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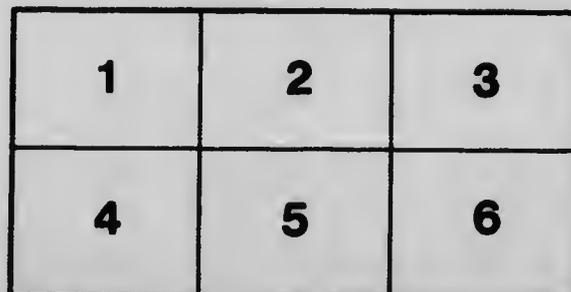
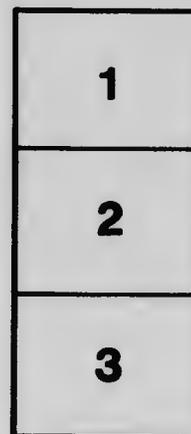
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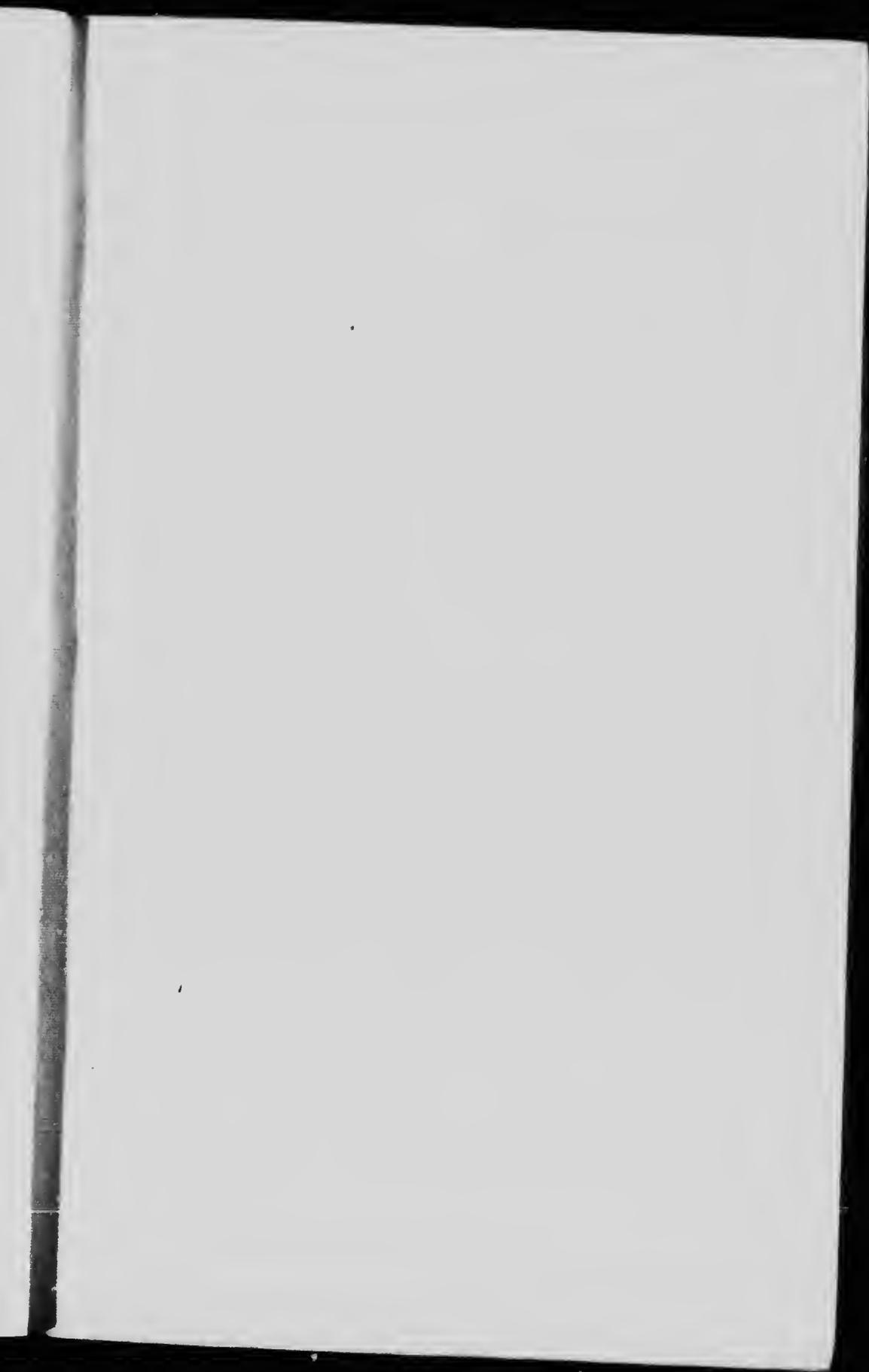
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THE LIFE & LETTERS
OF WILLIAM CORBETT
IN ENGLAND & AMERICA
BY LEWIS MELVILLE

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
WILLIAM COBBETT
IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY: A
Biography.
- THE THACKERAY COUNTRY.
- THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF WILLIAM
BECKFORD.
- THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF LAURENCE
STERNE.
- VICTORIAN NOVELISTS.
- "THE FIRST GEORGE."
- "FARMER GEORGE."
- "THE FIRST GENTLEMAN OF EUROPE."
- AN INJURED QUEEN (CAROLINE OF
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- THE BEAUX OF THE REGENCY.
- BATH UNDER BEAU NASH.
- BRIGHTON: ITS HISTORY, ITS FOLLIES, AND
ITS FASHIONS.
- SOCIETY AT TUNBRIDGE WELLS IN
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.





WILLIAM COBBETT

From an engraving by F. Bartolozzi, R.A. after a painting by J. R. Smith, 1801

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
WILLIAM COBBETT
IN ENGLAND & AMERICA
BASED UPON HITHERTO UNPUB-
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MELVILLE. WITH THIRTY-TWO
. . . ILLUSTRATIONS . . .
IN TWO VOLUMES. VOLUME ONE

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
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ERRATA

- Vol. I. p. 138, line 20, and p. 139, footnote, *for* 'the Rev. W Polwhele' *read* 'the Rev. Richard Polwhele.'
- Vol. I. p. 141, line 27, *for* 'Clarendon' *read* 'Clarence.'
- Vol. II. p. 225, lines 17-18, *for* 'Davis Geddies' *read* 'Davies Giddys.' [Davies Giddy, known from 1817 as Davies Gilbert.]

The Life and Letters of William Cobbett.

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TO
SIR WILLIAM COBBETT
AND
MR. RICHARD COBBETT

**" Fair LIBERTY was all his cry ;
For her he stood prepared to die,
For her he boldly stood alone,
For her he oft exposed his own."**

PREFACE

THIS biography is based mainly upon unpublished correspondence, gathered from many sources. Sir William Cobbett and Mr. Richard Cobbett have very kindly placed at my disposal the letters and papers of their grandfather in their possession. Most of them were collected by their uncle, the late James Paul Cobbett, whose intention it was at one time to write the life of his father, William Cobbett. The family papers include a considerable number of letters written between 1794 and 1832, the most interesting of which are (i) a series addressed by Cobbett to his wife and children during the period of his imprisonment in Newgate; and (ii) a series addressed to Queen Caroline at the time of her trial. From the unpublished Cobbett correspondence in the British Museum I have selected over a hundred letters to William Windham, some three-score to John Wright, and a dozen to his son, James Paul. Mr. Stanley Lathbury has permitted me to insert letters, preserved in his valuable autograph collection, to Cobbett from Joseph Bonaparte, Daniel O'Connell, and Talleyrand; and from various sources I have secured letters from Cobbett to William Pitt, Lord Auckland, Tom Creevey, Sir Francis Burdett, John Cam Hobhouse, Lady Anne Hamilton, Alderman Wood, the Rev. J. T. Mathias, the

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Rev. W. Polwhele, &c. &c., as well as letters from Windham, Burdett, Major Cartwright, and Jefferson. All these letters, with a few exceptions, are now printed for the first time.

It was after reading the great mass of Cobbett's unpublished correspondence that I decided to write a biography of this man, who, born "at the plough tail," as he put it, raised himself to a position from which for years he exercised an influence as far-reaching as that of any personage in the Kingdom, and who, learning English grammar at the age of twenty-three, before he reached middle-age was acclaimed in two continents as one of the most effective writers of strong and racy English.

In writing an account of the life of Cobbett, it is very easy to yield to the temptation to follow him into the innumerable questions in which he was interested, but I have endeavoured to avoid this pitfall, and to tell a straightforward story. It has, indeed, been my object to allow Cobbett to tell his story in his own words, and with this object I have drawn freely upon his correspondence.

The principal authorities for Cobbett's life, besides his correspondence, are (i) *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, in which pamphlet he replied, in 1796, to those who slandered him during his first sojourn in the United States, taking for his motto, "Now, you lying Varlets, you shall see how a plain tale shall put you down"; and (ii) the numerous autobiographical passages in his various writings, especially in his contributions to the *Political Register*, his *Advice to Young Men*, and his *Rural Rid.s.* Biographical information is also to be gleaned from William Windham's *Diary*,

Thomas Moore's *Journals and Life of Lord Byron*, Henry Hunt's *Correspondence and Memoirs*, De Morgan's *Budget of Paradoxes*, Daniel O'Connell's *Correspondence*, John O'Connell's *Recollections and Experiences*, the *Correspondence of Joseph Jekyll*, Greville's *Memoirs*, the lives of Major Cartwright, and of William Wilberforce, Dean Stanley's *Life of Dr. Arnold*, J. W. Francis's *Old New York*, Frederick Hudson's *Journalism in the United States*, Miss Mitford's *Recollections of a Literary Life*, Somerville's *The Whistler at the Plough*, Sir Richard Phillips's *Public Characters of all Nations*, James Grant's *Random Recollections of the House of Commons, Editors and Newspaper Writers of the Last Generation* (*Fraser's Magazine*, Feb. 1862), Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*, the obituary notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1835, and the Preface and Notes by John M. Cobbett and James P. Cobbett to their *Selections from Cobbett's Political Works* (6 vols., 1835). Character sketches and literary criticism are to be found in Hazlitt's *Table Talk*, Lord Dalling's *Historical Characters*, William Bates's *The Maclise Portrait Gallery*, J. E. T. Rogers's *Historical Gleanings*, Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits*, and Sir Leslie Stephen and Professor Saintsbury's essays on Cobbett.

There have, of course, been earlier biographies of Cobbett. The first, issued anonymously in 1835, is very scanty. The next appeared in the following year from the pen of the voluminous Robert Huish, and contained nearly one thousand closely-printed pages, a great number of which, however, are filled with long extracts from Cobbett's published works. Like all Huish's books, it is entirely unreliable, and must be used with the greatest care: I have used no statement made by Huish unless it is corroborated. In 1870 the Rev.

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John Selby Watson published an interesting study of the man; and eight years later Mr. Edward Smith issued a two-volume biography. Mr. Robert Waters prefixed a memoir to his edition of Cobbett's *English Grammar* (1883); and lastly, in 1904, Mr. E. I. Carlyle published his scholarly *William Cobbett: A Study of his Life as Shown in his Writings*. None of these writers, it may be remarked, have made any considerable use of Cobbett's correspondence.

To all previous writers on Cobbett, I am, in varying degrees, indebted; and I freely acknowledge the assistance I have derived from the excellent bibliography appended to Mr. Carlyle's monograph. I owe very sincere thanks to Sir William Cobbett and Mr. Richard Cobbett for their invaluable and generous assistance; to Mr. John Murray for his courteous permission to print in this work Cobbett's letters to Creevey, Fawkes, and Lord Folkestone from the *Creevey Papers*; and to Mr. Stanley Lathbury for the loan of letters to which reference has been made. Mr. Edward Smith has very kindly read the proofs of this work; and Mr. Richard Cobbett and Mr. A. M. Broadley have kindly lent prints for reproduction.

The chapter on "William Cobbett and Queen Caroline" has appeared in the *Nineteenth Century and After* (February, 1911), and the Introductory Chapter in the *Fortnightly Review* (April, 1912).

LEWIS MELVILLE.

SALCOMBE, HARPENDEN,
HERTS.

September, 1912.

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THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
WILLIAM COBBETT
IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

VOL. I.

A

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF WILLIAM COBBETT IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA

INTRODUCTORY

William Cobbett's goodly conceit—His favourable opinion of himself expressed in his writings—His insistence upon the fact that his fame was mainly due to his industry—"Always in spirits"—Everything sacrificed to his work—His scorn for the idle—"Thirty-five minutes a day at table"—Appreciation of natural beauties—Lack of interest in art—His disapproval of fiction—His low estimate of Shakespeare—His liking for the theatre—His epitome of the struggles and achievements of his life—A remarkable record—His egotism—His respect for education—His cocksureness on all subjects—Cobbett as a politician—True to his ideals—His desire to benefit the condition of the poor—His championship of their cause—His inconsistency arises from his ignorance—Not a philosophical statesman—His blunders—His views on the Jewish question—Sayers's skit—Cobbett's attack on pensioners and pluralists, tithes, and on corruption in the public service—His life an uphill battle—Heine's opinion of him—Cobbett a typical John Bull—The lust of battle strong within him—Cobbett as a writer—His triumph.

If there has lived any one with a more goodly conceit of himself than William Cobbett, more convinced of his virtues as a man, more satisfied with his achievements as a politician, and more delighted with the effects of his writings, history has failed to record his existence. In the realms of vanity—albeit it must never be forgotten that there was in him a substratum of sound common sense—it is verily William Cobbett first, and

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the rest nowhere. "I gave to the private soldiers of the regiment a perfect example of sobriety, economy, and of patient endurance of hardships of every sort, from my due proportion of which I would, upon no account, ever be exempted," he wrote, a baker's dozen of years after he left the army.¹ "I think I may venture to say that the lives of very few men have been marked with stronger proof of merit of every sort," he remarked at the age of forty-six, adding, "I *always* had weight and power. Wherever I was, I was a leader."² Again and again he referred to this quality or that as having given him "a degree of influence, such as is possessed by few others, in the most weighty concerns of the country."³ The "celebrity which my writings have obtained," he reflected, when "taking leave of his countrymen" on the eve of his second visit to the United States, "they will preserve long and long after Lords Liverpool and Sidmouth and Castlereagh are rotten and forgotten."⁴ He was never tired of stating what a fine fellow is William Cobbett; and in his books he persistently drew the attention of his readers to that great man. See what a hard-working, abstemious, clean-living, intelligent, and highly-gifted man I am! See what a good husband and father I am! See what I have suffered for my country's good! This was the burden of his song. Frequently he remarked how people benefited by reading this or the other of his books. In his opinion those who trod the narrow path did so because they were familiar with his writings, and only those transgressed who were unacquainted with his

¹ *Political Register*, October 5, 1805.

² *Ibid.*, July 17, 1809.

³ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 47.

⁴ *Political Register*, July 5, 1817.

works. If you had read this work of mine, or that (as the case might be), he would say to offenders, you would not have committed such an egregious blunder or have perpetrated such a stupid crime.

I have had from thousands of young men, and men advanced in years also, letters of thanks for the great benefit which they have derived from my labours (he wrote with much complacency). Some have thanked me for my Grammars, some for my Cottage Economy, others for my Woodlands and the Gardener; and, in short, for every one of my works have I received letters of thanks from numerous persons, of whom I had never heard before. In many cases I have been told, that, if the parties had had my books to read some years before, the gain to them, whether in time or in other things, would have been very great. Many, and a great many, have told me that, though long at school, and though their parents had paid for their being taught English grammar, or French, they had, in a short time, learned more from my books, on those subjects, than they had learned in years from their teachers. How many gentlemen have thanked me in the strongest terms for my Woodlands and Gardener, observing (just as Lord Bacon had observed in his time) that they had before seen no books, on these subjects, that they could *understand!* But I know not of anything that ever gave me more satisfaction than I derived from the visit of a gentleman of fortune, whom I had never heard of before, and who, about four years ago, came to thank me in person for a complete reformation, which had been worked in his son by the reading of my two SERMONS on *drinking* and on *gaming*.¹

Years after the publication of *The Tale of a Tub*, Swift exclaimed, "What a genius I had when I wrote

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), p. 7.

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that book." Cobbett, though convinced of the immortality of his works, never claimed to be a genius; indeed, somewhat ostentatiously, he repudiated all claims to genius.

Until very lately I have had for the far greater part of the time the whole of the press as my deadly enemy. Yet, at this moment, it will not be pretended that there is another man in the kingdom who has so many cordial friends (he wrote in 1830). The friendship which is felt towards me is pure and disinterested; it is not founded in any hope that the parties can have, that they can ever *profit* from professing it; it is founded on the gratitude which they entertain for the good that I *have done* them; and of this sort of friendship, and friendship so cordial, no man ever possessed a larger portion.

Now, mere *genius* will not acquire this for a man. There must be something more than *genius*: there must be industry: there must be perseverance: there must be, before the eyes of the nation, proofs of extraordinary exertion: people must say to themselves, "What wise conduct must there have been in the employing of the time of this man! How sober, how sparing in diet, how early a riser, how little expensive he must have been!" These are the things, and *not genius*, which have caused my labours to be so incessant and so successful.¹

Cobbett's industry was, indeed, wonderful—to the ordinary man it seems terrifying—and certainly his capacity for work has never been exceeded. In the diary of the second visit to the United States there is an entry on a day when he had to stay at an inn at Hamsburgh: "*Weary of being idle*. How few such days have I spent in my whole life." One of the most

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), pars. 5 and 6.

voluminous writers the world has ever known, he worked week after week, month after month, year after year, without interruption. Disappointments, and of these he had his full share, spurred him only to fresh efforts; he was never weary, never until the last years of his life ill, never till the day of his death out of spirits.

Scores of gentlemen have, at different times, expressed to me their surprise that I was "*always in spirits*," that nothing *pulled me down*; and the truth is that, throughout nearly forty years of troubles, losses, and crosses, assailed all the while by more numerous and powerful enemies than ever man had before to contend with, and performing, at the same time, labours greater than man ever before performed; all those labours requiring mental exertion, and some of them mental exertion of the highest order; the truth is, that, throughout the whole of this long time of troubles and of labours, I have never known a single hour of *real anxiety*; the troubles have been no troubles to me; I have not known what *lowness of spirits* meant; have been more gay, and felt less care, than any bachelor that ever lived. "You are *always in spirits*, Cobbett!" To be sure; for why should I not? *Poverty* I have always set at defiance, and I could, therefore, defy the temptation of riches.¹

To his work Cobbett sacrificed everything that makes life enjoyable to most people. He never trod the primrose path of dalliance, and he wrote scornfully of those who invented dressing-gowns and slippers. "They could have had very little else to do," he remarked. This was perhaps the harshest thing he could say, for in his eyes there was nothing more contemptible than to have little

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 92.

8 THE LIFE OF WILLIAM COBBETT

to do. He enjoyed his food, but the pleasures of the table he knew not.

I am certain that, upon an average, I have not, during my life, spent more than *thirty-five minutes a day at table*, including all the meals of the day. I like, and I take care to have, good and clean victuals; but if wholesome and clean, that is enough. If I find it, by chance, too *coarse* for my appetite, I put it aside, or let somebody else do it, and leave the appetite to gather keenness. But the great security of all is, to eat *little* and to drink nothing that *intoxicates*. He that eats till he is *full* is little better than a beast; and he that drinks till he is drunk is quite a beast.¹

Few men had a keener appreciation of natural beauties than the author of *Rural Rides*, but in the beauties of art he was not interested. Of painting and sculpture there is no reason to believe that he acquired, or even desired to acquire, any knowledge. Literature for him meant political treatises, and works on farming and kindred subjects; for poetry and novels and plays he always evinced the greatest contempt.

I deprecate *romances* of every description. It is impossible that they can do any *good*, and they may do a great deal of harm. They excite passions that ought to lie dormant; they give the mind a taste for highly-seasoned matter; they make matters of real life insipid; every girl, addicted to them, sighs to be a SOPHIA WESTERN, and every boy a TOM JONES. What girl is not in love with the *wild* youth, and what boy does not find a justification for his wildness? What can be more pernicious than the teachings of this celebrated romance? Here are two young men put before us, both sons of the

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 30.

same mother ; the one a *bastard* (and by a parson too), the other a *legitimate child* ; the former wild, disobedient, and squandering ; the latter steady, sober, obedient, and frugal ; the former everything that is frank and generous in his nature, the latter a greedy hypocrite ; the former rewarded with the most beautiful and virtuous of women and a double estate, the latter punished by being made an outcast. How is it possible for young people to read such a book, and to look upon orderliness, sobriety, obedience, and frugality as *virtues* ? And this is the tenor of almost every romance, and of almost every play, in our language. In *The School for Scandal*, for instance, we see two brothers ; the one a prudent and frugal man, and, to all appearance, a moral man, the other a hare-brained squanderer, laughing at the morality of his brother ; the former turns out to be a base hypocrite and seducer, and is brought to shame and disgrace ; while the latter is found to be full of generous sentiment, and Heaven itself seems to interfere to give him fortune and fame. In short, the direct tendency of the far greater part of these books is to cause young people to despise all those virtues, without the practice of which they must be a curse to their parents, a burden to the community, and must, except by mere accident, lead wretched lives. I do not recollect one romance nor one play in our language which has not this tendency. How is it possible for young princes to read the historical plays of the punning and smutty Shakespeare and not think that to be drunkards, blackguards, the companions of debauchees and robbers, is the suitable beginning of a glorious reign ? ¹

For Shakespeare, then, Cobbett had no admiration, and he certainly scored a point when he wrote that "after it had been deemed almost impiety to doubt of the

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 311.

genius of Shakespeare surpassing that of all the rest of mankind ; after he had been called the '*Immortal Bard*,' as a matter of course, as we speak of Moses and Aaron, there having been but one of each in the world ; after all this, comes a lad of sixteen years of age, [who] writes that which learned doctors declare could have been written by no man but Shakespeare."¹ It is thoroughly in keeping, however, with the contradictory nature of Coblett's character that he who exclaimed that Shakespeare was over-rated should show a thorough acquaintance with the works of that author, and should draw on him again and again for appropriate quotations ; and that he, who had not a good word for the master-dramatist, should break through his rule of all work and no play to go to the theatre. "I was, until the birth of my third son, a constant haunter of the playhouse, in which I took great delight," he confessed in later life ; "but when *he* came into the world, I said, 'Now, Nancy, it is time for us to leave off going to the play !' "²

Cobbett became famous not merely, as he asserted, because he was industrious, an early riser, sober, economical, and persevering, but because he had, beyond all question, been gifted with a streak of genius. He was, however, a little jealous of this endowment, and preferred to assume that his rise in the world was due entirely to the character that it was his proudest boast to have moulded. Within the limits of a single paragraph he has epitomised the struggles and achievements of his life :—

Thrown (by my own will, indeed) on the wide world at a very early age, not more than eleven or twelve years,

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 79.

