work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

may be of use to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension.... We should not then perhaps be so forward, out of an affectation of an universal knowledge, to raise questions, and perplex ourselves and others with disputes about things to which our understandings are not suited.

Walpole claims that he has no aptitude for philosophy and "no curiosity about the anatomy of Nature." While expressing his enthusiasm for "original genius" in the arts, he refers to his "sovereign contempt for Euclid, and Newton, and Locke," but on another occasion, he argues that the French,

"till they have excelled Newton, and come near to Shakespeare," cannot sustain their "airs of superiority." When he criticises Locke, he has in mind the latter's intricate analysis of the human mind's development and operation. From another viewpoint, he admires Bacon and Locke as careful students of the world we all experience through our five senses: they "were almost the first philosophers who introduced common sense into their writings, and were as clear as Plato was unintelligible—because he did not understand himself."

In his political writings, Locke is the great philosopher of liberty and religious toleration, but there are two classes to whom he will not grant equal rights—atheists, because they acknowledge no power by whom they can swear an oath, and Roman Catholics, because they owe allegiance to a foreign prince. When Ireland is given its own Parliament in 1782, Walpole, who shares the common Protestant contempt for "Romish superstition," is firmly against the extension of political rights to the Catholic population, being convinced that "No change of times or persons, no heterogeneous commixture of the partisans that lead factions, can authorise or justify an adoption of Catholics into civil Government.... Papists and liberty are contradictions." (Interestingly, the openly Deist Thomas Paine holds that in America, because it has no established church, a Catholic priest or an Episcopalian minister is a good citizen and neighbour.)

Walpole is well aware that however strongly he opposes the theology and politics of the Roman Church, he owes to it the glories of the mediaeval vaulting, stained glass and statuary that he loves. He tells his High Church friend William Cole:

I like Popery as well as you, and have shown I do. I like it as I like chivalry and romance. They all furnish one with ideas and visions, which Presbyterianism does not ... but for the mysterious, the Church in the abstract, it is a jargon that means nothing.

The Middle Ages and Renaissance are Walpole's special delight. Among the greatest treasures at Strawberry Hill are a monk's chair dating from the thirteenth century and the armour of the sixteenth century French King Francis I. Yet however accomplished as a connoisseur of art old and new—he is an early admirer of the pioneer Renaissance painter Masaccio—as a judge of contemporary literature, Walpole, like Johnson, is found wanting. The poets of his own time he most esteems are Robert Jephson, Hannah More, Sir Charles Williams, Erasmus Darwin, William Mason, and Thomas Gray—and in the case of Gray he prefers "The Bard," "The Progress of Poesy" and "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" to "An Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard." However, he recognises the quality

of "The Village" by the young George Crabbe, who "writes lines that one can remember," and conversely makes an acute criticism of Macpherson's *Ossian*, the purported translation of an ancient Gaelic epic: "It tires me to death to read how many ways a warrior is like the moon, or the sun, or a rock, or a lion, or the ocean." He realises that the poems Thomas Chatterton tries to pass off as fifteenth century compositions are his own work and has to defend himself against unfair charges of responsibility for the young man's suicide. While he quickly spots that Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is "a truly classic work," he fails to appreciate most of the major fiction of his time. He finds Fielding's *Tom Jones* vulgar and tasteless, Richardson's enormous epistolary novels "deplorably tedious lamentations," and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* trivial. In Frances Burney's first two novels, he does see merit, but ranks *Evelina* above its much richer successor, *Cecilia*. Regretting the literary poverty of "this our Augustan age," he dismisses "indolent Smollett! trifling Johnson! piddling Goldsmith!" Against Johnson he has a special animus, and, at his most outrageous, writes, "How little will Dr. Johnson be remembered, when confounded with the mass of authors of his own calibre!" When Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* is published, Walpole comments that Johnson is a mixture "of strong sense, of the lowest bigotry and prejudices, of pride, brutality, fretfulness, and vanity; and Boswell is the ape of most of his faults, without a grain of his sense." For once, he shows real insight into Johnson the man when he observes that, "though he was good-natured at bottom, he was very ill-natured at top."

Looking back to the poetry of the earlier part of the century, we find that Walpole admires Pope but dismisses *The Seasons* of James Thomson, though he detects "innumerable fine things" in Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. Further back, he adores Shakespeare, in whom he finds "texts out of the book of nature, in comparison of which," he insists, "the works of all other writers in every language that I understand are to me apocryphal." In Montaigne he can perceive only "the twaddle of a pedant."

Among the Roman poets (he admits he has forgotten the little Greek he ever knew), Walpole prefers *Pharsalia*, Lucan's epic of civil war, to Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which he regrets that the beautiful language is yoked to an absurd plot. He tries to persuade the poet Mason that "Epic poetry is the art of being as long as possible in telling an uninteresting story; and an Epic poem is a mixture of History without truth, and of Romance without imagination"; he adds that in *Paradise Lost* Milton, "all imagination, and a thousand times more sublime and spirited [than Virgil], has produced a monster." However purblind his response to epic, Walpole makes a vigorous counter-attack when Sir John Hawkins tries to put down comedy: "Now I hold a perfect comedy to be the perfection of human composition,

and believe firmly that fifty Iliads and Aeneids could be written sooner than such a character as Falstaff's."

Responding to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Walpole confesses to Lady Ossory, "I am apt to have strong prejudices both when I like and dislike." These prejudices, however, are not all literary. From being "so unfortunate as to love that unfashionable people"—he refers to the Scots—in the mid-seventeen fifties and insisting that his high opinion of them is "formed on fact," he takes to blaming them not only for the Young Pretender's frighteningly real threat to the House of Hanover in 1745 but, largely through Lord Bute's influence on George III, for the disastrous war with the American colonies three decades later. He even traces the influence of Scottish Jacobites back through seven earlier reigns, telling Mann they are "the authors of the present, as they have been of every, civil war,—since the days of Queen Elizabeth." So conscious is he of the obsessive nature of this prejudice that it contributes to his retention of an aging and incompetent Scottish gardener—"I will not be unjust," he determines, "even to that odious nation ... I know how strong my prejudices are, and am always afraid of them." Eventually, after years of sniping at Scottish ministers in English government and nicknaming England Nova Scotia, he welcomes the news that the centenary of the Glorious Revolution that thrust James II and his descendants from power is being celebrated in Scotland. No such leavening relieves his denunciations of the people of France when they murder their King and Queen and mount the Reign of Terror, denunciations which rise to such a pitch that he can write, "I begin to think that our hatred of them is not national prejudice, but natural instinct."

In many of his judgments on religious leaders and ecclesiastics, Walpole shows equal bias. Blindly he declares, "Calvin and Wesley had just the same views as the Pope; power and wealth their objects." The admittedly controversial figure of the Bishop of Derry—the Earl-Bishop he sarcastically calls him, after the cleric inherits the Earldom of Bristol from a brother—earns his opprobrium, apparently because he has been anti-American and favours Catholic emancipation. When his purchase of a London house causes him legal difficulties with Colonel and Ned Bisshop, he refers to his lawsuit "against the Bishops, an odious race whether clerical or laic."

Walpole can make equally black-and-white judgments about individuals. It is impossible to credit his assertion that the statesman George Grenville is "the falsest and most contemptible of mankind" or that in 1773 Lord Mansfield "hopes the Chancellor of France has courage and villainy enough to assist him in enslaving us, as the French Chancellor has enslaved his own country!" Whatever the degree of her complicity in her husband's

murder, Catherine the Great is more than the Catherine Slay-Czar and oppressor of Poland of the letters.

Equally exaggerated are the panegyrics that Walpole lavishes on his idols. He is probably just in crediting his father for two decades of national stability and peace, and he has the grace to admit, "with all the veneration I feel for his memory I never thought him perfect." On a different plane, however, are his claims that Sir Robert was "the best and wisest of men" and "the glory of human nature," that he possessed "the greatest understanding in the world," and that, although he was called "the Father of Corruption," he acted "on one great plan of honesty from the beginning of his life to the end ... and was as incapable of fear as of doing wrong." Perhaps, however, the difficulties of governing should be taken into account in considering the great letter-writer's rhetorical question "Was it a capital crime to bribe those *on sale* to promote the happiness of themselves and others, to bribe them to preserve the constitution and make the commerce of their country flourish?"

Almost as laudatory is his view of his greatest and lifelong friend, his cousin Henry Conway, who appears to be an able soldier and an unusually honourable politician, as brave in the debating chamber as on the battle-field, perhaps even a man "whom nature always designed for a hero of romance," but does he really deserve the apostrophe Walpole addresses to him when the elder William Pitt disappoints many by accepting a pension for himself and a title for his wife: "Oh, my dear Harry! I beg you on my knees, keep your virtue: do let me think there is still one man upon earth who despises money." He lets Conway know that "Mme du Deffand says, I love you better than anything in the world."