² *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), ii. 333.

without money to support, without friends to advise, and without book-learning to assist me; passing a few years dependent solely on my own labours for my subsistence; then becoming a common soldier, and leading a military life, chiefly in foreign parts, for eight years; quitting that life after really, for me, high promotion, and with, for me, a large sum of money; marrying at an early age, going at once to France to acquire the French language, thence to America; passing eight years there, becoming bookseller and author, and taking a prominent part in all the important discussions of the interesting period from 1793 to 1799, during which there was, in that country, a continued struggle carried on between the English and the French parties; conducting myself, in the ever-active part which I took in that struggle, in such a way as to call forth marks of unequivocal approbation from the Government at home; returning to England in 1800, resuming my labours here, suffering, during these twenty-nine years, two years of imprisonment, heavy fines, three years' self-banishment to the other side of the Atlantic, and a total breaking of fortune, so as to be left without a bed to lie on, and, during these twenty-nine years of troubles and punishments, writing and publishing, every week of my life, whether in exile or not, eleven weeks only excepted, a periodical paper, containing more or less of matter worthy of public attention; writing and publishing, during *the same twenty-nine years*, a Grammar of the French and another of the English language, a work on the Economy of the Cottage, a work on Forest Trees and Woodlands, a work on Gardening, an account of America, a book of Sermons, a work on the Corn-plant, a History of the Protestant Reformation; all books of great and continued sale, and the *last* unquestionably the book of greatest circulation in the whole world, the Bible only excepted; having, during *these same twenty-nine years* of troubles and embarrassments without

number, introduced into England the manufacture of Straw-plat; also several valuable trees; having introduced, during the *same twenty-nine years*, the cultivation of the Corn-plant, so manifestly valuable as a source of food; having, during the same period, always (whether in exile or not) sustained a shop of some size in London; having, during the whole of the same period, never employed less, on an average, than ten persons, in some capacity or other, exclusive of printers, bookbinders, and others, connected with papers and books; and having, during these twenty-nine years of troubles, embarrassments, prisons, fines, and banishments, bred up a family of seven children to man's and woman's state.¹

This is truly a remarkable record. To start in life the uneducated son of a peasant-farmer, and by sheer determination to become one of the most potent factors in English political life; to learn English grammar at the age of twenty-three, and within a few years to write the language in a style so pure and virile as to call forth the plaudits of the most exacting critics—these are achievements hard to beat. When, to oblige an officer in his regiment, Cobbett drew up a Report on the state of New Brunswick, he declared thirty years later that he could remember "it placed a great number of topics very briefly in a very clear light; that the transitions were natural and easy; that the style was precise, and the distribution judicious."² After this, it was surely supererogatory for him to add that he was "very much pleased with it." It may surprise many people that Cobbett should speak of his work in these terms; but

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 4. The opening statement of this quotation is not quite accurate. Cobbett earned his living from a very early age, but he did not leave his father's house until 1783, when he was twenty years of age.

² *Cobbett's Weekly Political Pamphlet*, December 6, 1817.

this is not so wonderful as that he should have been able to do the work. It is, indeed, not astonishing that he was egotistical. His egotism was not offensive, because there was no affectation. It arose naturally out of the genuine pleasure he derived from the success he had made of his life. When he realised what he had been and what he had become, his life seemed to him to be indeed a romance—as, indeed, it was. “His egotism is full of individuality, and has room for very little vanity in it. He does not talk of himself for lack of something to write about, but because some circumstance that has happened to himself is the best possible illustration of the subject, and he is not the man to shrink from giving the best possible illustration of the subject for a squeamish delicacy,” said Hazlitt, whom it was not easy to please. “We feel delighted, rub our hands and draw our chair to the fire, when we come to a passage of this sort; we know it will be something new and good, manly and simple, not the same insipid story of self over again.”¹ It is easy to laugh at the man; it is impossible for any understanding person to feel contempt for him.

A notorious poseur of the present day once declared that it was Oxford that had made him insufferable. With Cobbett there was at one time the danger that self-education would make him more insufferable than all the teaching he might have had at Oxford or Cambridge. His respect for education was so great, and he was so conscious of his own shortcomings, that when Talleyrand asked him at which university he had studied, he regarded the question as an attempt outrageously to flatter him. Yet Cobbett was always at pains to express his contempt for the ordinary channels of education.

¹ *Table Talk*, vi.

Like most self-educated men, Cobbett was inclined to rate very highly even the most ordinary information, because he had acquired it at such cost. Most people who have learnt English grammar in their youth take such knowledge for granted; Cobbett, who had first studied it at the age of twenty-two, regarded it with a vastly exaggerated respect. No one he had known in those days of his boyhood had been able to speak or write English correctly; consequently, when he acquired that knowledge, he regarded it as the most wonderful thing in the world, and for the rest of his life went about saying, "Learn English grammar; learn English grammar."

There is a little hop-garden in which I used to work when from eight to ten years old; from which I have scores of times run to follow the hounds, leaving the hoe to do the best that it could to destroy the weeds; but the most interesting thing was a *sand-hill*, which goes from a part of the heath down to the rivulet. As a due mixture of pleasure with toil, I, with my two brothers, used occasionally to disport ourselves, as the lawyers call it, at this sand-hill. Our diversion was this: we used to go to the top of the hill, which was steeper than the roof of a house; one used to draw his arms out of the sleeves of his smock-frock, and lay himself down with his arms by his sides; and then the others, one at head and the other at feet, sent him rolling down the hill like a barrel or a log of wood. By the time he got to the bottom, his hair, eyes, ears, nose and mouth were all full of this loose sand; then the others took their turn, and at every roll there was a monstrous spell of laughter. I had often told my sons of this while they were very little, and I now took one of them to see the spot. But that was not all. This was the spot where I was receiving my *education*; and this was the sort of

education; and I am perfectly satisfied that, if I had been brought up a milksop, with a nursery-maid everlastingly at my heels, I should have been at this day as great a fool, as inefficient a mortal, as any of those frivolous idiots that are turred out from Winchester and Westminster Schools, or from any of those dens of dunces called Colleges and Universities. It is impossible to say how much I owe to that sand-hill; and I went to return it my thanks for the ability which it probably gave me to be one of the greatest terrors to one of the greatest and most powerful bodies of knaves and fools, that were ever permitted to afflict this or any other country.¹

"To communicate to others the knowledge that I possess has always been my taste and my delight,"² he wrote in his later days; and of his qualification for the part of mentor he never had any doubt. "Few who know anything of my progress through life will be disposed to question my fitness for the task. Talk of rocks and breakers and quagmires and quicksands, who has ever escaped from amidst so many as I have! . . . If such a man be not, after he has survived and accomplished all this, qualified to give Advice to Young Men, no man is qualified for the task."³ With the utmost cocksureness he delivered judgment upon all subjects from literature to domestic economy and vaccination, from the Reformation to the French Revolution. He could not easily be led, he could never be driven; and of his unaccommodating disposition he was well aware. "I beg leave to hint to those who give me advice, which they wish I should follow, not to do it in too dictatorial a style," he addressed his correspondents when he was

¹ *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), i. 125.

² *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 4.

³ *Ibid.*

editing the *Porcupine* in the United States; "for, if I have any good qualities, docility, I am afraid, is not to be numbered amongst them."

Cobbett wrote on all subjects, but he found his greatest interest in politics. It has frequently been stated that he was the most inconstant and faithless of politicians, but those who enunciate this sentiment show themselves as lacking utterly in understanding of his character. No man was more true to his ideals than William Cobbett. He was all his life on the side of the oppressed, all his life he stood for reform. He had lived with the poor, and he knew how they suffered, and in what ways poverty hit them hardest; and his desire to improve their condition, which had steadily deteriorated during the period of the great wars, was as strong when he died as when he first became a public man. Often he was angry with his *protégés* for their stupidity, for their ignorance of matters with which they should have acquainted themselves, for their wasteful ways and petty extravagances; but neither their sins of commission nor omission could alienate his sympathies from them, and, despite all their failings, he took them and cherished them under his broad wing to the end. He admonished them, he beat them; but he was always the loving, if stern, parent, and the poor knew of his affection, and in return loved and respected him. "I have taught the working people *their rights*; I have done all in my power to prevent them from being oppressed."¹ That was the proud boast he made towards the end of his life, and in those words are contained the keynote to all his writings.

Cobbett all the days of his life stood for the poor

¹ *Two-penny Trash*, October 1, 1830.

against all comers, and the parsons who preached that people should be content with their station in life found themselves as roughly handled as the politicians who promulgated laws to keep the people in their station. To tell the poor to be content was in Cobbett's eyes the cardinal sin. He realised it was only by agitation that an improvement in the condition of the lower orders could be effected, and, with a view to ultimate content, he, in season or out of season, preached discontent.

It is a sorry effort that people make to persuade others, or to persuade themselves, that they can be happy in a state of *want* of the necessities of life. The doctrines which fanaticism preaches, and which teach men to be *content* with *poverty*, have a very pernicious tendency, and are calculated to favour tyrants by giving them passive slaves. To live well, to enjoy all things that make life pleasant, is the right of every man who constantly uses his strength judiciously and lawfully. It is to blaspheme God to suppose that he created men to be miserable, to hunger, thirst, and perish with cold, in the midst of that abundance which is the fruit of their own labour. Instead, therefore, of applauding "*happy poverty*," which applause is so much a fashion of the present day, I despise the man that is *poor* and *contented*; for such content is a certain proof of a base disposition, a disposition which is the enemy of all industry, all exertion, all love of independence.¹

The question of the food of the poor interested him keenly, and occasioned some of his most caustic articles. He said that, rather than see the working people of England reduced to live upon potatoes, he would see them all hanged, and be hanged with them, and he

¹ Par. or pp. 6-7.

would be satisfied to have written upon his grave-stone :
 "Here lies the remains of William Cobbett, who was
 hanged because he would not hold his tongue without
 complaining while his labouring countrymen were re-
 duced to live upon potatoes."

Brougham and Birkbeck, and the rest of the Mal-
 thusian crew, are constantly at work preaching *content*
to the hungry and naked. To be sure, they themselves,
 however, are not content to be hungry and naked.
 Amongst other things, they tell the working-people that
 the working-folks, especially in the North, used to have
 no bread, except such as was made of oats and of barley.
 That was better than potatoes, even the "nice mealy
 ones," especially when carried cold to the field in a bag.
 But these literary impostors, these deluders, as far as
 they are able to delude; these vagabond authors, who
 thus write and publish for the purpose of persuading the
 working-people to be quiet, while they suck luxuries and
 riches out of the fruit of their toil; these literary im-
 postors take care not to tell the people, that these oat-
 cakes and this barley-bread were always associated with
 great lumps of flesh-meat; they forget to tell them this,
 or rather these half-mad, perverse, and perverting impos-
 tors suppress the facts, for reasons that are too manifest
 to need stating.¹

To state the matter plainly, he summed up the ques-
 tion towards the end of his life: "I would rather that
 the people should believe in *witchcraft*, and have plenty
 of bread and meat and good Sunday coats, than that
 they should laugh at *witchcraft*, and be fed on potatoes
 and covered with rags."² Against the game laws he
 tilted with might and main; and it was his hatred of

¹ *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), ii. 365.

² *Two-penny Trash*, May 1, 1831.

this piece of oppressive legislation that inspired one of the happiest efforts of his pen.

Admire with me, reader, the singular turn of the mind of Sir James Mackintosh, whose whole soul appears to have been long bent on the "amelioration of the Penal Code," and who has never said one single word about this new and most terrible part of it! Sir James, after years of incessant toil, has, I believe, succeeded in getting a repeal of the laws for the punishment of "witchcraft," of the very existence of which laws the nation was unacquainted. But not a word has he said about the *game-laws*, which put into the gaols a full third part of the prisoners, and to hold which prisoners the gaols have actually been enlarged in all parts of the country! Singular turn of mind! Singular "humanity"! Ah! Sir James knows very well what he is at. He understands the state of his constituents at Knaresborough too well to meddle with game-laws. He has a "friend," I dare say, who knows more about game-laws than he does. However, the poor *witches* are safe: thank Sir James for that. Mr. Carlile's sister and Mrs. Wright are in gaol, and may be there for life! But the poor witches are safe. No hypocrite; no base pretender to religion; no atrocious, savage, *black-hearted* wretch, who would murder half mankind rather than not live on the labours of others; no monster of this kind can now persecute the poor witches, thanks to Sir James, who has obtained security for them in all their rides through the air, and in all their sailings upon the horse-ponds!¹

That Cobbett was inconsistent in his writings cannot be denied, but it has not yet been made clear enough that this arose directly out of his ignorance. Unlike men who had been to public school and university, and

¹ *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), i. 280-1.

had taken advantage of their opportunities, he had no substratum of knowledge upon which to found principles for guidance. He had to educate himself, to grope his way in the dark, after he had entered political life. Searching for means to advance the cause he had at heart, he fought first on one side and then on the other ; but it could never truthfully be said that he belonged to any party. Like the Irish party of to-day in the House of Commons, he was independent, forming temporary alliances either with Whigs or Tories, as might further his object. He gained nothing by changing his coat ; he sought nothing ; he was no disappointed place-hunter ; no government was rich enough to buy him.

Cobbett's early training had given him no chance to become a philosophical statesman. He could not take a broad view of a question ; he was incapable of discerning remote causes or of foreseeing ultimate results ; he could not allow that there might be something said for the other side. He made bad mistakes. He insisted that the national debt must destroy England, being ignorant of the great resources of the country that has enabled it to carry the burden with a minimum of inconvenience ; and, knowing nothing of the principles of political economy, he declared that a paper currency must inevitably bring ruin in its train. No more than the rest of the politicians did he discern the vast political interest that would subsequently be acquired by Dissenters, and he dismissed Nonconformists in a sentence as "nasty, canting, lousy Methodists, who inveigle the pennies even from the servant girls" ;¹ while his opinions on the Bill to give civil rights to Jews make amusing reading to-day, as his daughter Susan wrote after his death on the sheet

¹ *Two-penny Trash*, February 1, 1831.

of manuscript notes of a speech he had prepared. If this Bill became law, he said, it would make the common people begin to doubt of the truths of Christianity.

For it will tell them that he who openly declares *Jesus Christ to be an impostor* is as fit for a juryman, a judge, a Privy Councillor, a Prime Minister, a Lord Chancellor, or a member of Parliament, as he who *adores Jesus Christ*.

And is this nothing? Will this give no shock to their opinions?

It must have upon their minds one of two effects: it must make them wholly regardless of the Christian Religion; or it must make them hold in detestation and abhorrence those who have passed this impious law. I trust in God it would have the latter effect.

They have no right to take this religion away: they did not give it.

Suppose it was proposed to us to admit a race of *cannibals* to these powers, should we have a right to do it?

Jew has always been synonymous with *sharper, cheat, rogue*.

This has been the case with no *other race* of mankind. Rothschild married his own niece.

They will flock in upon us from all countries.¹

In turn Cobbett attacked almost every institution in the kingdom. This was happily hit off in a skit by James Sayers, the caricaturist:—

“Mr. Cobbett ask'd leave to bring in very soon
A Bill to abolish the Sun and the Moon.
The Honourable Member proceeded to state
Some arguments, used in a former debate,

¹ The Cobbett MSS. Cobbett opposed the Bill for the Emancipation of the Jews introduced in the House of Commons on March 1, 1833.

On the subject of sinecures, taxes, vexations,
 The Army and Navy, and old Corporations :—
 The Heavenly Bodies, like those upon Earth,
 Had, he said, been corrupt from the day of their birth,
 With reckless profusion expending their light,
 One after another, by day and by night.
 And what class enjoy'd it?—The upper alone—
 Upon such they had always exclusively shone.

These abuses must cease—they had lasted too long—
 Was there anything right?—was not everything wrong?
 The Crown was too costly,—the Church was a curse,—
 Old Parliament's bad,—Reform'd Parliament's worse,—
 All revenues ill-manag'd,—all wants ill-provided,—
 Equality,—Liberty,—Justice, divided.”¹

It has been said that Cobbett not only shifted his allegiance, but that he changed his opinions. The reply to the one charge is also the answer to the other. He knew what he wanted, but he did not know how to get it. Before he went to the United States he was the advocate of government by the sovereign people; when he was there he was all for a monarchy; on his return to England he saw the advantages of a republic. So long as the French Revolution was regarded by numerous persons in this country as the dawn of liberty, he could see only its faults; when the general opinion veered round, he began at last to see some justification for it. He was, indeed, as Lord Dalling has dubbed him, “The Contentious Man”; but he was not contentious merely for the sake of being so, though it must be confessed that he dearly loved a fight. “The extent and complication of political questions is such,” he quoted from Lord Chatham, “that no man can justly be ashamed of having been sometimes mistaken in his determinations; and the propensity of the human mind to confidence and

¹ *Notes and Queries*, 1833; 2nd Series, x. 293.

friendship is so great that every man, however cautious, however sagacious, or however experienced, is exposed sometimes to the artifices of interest and the delusions of hypocrisy; but it is the duty, and ought to be the honour, of every man to own his mistake, whenever he discovers it, and to warn others against those frauds which have been too successfully practised upon himself."¹

Cobbett attacked those who had pensions, and those who had sinecures, and those who were pluralists; he made violent onslaughts on the system of tithes; he exposed corruption in the public services—and by so doing set the governing classes against him.

To those who have been accustomed to live upon the labour of others, no thought is so horrible as that of their being compelled to work for their own living. Such people look upon the industrious part of mankind as having been made to work for them; just as we look upon dogs as having been made to keep our sheep, and upon horses as having been made to draw our wagons or carts. These insolent wretches call you *the peasantry*, or the *population*; they never call you *the people*. The word *people* is quite out of use with them. They always speak of you as we speak of the stock upon a farm, which we think ourselves justified in treating in any manner that we please. A reform of the Parliament, by compelling these people to earn their own bread in some way or another, will make them cease to talk about *peasantry* and *population*. They will once more discover that you are *people*; and when they begin to sweat a little, they will discover that hard labour is worthy of good food and good raiment.²

Against injustice he would fight with all his strength; but it must be confessed that, while many of his blows

¹ *Life of Chatham*, i. 42.

² *Two-penny Trash*, May 1, 1831.

were well directed, others, instead of hitting the antagonist at whom they were aimed, as likely as not fell upon the very persons for whose sake he had engaged in the combat. It is surprising, however, to read in Hazlitt's essay that Cobbett could not fight an uphill battle. "He will not bear the least punishment," the critic wrote. "If any one turns upon him (which few people like to do) he immediately turns tail." Surely this is a most amazing misconception. In this matter Heine saw more clearly into the heart of the reformer. "Alte Cobbett! Hund von England! Ich liebe dich nicht, denn fatal ist mir jede gemeine Natur; aber du dauerst mich bis in tiefsten Seele, wenn ich sehe, wie du dich von deiner Kette nicht losreissen und jene Diebe nicht erreichen kannst, die lachend vor deinen Augen ihre Beute fortschleppen und deine vergeblichen Sprünge und dein ohnmächtiges Geheul verspotten."¹ From beginning to end Cobbett's life was an uphill battle; all his days he was tilting against vested interests on behalf of his beloved poor, whom he was endeavouring to show the state of degradation into which they had fallen, the causes of it, and the way out.

In Cobbett's vocabulary there was no such word as fear, and it distressed him not at all to stand alone against the United States or carry on warfare single-handed against the government of his own country. If he was fearless, however, he was not foolhardy. He would make sacrifices for his cause, but he had the utmost contempt for the martyr whose martyrdom was useless. In a day when Englishmen were hated in the United States, he declared himself a believer in monarchy, and at Philadelphia at the risk of his life waved the

¹ *Werke* (Hamburg, 1861), iii. 93. *Englische Fragmente*.

Union Jack in the face of the republican inhabitants, because he believed that he was serving his native land by this act of defiance. On the other hand, when, later in life, owing to the impending suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, he was in danger of being imprisoned, he left England because in his opinion his incarceration would do nothing to advance the cause he had at heart.

Cobbett was, indeed, a typical John Bull. The lust of battle was always strong within him, and the indulgence of this passion was the one luxury he allowed himself. It has been well said that he loved the cut and thrust, the falls, bruises, and dry blows of an argument. He thoroughly enjoyed the game, and played it in deadly earnest, often forgetful of the fact that others did not care for the sport so much as he did. He asked quarter from none, and gave none. "Let them write on, till their own pens are worn to the stump; let the devils sweat; let them fire their balls at my reputation, till the very press cries out murder," he roared out his defiance at his American traducers. "If ever they hear me whine or complain, I will give them leave to friter my carcase and trail my guts along the street, as the French *sans-culottes* did those of Thomas Maudit."¹ Whatever the provocation he received, Cobbett never struck a fowl blow, and in his very first pamphlet he laid down the law he proposed to observe in all controversy.

No man has a right to pry into his neighbour's private concerns; and the opinions of every man are his private concern, while he keeps them so; that is to say, while they are confined to himself, his family, and particular

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupine* (ed. 1797), p. ix.

friends; but when he makes those opinions public; when he once attempts to make converts, whether it be in religion, politics, or anything else; when he once comes forward as a candidate for public admiration, esteem or compassion, his opinions, his principles, his motives, every action of his life, public or private, becomes the fair subject of public discussion.¹

Cobbett always played fair, but he was not always aware at the time of the weight of his blows. "I am, upon reflection, ready to confess that I may have laid on the lash without a due regard to mercy," he confessed in later years. "The fact is, that I have so long had the misfortune to be compelled to keep a parcel of badger-hided fellows, like Scarlett, in order, that I am, like a drummer that has been used to flog old offenders, become heavy-handed."² In turn almost every notable person in England, France, and the United States was attacked by him, not to their advantage; for, as Leslie Stephen put it, "no sturdier cudgel-player had stepped into the literary ring since his master had published the Drapier's Letters." He was indeed the most powerful political writer of his day. "He might be said to have the clearness of Swift, the naturalness of Defoe, and the picturesque satirical description of Mandeville," Hazlitt wrote, "if all such comparison were not impertinent. A really great and original writer is like nobody but himself." There are no purple passages in Cobbett, and he does not lend himself easily to quotation; indeed, nothing is ever quoted from him but a nickname, in the bestowal of which he was often as happy as he was prolific. Thus in literature we have the Great Lexico-

¹ *Observations on the Emigration of Dr. Priestley.*

² *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), vol. i. p. 89.

grapher as "Old dread-Death and dread-Devil Johnson, that teacher of moping and melancholy"; and in politics, Lord Liverpool as "the Stern-path-of-duty man"; Canning, "the Jester"; Peel, "the Oxford-Scholar"; Burdett, "Sir Glory"; David Ricardo, "the Oracle"; and Hobhouse, from his relations with Burdett, "Sancho." If Cobbett penned no purple passages, he, however, showed a poet's soul when he described rural scenery, and his portraiture of nature was exceptionally graphic and vivid. He never wrote a sentence of which the meaning is for an instant in doubt; in the most direct manner conceivable he conveyed what he wished to say. In his political writings he was virile, sarcastic, brutal sometimes, often humorous, and occasionally, and unexpectedly, pathetic. His powers of observation and his retentive memory supplied him with apposite illustrations with which to adorn his arguments; and if he frequently repeated himself, this was usually done deliberately, because he thought that by repetition he could more easily familiarise his readers with his views. He is one of the best and most forcible writers in the language—he might well be held as an object lesson to the *petits-maitres* of letters—and he will always be read with admiration and pleasure by those who can appreciate virile prose.

Cobbett often expressed his political opinions violently, but, taken as a whole, they were not in themselves violent; and the doctrines he preached, which then were dubbed revolutionary, are among the common-places of the day. No man ever fought in a nobler cause or with more sincerity, with more persuasiveness, with more courage. "I think it is the best way to disguise nothing; to do what is *right*; to be sincere,

and to let come what will." ¹ That was his creed, and to the best of his ability he acted up to it. He fought, and he triumphed, though his victories only bore fruit after he was in his grave. How much good he did by pleading the cause of the poor with all the genius of common sense with which he was so plentifully endowed has not yet, perhaps, been generally appreciated, nor how many of the reforms that have been effected since his day were due to his teachings.

"E'en when his stormy voice was loud,
And guilt quaked at the sound,
Beneath the frown that shook the proud
The poor a shelter found.

Dead Oak, thou liv'st ! Thy smitten hands,
The thunder of thy brow,
Speak, with strange tongues, in many lands ;
And tyrants hear them NOW !

Beneath the shadow of thy name,
Inspired by thy renown,
Shall future patriots rise to fame,
And many a sun go down." ²

¹ *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), i. 190.

² Verses by Ebenezer Elliott, author of the *Corn-Law Rhymes*.

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CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS (1763-1784)

George Cobbett, grandfather of the author—George and Ann Cobbett, parents of the author—The birth of William Cobbett and his brothers—Cobbett's scanty education—His early love of gardening—Set to work on his father's farm and at Farnham Castle—Runs away at the age of eleven to see Kew Gardens—Sees the Prince of Wales—Reads *The Tale of a Tub* with great enjoyment—Returns to Farnham—Enjoys rural scenes and sports—Visits Portsmouth in 1782—Volunteers for the navy, but is refused—Sighs for a wider sphere of activity than farming—Leaves Farnham for London suddenly in 1783—His visit to his native town seventeen years later—In London secures employment as clerk to an attorney—His hatred of the work—His life in Gray's Inn—Goes to Chatham to enlist in the Marines, but by mistake enlists in the Fifty-fourth Regiment.

IN the parish churchyard of the little Surrey town of Farnham there is a gravestone bearing the legend, "In memory of George Cobbett, who died on 15th December, 1760, aged 59." This George Cobbett was a day-labourer, illiterate like all of his class in those days, and all that is known of him is that he married early in life, and worked for one farmer from the day of his marriage to the day of his death. He had a son, also called George, who, more ambitious than his sire, became a small farmer, and in his later days purchased an old inn on the right bank of the river Wey, called "The Jolly Farmer." It is stated that George Cobbett taught himself the rudiments of mathematics and of land surveying, and that he was consulted by his neighbours when disputes arose as to the boundaries of farms. Of the younger George some particulars have been handed

down by his son William, the famous author and politician.

The reader will easily believe, from the poverty of his parents, that he had received no very brilliant education; he was, however, learned for a man in his rank of life. When a little boy, he drove the plough for two-pence a day, and these his earnings were appropriated to the expenses of an evening school. What a village school-master could be expected to teach, he had learnt, and had besides considerably improved himself in several branches of the mathematics. He understood land surveying well, and was often chosen to draw the plans of disputed territory; in short, he had the reputation of possessing experience and understanding, which never fails, in England, to give a man in a country place some little weight with his neighbours. He was honest and frugal.¹

George Cobbett married, on October 12, 1759, a girl in his own station of life, one Ann Vincent. She was so illiterate that she could not even sign her name, but this in those days was no particular disadvantage. She made her husband happy, and herself was beloved and respected by her friends and neighbours. There were four children of the marriage—George, Thomas, William, and Anthony. The eldest became a shopkeeper; the second, who outlived all his brothers, became a farmer; and the youngest entered the Honourable East India Company's service as a private soldier, and subsequently acquired notoriety as a pugilist. The third son, William, the subject of this memoir, was born on March 9, 1763.²

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupine* (ed. 1797), pp. 3-4.

² The date of William Cobbett's birth has never been satisfactorily settled. He gave it as March 9, 1766; but this is inaccurate, for the Farnham Parish Register records the baptism of William on April 1, 1763, and Thomas, aged two years, and Anthony on April 27, 1764.



THE HOUSE AT FARNHAM IN WHICH CORBETT WAS BORN
From an old print

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The education that the children of small farmers received in the sixties and seventies of the eighteenth century was inconsiderable. William Cobbett in later days declared that he had some faint recollection of going to a school kept by an old woman, who, he added, "did not succeed in teaching me my letters." What he and his brothers learnt they learnt from their father, who in the evenings taught them to read and write, and introduced them to the elementary mysteries of arithmetic. George Cobbett talked to his sons of his gardens and his fields, in which all his interests were centred, and his son William could remember how, spurred by his father's enthusiasm, he at the age of six climbed up the side of a steep sand-rock, and scooped out a plot four feet square to serve as a garden, and carried up the soil in the bosom of his little blue smock-frock.

Early habits and affections seldom quit us while we have vigour of mind left (Cobbett wrote half a century later). I have never lost one particle of my passion for these healthy and rational and heart-cheering pursuits, in which every day presents something new, in which the spirits are never suffered to flag, and in which industry, skill, and care are sure to meet with their due reward. I have never, for any eight months together, during my whole life, been without a garden.¹

Thomas, then, was born in 1762, and Anthony in 1764. As Cobbett states that he had heard his mother say that there was but three years and three-quarters difference between the age of the eldest and that of the youngest child, evidently George was born about midsummer 1761. Most writers have given the birth of William as March 9, 1762, and this is inscribed on his tombstone; but in the light of the above facts, brought to light through the researches of Mr. E. I. Carlyle, this cannot be accepted, and it is safe to assume—since there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the month and the day of the month—that Cobbett was born on March 9, 1763.

¹ *A Year's Residence in the United States*, par. 6.

32 THE LIFE OF WILLIAM COBBETT

The lads were early set to work, and George Cobbett could soon boast that he had four boys, the eldest of whom was but fifteen years old, who did as much as any three men in the parish of Farnham.

I do not remember the time when I did not earn my living (William Cobbett stated in later days). I was bred at the plough tail. My first occupation was driving the small birds from the turnip seed, and the rooks from the peas. When I first trudged afield, with my wooden bottle and my satchel swung over my shoulders, I was hardly able to climb the gates and stiles; and, at the close of the day, to reach home was a task of infinite difficulty. My next employment was weeding wheat, and leading a single horse at harrowing barley. Hoeing peas followed, and thence I arrived at the honour of joining the reapers in harvest, driving the team and holding the plough.¹

Young William generally worked on his father's farm, but sometimes he was employed to clip box-edgings and weed beds of flowers in the gardens of the Bishop of Winchester at the Castle close by. He always had a passion for beautiful gardens, and at the age of eleven, when he was working at the Castle, he met there a man from the King's garden at Kew, who inflamed his imagination with such an account of the wonders to be seen there that the little boy forthwith left Farnham with the intention to inspect the royal domain.

The next morning, without saying a word to any one, off I set, with no clothes except those upon my back, and with thirteen halfpence in my pocket. I found that I must go to Richmond, and I accordingly went on

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupine*, p. 5.



Father kept the sign of the Jolly Farmer at Farnham. I was his Poi Boy and thought an Ornament to the profession,—at Seven Years Old my natural genius began to expand and display'd itself in a taste for Plunder and oppression!—I robbed Orchards set Father's Bull-Dog at the Cats—quarrelled with all the Poor-Boys, and beat all the little Girls of the Town—to the great admiration of the inhabitants; who prophecied that my talents (unless the Devil was in it) would one day elevate me to a Post in some publick situation.

Vide—My own Memoirs in the Political Register of 1800.

COBBETT AS A CHILD
 From a caricature by Gillray

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from place to place inquiring my way thither. A long day (it was in June) brought me to Richmond in the afternoon. Two pennyworth of bread and cheese and a pennyworth of small beer which I had on the road, and one halfpenny that I lost somehow or other, left threepence in my pocket. With this for my whole fortune, I was trudging through Richmond in my blue smock-frock, and my red garters tied under my knees, when, staring about me, my eye fell upon a little book in a bookseller's window, on the outside of which was written, "*The Tale of a Tub*, price 3d." The title was so odd that my curiosity was excited. I had the three pence; but then I could not have any supper. In I went and got the little book, which I was so impatient to read, that I got over into a field at the upper corner of Kew Gardens, where there stood a haystack. On the shady side of this I sat down to read. The book was so different from anything that I had ever read before, it was something so new to my mind, that, though I could not understand some parts of it, it delighted me beyond description, and produced what I have always considered a sort of birth of intellect.

I read on until it was dark without any thought of supper or bed. When I could see no longer, I put my little book in my pocket and tumbled down by the side of the stack, where I slept till the birds in Kew Garden awakened me in the morning, when I started off to Kew, reading my little book.

The singularity of my dress, the simplicity of my manner, my lively and confident air, and doubtless his own compassion besides, induced the gardener, who was a Scotchman, I remember, to give me victuals, find me lodging, and set me to work; and it was during the period I was at Kew that George IV. and two of his brothers laughed at the oddness of my dress while I was sweeping the grass-plot round the foot of the Pagoda.

The gardener, seeing me fond of books, lent me some

gardening books to read; but these I could not relish after my *Tale of a Tub*, which I carried about with me wherever I went, and when I—at about twenty years old—lost it in a box that fell overboard in the Bay of Fundy, in North America, the loss gave me greater pain than I have since felt at losing thousands of pounds.¹

How long Cobbett was at Kew is not known, but probably he was soon summoned to return to his home. There, all was not work. The boys went to the cricket-matches, bathed in the Wey (where William on one occasion was nearly drowned), roamed over the park that surrounded the Castle, or walked the couple of miles to Moor Park, where—though the fact was assuredly unknown to them—the author of *The Tale of a Tub* had spent many unhappy years. They were present at Farnham fairs, held on Holy Thursday and November 13, and sometimes were taken by their father to the great Michaelmas hop fair at Weyhill.

William thoroughly enjoyed the rural scenes and sports of his boyhood. Though a conscientious worker, the cry of the hounds always had the power to draw him away; and whenever he heard them he would fly from whatever he was doing, bound over the fields, and dash through the brakes and coppices to get a sight of the hunt.

When I was a very little boy, I was, in the barley-sowing season, going along by the side of a field near Waverley Abbey; the primroses and bluebells bespangling the banks on both sides of me; a thousand linnets singing in a spreading oak over my head; while the jingle of the traces and the whistling of the ploughboys

¹ *Cobbett's Evening Post*, February 5, 1820. It must be remembered that Cobbett always assumed that he was born in 1766. See the footnote on p. 30 of this volume.

saluted my ear from over the hedge ; and, as it were to snatch me from the enchantment, the hounds at that instant, having started a hare in the hanger on the other side of the field, came up scampering over it in full cry, taking me after them many a mile. I was not more than eight years old, but this particular scene has presented itself to my mind many times every year from that day to this. I always enjoy it over again.¹

For their holidays the lads usually were sent to their paternal grandmother, who still dwelt in the house that her husband had occupied.

It was a little thatched cottage with a garden before the door. It had but two windows ; a damson tree shaded one, and a clump of filberts the other. Here I and my brothers went every Christmas and Whitsuntide to spend a week or two, and torment the poor old woman with our noise and dilapidations. She used to give us milk and bread for breakfast, an apple pudding for our dinner, and a piece of bread and cheese for supper. Her fire was made of turf cut from the neighbouring heath, and her evening light was a rush dipped in grease.²

Once at least William went further afield, whereby hangs a tale. It was in the autumn of 1782, and he went to visit a relation who lived in the neighbourhood of Portsmouth, and from the top of Portsdown he beheld the sea for the first time.

No sooner did I behold it than I wished to be a sailor (he has recorded). I could never account for this sudden impulse, nor can I now. Almost all English boys feel the same inclination ; it would seem that, like young ducks, instinct leads them to rush on the bosom of the water.

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 288.

² *The Life of Peter Porcupine*, p. 2.

But it was not the sea alone that I saw : the grand fleet was riding at anchor at Spithead. I had heard of the wooden walls of Old England ; I had formed my ideas of a ship and a fleet ; but what I now beheld so far surpassed what I had ever been able to form a conception of, that I stood lost between astonishment and admiration. I had heard talk of the glorious deeds of our admirals and sailors, of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and of all those memorable combats that good and true Englishmen never fail to relate to their children about a hundred times a year. The brave Rodney's victories over our natural enemies, the French and Spaniards, had long been the theme of our praise and the burthen of our songs. The sight of the fleet brought all these into my mind ; in confused order, it is true, but with irresistible force. My heart was inflated with national pride. The sailors were my countrymen, the fleet belonged to my country, and surely I had my part in it and all its honours : yet, these honours I had not earned ; I took to myself a sort of reproach for possessing what I had no right to, and resolved to have a just claim by sharing in the hardships and the dangers.¹

It was late in the evening when he arrived at Portsmouth, and, weary as he was after his thirty-miles' walk, he lay awake all night, his mind full of this new and engrossing scheme. At dawn he arose, walked down to the beach and took a boat out to the *Pegasus*, commanded by Captain the Honourable George Berkeley. He begged Berkeley to enrol him as one of the crew.

The Captain had more compassion than is generally met with in men of his profession ; he represented to me the toils I must undergo, and the punishment that the least disobedience or neglect would subject me to.

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupine*, pp. 10-11.

He persuaded me to return home, and I remember he concluded his advice with telling me that it was better to be led to church in a halter, to be tied to a girl that I did not like, than to be tied to the gangway, or, as the sailors call it, married to *Miss Roper*. From the conclusion of this wholesome counsel I perceived that the Captain thought I had eloped on account of a bastard.¹

In vain Cobbett gave the assurance that choice only had led him to the sea. Berkeley sent him ashore. As a last resource the lad went to the Post-Admiral, Evans, but the Admiral declined to reverse the Captain's decision; whereby, said Cobbett gratefully, years after, "I happily escaped, sorely against my will, from the most toilsome and perilous profession in the world."

Cobbett returned to the plough, but, as he said, he was now spoilt for a farmer. Before he went to Portsmouth he had had no ambition greater than to surpass his brothers in the execution of the manual labour that fell to their lot, but after this glimpse of a wider life a very different ambition stirred within him. Working on a farm no longer pleased him; no longer did he find any satisfaction in the singing of the birds or even in following the hounds. He sighed for fresh woods and pastures new, for a wider range of activity.

However, seeing no opening in the greater world, he remained working on the farm at Farnham until May 6, 1783, on which day he was to take two or three lasses to the fair at Guildford. He was to meet his companions at a spot three miles from "The Jolly Farmer," and in the morning, dressed in his Sunday clothes, and with something under a pound in his pocket, he sallied forth to keep the tryst. On the way he came to the London

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupino*, p. 12.

road, and there he saw coming towards him the stage-coach bound for the metropolis. He had never in his wildest dreams thought of going to London ; but, always the creature of impulse, just as he had gone suddenly to Kew, and later had suddenly volunteered for the navy, so now on the spur of the moment he boarded the coach and went to London. In this manner, without a word of farewell, he left his native town, which he did not see again for seventeen years, when the uncouth rustic had become a man famous, or at least notorious, in two continents.

When I returned to England, in 1800, after an absence from the country parts of it of sixteen years, the trees, the hedges, even the parks and woods, seemed so *small*. . . . I had to cross, in my post-chaise, the long and dreary heath of Bagshot ; then, at the end of it, to mount a hill called Hungry Hill ; and from that hill I knew I should look down into the beautiful and fertile vale of Farnham. My heart fluttered with impatience, mixed with a sort of fear, to see all the scenes of my childhood ; for I had learnt before, the death of my father and mother. There is a hill, not far from the town, called Crooksbury Hill, which rises up out of a flat in the form of a cone, and is planted with Scotch fir-trees. Here I used to take the eggs and young ones of crows and magpies. This hill was a famous object in the neighbourhood. It served as the superlative degree of height. "As high as Crooksbury Hill" meant, with us, the utmost degree of height. Therefore, the first object that my eyes sought was this hill. *I could not believe my eyes!* Literally speaking, I, for a moment, thought the famous hill removed and a little heap put in its stead ; for I had seen in New Brunswick a single rock, or hill of solid rock, ten times as big and four or five times as high ! The post-boy, going down hill, and

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not a bad road, whisked me in a few minutes to the Bush Inn, from the garden of which I could see the prodigious sand-hill where I had begun my gardening works. What a *nothing!* But now came rushing into my mind, all at once, my pretty little garden, my little blue smock-frock, my little nailed shoes, my pretty pigeons that I used to feed out of my hands, the last kind words and tears of my gentle and tender-hearted and affectionate mother. I hastened back into the room. If I had looked a moment longer, I should have dropped. When I came to reflect, *what a change!* I looked down at my dress. What a change! What scenes I had gone through! How altered my state! I had dined the day before at a Secretary of State¹ in company with Mr. Pitt,¹ and had been waited upon by men in gaudy liveries! I had had nobody to assist me in the world; no teachers of any sort. Nobody to shelter me from the consequence of bad, and no one to counsel me to good, behaviour. I felt proud. The distinctions of rank, birth, and wealth all became nothing in my eyes; and from that moment (less than a month after my arrival in England) I resolved never to bend before them.²

Cobbett arrived in London at nine o'clock in the evening of May 6, 1783, and, like the true adventurer, found he had only the traditional half-crown in his pocket. Good fortune, however, pursued him. As a Scotch gardener had befriended him at Kew, so in the metropolis a fellow-traveller on the coach took him under his wing. The fellow-traveller was a Southwark hop-merchant, who, it presently transpired, had often dealt with Cobbett's father. He begged Cobbett to return to Farnham, but when the lad refused he took

¹ The "Secretary of State" was William Windham. Windham, however, was not in 1800 a Secretary of State, but Secretary at War, with a seat in the Cabinet.

² *A Year's Residence in the United States*, pp. 24-5.

him into his house. Fully cognisant of the perils of the town for a country lad, the merchant wrote to George Cobbett, who ordered his son to come home. William for the first time in his life, he declared, refused obedience to a paternal command. "Willingly would I have returned, but pride would not suffer me to do it," he wrote in later days. "I feared the scoffs of my acquaintances more than the real evil that threatened me."

The merchant, instead of casting off the young man for declining to follow his advice, as only too many people would have done, showed himself a Good Samaritan, and forthwith proceeded to find employment for his *protégé*. In the first instance he recommended him to a draper who required an assistant to serve behind the counter; but the first qualification for such a position is gentility, and the draper advised the young rustic, who came to him (Huish relates) attired in short and light yellow breeches, a fustian coat, a red plush waistcoat, and a pair of hob-nailed high-lows, to return without delay to the plough. Eventually he was engaged as a clerk by an attorney, Holland by name. He could write a plain hand, but he wrote very slowly, spelt abominably, had no knowledge of grammar, and could not read the crabbed caligraphy of his employer. It is, therefore, not surprising to learn that at first he was almost useless in the office; but he worked as only Cobbett could work to conquer his deficiencies. However, just when Holland was beginning to express satisfaction with his clerk's progress, the clerk was sick of the work and of the life.

No part of my life has been totally unattended with pleasure except the eight or nine months I passed in

Gray's Inn (he wrote twelve years later). The office (for so the dungeon where I wrote was called) was so dark that, on cloudy days, we were obliged to burn candle. I worked like a galley-slave from five in the morning till eight or nine at night, and sometimes all night long. How many quarrels have I assisted to foment and perpetuate between those poor innocent fellows, John Doe and Richard Roe! How many times (God forgive me!) have I set them to assault each other with guns, swords, staves, and pitch-forks, and then brought them to answer for their misdeeds before Our Sovereign Lord the King seated in His Court of Westminster! When I think of the *soids* and *so forths* and the counts of tautology that I scribbled over; when I think of those sheets of seventy-two words, and those lines two inches apart, my brain turns. Gracious heaven! if I am doomed to be wretched, bury me beneath Iceland snows, and let me feed on blubber; stretch me under the burning line and deny me thy propitious dews; nay, if it be thy will, suffocate me with the infected and pestilential air of a democratic club-room; but save me, O save me, from the desk of a pettifogging attorney!¹

It was, perhaps, less the work that aroused Cobbett's ire than the conditions under which it had to be performed. With Holland he found apparently little fault, but in the endeavour to describe Holland's "laundress" he ransacked his vocabulary.

Mr. Holland was but little in the chambers himself. He always went out to dinner, while I was left to be provided for by the "laundress," as he called her. Those

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupine* (ed. 1797), p. 17.

It is worthy of mention that three of Cobbett's sons became barristers. "My three eldest sons are bent on the law," Cobbett wrote to Thomas Smith, of Liverpool, February 23, 1824. "William is entered at Lincoln's Inn; Johnny will be next week, and James the week after."—Add. MSS. 28104, f. 71.

gentlemen of the law who have resided in the Inns of Court in London know very well what a "laundress" means. Ours was, I believe, the oldest and ugliest of the officious sisterhood. She had age and experience enough to be Lady Abbess of all the nuns in all the convents of Irish-Town. It would be wronging the Witch of Endor to compare her to this hag, who was the only creature that deigned to enter into conversation with me. All except the name, I was in prison, and this Weird Sister was my keeper. Our chambers were to me what the subterraneous cavern was to Gil Blas: his description of the Dame Leonarda exactly suited my "laundress"; nor were the professions, or rather the practice, of our masters altogether dissimilar.¹

To a young man who had been used to being in the open air all day, the confinement in an ill-ventilated office must have been something like torture, and many times during the months he was in Gray's Inn, Cobbett must have regretted that he had left Farnham, and wished himself back again. On Sundays, the only days on which he was permitted to leave the chambers, he usually walked to St. James's Park, there to feast his eyes with the sight of the trees, the grass, and the water. Once, early in 1784, on his way to the park, he saw an advertisement inviting young men to join the Marines at Chatham. His old passion for the sea revived, and, though undeceived by the alluring terms of the notice that promised glory and riches to those that joined the corps, he thought he could not be worse off than he was. He went forthwith to Chatham, and on February 4, 1784, enlisted, as he thought, in the Marines. By some misunderstanding, however, he had enlisted, not in the Marines, but in the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Foot,

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupine*, p. 18.

which was serving at Nova Scotia. The mistake could not be remedied, but Cobbett relieved his feelings by telling Captain Lane of the Fifty-fourth, before whom he was brought, that he had thought himself engaged in the Marines. "By Jasus, my lad, and you have had a narrow escape!" the officer cried, and hastened to console the new recruit by dwelling on the splendid record of the regiment, and dilating on the beauties and riches of Nova Scotia, with so much ardour that Cobbett expressed himself perfectly enchanted with the prospect of a voyage thither.

CHAPTER II

IN THE ARMY (1781-1792)

At the depôt at Chatham—The private soldier of the day—Cobbett abstains from drink and gambling—Benjamin Garlike—Cobbett's determination to rise in the world—Devotes his leisure to reading—Studies grammar—His account of his industry—Joins his regiment at Halifax—The regiment goes to St. John's—Cobbett's description of New Brunswick—Promoted corporal—Then sergeant—And then sergeant-major—His occupations—Obtains his discharge—Secures excellent testimonials—Charges some officers of his regiment with speculation—His preparations for the case—Interview with Sir George Yonge—Obstacles put in his way by the authorities—Letter to Sir Charles Gould—His appeal to Pitt—The court-martial assembles in London—Cobbett does not appear—The reasons for his absence.

FOR upwards of a year Cobbett remained at the depôt at Chatham, learning his drill and the other duties of a private soldier. "If my father had any fault, it was not being submissive enough, and I am afraid my acquaintance has but too often discovered the same fault in his son," Cobbett wrote in 1796; and certainly no one has ever challenged this statement. It is, therefore, the more to Cobbett's credit that he made an exemplary soldier. The private soldier of that day was the lowest of the low, and Cobbett said afterwards that, with the sole exception of himself, there was only one other sober man in the regiment—Corporal Bestland. Drink, debauchery, and gambling were the amusements of the men as of the officers; but Cobbett, strengthened by the precepts of his father and mother, during the whole eight years he was in the army never tasted any in-

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—as I shot up into a hobble-dehoy, I took to driving the Plow for the benefit of mankind, which was always my prime object ;—hearing that the Church-Wardens were after me, I determined to become a Hero, and secretly quitting my agricultural pursuits, and Sukey Stubbs,—Voluntered as a Private-Soldier into the 51st Regiment, commanded by that tried Patriot and Martyre Lord Edwd. Fitzgerald—and embarked for the Plantations.

Vide—My own Memoires in the Political Register for 1804.

COBBETT THE RECRUIT
From a caricature by Gillray

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toxicating liquor, nor touched a card, nor indulged in any form of dissipation. This he has recorded with much self-complacency; but while some may laugh at this, more will praise him for having accomplished the difficult feat of emerging unscathed from the demoralising environment in which he had, ignorant of the dangers, placed himself. In what esteem the army in that day was held is made clear by the fact that George Cobbett was willing to make the sacrifice, the great sacrifice to one with his small means, to put up the money necessary to purchase his son's discharge. Cobbett, however, declined the generous offer. He never of his own free will retreated from any position he had taken up; and whatever the business upon which he embarked, notwithstanding that to proceed spelt disaster, he always went through with it to the end.

Cobbett subsequently declared that at this period of his life he owed much to the advice and encouragement of Benjamin Garlike, a young man of superior social position, whose acquaintance he had made in London. As a matter of fact, however, while encouragement and advice are good for all, no man required them less than Cobbett. To advice he rarely listened, and his belief in himself was so great that encouragement could scarcely spur him to greater efforts than those he made on his own initiative. That he was determined to succeed in the world is clearly shown by the way he spent his time in the army. He learnt that it was possible to rise from the ranks, and he saw here a general and there a captain who had done so. In his own regiment the quartermaster had been a private soldier, and so had the adjutant, who was also a lieutenant; and besides these, in the garrison of Halifax in Nova Scotia there were no

less than seventeen officers who had risen from the ranks. What others had done, Cobbett had no doubt he also could do. The first essential was good conduct ; and Cobbett, during the eight years he was in the service, was never once disgraced, confined, or even reprimanded. The second essential was to acquire some degree of education, and upon how well he succeeded in this matter it is unnecessary to dwell.