Similarly idealised are his estimates of Sir Horace Mann, who never returns from Florence, and Sir Horace's brother Gal, who suffers an early death in 1757, but whose friendship Walpole is able to enjoy for a decade in London. Occasionally, however, he suffers a disillusion. In 1770 he describes Mme de Choiseul, whom he has met in France, as "the most perfect being I know of either sex" and four years later recommends her acquaintance to Conway claiming, "She has more sense and more virtues than almost any human being." A decade further on, he is greatly disappointed by the way she extracts her letters from the deceased Mme du Deffand's papers, which have been bequeathed to him, instead of waiting for him to have them returned, and by her failure to write to him, "though," he says, "she had professed so much friendship for me."

While Walpole is capable of making hair-raising statements about people he abominates, his temperament is predominantly compassionate, and he usually behaves kindly to man, woman, child, and beast. Despite his recent fear at the threat to the House of Hanover, he finds the spectacle

of the Highland leaders of the rebellion on trial and in peril of the headsman's axe "the greatest and most melancholy scene I ever yet saw." Indeed, he shudders whenever he reads of a person awaiting execution, "for it is shocking to reflect that there is a human being at this moment in so deplorable a situation." In old age, he confides to Lady Ossory, "I hate to read or hear of miseries that one knows it is out of one's power to remedy." When he can try to help the wretched by giving to charity or using his influence, he does so—whether it means donating £50 towards potatoes for the poor, contributing to a fund for French prisoners of war, or urging better treatment for injured British soldiers or children doomed to sweep chimneys. He is outraged to learn that the Duke of Northumberland's much disliked steward "has beaten a poor woman that he found gleaning on his field unmercifully," and when the carpenters working at Strawberry Hill strike for higher wages, he asks, "how can one complain? The poor fellows, whose all the labour is, see their masters advance their prices every day, and think it reasonable to touch their share."

Sensitive, too, to emotional suffering, Walpole is repulsed by Lady Isabelle Finch's refusal to present at the Palace an illegitimate female relative. "Lady Bel," he protests, "called it publishing a bastard at Court ... think on the poor girl." (Happily, the prude's niece Lady Charlotte Fermor does present the young woman, who is received by the Royal Family.) When his father, Sir Robert, is raised to the peerage, Horace expresses pity for his humiliated half-sister, who, being born out of wedlock, must have a patent passed before she can take her rank as an earl's daughter.

The dying and their families also excite Walpole's compassion. Finding George Montagu, an intimate friend, and his sisters grieving for the loss of their brother—"in the extremest distress," he says, "I ever saw"—he explains to the Secretary at War, Henry Fox, that he must remain at Windsor to comfort them. When Mrs. Leneve, long a member of his father's household, is near her end, he travels almost daily to London to attend her. Still closer to him is his young niece Maria; he spends his days at her house while her much cherished husband, Earl Waldegrave, is dying at the age of forty-eight.

Walpole is fond of children and is pleased to accommodate the three-year-old daughter of Conway and his wife at Strawberry Hill, along with her nursemaid, while her parents are in Ireland, where Conway is serving as Secretary of State. On a later occasion, he cannot visit Conway because he is playing host to his sister and her sick child. Once, his liking for children leads to an amusing scene. At Ragley, the estate of Conway's brother, the Earl of Hertford, the Rev. Mr. Seward sees Walpole, a man unknown to him, on the floor of a dirt-filled lumber room, then inscribing a

painting, subsequently playing with the children and dogs, and finally, to his astonishment, formally dressed at the dinner table.

Animals, too, arouse his sympathy. He dislikes hunting both as "a persecution of animals" and "an image of war." When there is a panic about mad dogs and the animals are being killed in the London streets amidst fierce controversy, he writes, "the streets are a very picture of the murder of the innocents—one drives over nothing but poor dead dogs! The dear, good-natured, honest, sensible creatures! Christ! how can anybody hurt them?" A new edition of *The Compleat Angler* of Izaak Walton leads him to deny that angling is "so very *innocent* an amusement." He goes on to say, "We cannot live without destroying animals, but shall we torture them for our sport?" and he continues by relating how,

I met a rough officer ... t'other day, who said he knew such a person was turning Methodist; for, in the middle of conversation, he rose, and opened the window to let out a moth. I told him that I did not know that the Methodists had any principle so good, and that I, who am certainly not on the point of becoming one, always did so too.

For all his kindness, Walpole can on occasion display some cruelty, whether activated by indignation, high spirits that get out of hand, or a vein of malice that overcomes his better nature. When Sir Horace Mann's neglectful father complains that his son writes to Walpole but not to him, Walpole's response, "Sir, I write him kind answers; pray do you do so?" elicits a blush and a muttered "Perhaps I have lived too long for him!" "Perhaps," replies Walpole, "you have." Hearing that Lord Bath and Lord Sandys have had their pockets picked, Walpole comments, "I fancy it was no bad scene, the avarice and jealousy of their peeresses on their return." At George Pitt's ball, when Lord and Lady Coventry begin to quarrel publicly over the biblical books attributed to Solomon, he begs the ladies "to take my Lord out and make him dance so continually that the quarrel might not be made up when they went home," and the ladies act accordingly, "delighted with the thought of depriving the Countess of that night's perquisites of her beauty." During a supper party at Paris, he plays an unkind joke on Sir Gilbert Elliot, misinforming the company that this gentleman does a marvellous imitation of William Pitt the Elder's speech. At a bluestocking party, the hostess, Lady Lucan, finds she has made a mistake in inviting both Mrs. Montagu and Dr. Johnson, who form hostile circles at opposite ends of the room. She angrily tells Walpole she will never invite Johnson again. He describes how, "I took her side, and fomented the quarrel, and wished I could have made Dagon and Ashtaroth scold in Coptic."

Despite his faults, Walpole deserves respect for maintaining a high degree of integrity in a corrupt age. Most of his income comes from sinecures given to him by his father. As he makes clear to Grosvenor Bedford, his deputy in the Exchequer, he will not tolerate any pilfering of the public purse. He prides himself on never having asked favours from ministers, even those who were his friends, and, to avoid incurring obligations, he twice rejects an offer of lifetime tenure of the remunerative public post he holds jointly with his brother Sir Edward till the latter's decease in 1784. When Lieutenant-General Conway is deprived of his regiment for voting in Parliament against the legality of general warrants, he ignores a warning that "as a subaltern of the Exchequer" he must defend the Government and instead supports his cousin at some risk of having his income cut off. Later, Conway, restored to royal favour and a full General, is appointed Commander-in-Chief, and Walpole, knowing he will be pressed to solicit favours from him, requests his cousin in advance to grant only those applications which are "perfectly just and reasonable."

In the early years of his absorption in Strawberry Hill, antiquarianism, and Parliament (he says, "Nature, that gave me a statesman's head, forgot to give me ambition"), Walpole has an uneasy relationship with his family. In 1748, he writes to Mann of a nephew, son of his eldest brother, who is travelling to Florence: "I, who am not troubled with partiality to my family, admire him much." He turns against his father's brother when he holds the latter responsible for that nephew's rejection, despite his being free from any other attachment, of a match with the wealthy Margaret Nicholl. That match would, he believes, have "saved Houghton and all our glory!" (That "He had made Houghton much too magnificent for the moderate estate which he left to support it" is one of the rare faults he finds in his father.) Subsequently, he accuses the same relative of depriving Sir Robert's grandchildren of their rightful inheritance, and when the man is ennobled as Baron Wolterton, he informs Mann, "My uncle's ambition and dirt are crowned at last."

Horace Walpole has two older brothers, Robert, the second Lord Orford and father of his nephew, and Edward, later Sir Edward, who has a son and three daughters by a beautiful mistress. In 1751, Robert dies in debt, leaving Horace "much to forgive" and the fear, as he laments, that "Houghton and all the remains of my father's glory will be pulled to pieces!" Robert's estranged wife, and then widow, Lady Orford, figures largely in Walpole's correspondence, first as a figure of fun in Florence, where she consorts with two other learned women, Lady Pomfret and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and then as a kind of vampire sucking up the family wealth, and taking and discarding husbands and lovers while living in Italy totally indifferent to the welfare or existence of her son. The one miti-

gating factor Walpole notes is that she was “forced into our family against her will.”

For some years, Horace is at odds with his brother Edward, quarrelling with him over the disposition of a parliamentary borough and accusing him of unfriendliness and envy: he ends one letter to him, “Yours or not, as you please, HOR. WALPOLE.” Later their relationship softens, and Horace develops much affection for Edward’s three daughters—Laura, Maria, and Charlotte.