Putting temptation behind him at the outset, Cobbett set himself resolutely to improve his mind. Soon after he enlisted he subscribed to a circulating library, and he read the greater part of the books on those shelves more than once. At first he may have been assisted in his choice of books by the librarian's pretty daughter, with whom he fell in love—a passion which was nipped in the bud by the girl's marriage to a London stationer. Even of assistance in the choice of books, however, Cobbett was independent, for at this time he read all classes of literature with equal avidity—plays, novels, history, poetry, whatever he could lay hands upon. Of course, such indiscriminate reading gave him but a superficial knowledge of things, but it formed an excellent basis upon which to work. Gradually he inclined to those books from which he could derive useful instruction ; and early in his military life, while studying French and fortification, he read at one and the same time, according to his own account, Lowth's *Grammar*, Isaac Watts's *Logic*, "the Rhetoric of some fellow whom I have forgotten," a book on geometry, and the Duke of York's *Military Exercises and Evolutions*. A simultaneous study of these works would have taxed the energies of a student well grounded in the ordinary elements of education, but to make headway Cobbett as he went along had to acquire

these elements, and to acquire them while suffering all the discomforts of the life of a private soldier in the eighteenth century.

I learned grammar when I was a private soldier on the pay of sixpence a day. The edge of my berth, or that of the guard-bed, was my seat to study in; my knapsack was my bookcase; a bit of board lying on my lap was my writing-table; and the task did not demand anything like a year of my life. I had no money to purchase candle or oil; in winter time it was rarely that I could get any evening-light but that of the *fire*, and only my *turn* even of that. . . . To buy a pen or a sheet of paper I was compelled to forego some portion of food, though in a state of half-starvation; I had no moment of time that I could call my own; and I had to read and to write amidst the talking, laughing, singing, whistling, and brawling of at least half a score of the most thoughtless of men, and that, too, in the hours of their freedom from all control. Think not lightly of the *farthing* that I had to give, now and then, for ink, pen, or paper! That farthing was, alas! a *great sum* to me! I was as tall as I am now; I had great health and great exercise. The whole of the money, not expended for us at market, was *twopence a week* for each man. I remember, and well I may! that, upon one occasion, I, after all absolutely necessary expenses, had, on a Friday, made shift to have a half-penny in reserve, which I had destined for the purchase of a *red-herring* in the morning; but when I pulled off my clothes at night, so hungry then as to be hardly able to endure life, I found that I had *lost my half-penny!* I buried my head under the miserable sheet and rug, and cried like a child!¹

In the attorney's office Cobbett had experienced the drawbacks attendant upon a want of knowledge of

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 44.

grammar, and these were again brought home to him when, because he wrote a fair hand, he was appointed clerk to Colonel (afterwards General) Hugh Debbieg, the commandant of the Chatham garrison. His friend Garlike at this time impressed upon him the desirability of supplying the defects of his education.

Benjamin Garlike to William Cobbett

LONDON, circa 1783.

. . . Now, then, my dear Bill, it is for you to determine whether you shall all your life yield an abject submission to others, or whether you yourself shall be a guide and leader of men. Nature has done her part towards you most generously; but her favour will be of no avail without a knowledge of grammar. Without that knowledge you will be laughed at by blockheads: with it, you may laugh at thousands who think themselves learned men.¹

Colonel Debbieg, of whom Cobbett remarked gratefully that "his friendship extended beyond his interest," evidently saw possibilities in the recruit, and he, too, strongly urged him to learn to speak and write correctly, enforcing his advice with a promise of reward in case of success.

¹ *Cobbett's Weekly Political Pamphlet*, December 6, 1817.

Garlike entered the Diplomatic Service, and was consequently seldom in England. Still, he and Cobbett saw each other from time to time. "Our politics when we met did not accord," Cobbett wrote of these later days; "and though he retained all the kindness and all the virtue and integrity of his youth, he had lost all its vigour. He had lived so long in courts, had so long had to do with superior power, and had so long lived in submission to the mandates of others, that he became nervous when he heard my ordinary talk about men in place and authority. But he was a most kind and virtuous man, and to his advice I owe all I have ever possessed beyond the lot of a common soldier" (*Ibid.*). Garlike subsequently became Envoy at Constantinople. He died at an early age in 1815.

I procured me a Lowth's grammar, and applied myself to the study of it with unceasing assiduity, and not without some profit; for, though it was a considerable time before I fully comprehended all that I read, still I read and studied with such unremitting attention, that, at last, I could write without falling into any very gross errors. The pains I took cannot be described: I wrote the whole grammar out two or three times; I got it by heart; I repeated it every morning and every evening, and when on guard I imposed on myself the task of saying it all over once every time I was posted sentinel. To this exercise of my memory I ascribe the retentiveness of which I have since found it capable, and to the success with which it was attended, I ascribe the perseverance that has led to the acquirement of the little learning of which I am master.¹

These studies, invaluable in themselves, had the further advantage of keeping Cobbett out of mischief. Though there must have been times with him when ginger was hot in the mouth, and when he would fain have enjoyed himself like his comrades, he conquered all such desires, and applied all his energies to overcoming his disabilities and preparing himself for success in life.

The natural abilities with which I have been endowed, whatever may have been their amount, would have been of comparatively little use, even aided by great sobriety and abstinence, if I had not, in early life, contracted the blessed habit of husbanding well my time. To this more than to any other thing I owed my very extraordinary promotion in the army. I was *always ready*: if I had to mount guard at *ten*, I was ready at *nine*: never did any man, or any thing, wait one moment

¹ *Life of Peter Porcupine*, pp. 21-2.

for me. Being, at an age *under twenty years*,¹ raised from Corporal to Sergeant-major *at once*,² over the heads of thirty Sergeants, I naturally should have been an object of envy and hatred ; but this habit of early rising and of rigid adherence to the precepts which I have given you, really subdued these passions ; because every one felt, that what I did he had never done, and never could do. Before my promotion a clerk was wanted to make out the morning report of the regiment. I rendered the clerk unnecessary ; and long before any other man was dressed for the parade, my work for the morning was all done, and I myself was on the parade, walking, in fine weather, for an hour perhaps. My custom was this : to get up in summer at daylight, and in winter at four o'clock ; shave, dress, even to the putting of my sword-belt over my shoulder, and having my sword lying on the table before me, ready to hang by my side. Then I ate a bit of cheese, or pork, and bread. Then I prepared my report, which was filled up as fast as the companies brought me in the materials. After this I had an hour or two to read, before the time came for any duty out of doors, unless when the regiment or part of it went out to exercise in the morning. When this was the case, and the matter was left to me, I always had it on the ground in such time as that the bayonets glistened in the *rising sun*, a sight which gave me delight, of which I often think, but which I should in vain endeavour to describe. If the *officers* were to go out, eight or ten o'clock was the hour, sweating the men in the heat of the day, breaking in upon the time for cooking their dinner, putting all things out of order and all men out of humour.

¹ He was twenty-three, not twenty, years of age. See the footnote, vol. i. p. 30.

² This differs from the account given in the *Political Register* for June 17, 1809, where Cobbett states that he was made a Corporal almost immediately after his arrival in Nova Scotia, Sergeant a few months afterwards, and at the end of about a year and a half Sergeant-major.

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When I was commander, the men had a long day of leisure before them; they could ramble into the town or into the woods; go to get raspberries, to catch birds, to catch fish, or to pursue any other recreation, and such of them as chose, and were qualified, to work at their trades. So that here, arising solely from the early habits of one young man, were pleasant and happy days given to hundreds.¹

The newly-recruited detachments sailed early in 1785 from Gravesend to join the regiment at Halifax, in Nova Scotia. To this place Cobbett had been eagerly looking forward.

When I first beheld the barren, not to say hideous, rocks at the entrance of the harbour, I began to fear that the master of the vessel had mistaken his way; for I could perceive nothing of that fertility that my good recruiting Captain had dwelt on with so much delight. Nova Scotia had no other charm for me than that of novelty. Everything I saw was new: bogs, rocks and stumps, mosquitoes and bull-frogs; thousands of Captains and Colonels without soldiers, and of 'Squires without stockings or shoes. In England I had never thought of approaching a 'Squire without a most respectful bow; but in this new world, though I was but a Corporal, I often ordered a 'Squire to bring me a glass of grog, and even to take care of my knapsack.²

Within a few weeks, happily, the Fifty-fourth was ordered to St. John's in New Brunswick, and there and in other places in the same province the regiment remained for six years. Very different was the impression made upon Cobbett by the scenery of New Brunswick.

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 39.

² *The Life of Peter Porcupine*, p. 23.

The province of New Brunswick, in North America, in which I passed my years from the age of eighteen to that of twenty-six, consists in general of heaps of rocks, in the interstices of which grow the pine, the spruce, and various sorts of fir-trees, or, where the woods have been burnt down, the bushes of the raspberry or those of the huckleberry. The province is cut asunder lengthwise by a great river, called the St. John, about two hundred miles in length, and, at half-way from the mouth, full a mile wide. Into this main river run innumerable smaller rivers, there called CREEKS. On the sides of these creeks the land is, in places, clear of rocks; it is, in these places, generally good and productive; the trees that grow here are the birch, the maple, and others of the deciduous class; natural meadows here and there present themselves; and some of these spots far surpass in rural beauty any other that my eyes ever beheld; the creeks, abounding towards their sources in waterfalls of endless variety, as well in form as in magnitude, and always teeming with fish, while water-fowl enliven their surface, and while wild-pigeons of the gayest plumage flutter, in thousands upon thousands, amongst the branches of the beautiful trees, which sometimes, for miles together, form an arch over the creeks.

I, in one of my rambles in the woods, in which I took great delight, came to a spot at a very short distance from the source of one of these creeks. Here was everything to delight the eye, and especially of one like me, who seems to have been born to love rural life, and trees and plants of all sorts. Here were about two hundred acres of natural meadow, interspersed with patches of maple-trees in various forms and of various extent; the creek (there about thirty miles from its point of joining the St. John) ran down the middle of the spot which formed a sort of dish, the high and rocky hills rising all round it, except at the outlet of the creek, and these hills crowned with lofty pines: in the hills were the sources

of the creek, the waters of which came down in cascades, for any one of which many a nobleman in England would, if he could transfer it, give a good slice of his fertile estate; and in the creek, at the foot of the cascades, there were, in the season, salmon, the finest in the world, and so abundant, and so easily taken, as to be used for manuring the land.

If nature, in her very best humour, had made a spot for the express purpose of captivating me, she could not have exceeded the efforts which she had here made.¹

In Cobbett's case virtue was its own reward and something more. Colonel Debbieg did not forget his promise to use his influence on behalf of the industrious apprentice, who, before his departure for Nova Scotia, was promoted Corporal.

There is no situation where merit is so sure to meet with reward as in a well-disciplined army. Those who command are obliged to reward it for their own ease and credit. I was soon raised to the rank of Corporal, a rank which, however contemptible it may appear in some people's eyes, brought me in a clear twopence *per diem*, and put a very clever worsted knot upon my shoulder too.²

While he was Corporal, Cobbett was made clerk to the regiment, and in this position he first gave evidence of his enormous appetite for work. He was willing to do everything, and most of the officers were only too willing to let him do everything, so long as they could take the credit for themselves.

In a very short time, the whole of the business, in that way, fell into my hands; and at the end of about

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, pars. 142, 143, 144.

² *The Life of Peter Porcupine*, p. 22.

a year, neither adjutant, pay-master, or quarter-master, could move an inch without my assistance. The *military* part of the regiment affairs fell under my care in like manner. About this time the new *discipline*, as it was called; that is to say, the mode of handling the musket, and of marching, &c., called "*Dundas's System*," was sent out to us, in little books, which were to be studied by the officers of each regiment, and the rules of which were to be immediately conformed to. Though any old woman might have written such a book; though it was excessively foolish from beginning to end; still, it was to be complied with; it ordered and commanded a *total change*, and this change was to be completed before the next annual review took place. To make this change was left to me, who was not then twenty [twenty-three] years of age, while not a single officer in the regiment paid the least attention to the matter; so that when the time came for the annual review, I, then a *Corporal*, had to give lectures of instruction to the officers themselves, the Colonel not excepted; and, for several of them, if not for all of them, I had to make out, upon large cards, which they bought for the purpose, little plans of the position of the regiment, together with lists of the words of command, which they had to give in the field. . . . There was I, at the review, upon the flank of the Grenadier Company, with my worsted shoulder-knot, and my great, high, coarse, hairy cap; confounded in the ranks amongst other men, while those who were commanding me to move my hands or my feet, thus or thus, were, in fact, uttering words which I had taught them; and were, in everything excepting mere authority, my inferiors; and ought to have been commanded by me. . . .

In my regiment I was everything; the whole corps was under my control; I rendered services, not only in the regiment, but in the provinces where we were stationed, such as no one but myself would have thought of. I remember a set of *Commissioners* being sent out from



arrived in safety (according to the proverb), being a Scholar, (for all the world knows that I can Read and Write) I was promoted to the rank of a Corporal, and soon after appointed to teach the Officers their duty—found them all so damnably stupid, that though I took the pains to draw up my instructions on Cards, I could not with all my Canning and Kicking drive one manual movement into their thick heads!

N.B. These cards were so much admired by Genl. Dundas, that he made them the Foundation of his New Military System.

Vide—My own Memoirs in the Political Register of 1800.

COBBETT TEACHES HIS OFFICERS THEIR DUTY

From a caricature by Gillray

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England, a part of whose business it was to make a statement and report of the population, &c., &c., of the provinces. They lived about our quarters for some time; they had some jovial carousings with our officers; but *it was I* who made out their statement, and *drew up their report* to be sent home to the King; for which, by the by, they never even gave me their thanks. This statement, which, as was the case with everything that I meddled with, was done in so clear, correct, and, in point of penmanship, so beautiful a manner, that, I have been told, the Duke of Kent, when he afterwards became Commander-in-Chief of those provinces, had it copied, and took away the original as a curiosity. This was the way in which I did everything. I was, of course, very much envied and hated by the weak and the wicked, and, as was natural to expect, I did not, amongst people whom, though my superiors in rank, I could not help despising, bear myself with much moderation. From nineteen to twenty-seven is not much of an age for moderation, especially with those who must necessarily despise all around them. But the fame of my services and talents ran through the whole country. Every good man respected me. I was invited to visit people in all parts of the provinces. While we lay at Frederickton in New Brunswick, I had the settling, or rather the preventing, of eight or nine law-suits. I had the affairs of a whole regiment to attend to; all its accounts, its parades, its guards, its everything. I found, however, time for studying English and French grammar; I learnt geometry and fortifications; I built a barrack for four hundred men, without the aid of either draughtsman, carpenter, or bricklayer; the soldiers under me cut down the timber and dug the stones, and I was the architect; I went through a track of woods, of about a hundred miles, where no man had ever ventured before to go alone; and this I did for the purpose of putting a stop to desertion, by showing the regiment that I *myself* was

able to follow the fugitives, and, accordingly, after that we had no more desertions to the United States. With all these occupations (of which I mention only a few particulars that occur to me at the moment) I found time for skating, fishing, shooting, and all the other sports of the country, of which, when I left it, I had seen, and knew, more than any other man.¹

This account is displeasing because it emphasises the vanity of the author, but there is no doubt that it is a truthful record. It was written a quarter of a century after Cobbett had left the army, and, looking back, he may well have regarded with complacency the position to which he had attained within a few years of learning to spell. The officers made use of him, and, for his own ends, he permitted this. His object, however, was harmless enough, being only the desire to feel himself the motive power of the machine. "Though no nominal addition was made to my pay, and no nominal addition to my authority," he wrote, "I acquired the latter as effectively as if a law had been passed to confer it upon me." The officers were lazy, ignorant, self-indulgent, and rapacious, and he despised them heartily. Only for Lord Edward Fitzgerald² had he any respect, and him he described to Pitt in 1800 as the only really sober and honest officer he had ever met. He boasted that in his intercourse with his superiors he never hid his dislikes or restrained his tongue, and that he would have been broken and flogged for fifty different offences given to his "supreme jackasses," had they not been kept in awe by his inflexible sobriety, impartiality, and integrity,

¹ *Political Register*, June 17, 1809.

² Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763-1798), son of James, first Duke of Leinster, is best known for the active part he took in Irish politics.

by the consciousness of their inferiority to him, and by the real and almost indispensable necessity of the use of his talents.¹ How he must have been hated, not only by the thirty Sergeants over whose head he had been promoted to be Sergeant-major, but by all the officers with whom he was brought into contact!

It was his determination to expose the peculations of certain officers of the regiment that decided Cobbett to retire from the Service. He applied for his discharge, and resisted the overtures of Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald and of General Frederick, the Colonel of the regiment, who promised him that if he withdrew his application he should be immediately recommended for a commission. Though he could now grasp the reward for which he had striven, he was not to be moved from his purpose. The following order was issued in the garrison of Portsmouth on the day of his discharge:—

PORTSMOUTH, *December 19, 1791.*

Sergeant-major Cobbett having most pressingly applied for his discharge, at Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald's request, General Frederick has ordered Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald to return the Sergeant-major thanks for his behaviour and conduct during the time of his being in the regiment, and Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald adds his most hearty thanks to those of the General.

A further testimony was given by Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald.

These are to certify that the bearer hereof, William Cobbett, Sergeant-major in the aforesaid regiment, has served honestly and faithfully for the space of eight

¹ *Cobbett's Political Pamphlet*, December 6, 1817.

years, nearly seven of which he has been a non-commissioned officer, and of that time he has been five years Sergeant-major to the regiment ; but, having very earnestly applied for his discharge, he, in consideration of his good behaviour and the services he has rendered the regiment, is hereby discharged. Given under my hand and the seal of the regiment, at Portsmouth, this 29th day of December, 1791. EDWARD FITZGERALD.

Of the reason of his desire to be free of the Service Cobbett had been careful to give no hint. So early as 1787, when he was serving as clerk of the regiment, he discovered that the Quartermaster, to whom fell the duty of issuing the men's provisions to them, kept about a fourth part to himself. Staggered by the knowledge he had acquired, he imparted it to some of the older sergeants, who assured him that this had been the case for years, and were astonished and terrified at the idea of his making any complaint. Complain he did, however ; but the reception which he met with convinced him that he must take no further steps until he had secured his discharge and placed himself beyond the reach of a court-martial.

Subsequently he discovered that other officers were committing flagrant breaches of trust that affected the public purse ; but it was the injustice to his comrades that aroused his fiercest indignation, and fixed his determination to bring the offenders to book. It was not that he had any great liking for those who served with him in the ranks, but that he was constitutionally averse to letting wrong pass unpunished. The men might be worthless fellows, but clearly the officers concerned were scoundrels. He began forthwith to collect material for an exposure on his return to England. He brought to



I was now made Sarjeant Major and Clerk to the Regiment, and there being only One Man in it, besides myself, who could read or keep himself sober (viz.—poor little Corporal-Bestland)—I constituted him my Deputy;—being intrusted with the care of the Regimental Books, the Corporal and myself (tho. both of us blastedly afraid of a pair of Bloody Shoulders)—purloined, and Copied by night such Documents as promised to be serviceable in the great National Object which I had in view;—namely, to Disorganise the Army, preparatory to the Revolutionizing it altogether!

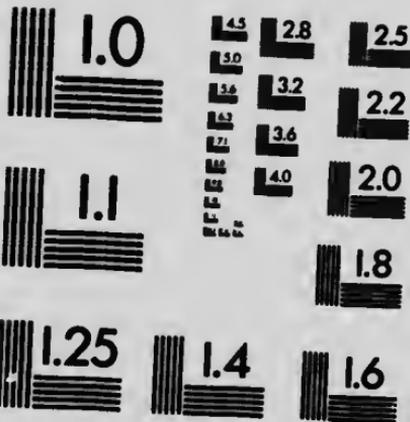
Vide—My own Memoirs in the Political Register of 1809.

COBBETT CLERK TO THE REGIMENT
From a caricature by Gillray



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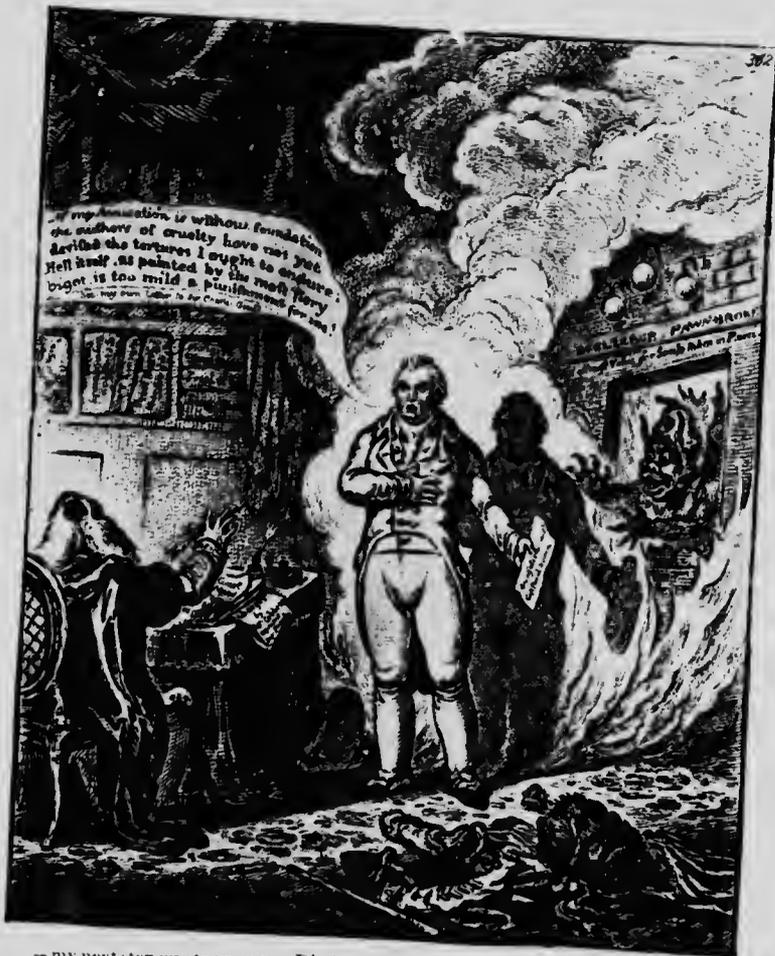
the preparation of his case the greatest care and the greatest industry. He had to work secretly, for one overt step would have had the immediate result of his being degraded to the ranks. He had access to the regimental books, and he made copies of the incriminating accounts. Here, however, he was face to face with a difficulty. When he made his charges, it was more than likely the books would be destroyed or tampered with, and who would believe his word that his copies were accurate against the officers' declaration that they were false? It was essential that he should have a witness to their being true copies; but to secure that witness he must unfold his scheme, and if his confidant betrayed him there was no knowing what might happen. So difficult was the position, and so great the risk, that at one time he almost decided to abandon the affair. "I dreamt twenty times, I dare say, of my papers being discovered, and of my being tried and flogged half to death," he admitted; and it was only a fresh act of injustice towards the men that made him set danger at defiance. He summoned his courage to his aid, and confided in Corporal William Bestland, who wrote in the office under him. He chose his man well. Together they made, checked, and signed copies, and stamped them with the regimental seal, so that they might be able to swear to them when they brought them into court. Everything was prepared when the regiment sailed for England, and all danger seemed over, when, as the troopship reached Portsmouth, a rumour circulated on board that all boxes and luggage would be searched. Cobbett contrived to avert the peril by entrusting the papers to a customs-house official to convey them on shore. Here, too, Cobbett was fortunate

in his man, who took the documents to his home, and later restored them to their owner.