Although Walpole is most at home among people of his own class, he has, at least theoretically, egalitarian views, and, in his own words to Lady Ossory, is “not apt to be intoxicated with Royalty.” Even when he is recoiling from the French Revolution, he tells her, “I am not grown a whit more in love with princes and princesses than I ever was … I do not dislike kings, or nobility, or people, but as human creatures that, when possessed of full power, scarce ever fail to abuse it.” Moving in the highest circles, he must comply with conventions that sometimes irritate him. He is always careful to be correct in kissing the hands of royalty, and he is capable of expelling a party with tickets of admission to Strawberry Hill to accommodate the visit of a Polish princess (who never appears). After obeying the command of his friend Princess Amelia, daughter of George II, to attend a party in her honour at Stowe, he returns home and complains to Mme du Deffand that to wait on princes one must be false, submissive, and flattering. Polite and politic hypocrisy is part of the social game: he can write to Pitt the Elder’s nephew of “my real regard to Mr. Grenville,” a politician he abominates, and can pretend that his deliberate failure to answer Lady Craven’s letters is due to ignorance of her address as she travels. He confesses to hating “ceremonious customs” as opposed to heartfelt observances, and applies the term “puppet-show” to George III’s coronation and Lord Chatham’s funeral, neither of which he will attend.

With humbler people who share his antiquarian interests, however, Walpole can be fully at ease. He assures the Yorkshire vicar Henry Zouch that “though, in the common intercourse of the world, rank and birth have their proper distinctions, there is certainly no occasion for them between men whose studies and inclinations are the same.” More surprisingly, so intense is his feeling for Mme du Deffand that when her servant Wiart apologises for presuming to write to him after her death, his response is “that his attachment to his mistress levelled all distinctions.”

Walpole has much satisfaction in never allowing a different kind of obstacle to disrupt his affectionate relationship with his fellow antiquarian William Cole, a High Church clergyman and Tory royalist whose politics are antithetical to his own. “Indeed, our old and unalterable friendship is creditable to us both,” he points out, “and very uncommon between two

persons who differ so much in their opinions relative to Church and State." To oblige his friend, Walpole agrees to write the life of the Rev. Thomas Baker, observing, "he was what you and I are, a party-man from principle, not from interest"; harmony between two people of opposite views is possible, he reasons, "when both are sincere in their opinions, as we are."

Given his lifestyle and temperament, it would have taken a most unusual woman, probably one who shared his passions for antiquarianism and Strawberry Hill, to enter into a happy marriage with Horace Walpole. He does appear to be tempted by a pretty widow and writes to her speaking of himself as her lover: he describes to Montagu how "Prince Edward asked me at the Opera t'other night, when I was to marry Lady Mary Coke: I answered, as soon as I got a regiment." Four days later, he sends the lady a mock proposal supplemented by verses addressed to William Pitt asking for command of "a Troop or Company." But he seems to make it clear that among the ladies he has "two sovereigns"—Lady Mary Coke and the Duchess of Grafton (after her divorce and remarriage, Countess of Upper Ossory). In 1764, he writes to Conway, "I am heartily glad the Duchess of Bedford does not set her heart on marrying me to anybody; I am sure she would bring it about."

It is difficult to tell whether he feels a lack in his life. When Conway and Lady Ailesbury leave their infant daughter at Strawberry Hill in 1752, he sends them news speaking playfully of the child as his wife, and keeps up the whimsy when she is reunited with her parents. Long afterwards, when he spends much time with Lady Browne, his neighbour at Strawberry Hill, he refers to her as "my nominal wife," and writes that they qualify for the Dunmow Flitch, proverbially awarded to a married couple who have lived together in unbroken harmony for twelve months and a day. In his last years, he calls his young friends the Berry sisters his two wives and prettily declares, "I am not less in love with my wife Rachel than with my wife Leah."

Walpole's views on marriage are marked by good sense and kindness. Where there is no serious objection, he favours letting the young have their own way, especially in the case of women, "whose happiness really does depend, for some time at least, on the accomplishment of their wishes." He is glad to receive felicitations on a nephew's match that is "suitable enough in age, rank, fortune, and good nature," and considers an adequate income, but not great wealth, as one of the elements usually requisite to marital success. His great-niece Lady Maria Waldegrave earns his commendation for breaking off her engagement with the handsome and exceedingly rich Lord Egremont when that love-smitten man proves to be "a most worthless young fellow ... weak and irresolute."

Walpole dislikes elopements but does not regard them all with equal severity. When Lady Susan Fox-Strangways, Lord Ilchester's daughter, does not scruple to break a solemn promise and run off with the actor William O'Brien, his sympathy is with the father: he exclaims, "I could not have believed that Lady Susan would have stooped so low." A few months later, he hears that the plain Lady Harriot, youngest sister of Lord Rockingham, "has stooped even lower than a theartic swain, and married her footman," and is intrigued to hear that she "has mixed a wonderful degree of prudence with her potion" by settling a hundred pounds per annum on her bridegroom and entailing her fortune on their children, or, in the absence of children, on her own family. His reaction to the runaway marriage of his great-niece Laura Keppel with George Fitzroy, heir of Baron Southampton, is that "For such an exploit her choice is not a very bad one," but he cannot altogether blame the irreconcilable Lady Southampton, who has thirteen other children and wanted a fortune for her son. He is distinctly happier when he can report in the similar case of his half-sister's admirable but penniless daughter Sophia, "the father, who is good-natured, has at last given his consent." When another of his great-nieces, Lady Maria Waldegrave, and the Duke of Grafton's son Lord Euston, both of whom he has advised to the contrary, marry against the Duke's wishes, he comments next day, "I am not fond of matches where any proper consent is wanting," but the deed being done, he hopes Lady Ossory and her mother will not condemn the couple. On his part, "it was no effort to exchange prudence for kind wishes." The bride has been the victim of "absurd stories" spread by women who "are hags of high rank; they bestow Sunday mornings on church, and the rest of the year on scandal, malice, envy, and lies of their neighbours." Thirteen months after the marriage, the Duke, who has continued his son's allowance, recognizes his daughter-in-law's merit.

Sometimes Walpole realises that his judgment about the prospects of a marriage has been wrong. When his half-sister accepts a proposal from the soldier Charles Churchill, he describes it to Mann as "a foolish match" (both are illegitimate and neither is rich), but the two prosper, and he remains on excellent terms with them both, and on the death of his nephew Lord Malpas, he remarks on the widow's grief, "As his father's profusion called for his restoring the estate, we lamented this match; but it proved a blessing."

(III) THE LATER YEARS

The man who enters on a strange friendship with Mme du Deffand is diligently curious in matters antiquarian; devoted to his little Gothic castle;

highly selective in his appreciation of literature; implacably hostile to absolute power; humane and just in his opposition to aggressive war and imperial conquest; incapable of comprehending profoundly religious minds; conservative in his belief in the social usefulness of Christianity; intolerant of Roman Catholicism and the Scots; upright in money matters; prejudiced in many of his personal judgments; at loggerheads with some relatives and protective of others.

After he returns from France in the spring of 1766, two new topics become prominent in Walpole's letters — the marriage of a favourite niece and the quarrel between Britain and America. His much-cherished niece Maria, widow of Lord Waldegrave, who has left her with three daughters, catches the eye of the Duke of Gloucester, a favourite brother of George III. Walpole advises her against the connection. In September 1766, however, they secretly marry, but then appear to the world to be living together unwed. More than five years later, Maria's father, Sir Edward, reveals the secret to Horace, who replies:

Though entirely out of the secret of the match, I never doubted it, from the long conviction I have had of Lady Waldegrave's strict virtue and many excellent qualities.... For her sake I did not approve the connection; for my own I could take no part in it, without being sure of the marriage.... Your daughter, I think, has too nice a sense of honour herself to blame me.

He immediately writes also to Maria. Nineteen months afterwards, he suspects, as he warns Mason, that his correspondence is being opened in transit on account of his niece's "relation to Royalty."

Unfortunately for all concerned, another brother of the King, the young Duke of Cumberland, has also married surreptitiously. Walpole describes his bride as a coquette "artful as Cleopatra." The King is furious. Feeling that he must treat both brothers in the same way, he forbids them the court.

Gingerly, Walpole establishes correct, even cordial relations with the Duke of Gloucester and advises him, at his request, on the best way to seek a reconciliation with the King. Suffering from weak health, and several times in danger of his life, the Duke finds refuge from the English winter in Italy. In mid-1777, he seems once again on the verge of expiring. His estrangement from his brother has preyed on his mind, and, when he rallies, Walpole reports to Lady Ossory, "The Duke of Gloucester is risen from the dead.... Probably a kind message from the King by Colonel Jennings wrought the miracle." The Duke relapses, but after the King has sent "a most kind and brotherly letter" saying that "his affection never had al-

tered, never should," he recovers once more. By mid-1780, Walpole can inform Mann that both the errant Dukes are reconciled with the monarch, though he does not receive their wives.

The end of Walpole's relationship with the Gloucesters is less happy. For a long time he remains their friend, and he is involved in the engagements and marriages of his niece's Waldegrave daughters while reflecting that he is one "whose plan it certainly never was to be included in any royal drama. It was one of Fortune's caprices, who loves to throw her vanities into the lap of one who never stirred an inch to seek or meet them." However, in 1791, he learns that the Duke is betraying his niece with the society lady Mrs. Buller, of whom he writes, "I huffed her ... for her bad taste in sending for *double Glo'ster cheese* in an evening and vowed I will never enter her doors, if smelling of it." In future, he visits with the Duchess but not her husband.

While Walpole is still in France, Parliament takes an—alas, temporary—step backwards from imposing taxes on the American colonies, which have no representation at Westminster. As mutual hostility increases, a scruple about aiding merchants who deal in slaves briefly troubles him, but he soon decides, like many fellow countrymen, that the Americans' cause is just. Confronted with an administration that backs George III's assertion of his rights over the inflamed colonies and a quiescent opposition, Walpole sees a people and a parliament riding blindly towards their own destruction, and decides, after war breaks out, that the Americans are the real English and are fighting for the rights of Britons too. England, moreover, is pouring men and money into a distant war, destroying her own trade with her colonies, and tempting France and Spain to intervene—the French may invade—and complete her ruin. He entertains French visitors at his celebrated castle and quips that he does so "that they may not burn poor Strawberry."

As the two sides win and lose battles, Walpole foresees that his island home will complete a cycle: having grown under the leadership of Pitt, now Lord Chatham, who opposes the war with America, into a great empire, it will relapse into "an insignificant solitude under a Bashaw." Moreover, its culture is etiolated—few new books are worth reading, few new plays worth seeing. The rage is for ruinous, deep gambling and newspapers full of "personal scurrilities ... especially on young and handsome women." In 1779, he is sure his country's greatness "was buried last year, with Lord Chatham"; his consolation is that "Liberty has still a continent to exist in." The future will be in the Americas, where nature will provide exotic sights for poets and a new Thucydides, a new Virgil, a new Newton may arise. He insists also that the colonists "are as much my countrymen as those born in

the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields; and, when my countrymen quarrel, I think I am free to wish better to the sufferers than to the aggressors."

In November 1781, when reports reach the mother country that Cornwallis has surrendered at Yorktown, as Burgoyne did at Saratoga in 1777, Walpole is torn between rejoicing that the bloodshed and vain expense will end and shame at his nation's humiliation. "When," he asks, "did England see two whole armies lay down their arms and surrender themselves prisoners?" In his subsequent letters before the Peace Treaty is signed, there is a dizzying alternation between antithetical pronouncements: Britain is irretrievably ruined; Britain may possibly revive. On the one hand, his nation seems to be a losing player that has gambled away both the prosperity it enjoyed under his father and the imperial glory it gained under Pitt. On the other, his hope intermittently returns that the Court's politicians, who are leading the country towards royal despotism, will be overthrown by the Opposition Whigs, if only their two factions, led by Lord Rockingham and Lord Shelburne, can avoid a fatal rupture. The Whigs' first Prime Minister, Lord Rockingham, dies suddenly in office, and Walpole's fears reawaken. Shelburne succeeds, and his behaviour is "improper in every light," but he supports the peace. The terms, which allow Britain to keep Gibraltar, are better than Walpole has for several years thought attainable, yet many in Britain are discontented. Shelburne's government is defeated by his opponents. "The triumphant party," Mann is informed, "declare for adherence to the Peace, though they condemn it."

In 1773, the year of the Boston Tea Party, another family affliction strikes. Walpole learns that his nephew Lord Orford is overtaken by insanity. In subsequent letters, he describes how, while Lady Orford remains in Italy indifferent to her son's plight, he withdraws from all the delights of his connoisseurship and antiquarianism to exhaust himself in caring for the forty-two-year-old wastrel. Accounts of the latter's sullen silences, furious rages, suicide attempts, and intermittent failures to recognize his familiars mingle with expressions of Walpole's bewilderment as he deals with the debt-ridden estate of the incapacitated prodigal. "Think of me," he appeals to Lady Ossory, "putting queries to lawyers, up to the ears in mortgages, wills, settlements, and contingent remainders." At the same time, as he explains to Mann, he is most concerned "to watch over my Lord's person and to take care that every attention of humanity and tenderness be paid to him, and that his unfortunate life may be made as comfortable as possible." Compelled to sell his horses and dogs, he worries how his nephew will react if he regains his senses. Meanwhile, Horace and his brother Sir Edward, who shows some concern but will never leave his house, refuse "the horrid extremity of taking out a commission of lunacy": as well as the possible loss of his government places, "Compassion, humanity, tenderness, pride,

hope, all make us dread such a step." While Walpole tends his nephew, his beloved dog Rosette, who has accompanied him on travels to English mansions and to Paris, takes fatally ill, and he declares to Lady Ossory, "In truth, I know nothing, think of nothing but my poor nephew's affairs and Rosette." After about a year, Lord Orford regains his senses to the surprise of his physicians, who now expect him to recover completely and order his release. Walpole is relieved to hear him say "that he is convinced all that has been done is right; that it is what he wished done, but could not undertake," and to be able to return to the pleasures of Strawberry Hill. Later Lord Orford goes back to his disreputable companions, and his uncle informs Mann, "My late ward has fairly washed his hands of me on some very necessary remonstrances on his health and affairs."

For the next three years, Walpole lives in dread of "an express from Norfolk," and in April 1777 the message comes. He hastens back to find the younger man, as he notifies Sir Edward, living in a parsonage "of lath and plaster" with "low wretches" and forty-year-old Mrs. Turk, "red-faced, and with black teeth ... with whom he has lived these twenty years." After dark, Walpole is compelled to retreat to an inn, for "The single chamber without a bed is a parlour seven feet high, directly under my Lord's bed-chamber, without shutters, and so smoky that there is no sitting in it, unless the door is open." Seeking relief from attending, along with two doctors, the sometimes suicidal patient, he meets the antiquary William Cole for dinner at Cambridge. Afterwards he writes to him, "the beauty of King's College Chapel, now it is restored, penetrated me with a visionary longing to be a monk in it," but then reflects, "I hope doing one's duty is the best preparation for death." This time he resolutely refuses to have anything to do with his nephew's business affairs, despite a request from Mr. Sharpe, the British lawyer of the perennially suspicious Lady Orford. In a letter to Mann, he asserts, "I have a little too much spirit to bear being distrusted, then accused, and still applied to." By June, he has largely returned to his normal life, and in March 1778 there comes a report that Lord Orford has again recovered. Walpole believes, however, that his nephew never completely regains his sanity. A piece of evidence he cites is the way the man marches his county militia to Norwich only to "write in the orderly book there, that if the French should land on any part of the coast, the magistrates were to burn the suburbs of that city, which would then be impregnable." If he has recovered, he has recovered only to commit what is in Walpole's eyes the worst crime he could commit against the family: he sells the glory of the family, Sir Robert's great collection of old masters, which are bought by Catherine II of Russia. "Well! adieu to Houghton!" is Walpole's cry to Mann; "about its mad master I shall never trouble myself more." However, twelve years later he can still say that "if ever I had merit

in any part of my life, it has been in my care of Lord Orford." In 1781, when Lady Orford dies, Walpole forwards a copy of her will to her son, and comments to Mann, "My Lord has now and then a just thought: but his infamous crew divert him from pursuing it." Lord Orford's return for all the devotion Walpole has shown him is to send him a box of plover's eggs once a year — "the only notice," he observes, "he ever takes of me."

Lady Orford has left a large part of her estate, which includes plate and jewels of doubtful ownership she took from England, to her Italian lover, Cavaliere Mozzi. Lord Orford disputes the will but, instead of going to law, seeks mediation and asks Walpole to serve as one of the referees. The latter informs Mann that he agreed to do so "provided I were allowed to act handsomely and like a gentleman, and not like a lawyer." The negotiations involve four referees and two lawyers and encounter delays due to illnesses and a suicide, but after three years there is an agreement. The details are reported week by week to Mann, who gets in touch with Mozzi. A happy result of Walpole's labours is his stumbling across a letter from his nephew to Lady Orford attributing the great improvement of both their estates to his care. "This," he admits, "is a satisfaction I never expected to see under his hand."

At one point Walpole predicts that should he unexpectedly outlive his nephew, his determination not to see Mozzi unfairly treated will have led that nephew to disinherit him, though he professes not to care. When a settlement is reached without entirely contenting either party, Walpole, to his surprise, receives from Lord Orford a letter of thanks followed seven months later by £4,000 left him by his father but withheld for forty years.

At the beginning of December 1782, Walpole is temporarily incapable of negotiating because of an attack of gout. Although he has relied on a temperate lifestyle to protect him from this hereditary disease, as he grows older it afflicts him with increasing frequency and severity. From the summer of 1760 onwards, it is a recurrent topic in his letters, and in 1770, in the sixth week of suffering, he writes to Montagu, "The gate of painful age seems open to me, and I must travel through it as I may!" Sometimes the pain pins him to his bed or couch; often it makes holding a pen impossible so that he has to dictate his letters. At its worst, it delivers him over to spells of agony and deprives him of sleep. He describes how, "I am still lifted out of bed by two servants; and by their help travel from my bedchamber down to the couch in my Blue Room." "For eight days," he wails to Mann, "I underwent the humiliation of being fed." By February 1779, he fears the next attack may bring permanent confinement.