Cobbett received his discharge from the army on December 29, 1791, and on January 14 wrote to the Secretary at War, Sir George Yonge, informing him of his intention to prosecute, and enclosing a petition to the King stating the substance of his complaints. He was summoned to an interview with Sir George Yonge on January 24, when he told his story; but, hearing nothing further for more than a fortnight, he wrote on February 10 to remind Sir George that he had, from the first, told him that he had no other business in London, that his stock of money was scanty, and that to detain him in London was to ruin him.

This produced its effect. In a reply, dated February 15, he was informed that it was intended only to try the accused upon part of the charge that had been preferred; and it subsequently transpired that, even of the charges that remained, those parts were omitted that to Cobbett appeared the most material.

But this was not all (Cobbett commented later). I had all along insisted that, unless the Court-Martial were held in *London*, I could not think of appearing at it; because, if held in a garrisoned place like Portsmouth, the thing must be a mere mockery. In spite of this, however, the Judge Advocate's letter of the 23rd of February informed me that the Court was to be held at Portsmouth or Hilsea. I remonstrated against this, and demanded that my remonstrance should be laid before the King, which, on the 29th, the Judge Advocate promised should be done by himself; but, on the 5th of March, the Judge Advocate informed me that he had laid my remonstrance before . . . *whom*, think you? Not the *King*, but the *accused* parties, who, of course,



— my next step was to procure a Discharge from my ever-lamented associate the Lord Edwld. Fitzgerald:—with this I returned to England and directly set about writing "The Soldier's Friend"—which I nightly dropt about the Horse-Guards and drank "Damnation to the House of Brunswick!"—more-over, I wrote 27 Letters to my Royal Master, to Mr. Pitt and the Judge-Advocate, against my Officers, 23 of which Letters were stolen by the public-Robbers, and never came to hand,—so that I had no means of obtaining Credit for my Charges & procuring a Court-Martial—but—by solemnly Pledging my precious Soul to the Devil in the presence of Judge Gould for the Truth of my allegations, and my ability to support them by evidence !!!—
 Vide—My own Memoirs in the Political Register 1809.

COBBETT ACCUSES HIS OFFICERS
From a caricature by Gillray

thought the Court ought to assemble at Portsmouth or Hilsea, and doubtless for the very reasons that led me to object to its being held there.¹

*William Cobbett to Sir Charles Could, Judge-Advocate
General*

LONDON, February 25, 1792.

. . . I should here insert the names of the witnesses I wish to be officially summoned; but the very unexpected and alarming circumstance of its being proposed to hold the Court-Martial at Portsmouth or Hilsea prevents me from doing this at present. I have placed myself in London, Sir, and have continued here ever since the 26th December last, for no other purpose than the prosecution of this affair, never imagining it possible that charges of such importance, and such a general concern, would be investigated anywhere else; and as it certainly is not his Majesty's desire to embarrass those who come forward in a public action and appeal to his justice, I hope, upon reconsideration of the matter, the Court will be ordered to assemble in London.

I have no other views, Sir, in this undertaking, than such as arise from a desire to render my country, and the army, a service; and being well convinced of the goodness of my cause, all I wish for is a fair and impartial trial. But this I freely declare I cannot expect at Portsmouth or Hilsea; there the regiment is quartered, there the accused must have formed connections, and there all the witnesses I may call upon will be totally in their power. I certainly am entitled to his Majesty's protection on this occasion. In London I should think myself perfectly safe, and should give my evidence without fear. At Portsmouth I shall be a friendless, unsupported individual, surrounded with a host of enemies, and I should look upon my life as being in danger.

¹ *Political Register*, June 17, 1809.

Upon this point Cobbett was firm: if the court-martial was held at Portsmouth or Hilsea, he would not appear.

William Cobbett to William Pitt

[LONDON], March 7, 1792.

. . . I have now, Sir, done all a man can do in such a case. I have proceeded regularly, and, I may add, respectfully, from first to last; if I am allowed to serve my country by prosecuting men who have injured it, I shall do it; if I am thwarted and pressed down by those whose office it is to assist and support me, I cannot do it: in either case, I shall be satisfied with having done my duty, and shall leave the world to make a comparison between me and the men whom I have accused.¹

This dignified remonstrance had its effect, and Cobbett was informed that the court-martial would be held in London. But it soon became clear to Cobbett that "military justice in England was pretty nearly akin to military justice in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick." His case rested on the regimental books, and the extracts signed by Bestland and himself. He had so early in the proceedings as January 22 asked Sir George Yonge to have the books impounded, but until February 18 they were left in the hands of the accused. He asked that his witness should be discharged from the Service, as he could not name him and leave him to the tender mercies of the officers. This was denied him, and consequently it was impossible for him to call Bestland as a witness. Indeed, every possible obstacle was placed in his path. It is clear that the War Office was anxious that the affair should not be proceeded with, knowing that, when

¹ *Political Register*, June 17, 1809.

charges of dishonesty began to be bandied about, there was no knowing against whom other charges might be preferred. There were few officials at the end of the eighteenth century who would have been willing to submit their accounts to auditors. With the regimental books left in the hands of the accused, and his principal witness refused him, Cobbett knew he could do nothing in the matter.

The court-martial assembled in London on March 24 to examine the charges of making a false muster of men, of making false returns, of misapplying money, and of selling stores and clothes brought against Captain Richard Powell and Lieutenants Christopher Seton and John Hall—Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew Bruce had also been accused, but he had died on December 13—but Cobbett did not appear. The Court was adjourned for three days, and when, on its reassembling, Cobbett was not present, the Court, as in duty bound, found that "the said several charges against these officers are, and every part thereof is, totally unfounded."

The Judge-Advocate-General at once consulted the Law Officers of the Crown as to whether Cobbett could be prosecuted for slander; but Sir John Scott and Sir John Mitford, respectively Attorney-General and Solicitor-General, gave it as their opinion that "Cobbett, unless he could be proved to have conspired with others wilfully and maliciously to prefer these charges, could not be criminally prosecuted. The parties injured by his conduct, which is most highly blameable, might maintain actions upon the case against him." The officers announced their intention of prosecuting Cobbett when they could discover his whereabouts; but when he returned in 1800 no steps were taken, and nothing

was heard of the business until he had been back in England for nine years, when, as a political move, with the object of discrediting him, a pamphlet of the Proceedings of the Court-Martial was issued. Cobbett made his defence in the *Political Register*, June 17, 1809; and he declared that he would have taken no notice of the *brochure* had the whole of the papers been published, but as only five of his letters out of the twenty-seven he had written in connection with the case were printed, he felt it due to himself to make an explanation.

The question is, was Cobbett's conduct "most highly blameable"? That he was sincere, or the most abominable hypocrite, is clear from the following letter:—

William Cobbett to Sir Charles Gould

LONDON, March 11, 1792.

If my accusation is without foundation, the authors of cruelty have not yet devised the tortures I ought to endure. Hell itself, as painted by the most fiery bigot, would be too mild a punishment for me!

I came forward, Sir, in this business with the best grace that can possibly accompany a man's actions; if I were not always a steady asserter of the soldier's rights, if I were not always an opposer of the depredations on the soldiers and the public, and if my practice did not always agree with my profession; if any man can prove that I ever cheated him of a farthing, or ever winked at such practices in any one else, I will say that I am a villain, and that the officers that I accuse are good and virtuous men.

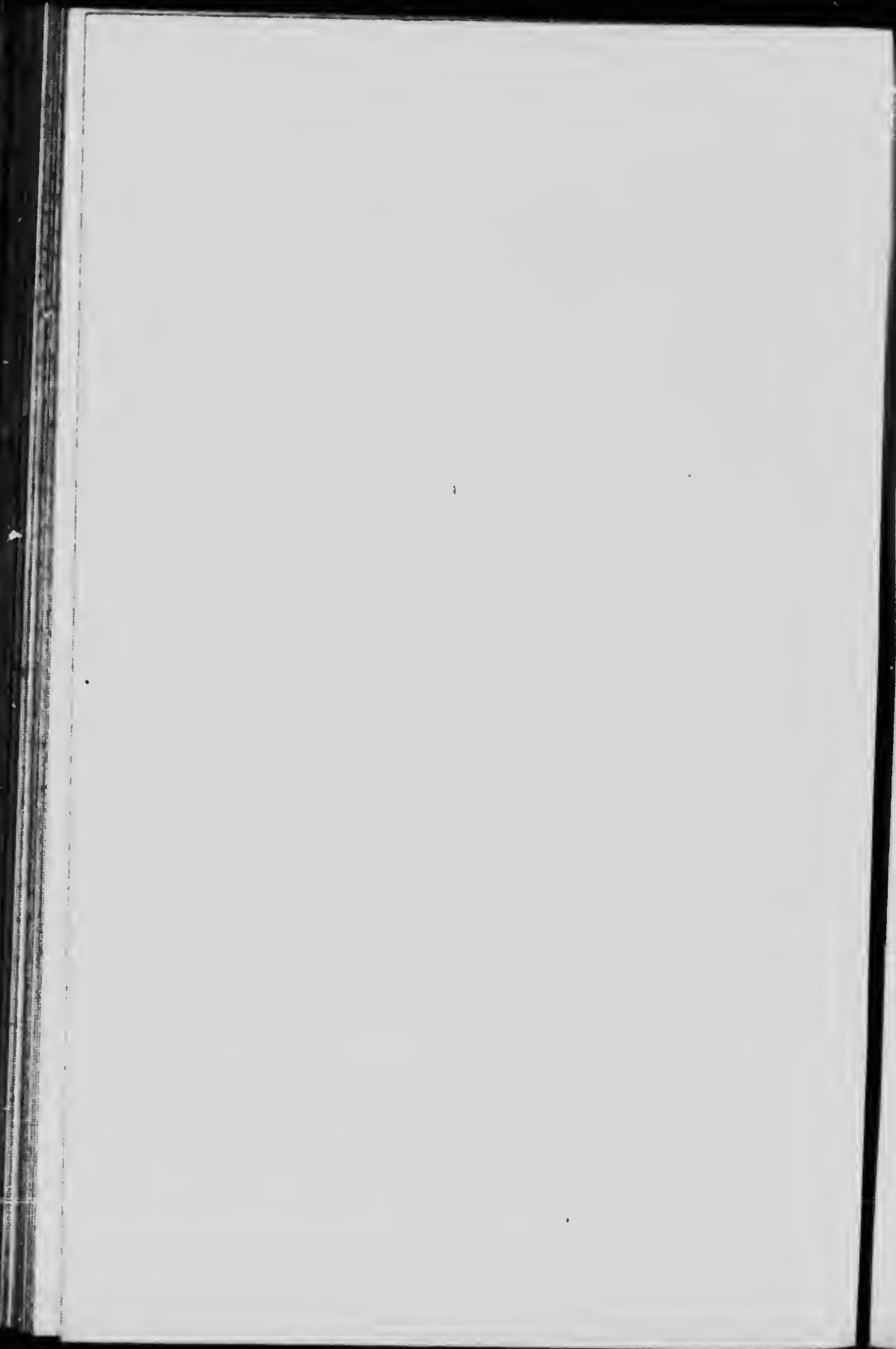
With all his faults, Cobbett was not a hypocrite. He had everything to lose, and nothing to gain, by bringing the charges against the officers. His actions throughout were straightforward. When, however, he found that



the Court-Martial was assembled at Chelsea as I requested, and Capt. Powele and the other accused Persons were placed at the Bar:—when—blast-my-Eyes!—I saw, the whole of that damn'd 51st Regiment Drummers, Fifers and all, marching boldly into the Hall to bear Testimony against Me!!—on this, I instantly ran to a boat which I had Providentially secured, and crossed the Thames.—
 —Damn'd infernal-Idiots!—did the Judge-Advocate and his Gang of Publick Robber's think that I would stay to witness my own Exposure and condemnation?
 Vide— my own Memoir's in the Political Register 1209.

THE FLIGHT OF COBBETT

From a caricature by Gillray



every opportunity had been given to the accused to tamper with the books upon which his case rested, and when he was denied his principal witness, he may well have realised that it was unlikely that he could prove his case. What decided him not to appear, however, was the information given him by Captain Lane, that the incriminated officers had organised a conspiracy to discredit his testimony by charging him with sedition, and had suborned a number of soldiers under their command to swear that just before leaving the regiment he had proposed the toast of "the destruction of the House of Brunswick." If this fabrication was adhered to, he would certainly, Lane told him, be sent to Botany Bay. "I could not obtain a chance of success, without exposing the back of my poor faithful friend Bestland, which, had I not pledged myself not to do, I would not have done," Cobbett wrote. "It was useless to appear, unless I could have tolerably fair play; and, besides, it seemed better to leave the whole set to do as they pleased than to be made a mortified witness of what it was quite evident they had resolved to do."

CHAPTER III

MARRIAGE (1792)

Cobbett marries Ann Reid—His first meeting with her—Another love affair—His consideration for his wife—Reference to Mrs. Cobbett in Tom Moore's *Diary*—The qualities Cobbett demanded in a wife—His household—His devotion to his wife and his wife's family—His letters to his wife's brother, Lieutenant Reid—His happy married life.

AFTER obtaining his discharge, and in the midst of the business connected with the charges he had brought against his regimental officers, Cobbett, at Woolwich, on February 5, 1792, married a young girl, Ann Reid, whom he had met five years earlier.

When I first saw my wife, she was *thirteen years old*, and I was within about a month of *twenty-one*.¹ She was the daughter of a Sergeant of Artillery, and I was the Sergeant-major of a regiment of Foot, both stationed in forts near the city of St. John, in the province of New Brunswick. I sat in the same room with her, for about an hour, in company with others, and I made up my mind that she was the very girl for me. That I thought her beautiful is certain, for that I had always said should be an indispensable qualification; but I saw in her what I deemed marks of that sobriety of *conduct* of which I have said so much, and which has been by far the greatest blessing of my life. It was now dead of winter, and, of course, the snow several feet

¹ In 1787 Cobbett was twenty-four years of age. See footnote, vol. i. p. 30.

deep on the ground, and the weather piercing cold. It was my habit, when I had done my morning's writing, to go out at break of day to take a walk on a hill at the foot of which our barracks lay. In about three mornings after I had first seen her, I had, by an invitation to breakfast with me, got up two young men to join me in my walk; and our road lay by the house of her father and mother. It was hardly light, but she was out on the snow, scrubbing out a washing-tub. "That's the girl for me," said I, when we had got out of her hearing. One of these young men came to England soon afterwards; and he, who keeps an inn in Yorkshire, came over to Preston, at the time of the election, to verify whether I were the same man. When he found that I was, he appeared surprised; but what was his surprise, when I told him that those tall young men, whom he saw around me, were the *sons* of that pretty little girl that he and I saw scrubbing out the washing-tub on the snow in New Brunswick at daybreak in the morning!

From the day that I first spoke to her, I never had a thought of her ever being the wife of any other man more than I had a thought of her being transformed into a chest of drawers; and I formed my resolution at once to marry her as soon as we could get permission, and to get out of the army as soon as I could. So that this matter was, at once, settled as firmly as if written in the book of fate. At the end of about six months my regiment, and I along with it, were removed to Frederickton, a distance of a *hundred miles* up the river of St. John; and, which was worse, the artillery was expected to go off to England a year or two before our regiment! The artillery went, and she along with them; and now it was that I acted a part becoming a real and sensible lover. I was aware that, when she got to that gay place Woolwich, the house of her father and mother, necessarily visited by numerous persons not the most select, might become unpleasant to her, and I did not

like, besides, that she should continue to *work hard*. I had saved a *hundred and fifty guineas*, the earnings of my early hours, in writing for the paymaster, the quartermaster, and others, in addition to the savings of my own pay. *I sent her all my money* before she sailed; and wrote to her to beg of her, if she found her home uncomfortable, to hire a lodging with respectable people: and, at any rate, not to spare the money, by any means, but to buy herself good clothes, and to live without hard work, until I arrived in England; and I, in order to induce her to lay out the money, told her that I should get plenty more before I came home.

As the malignity of the devil would have it, we were kept abroad *two years longer* than our time, Mr. Pitt (England not being so tame then as she is now) having knocked up a dust with Spain about Nootka Sound. Oh, how I cursed Nootka Sound, and poor bawling Pitt too, I am afraid! At the end of *four years*, however, home I came, landed at Portsmouth, and got my discharge from the army by the great kindness of poor Lord Edward Fitzgerald, who was then the Major of my regiment. I found my little girl *a servant of all work* (and hard work it was), *at five pounds a year*, in the house of a Captain Brisac; and, without hardly saying a word about the matter, she put into my hands *the whole of my hundred and fifty guineas unbroken!*¹

A stalwart, good-looking young man, who had rapidly risen to be the Sergeant-major of his regiment, not unnaturally found favour in the eyes of girls of his own class; but Cobbett could truthfully boast of his constancy to the little girl whom he had chosen to be his future wife. He was honest enough, however, to admit that once he was in thought disloyal to her before marriage. It was in New Brunswick, and he had lost his

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, pars. 94, 95, 96.

way, and was hospitably taken in by a Royalist farmer, introduced to the sons of the house—but he shall tell his romance in his own words.

But there was *another member* of the family, aged nineteen, who (dressed according to the neat and simple fashion of New England, whence she had come with her parents five or six years before) had her long light-brown hair twisted nicely up, and fastened on the top of her head, in which head were a pair of lively blue eyes, associated with features of which that softness and that sweetness, so characteristic of American girls, were the predominant expressions, the whole being set off by a complexion indicative of glowing health, and forming, figure, movements, and all taken together, an assemblage of beauties far surpassing any that I had ever seen but *once* in my life. That *once* was, too, *two years ago*; and in such a case and at such an age, two years, two whole years, is a long, long while! Here was the *present* against the *absent*; here was the power of the *eyes* pitted against that of the *memory*; here were all the senses up in arms to subdue the influence of the thoughts; here was vanity, here was passion, here was the spot of all spots in the world, and here also was the life, and the manners and the habits and the pursuits that I delighted in; here was everything that imagination can conceive united in a conspiracy against the poor little brunette in England! ¹

But what though vanity, passion, everything that imagination can conceive, united in a conspiracy against the poor little brunette in England? Was not Cobbett's faithfulness a match for all these allurements? Needless to say, Cobbett hastens to give the assurance that he was not in love "with this bouquet of lilies and roses."

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 146.

He was not in love with the girl, but during the two years he was in the neighbourhood, all the time he could spare from his military duties he spent with her and her family—because, forsooth! he was so enchanted with the place! The honourable, straightforward Cobbett, he who later in life gave such excellent and moral advice to young men, having no thought of marriage, never told the girl—except by implication—that he loved her. Nor did he ever mention that he was engaged to be married; not even when it came to his knowledge that the whole countryside, including the girl, daily expected the announcement of the betrothal.

The *last parting* came: and now came my just punishment! The time was known to everybody, and irrevocably fixed; for I had to move with a regiment, and the embarkation of a regiment is an *epoch* in a thinly settled province. To describe this parting would be too painful even at this distant day, and with this frost of age upon my head. The kind and virtuous father came forty miles to see me just as I was going on board in the river. *His* looks and words I have never forgotten.

On what trifles turn the great events in the life of man! If I had received a *cool* letter from my intended wife; if I had only heard a rumour of anything from which fickleness in her might have been inferred; if I had found in her any, even the smallest, abatement of affection; if she had but let go any one of the hundred strings by which she held my heart: if any of these, never would the world have heard of me. Young as I was; able as I was as a soldier; proud as I was of the admiration and commendation of which I was the object; fond as I was, too, of the command, which, at so early an age, my rare conduct and great natural talents had given me; sanguine as was my mind, and brilliant as were my prospects: yet I had seen so much of the meannesses,

the unjust partialities, the insolent pomposities, the disgusting dissipations of that way of life, that I was weary of it: I longed, exchanging my fine laced coat for the Yankee farmer's homespun, to be where I should never behold the supple crouch of servility, and never hear the hectoring voice of authority, again; and, on the lonely banks of this branch-covered creek which contained (she out of the question) everything congenial to my taste and dear to my heart, I, unapplauded, unfeared, unenvied and uncalumniated, should have lived and died.¹

Having overcome this temptation, Cobbett never encountered another, or, if he did, he did not know it. He was the best of husbands, and, writing of his wife soon after their silver wedding, declared that "one hair of her head was more dear to me than all the other women in the world." No one could have been more devoted or more considerate, as, Cobbett-like, he was at pains to inform the world.

I began my young marriage days in and near Philadelphia. At one of those times to which I have just alluded, in the middle of the burning hot month of July, I was greatly afraid of fatal consequences to my wife for want of sleep, she not having, after the great danger was over, had any sleep for more than forty-eight hours. All great cities, in hot countries, are, I believe, full of dogs; and they, in the very hot weather, keep up, during the night, a horrible barking and fighting and howling. Upon the particular occasion to which I am adverting, they made a noise so terrible and so unremitted, that it was next to impossible that even a person in full health and free from pain should obtain a minute's sleep. I was, about nine in the evening, sitting by the bed: "I do think," said she, "that I could go to sleep *now*, if it

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, pars. 150-1.

were not *for the dogs.*" Downstairs I went, and out I sallied, in my shirt and trousers, and without shoes and stockings; and, going to a heap of stones lying beside the road, set to work upon the dogs, going backward and forward, and keeping them at two or three hundred yards' distance from the house. I walked thus the whole night, barefooted, lest the noise of my shoes might possibly reach her ears; and I remember that the bricks of the causeway were, even in the night, so hot as to be disagreeable to my feet. My exertions produced the desired effect: a sleep of several hours was the consequence; and, at eight o'clock in the morning, off went I to a day's business, which was to end at six in the evening.¹ . . .

Few men have been more frequently taken from home by business, or by necessity of some sort, than I have; and I can positively assert that, as to my return, I never once disappointed my wife in the whole course of our married life. If the time of return was contingent, I never failed to keep her informed *from day to day*; if the time was fixed, or when it became fixed, my arrival was as sure as my life. Going from London to Botley once with Mr. Finnerty, whose name I can never pronounce without an expression of my regard for his memory, we stopped at Alton to dine with a friend, who, delighted with Finnerty's talk, as everybody else was, kept us till ten or eleven o'clock, and was proceeding to *the other bottle*, when I put in my protest, saying, "We must go, my wife will be frightened." "Blood, man," said Finnerty, "you do not mean to go home to-night!" I told him I did; and then sent my son, who was with us, to order out the post-chaise. We had twenty-three miles to go, during which we debated the question whether Mrs. Cobbett would be up to receive us, I contending for the affirmative, and he for the negative. She was up, and had a nice fire for us to sit down at.

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 166.

She had not committed the matter to a servant: her servants and children were all in bed; and she was up to perform the duty of receiving her husband and his friend. "You did not expect him?" said Finnerly. "To be sure I did," said she; "he never disappointed me in his life."¹ . . .

With the exception of two brief references to her in Thomas Moore's *Diary*, and one in Miss Mitford's *Recollections*, nothing is known of Mrs. Cobbett save what can be deduced from her husband's writings. "Miss Tegart knows Cobbett's family, and says the women are as feminine and engaging persons as can be; Miss Cobbett is a particularly nice girl," so runs Moore's entry for August 25, 1819. On the next day the poet met the ladies at Tegart's, and thought "the mother a quiet, good sort of woman; and the daughter very gentle and, I dare say, sensible. I need not say a word more in praise of the good wife . . . to whom this admirable order [in the house at Botley] was due." Miss Mitford paid tribute to her hostess: "She was a sweet, motherly woman, realising our notion of one of Scott's most charming characters, Ailie Dinmont, in her simplicity, her kindness, and her devotion to her husband and children."²

Cobbett enumerates the qualities desirable in a wife: chastity, sobriety, industry, frugality, cleanliness, knowledge of domestic affairs, good temper, and beauty; and there seems every reason to believe that he found in his wife all these admirable gifts. It will be observed that he does not include among them intellect, or even intelligence, and it may be presumed that Mrs. Cobbett was not intellectual, or particularly intelligent. Cer-

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 176.