When his friends suffer from the same affliction, as many of them do, he ardently recommends the bootikins he wears overnight on his hands and feet as a means of reducing the length and frequency of visitations.

Occasionally the pain is mild, but when his friend Lady Blandford playfully congratulates him on having the disease, he protests, "If I could wish her any harm it should be that she might feel for one quarter of an hour a taste of the mortifications that I suffered from eleven last night till four this morning, and I am sure she would never dare to have a spark of courage again." Ten months later, however, in the middle of another attack, he confesses, "I should be ashamed of complaining with such an exemplar of fortitude hard by, as my poor old friend, Lady Blandford." This woman, so tormented for nearly three weeks by a bowel disease that she wanted to die, "would take nothing to assist nature" but only begged for laudanum. Walpole consoles himself for his agonies—he can write of "the red-hot bars of the gridiron on which I lie"—with a belief that gout protects one from other ailments and the thought of his good fortune in having servants and luxuries denied to the majority: "so much a bitterer cup," he admits, "is brewed for men as good as myself in every quarter of the globe!... I reflect on the million of my fellow creatures that have no one happiness, no one comfort!"—moreover, for the few who enjoy such privileges as his, "chance, not merit, drew the prize out of the wheel."

Age and disease can attack nerves as well as flesh: Walpole complains to Lady Ossory that "the clapping of a door makes me quiver like a poplar." Yet for all his weakness he can rise to an occasion. In June 1780, mobs incited by Lord George Gordon's fanatical hostility to Catholicism take possession of the London streets, plunder, kill, burn buildings, and besiege the Houses of Parliament, and it takes the authorities several days to regain control with the aid of soldiers. Walpole, too worried about friends and relatives to remain in safety at Strawberry Hill, sends first-hand accounts of the outrages to Mann and Lady Ossory. During the anarchy, he hastens from friend to friend, bringing news and comfort to the Duchess of Beaufort, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, Conway and Lady Ailesbury, and Conway's brother and sister-in-law, the Earl and Countess of Hertford. On the seventh he writes, "I ... am heartily tired with so many expeditions, for which I little imagined I had youth enough left." After two more days, he announces, "I have certainly been on my feet longer these last eight-and-forty hours than in forty days before." Back at Strawberry Hill, he reports to Mason:

I went to town on Wednesday, and though the night was the most horrible I ever beheld, I would not take millions not to have been present; and should I have seen the conflagration as I must from these windows, I should have been distracted for my friends.

At nine at night, on notice of fire, I went with the Duchess and her daughters to the top of Gloucester House, and thence beheld the King's Bench, which was a little town, and at a distance the New Prison in flames.... Yesterday was some slaughter in Fleet-street by the Horse-Guards, and more in St. George's Fields by the Protestant Association, who fell on the rioters, who appear to have been chiefly apprentices, convicts, and all kinds of desperadoes; for Popery is already out of the question, and plunder all the object. They have exacted sums from many houses to avoid being burnt as Popish.

Eleven years later, some of his stamina has survived, for he visits Windsor Castle, one of his great enthusiasms, with Conway and is able to stand for two and a half hours, and in 1795, two years before his death, he faces a severe ordeal when Queen Charlotte brings seven princesses and the Duchess of York to Strawberry Hill. He wears a sword and is afraid he may fall. A few days after the visit, he writes to Conway, "I am not dead of fatigue with my Royal visitors, as I expected to be, though I was on my poor lame feet three whole hours."

In his old age, Walpole still finds himself constrained by the painful demands of court etiquette, notwithstanding the transformation of England that he tells the expatriate Mann in 1775 has taken place in the forty years since the latter's departure. Because his letters refer to many of the changes in life and society, they contribute to social as well as political history. They comment on the modern invention of good roads; the swelling population and novel degree of traffic congestion in London; the inflation raising the prices of books, prints, paintings, coins, and antiquities, as well as the cost of engraving; the fashions for pyramids of feathers on ladies' headdresses; the extravagance and especially the heavy gaming impoverishing members of the aristocracy and driving some into exile; the rage for pleasure distracting a nation at war from its danger; the campaigns of the bishops against masquerades and adultery; and the great increase in robberies, probably aggravated by moral corruption spreading downwards from the upper class.

The demands of royalty and the need to care for the mad Lord Orford are not the only obstacles Walpole faces to the fulfilling of his dream of a tranquil old age at Strawberry Hill. A letter to Mann in 1777 speaks of the keeping of late hours now customary in society—dinner not served till close to 6 p.m. and the evening starting at 10 p.m., so that "If one does not conform, one must live alone; and that is more disagreeable and more difficult in town than in the country." The same letter discloses his discovery that the dampness at Twickenham is liable to bring on his gout, which drives him back to the dryer atmosphere of London.

At the beginning of 1779, Walpole writes to Lady Ossory of his flight, while still ill, from the city house in Arlington Street his father left him to Strawberry Hill. He complains that while enduring a scarcity of visitors in the capital, "I had no books or papers, or dogs or cats to amuse me." At this time, he has begun to negotiate the purchase of a house in Berkeley Square that he can make into a London home. The transaction is completed in August. He has his new dwelling "painted and papered" to his taste and exults, "I would not change my two pretty mansions for any in England." On returning there from Twickenham, he exclaims about his new residence, "It is so cheerful, that when I came back, I thought even Strawberry less brilliant than it was wont to be—am not I an old simpleton with a young wife!"

Among the afflictions of old age is what Walpole calls "the heavy tax one pays for living long." In 1776, the death of John Chute, who became his friend in Italy, draws from him the tribute that their principles, tastes, and memories were so completely shared that Chute was his "other self." Four years later, George Montagu, an intimate since their schooldays, completes his withdrawal into a solitary, incommunicative life; Walpole has written to him in 1764, "I cannot, as you do, bring myself to be content without variety, without events." The loss of Princess Amelia in October 1786 is followed, before the end of the year, by the death of Sir Horace Mann, still at Florence, leaving Lady Ossory as his principal epistolary confidante. Seventeen ninety-one robs him of the wit George Selwyn and his Twickenham neighbour Lord Strafford. Worst of all must be his discovery in July 1795 that he has outlived his beloved Henry Conway, who reached the rank of Field Marshal.

Difficulty in making young friends aggravates what Walpole suffers from the loss of his contemporaries. As early as 1761, when he is not quite forty-four, he begins to grieve that he has outlived the world that he knows, and in 1766 he declares, "When I reflect on how prodigious a quantity of events I have been witness to or engaged in, my life seems equal to Methusaleh's." Unlike Bertrand Russell, who, in his helpful little essay "How to Grow Old" advises against "undue absorption in the past" and urges, "One's thoughts must be directed to the future, and to things about which there is something to be done," Walpole admits that he cannot share the interests of the young or make them his companions. When his nieces come and talk about the current competition to be maids of honour, he confesses to Conway, "I cannot attend to what concerns them—Not that their trifles are less important than those of one's own time ... I, that was so impatient at all their chat, the moment they were gone, flew to my Lady Suffolk, and heard her talk with great satisfaction of the late Queen's coronation-petticoat."

Though incapable of intimacy with his young relatives, Walpole, who dutifully attends family functions, is not debarred from a lesser friendship with some of them. When his niece the Duchess of Gloucester goes with the ailing Duke to Italy, she leaves behind her three teenage daughters by her first husband, Lord Waldegrave, and asks Walpole to take a part in their care. Although "They can only think and talk of what is, or is to come," he admits, "I do love my nieces, nay like them," and he finds pleasure in giving pleasure to these obviously delightful young ladies. His letters include accounts of going boating with them on the Thames, holding an elaborate fête for them at Strawberry Hill, and driving them round London to show them the night-time illuminations. A few years later, he concludes:

I believe my nieces love me as much as they can love an old obsolete uncle, for I am always in good humour with them and never preach; but I do not wonder that they do not run to me with their histories, who never interfere in them, nor give my advice unless they ask it.

Walpole, much concerned with what people think of him, has a great fear of being laughed at. He has "always had a horror for juvenile antiquity" and discloses to Lady Ossory:

I am strangely afraid of being too young of my age. If everybody was an hundred, and I was only ninety, I would play at marbles, if I liked it, because my seniors would say, *That poor young creature!* but the sound of *That old fool!* is too dreadful.

When faro, once his favourite card game, is revived, he reports, "I have played but thrice, and not all night, as I used to do; it is not decent to end where one began, nor to sit up with a generation by two descents my juniors." By 1782, he has resolved to stop travelling, saying, "I have not philosophy enough to stand stranger servants staring at my broken fingers at dinner," and three years later when he goes to the theatre he does so only reluctantly with the comment, "I do not like exhibiting my antiquity in public: it looks as if I forgot it." Yet in 1781, he sets his fears aside long enough to join in the dancing at Hertford's house, to which he takes his Waldegrave great-nieces. "Oh! my Lady, my Lady," the Countess of Ossory reads, "what will you say, when the next thing you hear of me after my last letter is, that I have danced three country-dances with a whole set, forty years younger than myself." He confides to Conway:

I am continually tempted to retire entirely; and should, if I did not see how very unfit English tempers are for living quite out of the world. We grow abominable peevish and severe on others, if we are not constantly rubbed against and polished by them.

He has not forgotten the wisdom of his earlier warning to Montagu, “We are not made for solitude.”

Walpole’s last years would be bleak indeed were it not for the birth of a friendship as incongruous and as ardent as that with Mme du Deffand. After sadly reiterating for seventeen years that he cannot form close friendships with the young since the gap between their interests and his is unbridgeable, chance brings him in 1788 an unforeseeable companionship with two handsome, serious-minded women in their mid-twenties, the Misses Berry, who are not interested in cards or scandal. The elder sister, Mary, knows French and Latin; the younger, Agnes, has a gift for drawing. After the death of their mother, their father refused his rich maternal uncle’s demand that he remarry and try to beget a male heir. The result is that the uncle has disinherited him in favour of his younger brother, who makes him a small allowance of eight hundred pounds a year.

Walpole describes the sisters as “two charming beings, whom everybody likes and approves, and who yet can be pleased with the company and conversation and old stories of a Methusalem.” He likes to call them his wives, and assures them that while to be in love with one would be a cause of shame, to be in love with both is innocent. To compensate for the wrong that has been done them, he decides to make over to the family Little Strawberry Hill, a house that he let to his late friend the actress Mrs. Clive and dubbed Cliveden. The Duchess of Gloucester praises this act of “justice to injured merit.” Walpole’s devotion to the sisters is such that he can prefer staying at home and “conversing” with them by writing a letter to going out into company. When they are away in Yorkshire, he is ready to share them, saying, “Of all your visits ... I grudge the least that to your grandmother and aunt, as I can judge how happy you make them.” Whenever the family is travelling, he is torn between his longing for their return and guilt at any feeling he is constraining them.

In his letters to the Berrys, Walpole writes of his social and family engagements, of local news, and of new books; he introduces as intimate a matter as the Duke of Gloucester’s infidelity; he includes political news for Robert, the sisters’ father; and for all three he sends the latest intelligence of the tumultuous events in France, where the Revolution erupts in the summer of 1789. When Robert decides he must take his daughters to Italy for their health, Walpole is in terror at the prospect of their facing the perils of winter storms on the English Channel and unpredictable dangers in rev-

olutionary France. At one point, he feels the sisters are more his children than his wives.

When Walpole has just returned to England after first meeting Mme du Deffand, he writes to her that he is glad he left Paris in time to avoid the horror of the crowd's clapping at the execution of the shamefully treated defeated general the Comte de Lally. The French, he asserts, are crueler than the English. He must remember this barbarity when he recoils from the outrages of the French Revolution.

In the early years of Louis XVI's reign, Walpole is pleased by his encouragement of liberal reforms, though these are liable to be thwarted by a *Parlement* dedicated to preserving the privileges of the aristocracy and higher clergy. As the years pass, the threat of revolution grows, and when the mob storms the Bastille—a prison he has always hated to drive by, "knowing the miseries it contained"—he writes, "I adore liberty, but I would bestow it as honestly as I could; and a civil war, besides being a game of chance, is paying a very dear price for it." Even before the publication of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in November 1790, he predicts that the uprising will issue in rule by an emperor and laments that the cause of liberty will suffer an enduring setback. He perceptively blames the National Assembly for not drawing on experience to design a sound constitution, which the King would certainly have accepted, but instead relying on abstract theory and trying to "new-model the world with metaphysical compasses." He concedes to a correspondent, when discussing the belief that all men are equal, "We are all born so, no doubt, abstractedly; and physically capable of being kept so, were it possible to establish a perfect government, and give the same education to all men." Admiring both the language and the content of Burke's *Reflections*, he advises Mary Berry, "the whole is wise, though in some points he goes too far." To Lady Ossory, he writes, "Mr. Burke, with Solomon's seal, has put the evil spirits to flight ... though his talisman, I confess, will remain and be serviceable to Pharaoh's priests here-after." Disappointingly, when the first part of *The Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine's answer to Burke, appears in 1791, Walpole is less discriminating and ferociously denounces its entire argument failing to see the possibility that neither writer is entirely right nor entirely wrong.

Massacres multiply and upper class and clerical exiles stream into Britain. As the guillotine does its grisly work, Walpole confesses to Conway that "their horrific proceedings ... have given me what I call the French disease; that is, a barbarity that I abhor, for I cannot help wishing destruction to thousands of human creatures whom I never saw." Both the French atrocities and the indignation and anger that overcome Walpole make for some painful reading. He alternates between finding a unique cruelty in the French people that has been loosed in past times as well as at present

and deciding that human nature is more deeply depraved than he could ever have imagined. Although he repeatedly acknowledges that France had an appalling government, he has to be hard pressed by the more temperate Lady Ossory before he will admit "*How long* the French remained in the right at the beginning of the Revolution, may be a question." A little earlier, he has told her, "though I detest tyranny, I never should have ventured to act against it at the expense of blood.... Sure I am that the electors of the *États* gave them (and who but the whole nation could give?) no authority to shed a drop!" Very reasonably, he contrasts both the American Revolution and the recent Polish Revolution, which have produced balanced constitutions, with the bloodstained uprising in France. However, one of Walpole's *bêtes noires*, Catherine of Russia, quickly swept away the Polish regime; he wishes that she, instead of Marie Antoinette, could have been Queen of France: far fewer French would have been killed under her tyranny, while Poland would have remained free.

In August 1792, when it has become clear that an invasion by the Duke of Brunswick is not prospering and is unlikely to save the French Royal Family, Walpole declares, "But of all their barbarities the most inhuman has been their *not* putting the poor wretched King and Queen to death three years ago!... Louis and his Queen have suffered daily deaths in apprehension for themselves and their children." Thinking of their earlier monarchs and recognizing that no one should be entrusted with absolute power, Walpole finds causes of the French people's fall into savagery in their "servility and gross adulation" that "persuaded their kings that they were all-wise and omnipotent" as well as "their known vanity and insolence, which grew from Europe aping their trifling fashions, manners, and language." Rightly, he several times observes that Louis XVI, unlike his grandfather Louis XV and his contemporary Joseph II of Austria, is no tyrant, but one of the mildest of French kings. Ironically, he here agrees with Paine, who judges Louis XVI as being a far better person than most kings and "a man of a good heart." Did Walpole ever know that Paine argued against his execution and nearly went to the guillotine for doing so? When Louis is finally put to death in 1793, Walpole is further horrified by the National Assembly's simultaneous proclamation of atheism. Again, Paine and he agree: Paine wrote his attack on the Bible, *The Age of Reason*, as a defence of Deism when "the people of France were running headlong into atheism" and had it translated in the hope of stemming this disaster. Walpole is amazed when France can still field successful armies against many foreign enemies of the Revolution after much internal devastation and with "the extirpation of the usual root of enthusiasm, religion."

Louis' execution is followed nine months later by that of Marie Antoinette, who has been treated with great cruelty. Learning of her brave

and dignified deportment at her trial, Walpole, who has defended the beheading of his own country's Charles I, becomes obsessed with her fate and writes of her in his letters as though she were a saint and the noblest of all martyrs. "The last days of that unparalleled Princess," he claims, "were so superior to any death exhibited or recorded," and he asks, "What hero, philosopher, or martyr had equal possession of himself in similar moments?" and answers, "None, none, not one!" Ignoring her past follies and the youthful extravagance that even her mother, Maria Theresa, warned her against, he will concede no more than that "She herself as a mortal, might to God have accused herself of past errors, but I think no one else has a right to tax her with errors, which no man now can substantiate." Sadly, he discloses to Mary Berry, "I cannot open a French book, as it would keep alive ideas that I want to banish from my thoughts." He has long tired of the French exiles, finding that they stupidly imagine that foreign invasions of France will restore the old regime and they will return home. Seven months after Marie Antoinette's execution, he draws up a proposal to have the incomparable value of the tripartite institution of Monarch, Lords and Commons universally taught in all educational institutions, but "without punishments annexed," so that all would come to love this constitution and become immune to "monarchic or republican doctrines."

In November 1791, when Walpole is already shaken by the French abandonment of civilized constraint, he is jolted by news that his nephew has had a third attack of insanity together with a fever; the report comes from Lord Cadogan as Lord Orford's companions and servants have not notified his steward, his lawyer, or his uncle. Less than two weeks later, on 5 December, the third Lord Orford is dead, and Horace Walpole is his successor. He believes that had his nephew been committed to his care, he would have lived.