² Miss Mitford, *Recollections of a Literary Life* (ed. 1883), p. 200.

tainly when she married she could not write, for she only made her mark in the register; and it is doubtful if she ever learnt to write, for among the family papers no letter from her is to be found. Probably, too, she could not read, or at best could read only with difficulty, for Cobbett, when away from home, always addressed her through his eldest daughter, who always replied for her mother.

Cobbett would not have a wife "vain of her person, very fond of dress, fond of *flattery*, at all given to gadding about, fond of what are called *parties of pleasure*, and coquettish, though in the least degree." He would not have her given to reading or dancing or music. "Music, indeed!" he cried. "Give me a mother singing to her clean and fat and rosy baby, and making the house ring with her extravagant and hyperbolic encomiums on it." He wanted a cheerful household drudge, whose entire interest in life would be found in her husband, her children and her home.¹

Till I had a second child, no servant ever entered my

¹ The following is a list of Cobbett's children who survived infancy:—

1. ANNE, born at Philadelphia, July 11, 1795; died, unmarried, October 22, 1877.
2. WILLIAM, barrister, born at Philadelphia, November 26, 1798; died, married, without issue, January 12, 1878.
3. JOHN MORGAN, barrister and author, born in Pall Mall, London, November 13, 1800; died, married, February 13, 1877; leaving issue, two sons and a daughter.
4. JAMES PAUL, barrister and author, born in Duke Street, Westminster, June 23, 1803; died, married, without issue, March 11, 1881.
5. ELEANOR, born at Botley, December 6, 1805; died, unmarried, January 11, 1900.
6. SUSAN, born at Botley, April 24, 1807; died, unmarried, February 2, 1889.
7. RICHARD BAVERSTOCK BROWN, solicitor, born at Botley, March 18, 1814; died, married, June 3, 1875; leaving issue, two sons and two daughters.

house, though well able to keep one; and never in my whole life did I live in a house so clean, in such trim order, and never have I eaten or drunk, or slept or dressed, in a manner so perfectly to my fancy, as I did then. I had a great deal of business to attend to, that took me a great part of the day from home; but, whenever I could spare a minute from business, the child was in my arms; I rendered the mother's labour as light as I could; any bit of food satisfied me; when watching was necessary, we shared it between us; and that famous *Grammar* for teaching French people English, which has been for thirty years, and still is, the great work of this kind throughout all America, and in every nation in Europe, was written by me, in hours not employed in business, and, in great part, during my share of night-watchings over a sick, and then only, child, who, after lingering many months, died in my arms.¹

He was willing, nay, eager, to share his wife's labours, to assist her in every way, to do all that lay in his power for her, save make a companion of her.

I never dangled about at the heels of my wife; seldom, very seldom, ever *walked out*, as it is called, with her; I never "*went a-walking*" in the whole course of my life; never went to walk without having some object in view other than the walk; and, as I never could walk at a slow pace, it would have been hard work for her to keep up with me; so that, in the nearly forty years of our married life, we have not walked out together, perhaps, twenty times. I hate a dangler, who is more like a footman than a husband. It is very cheap to be kind in *trifles*; but that which rivets the affections is not to be purchased with money. The great thing of all, however, is to prove your anxiety at those times of peril for her, and for which times you, nevertheless, wish.

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 161.

Upon those occasions I was never from home, be the necessity for it ever so great: it was my rule that everything must give way to that.¹

Cobbett did not always consult his wife, and while there can be no doubt he always told her the truth, he did not invariably think it incumbent upon him to tell her the whole truth.

William Cobbett to John Wright

[Autumn 1805.]

I have one caution to give you, which I beg you will observe; and that is, never speak nor hint, in the presence of Mrs. Cobbett, anything relative to my pecuniary concerns, or concerns in trade, of any sort or kind. She has her own [MS. torn—ideas (?)] about such matters, which cannot be altered.

I have never mentioned the *Spirit of the Public Journals*² to her; and there is no occasion for it. She knows I have lost so much by printing, &c., that she is fearful of everything of the kind. I cannot blame her anxiety; but, as I cannot remove it, it is better not to awaken it. Always reserve these matters for *tête-à-tête* opportunities. We have left poor Nancy with an aching heart. Yours most faithfully,

WM. C.³

His devotion to his wife caused him to take the keenest interest in her family.⁴ He was always willing

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 168.

² This was a compilation of letters, essays, &c., taken from the English, American, and French journals for the year 1804, the subjects being such as interested politicians. It appeared in January 1805. Presumably the experiment was not a success, for Cobbett never repeated it.

³ Add. MSS. 22,906, f. 96.

⁴ The other children of Sergeant Thomas Reid of the Royal Artillery (who died in 1808) by his wife Eleanor (*née* Bambridge, whom he married at Quebec on December 7, 1769), were John, born at Quebec

to assist any of them, and to welcome them to Botley. "Return *home*," he wrote in 1810 to his wife's youngest brother, who was serving in the Peninsula as lieutenant in the Royal Artillery Drivers. "Return *home*. I mean to *me*. To *us*. This is your home." In this young man he took a paternal interest, and wrote to him as he would have written to one of his sons.

William Cobbett to Lieutenant Reid

BOTLEY, December 13, 1807.

MY DEAR FREDERICK,—Your sister has heard that you are going to Croydon to a ball. I know you cannot afford it; I see that it will be plunging you into new debts; I see in it evils of all sorts; and I beseech you to have no hankering after any such things which lead to expenses and to mischief.¹

William Cobbett to Lieutenant Reid

BOTLEY, September 30, 1809.

MY DEAR FREDERICK,—The last we heard of you was of your being safe arrived at Trujillo, in spite of the eager pursuit of those swift and cruel rascals, the French, who, even after you had so decidedly beaten them, would not suffer you to keep the field of battle, though, out of common civility, they might have suffered my Lord Talavera to sojourn two or three days, at least, at the place whence he took his new title. Aye, my dear boy, these French are a most perverse set. I always told you so, you know. I always advised you to take care of them. But, really, it is the worst of all their many bad tricks, not to let you stay to refresh yourselves a bit, after you

on April 22, 1771; Thomas, born at Woolwich on March 31, 1777; Eleanor, born at Woolwich on August 2, 1781; and Frederick, who became a Lieutenant in the Artillery Drivers, born at Gibraltar on February 11, 1785. Ann was born at Chatham on March 28, 1774.

¹ The Cobbett MSS.

had *beaten them*; and, what was still more abominable, to carry away with them so many of your men and your officers and your horses! O, fy! it is too bad. Why, then, there is no use in beating fellows like these. Pray, what signifies beating fellows that will not run away when they are beaten? You do, don't you? Aye, aye; you know what good-breeding is; but really these Jacobin French are not fit for gentlemen like you to have anything to do with. Come home; come away; leave the unmannerly fellows to themselves. Come back to us, and make war upon the hares and pheasants.¹

William Cobbett to Lieutenant Reid

BOTLEY, May 18, 1810.

MY DEAR FREDERICK,—Your letter has not at all surprised me. I wonder you are not dead before now. I am very sorry indeed for the hardships you have suffered; but a part of them at any rate are the fair fruits of your own folly; for, without asking any leave at all, you might, Col. Madden informs me, have been in England long ago, Gen. Howorth having left word for you to be sent home on account of your ill-health. He has now returned, and therefore you will have no difficulty in obtaining any leave that your health may fairly require. Though I have little stomach for the cause in which you are engaged, I would be the last man in the world to advise you to do anything dishonourable towards your comrades in order to secure your return to England; but if your remaining where you are is likely to produce no other effect than that of absolutely throwing away your life, by the means of a burning fever or a rotten liver, I would advise you decidedly to return without delay. Mrs. Madden detailed to me a week or two ago an account of your excellent behaviour, received from Gen. Howorth; and the General's brother whom

¹ The Cobbett MSS.

I met at dinner some [time] afterwards did the same. Both of them strongly recommended you being got into the Dragoon service, where, they both said, you might be *pushed on*. Now I, who am a great enemy to the *pushing system*, and who understood that even this pushing would require some money, told them both that I was very much disposed to do everything in my power to make you happy, but that I never would give one single farthing to procure you the happiness of being compelled to wear a pair of whiskers, and of being, at any moment, liable to be turned out of your profession, and left to beg your bread. I further told them, that whatever might be necessary to give you a fair start in the world, as a farmer or as a timber merchant, you should receive from me if you would; but as for anything else, I would have neither act nor part in it. What I then said I will abide by. I shall be very happy to see you in this way; I hope you will think seriously of it; and at any rate I beg you to believe me to be,

Your sincere friend,

WM. COBBETT.¹

Cobbett, it may be presumed, found in his wife what he wanted. More remarkable, however, is the fact that, having what he had wanted, he was happy when he had it.

“*Care!*” What *care* have I known! I have been buffeted about by this powerful and vindictive Government; I have repeatedly had the fruit of my labour snatched away from me by it; but I had a partner that never frowned, that was never melancholy, that never was subdued in spirit, that never abated a smile, on these occasions, that fortified me, and sustained me by her courageous example, and that was just as busy and as zealous in taking care of the remnant as she had been

¹ The Cobbett MSS.

in taking care of the whole; just as cheerful, and just as full of caresses, when brought down to a mean hired lodging, as when the mistress of a fine country-house, with all its accompaniments; and, whether from her words or her looks, no one could gather that she regretted the change. What "*cares*" have I had, then? What have I had worthy of the name of "*cares*"? ¹

Fortunate in having in his wife all the qualities that made him happy, he was unfortunate, though he did not realise it, in not having a wife who was capable of giving him such sound advice as might have saved him from various follies. The critic on the hearth may not always be appreciated, but to a public man she is an unmitigated blessing.

¹ *Advice to Young Men*, par. 217.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE UNITED STATES (1792-1800)

Cobbett and his wife visit France—His opinion of the French and the state of the country—Stays at Tilques—The outbreak of the Revolution—Sails suddenly for America—His long-standing desire to go to the United States—Settles at Wilmington—Endeavours to get a place under Government—Sets up as a teacher of English to the French refugees at Philadelphia—Cobbett's letter to Miss Smither—He begins his literary career—*Observations on Priestley's Emigration*—He becomes the champion of England in the United States—Other pamphlets—Cobbett and Bradford the publisher—Starts in business as a bookseller—His proud defiance of the Philadelphian mob—Talleyrand makes overtures to him—He is attacked and slandered—Replies in *The Life of Peter Porcupine*—His enjoyment of his notoriety—Founds *Porcupine's Gazette*—Dr. Benjamin Rush and Cobbett's attack on him—Rush wins a libel action against Cobbett—Cobbett, in New York, starts the *Rushlight*—His farewell to the United States—He returns to England.

IT was to France that Cobbett, accompanied by his bride, went in March 1792, and there he spent the six happiest months of his life. He was on his honeymoon, and prepared to be pleased with everything. He went, as most Englishmen did in those days, full of prejudices against the French, and was almost at once converted from dislike and contempt to liking and admiration. He found the people "honest, pious, and kind to excess"; and it would be ungenerous to inquire how far his favourable impression was influenced by the fact that he met everywhere with civility, and even hospitality, in a degree to which he had never been accustomed. He found, however, that many of the people among whom he lived were "already blasted with the principles of the

accursed revolution," which revolution, he was confident, was but a passing incident in the history of the country.

People may say what they please about the misery of the French peasantry under the old government; I have conversed with thousands of them, not ten among whom did not regret the change. I have not room here to go into an inquiry into the causes that have led these people to become the passive instruments, the slaves, of a set of tyrants such as the world never saw before, but I venture to predict that, sooner or later, they will return to that form of government under which they were happy, and under which alone they can ever be so again.¹

Cobbett, who had taken up his residence in the little village of Tilques, near St. Omer, proposed at first to stay in France until the following spring, in order to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language. It was his intention to spend the winter at Paris, but the trend of events made this undesirable. "I perceived the storm gathering," he wrote; "I saw that a war with England was inevitable; and it was not difficult to foresee what would be the fate of Englishmen, in that country, where the rulers had laid aside even the appearance of justice and mercy." He wished, however, at least to see Paris, and for that purpose left Tilques on August 9. Two days later, at Abbeville, he learnt that the King was dethroned and his guards massacred; and he at once changed his route and made for Havre-de-Grace, where he would find a ship bound for America. He travelled in a *calèche*, and, after frequent stoppages by the soldiery who desired to see his papers, arrived at the port on August 16. He sailed for the United States on Sep-

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupine* (ed. 1797), p. 29.

tember 1, the day of the general massacre at Paris. His wife soon followed him across the ocean.

Cobbett's visit to the United States was the result of no sudden resolution, for even before he had left the army he had resolved to settle there.

A desire of seeing a country, so long the theatre of a war of which I had heard and read so much; the flattering picture given of it by Raynal; and, above all, an inclination for seeing the world, led me to this determination. It would look a little like coaxing for me to say that I had imbibed principles of republicanism, and that I was ambitious to become a citizen of a free state, but this was really the case. I thought that men enjoyed here a greater degree of liberty than in England; and this, if not the principal reason, was at least one, for my coming to this country.¹

This desire to see America and its inhabitants, indeed, dated back to the days of Cobbett's childhood, when the War of Independence was in progress.

My father was a partisan of the Americans: he used frequently to dispute on the subject with the gardener of a nobleman who lived near us. This was generally done with good humour over a pot of our best ale; yet the disputants sometimes grew warm, and gave way to language that could not fail to attract our attention. My father was worsted without doubt, as he had for antagonist a shrewd and sensible old Scotchman, far his superior in political knowledge; but he pleaded before a partial audience: we thought there was but one wise man in the world, and that that one was our father. He who pleaded his cause of the Americans had an advantage too with young minds; he had only to represent the king's troops as sent to cut the throats

¹ *The Life of Peter Porcupine* (ed. 1797), p. 29.

of a people, our friends and relations, merely because they would not submit to oppression, and his cause was gained. Speaking to the passions is ever sure to succeed on the uninformed.¹

Cobbett landed in Philadelphia in October 1792, and went to Wilmington on the Delaware. He had come provided with a letter of recommendation from Mr. Short, the American Ambassador at Paris, to Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, and this, on November 2, 1792, he forwarded, together with a suggestion that it might be possible to find him a place in a Government office. "Ambitious to become the citizen of a free state," he wrote, "I have left my native country, England, for America. I bring with me youth, a small family, a few useful literary talents, and that is all."²

Thomas Jefferson to William Cobbett

PHILADELPHIA, November 5, 1792.

SIR,—In acknowledging the receipt of your favour of the 2nd instant, I wish it were in my power to announce to you any way in which I could be useful to you. Mr. Short's assurance of your merit would be a sufficient inducement to me. Public Offices in our Government are so few, and of so little value, as to offer no resource to talents. When you shall have been here some small time, you will be able to judge in what way you can set out with the best prospect of success, and if I can serve you in it, I shall be very ready to do it.—I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

TH. JEFFERSON.³

When Cobbett left the army he had contrived to

¹ *Life of Peter Porcupine* (ed. 1797), p. 7.

² M. D. Conway, *Life of Thomas Paine*, ii. 429.

³ *Life of Peter Porcupine* (ed. 1797), p. 31.



-I did not look behind me, till I got to St. Omer's—& thence fled to America;—here
 I offer'd to become a Spy for the English Government which was scornfully rejected;
 -I then turned to Plunder & Libel the Vankees for which I was Fined 5,000 Dollars &
 kicked out of the Country!—I came back to England (after absconding for Seven years)
 -& set up the Crown & Mitre to establish my Loyalty!—accepted from the Doctor
 £4,000 to print & disperse a pamphlet against "the Hell fire yell of Reform"—but
 applied the Money to purchase an estate at Botley, & left ye Doctor to pay the Paper &
 Printing!—being now Lord of the Manor, I began by sowing the seeds of discontent
 through Hampshire; I oppressed the Poor, sent the Aged to Hell, and damned the
 Eyes of my Parish Apprentices before they were open'd in the morning—& being now
 supported by a band of Reformers, I renewed my old favourite Toast of Damnation to
 the House of Brunswick!—and exalted by the sale of 10,000 Political Registers every
 week, I find myself the greatest Man in the World,—except that Idol of all my
 Adoration, his Royal & Imperial Majesty, Napoleone!—
 —see my own Memoiree in ye Political Register 1800.
COBBETT IN AMERICA
From a caricature by Gillray

save about two hundred guineas, but of this, after his residence in France and the long sea-voyage, not much remained. His hopes of enlisting in the Government service being thwarted, it behoved him without delay to find some way of earning a living. Fortunately there were at this time in the United States many Frenchmen who had fled from their own country when the Revolution broke out. Cobbett saw his opportunity and set up, at No. 81 Callowhill, Philadelphia, as a teacher of English to the refugees. He found many pupils, and estimated his income from this source at \$140 a month, or £336 a year. His teaching of English to Frenchmen gave him the idea of writing a book of instruction on the subject—"that famous *Maitre d'Anglois*," to quote the author, "which has long been the first book in Europe, as well as in America, for teaching French people the English language."¹ This work, in great part written, Cobbett mentions proudly, while he rocked the cradle in which reposed his first baby, was not, however, published until 1795, and therefore did not augment his income during the first years he was in America.

*William Cobbett to Miss Rachel Smither,
156 Houndsditch*

PHILADELPHIA, July 6, 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Since we have been in this country I have written to you half a dozen times, but have not had the good fortune to receive any answer. When I wrote to you before, I lived at Wilmington, a town about thirty miles from here, but since that I have found it to my advantage to remove to the capital. It is generally said, and often with much justice, that a rolling stone never gathers moss; this, however, has not been the

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 259.

case with me ; for though my rambles in France and this country cost me above a hundred and ninety guineas, and though I was reduced to about eighteen at my arrival at Wilmington, I am now better off than ever, notwithstanding my expenses in my family have been enormous. But I must not take the merit of this entirely upon myself ; my dear Nancy is entitled to her share of it ; it perhaps is entirely owing to her care, industry, and sweetness of temper that I owe all my success.

I told you before that we had a little boy ; my wife was brought to bed of a second boy about the middle of last March, but it was still-born, though alive a few minutes before. She suffered a great deal. But now prepare your tender heart to pity us. On the 3rd of June our other dear little fellow was snatched from us. Oh, Miss Smither ! I hope you will never experience a calamity like this. All I ever felt before was nothing—nothing at all, to this. The dearest, sweetest, beautifullest little fellow that ever was seen. We adored him. Everybody admired him. When we lived at Wilmington people came on purpose to see him for his beauty. He was just beginning to prattle, and to chase the flies about the floor with a fan. I am sure I shall never perfectly recover his loss. I feel my spirits altered. A settled sadness seems to have taken possession of my mind ; nor do I wish to be diverted from it. For my poor Nancy, I cannot paint to you her distress ; for several days she would take no nourishment. We were even afraid for her—never was a child so adored. I had two of the ablest physicians in the place, but I was not to be blessed. I am happy, however, that my Nancy is re-established—thank God, our means enabled me to change houses directly, and we are come a little into the country for the summer, where I hope we may recover, at least, tranquillity.

Excuse me if my mind's being engaged with my own sorrows has led me too far without mentioning your

good and kind father and sister. I hope you have all been happy since we saw you, and I pray God a continuation of your happiness.

This country is good for getting money, that is to say, if a person is industrious and enterprising. In every other respect the country is miserable. Exactly the contrary of what I expected it. The land is bad, rocky; houses wretched; roads impassable after the least rain. Fruit in quantity, but good for nothing. One apple or peach in England or France is worth a bushel of them here. The seasons are detestable. All is burning or freezing. There is no spring or autumn. The weather is so very inconstant that you are never sure for an hour, a single hour at a time. Last night we made a fire to sit by, and to-day it is scorching hot. The whole month of March was so hot that we could hardly bear our clothes, and three parts of the month of June there was a frost every night, and so cold in the day-time that we were obliged to wear great-coats. The people are worthy of the country—cheating, sly, roguish gang. Strangers make fortunes here in spite of all this, particularly the English. The natives are by nature idle, and seek to live by cheating, while foreigners, being industrious, seek no other means than those dictated by integrity, and are sure to meet with encouragement even from the idle and roguish themselves; for, however roguish a man may be, he always loves to deal with an honest man. You have perhaps heard of the plague being at Philadelphia last year. It was no plague; it was a fever of the country, and is by no means extraordinary among the Americans. In the fall of the year almost every person, in every place, has a spell of the fever that is called the fall-fever. It is often fatal, and the only way to avoid it is to quit the country. But this fever is not all. Every month has its particular malady. In July, for example, everybody almost, or at least one half of the people, are taken with vomitings for several

days at a time; they often carry off the patient, and almost always children. In short, the country altogether is detestable.

The greatest part of my acquaintance in this country are French merchants from St. Domingo and Martinico. To one of those Islands I shall probably go in about eight or nine months; and in that case, if I live so long, I shall be in England in about three years. For I do not intend to stay much above a couple of years in the Islands. Take care of my trunk and box, if you please, till you see me or hear from me. My Nancy's kind love to you all, and accept of mine at the same time. Doctor Priestley is just arrived here from England. He has attacked our English laws and Constitution in print, and declared his sentiments in favour of those butchers in France. He has, however, been attacked in his turn by an Englishman here. I will send you one of these pieces by another ship. Accept my love, and God bless you.

WM. COBBETT.

The English arms have been amazingly successful in the West Indies. The French have not an inch of land left of all their rich and fine possessions—the finest colonies in the world.¹

With his energy, persistence, and self-confidence, backed by his talent, Cobbett was sure, sooner or later, to make his way in the world; but it was the merest chance that started him in 1794 on his literary and political career. There had arrived at New York, on June 12 of that year, Dr. Joseph Priestley, an ardent supporter of the French Revolution, who had found England an uncomfortable residence for one holding his opinions.

Newspapers were a luxury for which I had little

¹ The Cobbett MSS.

relish, and which, if I had been ever so fond of, I had not time to enjoy (Cobbett related subsequently, referring to this period of his life). The manifestoes, therefore, of the Doctor, upon his landing in that country, and the malicious attacks upon the monarchy and the monarch of England which certain societies in America thereupon issued through the press, would, had it not been for a circumstance purely accidental, have escaped, probably for ever, not only my animadversions, but my knowledge of their existence. One of my scholars, who was a person that we in England should call a Coffee-house politician, chose for once to read his newspaper by way of lesson; and it happened to be the very paper which contained the addresses presented to Dr. Priestley at New York, together with his replies. My scholar, who was a sort of republican, or, at best, but half a monarchist, appeared delighted with the invectives against England, to which he was very much disposed to add. Those Englishmen who have been abroad, particularly if they have had time to make a comparison between the country they are in and that which they have left, well know how difficult it is, upon occasions such as I have been describing, to refrain from expressing their indignation and resentment; and there is not, I trust, much reason to suppose that I should, in this respect, experience less difficulty than another. The dispute was as warm as might reasonably be expected between a Frenchman, uncommonly violent even for a Frenchman, and an Englishman not unremarkable for *sang froid*; and the result was a declared resolution on my part to write and publish a pamphlet in defence of my country, which pamphlet he pledged himself to answer: his pledge was forfeited: it is known that mine was not. Thus, Sir, it was that I became a writer on politics.¹

Cobbett, so far as is known, had not hitherto felt

¹ *Political Register*, September 29, 1804.

drawn to the profession of letters. It has, indeed, often been said that he rewrote *The Soldier's Friend* in the same spirit that he had turned into decent English the reports of his superior officers; but Cobbett has emphatically denied the truth of this rumour.