Walpole, now the fourth Lord Orford, finds himself in possession of his father's Norfolk estate and compelled to spend long hours on business he is ill fitted to understand in order to deal with its tangled affairs. "I, who could never learn the multiplication table," he complains, "was not intended to transact leases, direct repairs of farmhouses, settle fines for church lands, negotiate for lowering interest on mortgages, &c." The stress brings on a few weeks of illness. His letters of this period mingle denunciations of the French Revolution; complaints about the burden of the estate, which is robbing him of his peace; discussions with the Berrys about their friendship (briefly troubled by a slur in a newspaper charging the Berrys with a mercenary motive); and literary matters.

In order to reduce the pressure on him, Walpole renounces everything he could contest and tolerates "the vast injustice" he has suffered by the actions of lawyers. With his old prudence, he refrains from drawing on

the estate as long as he is not certain that it has enriched him. He is especially determined to protect his existing fortune and, as soon as possible, to wrest back his way of life from a plague of business correspondence and meetings with lawyers. At one point, however, he has the pleasure of informing Conway how he has tried to protect his tenants from an avaricious clergyman who oppresses them over his tithes. "I took up the character of parson myself," he boasts, "and preached to him as pastor of a flock which it did not become him to lead into the paths of law, instead of those of peace." Yet in spite of the harassment that disrupts his life and his earlier claim that he does not care how his nephew disposes of the estate, he writes to Lady Ossory:

He has given me the whole Norfolk estate, heavily charged, I believe, but that is indifferent. I had reason to think that he had disgraced, by totally omitting me—but unhappy as his intellects often were, and beset as he was by miscreants, he has restored me to my birthright, and I shall call myself obliged to him, and be grateful to his memory.

A little less than six weeks after this expression of gratitude, he is able to inform the same lady he has found that his nephew "had principles" but that his rogue companions had exploited his "having never been sound in his senses" to try to persuade him that that uncle intended to subject him to the very fate he had worked so hard to save him from, namely confinement, and to make disinheritance his revenge. Worse still, he learns, "under pretence of removing him from the reach of my talons, they hurried him, in the height of a putrid fever, to Houghton, though he complained and begged to stop on the road," but he does not "suspect them of killing him intentionally, which was not their interest."

His new title of Lord Orford, which is all he would have inherited had his nephew withheld the estate, is only a burden, and he peremptorily rejects Lady Ossory's plea that he take his seat in the House of Lords. "I am never called *My Lord*," he assures her, "but I fancy I have got a bunch on my back." He would have preferred to remain what he had been "for above forty years, a burgess of Twickenham."

Walpole lives long enough to be aware of French victories in northern Italy in 1796 and the looting of Italian art, but he does not recognize that the triumphant general, Napoleon Bonaparte, is to be the emperor he predicted six years before. On 4 January 1797, when he tells Lady Ossory that, though free of pain, "walk again I never shall," he adds, "I may last a little longer—if to see France humbled, I shall be glad." Two months later he dies, leaving his works to be edited by Mary Berry.

(IV) THE LETTERS' EXCELLENCES

The letters of Horace Walpole, which deal with so many weighty as well as lighter matters, are shot through with strokes of wit—both his own and those of other people that he loves to report; they are enriched by his appetite for anecdotes and his power to evoke a scene; and they bring into view a multitude of characters. His wit sometimes serves as an instrument of criticism. Lamenting the recent craze for whist, then called whisk, he alludes to chapter seventeen of Revelation as he adjures Mann, “But do you conceive that the kingdom of the Dull is come upon earth … the only token of this new kingdom is a woman riding on a beast, which is the mother of abominations, and the name in the forehead is *whist*: and the four-and-twenty elders, and the women, and the whole town, do nothing but play with this beast.” In December 1774, “all North America is in a flame” and any measures taken by British politicians “will be new barrels of oil.”

Walpole likes to invest contemporaries with the names of appropriate characters from the Greco-Roman and biblical worlds. Catherine the Great, on seizing the Russian throne, becomes “This northern Athaliah,” and George III, facing Wilkes’s attack on royal power, is Xerxes. In a more amiable mood, Walpole scolds his ardently devout friend Hannah More, a campaigner against slavery, for not circulating her poem “Bonner’s Ghost”:

Madame Hannah, You are an errant reprobate, and grow
wickeder and wickeder every day. You deserve to be treated like
a *negre*; and your favourite Sunday, to which you are so partial,
that you treat the other poor six days of the week as if they had
no souls to be saved, should, if I could have my will, ‘shine no
Sabbath-day for you.’

Walpole enjoys embroidering his humour with invented words. He speaks of his “Antiquarianility” and of looking forward to being “teadrunk-with’d.” After mentioning his dying dog Rosette to Lady Ossory, he breaks off with “However, you have so little dogmanity, that I will say no more about her.” On the border of wit and poetry, he writes of the English landscape blossoming in a summer such as he never remembers, “It is Italy in a green gown.”

There can be occasions when, as Walpole states to the artist Richard Bentley, “The times produce nothing: there is neither party, nor controversy, nor gallantry, nor fashion, nor literature.” Then, as Gray notes, although he has little love for letters “where all the materials are drawn out of oneself,” he sometimes sets his fancy to work to produce what he calls

or miscalls “nonsense.” Thus he treats Henry Conway to the mock-prophecy that invention and improvements will lead to people’s “having whole groves of humming-birds, tame tigers taught to fetch and carry, pocket spying-glasses to see all that is doing in China”—and comments, “I have here set you the example of writing nonsense when one has nothing to say.” For the clerical poet William Mason’s benefit, he considers the possibility of human beings with all their organs multiplied fourfold and suggests, “How much more execution a fine woman would do with two pair of *piercers!* or four!”; he is satisfied that while Dryden would have plunged into indecency at the thought, “you are too good a divine ... to treat my quadruple love but platonically.”

In the field of wit and humour, Walpole does not shun the risqué. Referring to a term in fortification, he writes to Lady Ossory, “Have you heard that Mrs. St. Jack has declared that if the Colonel goes to America, she will accompany him? G. Selwyn says she will make an excellent *breastwork*.” Alluding to a satirical observation about him by Mr. Courtney, Walpole writes of a celebration of his recent recovery from illness in a poem by Mr. May. In the poem, Jove calls on Chiron, Esculapius and Hermes for medical assistance, and Walpole remarks in a letter to the Berry sisters, “it is lucky for my reputation, as Mr. Courtney talks of *the fire of my old age*, that he did not call Mercury.”

The greatest entertainment that Walpole offers his correspondents and leaves to posterity is probably his ever-flowing stream of irresistible anecdotes. He writes of Lord Bathurst pursued from seat to seat in church by a creditor calling loudly for “My money” during a sermon on avarice, and paints a comic picture of David Garrick at the Duke of Richmond’s fireworks “ogling and sighing” at a distance over his future wife, a French dancer as yet fiercely guarded by Lady Burlington. The Duchess of Newcastle’s favourite, for whom the Lord of the Treasury has to open and close the door continually, turns out to be “a common pig, that she brought from Hanover.” Walpole’s rare heroic subjects include the French Catholic servant who hastily finds a priest to confess to and then returns, against orders, to his wounded British master, Lord Crawford, expecting to be killed with him (both survive), and the Duke of Cumberland holding the candle himself as he silently endures the pain of an operation on his knee without being tied down. As absurd as these are brave is the compulsive gambler Miss Pelham, who beats her head as she loses hundreds of pounds to two aged peers and protests that “It was terrible to play with *boys!*” An example of malice is Lady Harrington’s saying, “in a soft voice, and very slowly,” to a woman who wonders she will let her daughter go to an opera but not a ball, “Mrs. St. John, if you *could* have a child, I am sure you would think as I do.”

As noteworthy as his anecdotes are the scenes that Walpole evokes. He can render for Lady Ossory the extravagant magnificence of Lord Stanley's ball:

The dome of the staircase was beautifully illuminated with coloured glass lanthorns; in the anteroom was a bevy of vestals in white habits, making tea; in the next, a drapery of sarcenet, that with a very funereal air crossed the chimney, and depended in vast festoons over the sconces. The third chamber's doors were heightened with candles in gilt vases, and the ballroom was formed into an oval with benches above each other, not unlike pews.

More endearing is the setting of Walpole's mock-Gothic castle at Strawberry Hill as described for Horace Mann in Italy:

the scene without ... is very different from every side, and almost from every chamber ... my little hill, and diminutive enough it is, gazes up to Royal Richmond; and Twickenham on the left, and Kingston Wick on the right, are seen across bends of the river, which on each hand appears like a Lilliputian seaport. Swans, cows, sheep, coaches, post-chaises, carts, horsemen, and foot-passengers are continually in view. The fourth scene is a large common-field, a constant prospect of harvest and its stages, traversed under my windows by the great road to Hampton Court.