During the interval of my discharge and of my departure for France, a proposition, preceded by a speech of the Secretary of War, was made in Parliament to augment the pay of the army. Some parts of the speech contained matter which a person, with whom I was acquainted, and to whom I had communicated my information upon such subjects, thought worthy of remark in print. Hence arose a little pamphlet, entitled *The Soldier's Friend*. Of this pamphlet I was not the author; I had nothing to do either with the printing or the publishing of it; and I never had in my possession, or ordered to be sent to any person, or to any place, three copies of it in my life.¹

It is to be presumed, therefore, that it was only his knowledge of French that induced a bookseller to invite him to translate into English (at the rate of twenty-five cents a page) Von Marten's *Law of Nations*, and his desire to earn money that caused him to undertake the task. "This is the book," he wrote in later years, "which was the foundation of all the knowledge that I have ever possessed relative to public law." From the mere fact that he did not read the newspapers, it may be

¹ *Political Register*, October 5, 1805. Yet Cobbett wrote in the *Register*, December 28, 1833, in answer to a charge that his children assisted him in the composition of his books: "1. Was a pamphlet written in London and published by Mr. Ridgway, when he lived in York Street, St. James Square, without any name of the author to it; it was called *The Soldier's Friend*: I have not a copy of it, and have not had for many years; but, at any rate, it was written before I was named, and therefore the 'children' could not have assisted in that."

deduced that Cobbett had not interested himself in the politics of the country during the two years that had elapsed since his arrival. With admirable philosophy he had borne his share of the dislike meted out by the Philadelphians to his countrymen. He could bear to hear England abused by the inhabitants of the United States, but when he learnt that there was an Englishman at New York abusing his own country, his indignation knew no bounds. Such a man must be reprov'd, and the man to perform this duty was, he had not the slightest doubt, William Cobbett. Forthwith he plunged into the composition of the pamphlet known as *Observations on Priestley's Emigration*.

I could have no hope of gain from the proposed publication itself (he wrote years after), but, on the contrary, was pretty certain to incur a loss; no hope of remuneration, for not only had I never seen any agent of the British Government in America, but I was not acquainted with any one British subject in the country. I was actuated, perhaps, by no very exalted notions of either loyalty or patriotism; the act was not so much an act of refined reasoning or of reflection, it arose merely from feeling, but it was that sort of feeling, that jealousy for the honour of my native country, which I am sure you will allow to have been highly meritorious, especially when you reflect on the circumstances of the times and the places in which I ventured before the public.¹

It is one thing for an unknown man to write a pamphlet, and another to get it published. The two principal booksellers in Philadelphia were Thomas Bradford and Mathew Carey; but as Bradford was known for his

¹ *Life of Peter Porcupine*, p. 34.

hatred of Great Britain, Cobbett in the first instance addressed himself to Carey.

Mr. Carey received me as booksellers generally receive authors (I mean authors whom they hope to get but little by): he looked at the title from top to bottom, and then at me from head to foot. "No, *my lad*," says he, "I don't think it will suit." *My lad!* God in heaven forgive me! I believe that, at that moment, I wished for another yellow fever to strike the city; not to destroy the inhabitants, but to furnish me too with *the subject of a pamphlet* that might make me rich.¹

Cobbett then took the manuscript to Bradford, who read it and expressed his approval, but wanted to know if it could not be made a little more popular, as he feared that the publishing of it would endanger the windows of his shop. More popular Cobbett refused to make it. "I never was of an accommodating disposition in my life," he stated in his account of the negotiation, and it must be confessed that he never spoke more truly. He had called the pamphlet *The Tartuffe Detected, or, Observations on Priestley's Emigration*, but, as a concession, he consented to delete the first title. Bradford then undertook to publish the pamphlet, which appeared anonymously and without a publisher's name in August 1794.

The following passages from the *Observations* will give some idea of the style in which Cobbett wrote at this early date:—

System-mongers are an unreasonable species of mortals: time, place, climate, nature itself must give way. They must have the same Government in every quarter of the globe, when perhaps there are not two countries which can possibly admit of the same form

¹ *Life of Peter Porcupine*, p. 34.

of Government at the same time. A thousand hidden causes, a thousand circumstances and unforeseen events, conspire to the forming of a Government. It is always done by little and little. When completed, it presents nothing like a *system*; nothing like a thing composed, and written in a book. It is curious to hear people cite the American Government as the summit of human perfection, while they decry the English; when it is absolutely nothing more than the Government which the Kings of England established here, with such little modifications as were necessary on account of the state of society and local circumstances. If, then, the Doctor is come here for a change of government and laws, he is the most disappointed of mortals. He will have the mortification to find in his *asylum* the same laws as those from which he has fled, the same upright manner of administering them, the same punishment of the oppressed. In the Courts of Justice he will every day see precedents quoted from the English law-books; and (which to him may appear wonderful) we may venture to predict that it will be very long before they will be supplanted by the bloody records of the revolutionary tribunal.

As to his talents as a writer, we have only to open our eyes to be convinced that they are far below mediocrity. His style is uncouth and superlatively diffuse. Always involved in *minutiæ*, every sentence is a string of parentheses, in finding the end of which the reader is lucky if he does not lose the proposition they were meant to illustrate. In short, the whole of his phraseology is extremely disgusting; to which may be added, that even in point of grammar he is very often incorrect.

It is no more than justice to say of these Addresses in the lump, that they are distinguished for a certain barrenness of thought and vulgarity of style, which, were we not in the possession of the Doctor's answer, might

be thought inimitable. If the parties were less known, one might be tempted to think that the Addresses were dull by concert; and that, by way of retaliation, the Doctor was resolved to be as dull as they. At least, if this was their design, nobody will deny but they have succeeded to admiration.

The *Observations* are well written. It is, indeed, one of the most amazing things in connection with this astonishing man that in this, his first essay in polemical literature, he showed his mastery of the art of controversy; his style was mature, his marshalling of arguments admirable, his assault well directed, and his power of denunciation undeniable. The pamphlet was topical, and attracted much attention.

Great praise, and, still more, great success, are sure to operate, with young and zealous men, as an encouragement to farther exertions. Both were, in this case, far beyond my hopes, and still farther beyond the intrinsic merits of my performance. The praise was, in fact, given to the boldness of the man, who, after the American press had, for twenty years, been closed against every publication relative to England, in which England and her King were not censured and vilified, dared not only to defend but to eulogise and exalt them; and the success was to be ascribed to that affection for England, and that just hatred of France, which, in spite of all the misrepresentations that had been so long circulated, were still alive in the bosoms of all the better part of the people, who, openly to express their sentiments, only wanted the occasion and the example that were now afforded them.¹

England did, indeed, at this time require an advocate

¹ *Political Register*, September 29, 1804.

in the United States. The bitterness provoked by the circumstances that had resulted in the War of Independence had not yet died away. The Federal party, headed by Washington, Adams, Hamilton, Jay, and Pinckney, desired to encourage amicable relations with the mother-country; but, according to Cobbett, the hatred of England was still so strong that a man had need of all his courage to declare himself an Englishman. The Democratic party, led by Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Rush, and Randolph, were openly anti-British, and cultivated the most intimate relations with France. The French Ambassador at Washington put forward a scheme for the adoption of the French scheme of weights and measures, an American writer proposed the general use of the French revolutionary calendar, and Thornton¹ suggested that, since the abandonment of the English language was not practicable, the words should be spelt phonetically, and the letters written and printed upside down. The general feeling of the country may be gauged from the fact that these absurd proposals were thought worthy of serious consideration by a considerable section of the public. In Philadelphia so strong was the feeling against England, that the marble statue of Lord Chatham was hanged and afterwards beheaded, and the portrait of George II. was torn down from the walls of the church he had founded. "Of the violence, the rage of the times," Cobbett declared to Pitt some years later, "no man not upon the spot can form an adequate idea."

¹ *Cadmus*, by Wm. Thornton, M.D. (Philadelphia, 1783). An Essay on Spelling Reform by Noah Webster (1789). It was also recommended by Brissot de Warville to produce an American language "on a principle of philanthropy, so as to aid the Americans in the gradual effacement of their origin."

Encouraged by the success of the *Observations on Priestley's Emigration*, Cobbett, during 1795, issued further pamphlets, over the signature of "Peter Porcupine": *A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats* (January), *A Kick for a Bite* (February), *A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats, Part II.* (March), and *A Little Plain English* (August). To describe in detail the contents in these works would make it necessary to re-write a considerable part of the history of the United States in those days; and all that it is necessary to say here is that in these, as well as in his later writings during the author's stay in America, Cobbett defended England and made vigorous onslaughts upon the French Revolution. Indeed, the ex-sergeant-major stood forward as the champion of Great Britain, and undoubtedly rendered great service to his country. "I can truly say," he declared subsequently, referring to the years he spent in America, "that I lived not for myself, or my family, but exclusively for my country and my King. I enjoyed nothing that the world calls pleasure, fortune was entirely neglected, and personal safety but little attended to."

I met every adversary that appeared against my country; defended it against every accusation; exposed its secret and chastened its open enemies; emboldened its friends to speak, and "stilled the madness of the crowd." In that city where, when I started on my career, an Englishman was ashamed to own his country; where my life had been a hundred times threatened unless I desisted to write against France; where the name of His Majesty was never mentioned unaccompanied with some epithet too foul and calumnious to repeat; in that city I lived to see a public celebration of Lord Nelson's victory over the French, and to be serenaded with the tune of "God save the King!" What a change!





CHRIST CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA. REFERRED TO BY WILLIAM
COBBETT AS BEING OPPOSITE HIS HOUSE IN SECOND STREET
From a print, 1796. in the possession of Richard Cobbett, Esq.

Certainly not to be entirely ascribed to me. But it was a change which I had a considerable share in producing ; I stayed the mischief ; I prevented that which would have prevented us from profiting from the events which time was hastening along. My American friends gave me all the credit of this change : I claim no such thing ; but I know that I deserve, and that I shall have, the lasting gratitude of both countries. . . . The time of my writing will be looked back to as a memorable epoch, not only in American politics, but in the political mind of America. I untied the tongue of British attachment : by an extraordinary exertion I broke the shackles in which the public mind had been held from the commencement of the revolutionary war, and once more opened a way for the workings of truth and of nature. . . . I lived to see, in that same city of Philadelphia, a public celebration of the feats of England over those of France, and to hear George the Third a favourite toast ; a change which my friends, certainly too partial, ascribed *wholly* to my exertions, but to which those exertions did assuredly greatly contribute.¹

The pamphlets already enumerated, and also *A New Year's Gift to the Democrats* (January, 1796), were issued by Bradford, who, out of respect for his windows, however, did not put his name at the bottom of the title-page. Cobbett has put on record his dealings with this publisher.

The terms on which Mr. Bradford took the *Observations* were what booksellers call *publishing it together*. I beg the reader, if he foresees the possibility of his becoming an author, to recollect this phrase well. *Publishing it together* is thus managed : the bookseller takes the work, prints it, and defrays all expenses of paper, binding, &c., and the profits, if any, are divided between him and the

¹ *Political Register*, September 29, 1804.

author. Long after the *Observations* were sold off, Mr. Bradford rendered me an account (undoubtedly a very just one) of the sales. According to this account, my share of the profits (my share only) amounted to the enormous sum of *one shilling and seven-pence half-penny*, currency of the State of Pennsylvania (or, about eleven-pence three farthings sterling), quite entirely clear of all deductions whatsoever!

Now, bulky as this sum appears in words at length, I presume that when *1s. 7½d.* is reduced to figures no one will suppose it sufficient to put a coat upon my back. If my poor back were not too broad to be clothed with such a sum as this, God knows how I should bear all that has been, and is, and is to be, laid on it by the unmerciful democrats. Why? *1s. 7½d.* would not cover the back of a Lilliputian; no, not even in rags, as they sell here.¹

After the *Observations*, Mr. Bradford and I *published it together* no longer. When a pamphlet was ready for the press, we made a bargain for it, and I took his note of hand, payable in one, two, or three months. That the public may know exactly what gains I have derived from the publications that issued from Mr. Bradford's, I here subjoin a list of them, and the sums received in payment.

| | Dols. | Cents. |
|----------------------------------|-------|--------|
| Observations | 0 | 21 |
| Bone to Gnaw, 1st part | 125 | 0 |
| Kick for a Bite | 20 | 0 |
| Bone to Gnaw, 2nd part | 40 | 0 |
| Plain English | 100 | 0 |
| New Year's Gift | 100 | 0 |
| Prospect | 18 | 0 |
| Total | 403 | 21 |

The best way of giving the reader an idea of the generosity of my bookseller is to tell him that, upon my going into business for myself, I offered to purchase

¹ *Life of Peter Porcupine*, pp. 38-9.

the copyrights of these pamphlets at the same price that I had sold them at. Mr. Bradford's refusing to sell is a clear proof that they were worth more than he gave me, even after they had passed through several editions.¹

Cobbett saw that there was more money to be obtained from his writings than he would make so long as he was associated in business with Bradford, but his breach with the publisher did not come about in connection with any dispute on financial matters.

I proposed making a mere collection of the debates, with here and there a note by way of remarks (to be entitled *The Prospect from the Congress-Gallery*). It was not my intention to publish it in Numbers, but at the end of the session in one volume; but Mr. Bradford, fearing a want of success in this form, determined on publishing in Numbers. This was without my approbation, as was also a subscription that was opened for the support of the work. When about half a Number was finished, I was informed that many gentlemen had expressed their desire that the work might contain a good deal of original matter and few debates. In consequence of this, I was requested to alter my plan; I said I would, but that I would by no means undertake to continue the work.

The first Number, as it was called (but not by me), was published; and its success led Mr. Bradford to press for a continuation. His son offered me, I believe, a hundred dollars a Number, in place of eighteen; and I should have accepted his offer had it not been for a word that escaped him during the conversation. He observed that their customers would be much disappointed, for that his father *had promised* a continuation, and *that it should be made very interesting*. This slip of the tongue opened my eyes at once. What! a book-

¹ *Life of Peter Porcupine*, p. 40.

seller undertake to promise that I should write, and that I should write to please his customers too! No; if all his *customers*, if all the Congress, with the President at their head, had come and solicited me; nay, had my salvation depended on a compliance, I would not have written another line.¹

Cobbett was at this time busily engaged upon the translation of Moreau de St. Méry's *Saint Domingo*, and upon another work the name of which he did not specify, and, having severed his connection with Bradford, would have discontinued *The Prospect from the Congress-Gallery* but for his desire, he said, "to convince the *customers* of Mr. Bradford that I was not in his pay; that I was not the puppet and he the showman." When Bradford heard that Cobbett was preparing to publish a continuing of the *Prospect*, the following correspondence passed:—

Thomas Bradford to William Cobbett

SIR,—Send me your account and a receipt for the last publication, and your money shall be sent you by Yours, &c. THO. BRADFORD.

PHILADELPHIA, April 22, 1796.

William Cobbett to Thomas Bradford

PHILADELPHIA, March 22, 1796.

SIR,—I have the honour to possess your laconic note; but, upon my word, I do not understand it. The requesting of a receipt from a person before any tender of money is made, and the note being dated April in place of March; these things throw such an obscurity over the whole, that I defer complying with its contents till I have the pleasure of seeing yourself. I am, your most obedient humble servant, WM. COBBETT.

¹ *Life of Peter Porcupine*, pp. 41-2.

Thomas Bradford to William Cobbett

SIR,—Finding you mean to pursue the *Prospect*, which you sold to me, I now make a demand of the *fulfillment* of your contract, and if honour does not prompt you to *fulfill* your engagements, you may rely on an *application* to the laws of my country, and, make no doubt, I shall there meet you on such grounds as will convince you I am not to be trifled with.—I am, yours, &c.

THO. BRADFORD.

March 22, 1796.¹

Cobbett now proposed to start in business as a bookseller on his own account, but while he was making his preparations he issued through another publisher Nos. 2, 3, and 4 of *The Prospect from the Congress-Gallery*, now called *The Political Censor*, and a pamphlet entitled *The Bloody Buoy*, a partisan account of the horrors of the French Revolution. In the spring of this year (1796) Cobbett took a house in Second Street, Philadelphia, but though he moved in in May, the shop was not opened until the second week in July.

Till I took this house, I had remained almost entirely unknown as a writer. A few persons did, indeed, know that I was the person who had assumed the name of Peter Porcupine; but the fact was by no means a matter of notoriety. The moment that I had taken a lease of a large house the transaction became the topic of public conversation, and the eyes of the Democrats and the French, who still lorded it over the city, and who owed me a mutual grudge, were fixed upon me.

I thought my situation somewhat perilous. Such truths as I had published, no man had dared to utter in the United States since the rebellion. I knew that these truths had mortally offended the leading men amongst

¹ *Life of Peter Porcupine*, pp. 43-4.

the Democrats, who could, at any time, muster a mob quite sufficient to destroy my house and to murder me. I had not a friend to whom I could look with any reasonable hope of receiving efficient support ; and, as to the *law*, I had seen too much of republican justice to expect anything but persecution from that quarter. In short, there were in Philadelphia about ten thousand persons, all of whom would have rejoiced to see me murdered ; and there might probably be two thousand who would have been very sorry for it, but not above fifty of whom would have stirred an inch to save me.

As the time approached for opening my shop, my friends grew more anxious for my safety. It was recommended to me to be cautious how I exposed at my window anything that might provoke the people, and, above all, not to put up any aristocratical portraits, which would certainly cause my windows to be demolished. I saw the danger ; but also saw that I must at once set all danger at defiance, or live in everlasting subjection to the prejudices and caprices of the democratical mob. I resolved on the former ; and, as my shop was to open on a Monday morning, I employed myself all day on Sunday in preparing an exhibition that I thought would put the courage and power of my enemies to the test. I put up in my windows, which were very large, all the portraits that I had in my possession of *kings, queens, princes, and nobles*. I had all the English Ministry, several of the bishops and judges, the most famous admirals, and, in short, every picture that I thought likely to excite rage in the enemies of Great Britain.

Early on the Monday morning I took down my shutters. Such a sight had not been seen in Philadelphia for twenty years. Never since the beginning of the rebellion had any one dared to hoist at his window the portrait of George the Third.

In order to make the test as perfect as possible, I had put up some of the "*worthies of the Revolution*," and

had found out fit companions for them. I had coupled *Franklin* and *Marat* together; and, in another place, *M'Kean* and *Ankerstrom*.¹

The mob crowded round the shop and threatened violence, but committed none. Cobbett's audacity, which took it by surprise, overawed it. And yet there were people who called Cobbett coward! His pamphlets had made "Peter Porcupine" notorious; the display in the windows of his shop made Cobbett famous throughout the United States. An idea of the position he attained in the eyes of the public, even before he opened his shop, may be deduced from the fact that Talleyrand, who at this time was in the United States, thought it worth while, in January 1796, to endeavour to enlist the pamphleteer on the side of France, or, at least, to persuade him to observe neutrality towards that country.

First, Talleyrand set up as a *merchant and dealer* at New York till he had acquired what knowledge he

¹ Quoted from the anonymous *Life of William Cobbett* (1835), pp. 109-12. Another account of the opening of his shop was given by Cobbett in the *Political Register*, October 5, 1805:—

"When I began the business of a bookseller in the city of Philadelphia, I resolved to put the power and the courage of the democrats to the test by opening shop with a grand exhibition of the portraits of kings, queens, princes, nobles, and bishops, and, in short, with every portrait, picture, or book that I could obtain, and that I thought like to excite rage in the inveterate enemies of Great Britain, particularly a large, coarse sixpenny representation of Lord Howe's victory over the French. . . . On the first morning of my exhibition I had put up a representation of Lord Howe's victory in a leaf of the *European Magazine*; but a bookseller with whom I was acquainted, and who came to see *how I stood it*, whispered me, while the rabble were gazing and growling at my door, that he had two large representations of the same action. They were about four feet long and two wide: the things that are hawked about and sold at the farm-houses in England. . . . The letters were large: the mob, ten or twenty deep, could read, and they did read aloud, too, LORD HOWE'S DECISIVE VICTORY OVER THE FRENCH."

thought was to be come at among persons engaged in mercantile affairs; then he assumed the character of a *gentleman*, at the same time removing to Philadelphia, where he got access to persons of the first rank, and all those who were connected with or in the confidence of the Government (Cobbett has related). Some months after his arrival in this city, Talleyrand left a message with a friend of his, requesting me to meet him at that friend's house. Several days passed away before the meeting took place: I had no business to call me that way, and therefore I did not go. At last this modern Judas and I got seated by the same fireside. I expected that he wanted to expostulate with me on the severe treatment he had met with at my hands: I had called him an apostate, a hypocrite, and every other name of which he was deserving; I therefore leave the reader to imagine my astonishment when I heard him begin with complimenting me on my *wit* and *learning*. He praised several of my pamphlets, the *New Year's Gift* in particular, and still spoke of them as mine. I did not acknowledge myself the author, of course, but yet he would insist that I was; or at any rate, they reflected, he said, *infinite honour* on the author, let him be who he might. Having carried this species of flattery so far as he judged it safe, he asked me, with a vast deal of apparent seriousness, whether I had received my education at *Oxford* or at *Cambridge!* Hitherto I had kept my countenance pretty well; but this abominable stretch of hypocrisy, and the placid mien and silver accent with which it was pronounced, would have forced a laugh from a Quaker in the midst of a meeting. I don't recollect what reply I made him; but this I recollect well; I gave him to understand I was no trout, and consequently was not to be caught by tickling.

This information led him to something more solid. He began to talk about *business*. I was no *flour-merchant*, but I taught English; and, as luck would have it, this

was the very commodity that Bishop Périgord wanted. If I had taught Thornton's or Webster's language, or sold sand or ashes or pepper-pot, it would have been just the same to him. He knew the English language as well as I did; but he wanted to have dealings with me in some way or other.

I knew that, notwithstanding his being *proscribed* at Paris, he was extremely intimate with Adet (the French minister to the United States); and this circumstance led me to suspect his real business in the United States: I therefore did not care to take him as a scholar. I told him that, being engaged in a translation for the press, I could not possibly quit home. This difficulty the lame fiend hopped over in a moment. He would very gladly come to my house. I cannot say but it would have been a great satisfaction to me to have seen the *ci-devant* Bishop of Autun, the guardian of the holy oil that anointed the heads of the descendants of St. Louis, come trudging through the dirt to receive a lesson from me; but, on the other hand, I did not want a Frenchman to take a survey either of my desk or my house. My price for teaching was *six* dollars a month; he offered me *twenty*, but I refused; and before I left him I gave him clearly to understand that I was not to be purchased.¹

¹ *Porcupine's Gazette*, May 1797. (*Selections from Cobbett's Political Works*, i. 151-2.)

Many years later Talleyrand wrote appreciatively to Cobbett.

Talleyrand to William Cobbett

Août 10, [1830?]

Tout se perfectionne: les ministres autrefois ne mettoient de grace dans leurs lettres que quand ils réferoient: vous avez voulu, monseigneur, parceque cela est dans votre caractère, que toute votre correspondance portat l'empreinte de votre bienveillance naturelle; je vous en remercie personnellement.

Agréez, monseigneur, l'hommage de la haute considération avec laquelle j'ai l'honneur d'être votre tout humble et très obéissant serviteur.

DE TALLEYRAND.

(From the autograph collection of Mr. Stanley Lathbury.)

Those whom "Peter Porcupine" attacked did not remain quiet under the torrent of abuse that was showered upon them, and Cobbett at the time he opened his shop was the most abused man in the United States. There were threats of personal violence, and Franklin Bache, the editor of the *Aurora*, announced his intention to thrash him, and would doubtless have done so but that Cobbett, meeting him in the street, knocked him down. He was assailed in the newspapers and in a host of pamphlets—*A Blue Shop for Peter Porcupine*, *A Pill for Porcupine*, *A Roaster for Peter Porcupine*, *The History of a Porcupine*, *A Picture of Peter Porcupine*, and *The Impostor Detected* are only a few of the lampoons. He was called the "celebrated manufacturer of lies and retailer of filth"; it was declared that his wife was not his wife but his mistress; it was stated by some that he was a French spy, by others that he was in the pay of the British Government, that he had been a highwayman in England, and had had to fly the country to save his life. At all these inventions Cobbett laughed; but none the less he repudiated them with vigour in the autobiographical sketch, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine* (August 1796), to which he attached to serve as motto the Shakespearian line, "Now, you lying varlets, you shall see how a plain tale will put you down." Cobbett's laughter, however, ceased abruptly when Thomas Bradford and his son announced that the author had not had a second shirt to his back when they took him under their patronage, and that he wrote so badly that all his manuscripts had to be carefully overhauled and corrected; then Cobbett rose in his wrath, and in his *Remarks on Pamphlets against Peter Porcupine* (September 1796) administered such a terrible castigation to these

assailants, that to the end of their days they must have been sorry they had ventured to give battle to so redoubtable a foe.