Discomfort figures in the letters, alongside elegance and beauty. Explaining to Lady Ossory that he goes occasionally, but only occasionally, to church services, Walpole observes that it is "most unpleasant to crawl through a churchyard full of staring footmen and apprentices, clamber a ladder to a hard pew to hear the dullest of all things, a sermon, and croaking and squalling of psalms to a hand-organ by journeymen brewers and charity children."

Besides creating a very rich self-portrait, Walpole's letters admit their reader into a vast gallery exhibiting diverse characters. A few of the pictures can be classified as sketches, in which a person is skewered, justly or unjustly, in a few words. Thus, Lord Edgcumbe "thinks nothing important that is not to be decided by dice," and Admiral Thomas Matthews "remains in the light of a hot, brave, imperious, dull, confused fellow." Travelling in secular France, Lord Findlater appears "as starched as an old-fashioned plaited neckcloth" which has "come to suck wisdom from this curious school of philosophy." The ladies are not let off any more lightly. When

Georgiana Spencer, Duchess of Devonshire, gives birth to a daughter, she "probably will stuff her poor babe into her knittingbag when she wants to play at macao, and forget it," and Walpole regrets that in the absence of congenial company, "I should be reduced to have recourse to Mrs. Wright at Hampton Court, to learn what all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood have had for dinner every day this week."

Probably the most prominent of the full-length portraits are those of the Duke of Newcastle, Lady Townshend, and Lady Mary Coke. Walpole joins in the widespread mockery of Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle, an immensely rich, hardworking politician with a capacious memory through whom Sir Robert Walpole used to maintain much of his control of the country and about whose ability or lack thereof historians still disagree. We see this man with "hands that are always groping and sprawling, and fluttering, and hurrying on the rest of his precipitous person" as a figure of fun who yet "can overturn ministries" and whom Queen Charlotte finds in the privy set up for her behind the altar at her husband's coronation. We also see him standing shunned at a ball at Bedford House while Walpole and his friends whisper loudly within his hearing, "Lord, how he is broke! how old he looks!" Five years later, time has "abated his ridiculous" and he is with a friendly Walpole when news arrives of the death of the Duchess of Leeds, his sister.

Brought to life, too, is Lady Ethelreda Harrison Townshend, the mother of a field marshal and of a chancellor of the exchequer, and a celebrated wit. Walpole tells how "My Lady Townshend has been to see the Hermaphrodite, and says, 'it is the only happy couple she ever saw.'" One can hear the very sound of her voice as, challenged for proof of another woman's adultery, she remonstrates, "Lord, child, she was all over proof." The same voice is present when she is described climbing the stairs of the original dwelling at Strawberry Hill: "Lord God! Jesus! what a house! It is just such a house as a parson's, where the children lie at the feet of the bed!" She is notorious for her libertinism. Walpole warns two men about to wear fine robes, "you will both look so abominably pink and blooming; I would not advise you to show yourselves to my Lady Townshend!" On the back of a print of her portrait, he writes:

This is the staple of the world's great trade;
On this soft bosom all mankind has laid.

Nevertheless he is her steadfast friend, and when she will only be reconciled to his niece Maria's marrying Lord Waldegrave if she may choose his clothes for the occasion, he agrees to wear fabric of "a white ground with purple and green flowers," unseemly as he finds these "juvenile colours."

No happier in marriage than Lady Townshend is Lady Mary Coke, whose maiden name is Campbell. She makes a dramatic entrance into the letters when she "cries her eyes to scarlet" after accepting, under great duress, Lord Coke's proposal: "She objects his loving none of her sex but the four queens in a pack of cards." When his gambling and drinking continue, she is reported to have told him "that she hates him, that she always did, and that she always will," and he has to fight a duel with pistols against Sir Harry Bellenden, whom her family has sent to challenge him. She appeals to a law court for protection, and six years after their marriage his death frees her. Walpole is long enchanted by "the youngest, handsomest, and wittiest widow in England," but in time she succumbs to a delusory pride claiming to have been married to the deceased Duke of York, brother of George III, and travels around Europe seeking royal company and honours before returning to England and re-entering Walpole's social circle.

For many years a woman more notorious than Lady Townshend or Lady Mary Coke figures largely in the correspondence. In 1749, Walpole encounters Elizabeth Chudleigh, whom he has known since she was five years old, at a masquerade where she was supposed to be Iphigenia but was "so naked that you would have taken her for Andromeda." At a breakfast party at her house, he finds that "Every favour she has bestowed is registered by a bit of Dresden china," and he observes "the *conveniences* in every bedchamber: great mahogany projections, as big as her own bobbies, with the holes, with brass handles, and cocks, &c." Years later, having become the wife and then the widow of the Duke of Kingston, she attains unwelcome fame when the Duke's nephews, eying his vast bequest to her, seek to prove that her marriage to their uncle was bigamous. In 1776, the multitude watch in fascination as she is tried by the House of Lords in Westminster Hall and convicted, but she is excused any penalty beyond the payment of her fees, although "the Attorney-General laboured to have her burnt in the hand." Her real husband, Augustus Hervey, is now Earl of Bristol, leaving her the title of Countess.

Worse than Elizabeth Chudleigh is the young Earl of Pembroke, who deserts his beautiful wife, only son, and great estate to elope with Kitty Hunter, the daughter of a Lord of the Admiralty, in a packet-boat while requesting the King to let him keep his rank of major-general. When the runaways are intercepted and brought back, they leave again. This time the Earl invites his wife to accompany them, and her tenderness is such that she is only "with difficulty withheld from acting as mad a part from goodness, as he had done from guilt and folly." Later, however, she declares that "he should have retrieved his character" before approaching her, but eventually he makes a settlement on Miss Hunter and her child and a rec-

conciliation takes place. In middle age, the Earl is notable for "his profligacy, counteracting his avarice."

Quite free from Pembroke's viciousness but marked by his own eccentricity is George Selwyn. This famous wit quips, when a waiter at his club is convicted of robbery, "What a horrid idea he will give of us to the people in Newgate!" and calls Charles James Fox and the younger William Pitt "the idle and the industrious apprentices." He is a lifelong friend of Walpole, who informs Mann that Selwyn's "passion is to see coffins and corpses, and executions.... With this strange and dismal turn, he has infinite fun and humour in him." In middle age, he adopts Maria Fagniani ("Mimie"), an eight-year-old French girl and brings her back from Paris with Signora Madre, her governess. He has the pleasure of taking them to visit Strawberry Hill. When Selwyn is dying, Walpole writes to the Berrys, "him I really loved, not only for his infinite wit, but for a thousand good qualities" and mourns him for "the goodness of his heart and nature."

Goodness is also a notable element in the character of Miss Boyle, whom Walpole credits with "real genius" when he sees how she "has carved three tablets in marble with boys, designed by herself" and "is painting panels in grotesque for the library, with pilasters of glass in black and gold." This woman, who, "to the last moment of her mother's life never relaxed one moment in attention," after that lady's death "is intoxicated with her release, and laughs and talks and gallops and drives and dances from night to morning, and from one end of the isle to t'other." Walpole is afraid she may become the prey of a fortune hunter, but when she accepts Lord Henry Fitzgerald, he comments, "I think they have both chosen well," and he takes Lady Clifden, the bride's old aunt, to visit them at their farm.

Although not all the pictures are equally clear and bright, the riches of this epistolary portrait gallery sometimes seem inexhaustible. The fullest portrait of all, the self-portrait, exhibits human nature with all its tantalizing contradictions. Walpole is addicted to his pleasures, yet compassionate and helpful to those in distress; abundant in kindness, yet sometimes gleefully cruel; punctilious in observing court etiquette, yet contemptuous of elaborate ceremonial; apt to take extreme views of others' moral character, yet ready to offer polite, insincere compliments to people he despises; utterly intolerant of peculation in his own Customs Department, yet always ready to defend his father's corruption.

In Horace Walpole, the talents required to make a great letter-writer meet with circumstances that lead to those talents being exercised to the full. He can describe, narrate, expound, tease, rebuke, wittily delight, and (occasionally to his own embarrassment) allow free play to his fancy. Living in London and the nearby Twickenham, he has friends who reside on country estates or abroad – the expatriate minister Sir Horace Mann, the

HORACE WALPOLE

soldier and politician Henry Conway, the increasingly reclusive George Montagu, the divorced Lady Ossory inadmissible at court—who rely on him for news and entertainment, and he makes them his confidants.

At one point, Walpole offers Lady Ossory his reflections on himself:

I can but laugh at my own party-coloured life—sometimes at Paris, and an editor of Grammont; sometimes playing all night at pharaoh with Madame de Mirepoix, or at loo with a greater favourite; now writing fables for Lady Anne, and verses for the Graces; then accused as a plotting republican.

As a childless bachelor and a lifelong civilian, Horace Walpole is not “a complete man,” a designation James Joyce bestows on Ulysses, seeing that wanderer as son, husband, lover, war dodger, military companion, hero, and inventor; but by adding what he personally experiences to what he experiences vicariously, Walpole creates in his letters a satisfactorily comprehensive panorama of human life.