I now take leave of the Bradfords and of all those who have written against me (so ended his *Remarks on the Pamphlets late published against Peter Porcupine*). People's opinions must now be made up concerning them and me. Those who still believe the lies that have been vomited forth against me are either too stupid or too perverse to merit further attention. I will, therefore, never write another word in reply to anything that is published about myself. Bark away, hell-hounds, till you are suffocated in your own foam. Your labours are preserved, bound up together in a piece of bearskin, with the hair on, and nailed to a post in my shop, where whoever pleases may read them gratis.

Cobbett found that his letters and parcels were opened at the post office, probably in the hope of finding therein matter that would convict him of being a spy; but this practice he stopped by the simple expedient of publishing the following letter in *Porcupine's Gazette*, a paper that he had recently started:—

Thursday, October 26 [1797].

REPUBLICAN POST OFFICE,—This is to notify the postmasters and others, between this place and New York inclusive, that, if the next package brought me by the English packet come to my hands *broken open*, and I *am not able to discover the persons who may break it open*, it is my resolution to *prosecute the postmaster-general*. I have no objection to people talking about *liberty* and the *rights of man* as long as they please, but I do not like that they should proceed so far *in the practice of them* as to ransack what comes under seal to my address.

WM. COBBETT.

This was probably the happiest period of Cobbett's life. His hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him. He was fighting for his country because he loved his country, and also because he loved fighting for its own sake. He had leaped into fame at a bound, and thoroughly enjoyed his success.

William Cobbett to his Father

September 1796.

When you used to set me off to work in the morning, dressed in my blue smock-frock and woollen spatter-dashes, with my bag of bread and cheese and bottle of small beer swung over my shoulder on the little crook that my old godfather Boxall gave me, little did you imagine that I should one day become so great a man as to have my picture stuck in the windows, and have four whole books published about me in the course of one week.

Between the summer of 1794 and the year 1800 Cobbett published twenty pamphlets, of which more than half a million copies were sold; but the writing of these and his work at the bookshop did not exhaust his energies, and on March 5, 1797, he began to issue a daily newspaper to which he gave the title of *Porcupine's Gazette*, which was founded, Cobbett stated, "with the intention of annihilating, if possible, the intriguing, wicked, and indefatigable faction which the French had formed in this country." *Porcupine's Gazette* circulated more widely than any other paper, and so widely extended his fame that Cobbett said subsequently when addressing Pitt, "I might safely have asserted that there was not in the whole country one single family in which some part or other of my writings had not been read, and in

which, generally speaking, they had not produced some degree of effect favourable to the interests of my country."¹ Confirmation of the fact that Cobbett did not over-estimate his influence is to be found in a letter which Dr. Priestley, who seems to have borne no malice, wrote on May 1, 1800, to the Rev. T. Lindsay: "At this time he is by far the most popular writer in this country, and, indeed, one of the best in many respects. He now publishes a paper called the *Rushlight*, which in sarcastic humour is equal, if not superior, to anything that I have ever seen. Till he began to censure the conduct of Mr. Adams, he was cried up by all his friends; though now they pretend to be ashamed of him."²

"It is somewhat singular," Cobbett commented upon the letters interchanged between himself and Thomas Bradford, "that Bradford should threaten me with a prosecution for *libel* just at the moment that others threatened me with a prosecution for writing." Bradford did not, indeed, enter an action; but there were others on the watch for an opportunity to muzzle the pamphleteer. First, in August 1797, he was indicted "for defaming his Catholic Majesty the King of Spain, his Envoy, and the Spanish Nation," and, in spite of a rancorous summing-up by Thomas M'Kean, Chief-Justice of Pennsylvania (and eke the father-in-law of Don Carlos Martinez de Yrujo, the Spanish Envoy), the Grand Jury threw out the bill. Cobbett, with vitriolic pen, described M'Kean in a way that fully explains, if it does not excuse, that worthy's subsequent conduct.

The grandfather of M'Kean was an Irishman, who *emigrated* by consent of his Majesty, and *twelve good*

¹ *Political Register*, September 29, 1804.

² Rutt, *Life of Priestley*, ii. 432.

and true men. He himself was born in America, in Chester county, and was for some time a hostler, then successively a constable, a sheriff, a justice of the peace, and a pettifogger, in which last capacity the revolutionists found him a man fit for their purposes. It was M'Kean who was guilty of the legal murder of the two Quakers Roberts and Carlisle; he has been a persecutor of this inoffensive sect from that day to this. He was the principal promoter of all the cruel laws and confiscations in Pennsylvania, and he now lives in a confiscated house. His private character is infamous; he beats his wife, and she beats him. He ordered a wig to be imported for him by Mr. Kid, refused to pay for it, was sued before the Mayor's Court, where, merely for the want of the original invoice which Kid had lost, the judge came off victorious. He is a notorious drunkard. The whole bar, one lawyer excepted, signed a memorial stating that so great a drunkard was he that after dinner person and property were not safe in Pennsylvania. He has been horsewhipped in the city tavern, and kicked in the street for his insolence to particular persons, and yet this degraded wretch is Chief Justice of the State.¹

The action for libel against the King of Spain having failed, and a suggestion that Cobbett should be deported from the United States under the Alien Act being found impracticable, a selection of his writings was brought together, and he was prosecuted for having in them published libels on every notable political antagonist in America, France, and England. The result of this action was that he was bound over in recognisances to the amount of \$4000 to be of good behaviour; and it was cheerfully anticipated that he would soon forfeit his

¹ Quoted from Huish's *Memoirs of William Cobbett*, i. 201.

recognisances. Soon he delivered himself into the hands of his enemies.

Dr. Benjamin Rush had risen into some repute by a system of purging and bleeding as a cure for yellow fever, a disease then prevalent in Pennsylvania. When there was an epidemic of yellow fever in 1797, distinguished physicians thought it necessary to warn the public against the danger of this treatment, and the warning was repeated by John Fenno in his paper, *The Gazette of the United States*, and by Cobbett in *Porcupine's Gazette*. Cobbett regarded Rush as a "poisonous trans-Atlantic quack," headed his article with the motto, "Can the Rush grow up without mire?" and made characteristic comments: "Bleeding a man to death," he wrote, "no matter what the disease, cannot be the proper method of saving his life." Rush instituted actions for libel against Fenno and Cobbett, but subsequently withdrew that against the American, being advised that an American jury would hesitate in such a case to bring in a verdict against a fellow-countryman. Cobbett demanded that the case should be removed from the Supreme Court of the State of Pennsylvania to the Courts of the United States, the Constitution allowing this privilege to an alien; but Chief-Justice M'Kean over-ruled the plea, being anxious at any cost to drive Cobbett out of the State. The prosecutor contrived to delay the trial from 1798 until December 13, 1799, when Cobbett, in pursuance of his vow to leave Philadelphia if M'Kean was elected Governor of Pennsylvania, had gone to New York. The case was tried before Justice Shippen, whose summing up occasionally reminds the reader of the famous case of Bardell *versus* Pickwick; and judgment was given against Cobbett for \$5000 on December 14, the day on which

Washington died, in some degree the victim of the treatment prescribed by Rush. Without delay, in pursuance of orders given by the executive, Cobbett's property in Philadelphia was sold by the sheriff at public auction; and among these effects was a part of the new edition in sheets of a collected edition of *Porcupine's Works*, sold as waste-paper.¹

The expenses of the action, damages and costs together, amounted to \$8000, and the forced sale of his effects, together with the destruction of the edition of *Porcupine's Works*, nearly ruined Cobbett, who began to think of returning to England.

William Cobbett to John Wright

NEW YORK, January 4, 1800.

I have but two moments to tell you of a very infamous affair. You heard, about two years ago, of a villainous quack, by the name of Rush, having sued me for scandal. The trial has been studiously put off till I came here, and the villains have sentenced me to pay 5000 dollars damages! Never mind. They cannot ruin me, while I have my soul left in me. Be not uneasy. We have given bail here, where I have good friends. They will get the money from us in April next. I shall, if I live, be in London in June. You will have many things from me next packet. Washington is dead.

P.S.—When you tell Mr. Gifford² this news, assure him that I am not cast down. I will fight as I retreat to

¹ During his second visit to the United States, Cobbett, being advised by Ambrose Spencer, Chief Justice of the State of New York, that there had been illegality in the proceedings against him and that compensation should be made, presented a memorial to the legislature at Harrisburg, praying that the fine of \$5000 be restored to him. This application, however, was unsuccessful.

² William Gifford (1725-1826), editor of and contributor to the *Anti-Jacobin*, and subsequently joint editor of the *Quarterly Review*.

the very water's edge. North and the things came safe. Another packet is in, and will leave this in about two weeks. Then you will get the things that I am preparing. Continue my monthly supply, but confine yourself in your letters to mere matters of business. The *Wodrop Sims* is not yet arrived, and, of course, I have not those things. I shall leave an agent here, and a good one; a good honest Englishman. Expect to hear from me next packet and to receive several valuable things, with the plan of my future operations.¹

Cobbett had ceased to publish *Porcupine's Gazette* on October 26, shortly before he left Philadelphia, but at the end of the year he fulfilled his promise to issue a farewell number to his subscribers.

There are some few things on which I humbly presume I may be permitted to congratulate myself (he wrote therein). Yes, I must congratulate myself on having established a paper, carried it to a circulation unparalleled in extent, and preserved this circulation to the last number, without the aid of any of those base and parasitical acts by which patronage to American newspapers is generally obtained and preserved; I congratulate myself on having, in the progress of this paper, uniformly supported, with all my feeble powers, the cause of true religion, sound morality, good government, and *real* liberty; I congratulate myself on never having, in a single instance, been the sycophant of the Sovereign People; and on having persisted, in spite of calumny, threats, prosecutions, and violence, from the one side, and of praises, promises, and caresses, from the other—in spite of the *savage howlings* of the *sans-culottes*, and the *soothing serenades* of the Federalists (for I have heard both under my window); I congratulate myself on having,

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 5.

in spite of all these, persisted in openly and unequivocally avowing my attachment to my native country and my allegiance to my King; and with still greater pride I congratulate myself on being the first, and perhaps the only, man, who, since the revolution, has in open court refused to take shelter under the title of *citizen*, and demanded justice as a *subject of King George*. Finally, I congratulate myself on having the entire approbation of every man of sense, candour, and integrity, the disapprobation of every fool, the hatred of every *malignant Whig*, and the curse of every villain.

Cobbett, with his hatred of being beaten, could not bring himself to leave America, and at New York he started a new paper, called the *Rushlight*, in which he made terrific onslaughts on M'Kean, Shippen, and "Sangrado" Rush. The venture was not particularly successful, and Cobbett at last yielded to the persuasions of his English correspondents, and sailed for home on June 1, 1800.

When people care not two straws for each other, ceremony at parting is mere grimace; and as I have long felt the most perfect indifference with regard to a vast majority of those whom I now address, I shall spare myself the trouble of a ceremonious farewell (so ran his farewell address, published in the American newspapers). Let me, however, not part from you in indiscriminating contempt. If no man ever had so many and such malignant foes, no one ever had more friends, and those more kind, more sincere, and more faithful. If I have been unjustly villified by some, others have extolled me far beyond my merits; if the savages of the city have scared my children in the cradle, those children have, for their father's sake, been soothed and caressed by the affectionate, the gentle, the generous inhabitants of the

country, under whose hospitable roofs I have spent some of the happiest hours of my life.

Thus and *thus*, Americans, will I ever speak of you. In a very little time I shall be beyond the reach of your friendship and your malice ; beyond the hearing of your commendations or your curses, but being out of your power will alter neither my sentiments nor my words. As I have never spoken anything but truth *to* you, so I will never speak anything but truth *of* you ; the heart of a Briton revolts at an emulation in baseness, and although you have as a nation treated me most ungratefully and unjustly, I scorn to repay you with ingratitude and injustice.

To my friends, who are also the real friends of America, I wish that peace and happiness which virtue ought to ensure, but which I greatly fear they will not find ; and as to my enemies, I can wish them no severer scourge than that which they are preparing for themselves and their country. With this I depart for my native land, where neither the moth of democracy, nor the rust of federalism, doth corrupt, and where thieves do not with impunity break through and steal five thousand dollars at a time.

It was with such bitterness in his heart that Cobbett returned to England. He had arrived in the United States filled with enthusiasm for the republic ; he left, after eight years, convinced that in that land justice was a farce, and that the liberty of the press and the liberty of the subject was less under the rule of a sovereign people than under a monarchy.

The subjects of a British King, like the sons of every provident and tender father, never know his value till they feel the want of his protection (he wrote in the *Porcupine*, shortly after he arrived in England). In the

days of youth and ignorance I was led to believe that comfort, freedom, and virtue were exclusively the lot of Republicans. A very short trial convinced me of my error, admonished me to repent of my folly, and urged me to compensate for the injustice of the opinion which I had conceived. During an eight years' absence from my country, I was not an unconcerned spectator of her perils, nor did I listen in silence to the slander of her enemies.

Though divided from England by the ocean, though her gay fields were hidden probably for ever from my view, still her happiness and her glory were the objects of my constant solicitude. I rejoiced at her victories, I mourned at her defeats; her friends were my friends, her foes were my foes. Once more returned, once more under the safeguard of that sovereign who watched over me in my infancy, and the want of whose protecting arm I have so long had reason to lament, I feel an irresistible desire to communicate to my countrymen the fruit of my experience; to show them the injurious and degrading consequences of discontent, disloyalty, and innovation; to convince them that they are the first as well as the happiest of the human race, and above all to warn them against the arts of those ambitious and perfidious demagogues who could willingly reduce them to a level with the cheated slaves, in the bearing of whose yoke I had the mortification to share.

CHAPTER V

COBBETT RETURNS TO ENGLAND (1800-1801)

Cobbett leaves New York for Halifax—And returns thence to England—Arrival at Falmouth, July 1800—John Wright—Cobbett already well known in England—Comes to London—Welcomed by the Tories—Dines with William Windham—Meets Pitt, Canning, and other leaders of the Party—Offered and declined the proprietorship of a Government organ—His determination to be independent—Revives the *Porcupine*—Trouble with the Post Office—Makes a formal complaint to Lord Auckland—Antagonistic attitude towards the Peace of Amiens—Letters on the subject to William Windham—Refusing to illuminate, his windows smashed by the mob—*Letters to Lord Hawkesbury*—Correspondence with William Windham—Sets up as bookseller and publisher—Issue of the *Works of Peter Porcupine* and other volumes.

COBETT went from New York to Halifax, where he was very kindly received by the Duke of Kent, then Commander-in-Chief of the forces in British North America. The expenses of the Rush trial, the fine inflicted, and the forced sale of his effects had left him almost penniless, and he paid his passage home with the proceeds of a subscription raised by "some very worthy men in Canada."¹ He landed at Falmouth early in July.

William Cobbett to John Wright

FALMOUTH, July 8, 1800.

I arrived here, with my family, last Friday, by the *Lady Arabella* packet-boat, and shall set off for London to-morrow morning, travelling by way of Bath, &c., &c., in a post-chaise, with Mrs. Cobbett and my two children;

¹ *Political Register*, January 4, 1817.

so that you may expect to see me in town on Saturday or Sunday next.

I have taken the liberty to give a draft on you for £20. I brought off only £50 in cash, and, as I have remained here and at Halifax much longer than I thought there would be any occasion for, I was apprehensive I should fall short. Mr. Pellew of this place, who, by the by, is a brother of the gallant Sir Edward Pellew, offered me whatever I might want, and I gave him the above-mentioned draft. Do not fail to accept it, and I will be careful to lodge the cash with you before the time of payment arrives. Indeed, I will do it immediately upon my arrival.

Pray make my most respectful compliments to Mr. Wm. Gifford, and, believe me, though in haste, your very sincere f^d and most obed^t se^t,
WM. COBBETT.

P.S.—That part of my baggage which I am not able to carry with me, I have sent to a waggon warehouse, directed to *your care*. I shall, undoubtedly, be in town before it, but if, by some accident, I should be detained longer on the road than the 17th instant, I beg the favour of you to go and claim the things (two trunks, one bale, one deal box, and one handbox), at the Swan and Two Necks, Lad Lane.¹

John Wright, to whom this letter was addressed, figures largely in the history of Cobbett's life during the next ten years. Born about 1770, the son of a Norwich clerk, he had been apprenticed to an uncle in the silk trade in that city; but when his indentures expired, instead of remaining in the business, he came to London, and found employment at Hookham's Library in Bond Street. Subsequently he set up for himself as a bookseller at No. 169 Piccadilly, and his shop became

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 9.

a resort of the politicians that supported Pitt. Canning was often to be seen there, and Hookham Frere; and thence Gifford issued the *Anti-Jacobin*, the first number of which appeared on November 20, 1797, and the last on the following July 9. While Cobbett was in America, Wright acted as his London agent, sent him out books, and took charge of the republication of his works in this country.

Cobbett's fame had spread to England long before his arrival. It had been said that Canning advised that the *Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine* should be reprinted in this country, and that Gifford wrote the preface to *A Bone to Grow*; it is certainly a fact that these and other pamphlets by the same author found a ready sale. Robert Heriot, the ostensible proprietor of the Government organs, the *True Briton* and the *Sun*, had written to Cobbett in Philadelphia inviting him to contribute to these papers—an offer Cobbett scornfully declined to entertain; and the *Gentleman's Magazine* kept a friendly eye on him.

*William Cobbett to Mr. Nichols, printer of the
"Gentleman's Magazine"*

PHILADELPHIA, August 1, 1797.

I am that identical William Cobbett (called Peter Porcupine) whose writings you have now and then honoured with your approbation. I take the liberty of enclosing you a file of my *Gazette* for the month past, which I shall repeat at the end of every month, begging of you to send me in return your useful and entertaining *Magazine*. This shall, however, be optional with you. I send you my paper, because, in your hands, I know it may be of use to my countrymen. Mark well all the passages respecting the *Republican Britons* amongst us.

Depend on it, they are sunk here below even the *par* of rascality and wretchedness.

Few booksellers in the United States carry on that branch of the business with more life than I do. If you choose, and can fall upon any arrangement, I will receive from you a few volumes of your magazine half-yearly. I could get 50, if not 100, subscribers to the work, and this would take off a good number of your surplus dead stock. This I must leave to yourself, Sir, but let me beg of you not to omit sending me your magazine half-yearly. I want also the two volumes for 1796. I will fall upon some method of getting you the money for these things. Let me have the honour of a letter from good "Old Sylvanus," and please to communicate to me the mode in which I can be most useful to your excellent publication.

America is becoming an interesting scene. Let me request you to pay particular attention to the humiliation we now experience on account of the *weakness of our Government*, and to beg you to observe that that weakness grows out of the abominable system of *universal suffrage*.¹

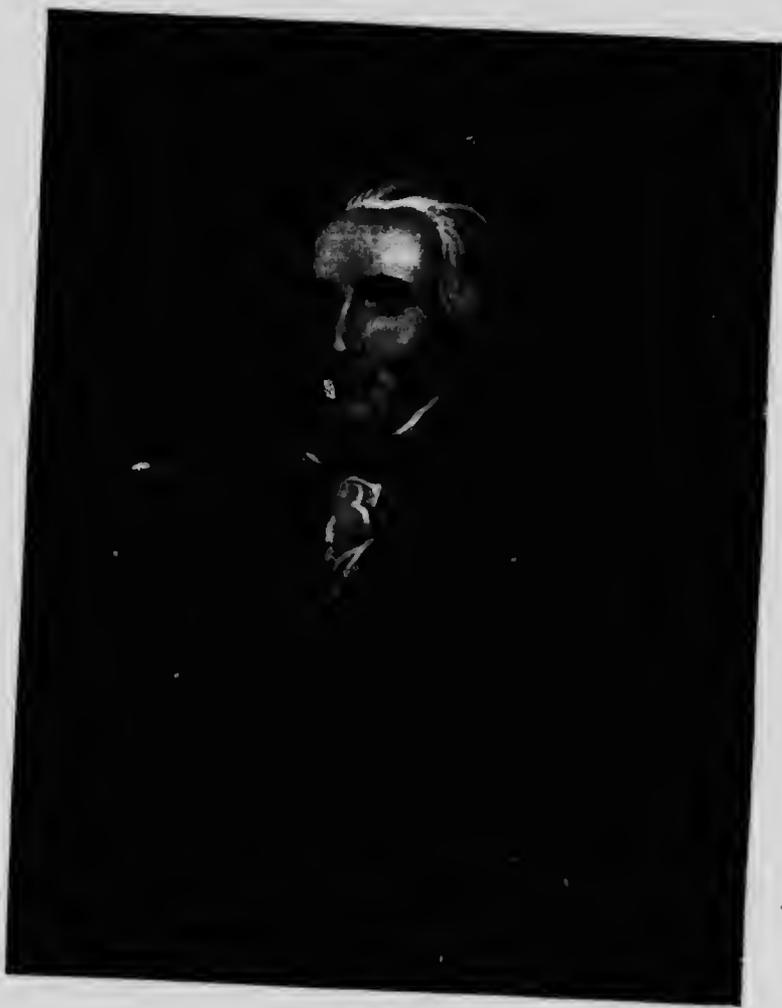
Because Cobbett in the United States had come forward as the champion of England and the opponent of France, the Tories in England welcomed him with open arms. William Windham, who presently declared in the House of Commons that a statue of gold ought to be erected in honour of Cobbett for his writings in America, invited him to dinner soon after his arrival in London.

William Cobbett to William Windham

ST. JAMES' STREET, August 1800.

Your favour of the 1st instant was not received till late on Saturday evening, or I should sooner have re-

¹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1835; vol. iv. n.s., p. 246.



WILLIAM WINDHAM

From an engraving by W. T. Fry, after a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.



turned you my thanks, and have expressed to you the pleasure with which I accept your invitation. As my first wish ever has been to merit the commendations of men distinguished for their wisdom and loyalty, for their unshaken attachment to ancient establishments and their unequivocal abhorrence of innovations, I need not say how great is the satisfaction I feel at hearing that my humble efforts are honoured with your admiration.¹

The dinner took place on August 7, and Cobbett made the acquaintance, not only of his host, but also of Pitt, Canning, Hookham Frere, George Hammond, George Ellis, and Malone. Cobbett was frankly delighted by the consideration shown him, the self-educated son of a small farmer, by some of the most distinguished men of the day. "I never was presumptuous in my life," he wrote, "and I regarded this [dinner] as a great act of condescension on the part of Mr. Windham, and more especially on the part of Mr. Pitt, of whose talents and integrity I had the highest possible opinion." Pitt was notoriously haughty in his attitude towards writers for the press, but he seems to have unbent with "Peter Porcupine." They conversed about various matters, they discussed Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and Cobbett ventured to recommend to the good offices of the Minister a man who had rescued valuable despatches, but had received no reward for his services. Subsequently George Hammond, then Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, gave a dinner-party in honour of Cobbett, at which were present Canning, Sir William Scott, and Lord Hawkesbury (afterwards the second Lord Liverpool). To Hammond had been entrusted the task to enlist Cobbett's services for the Party. Forthwith he offered the journalist the

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 1.

proprietorship of the *True Briton* or the *Sun*, whichever he should choose—no trifling offer, as Cobbett realised, for the types, presses, &c., were worth a considerable sum. "I am very much obliged to you and to the gentlemen of which you speak [George Rose and others], for this offer; but, though I am very poor, my desire is to render the greatest possible service to my country, and, I am convinced, that by keeping myself wholly free, and relying upon my own means, I shall be able to give the Government much more efficient support than if any species of dependence could be traced to me. At the same time I do not wish to cast blame on those who are thus dependent; and I do not wish to be thought too conceited and too confident of my own powers and judgment, to decline any advice that you, or any one in office, may at any time be good enough to offer me; and I shall always be thankful to you for any intelligence or information that any of you may be pleased to give me." Hammond was disappointed by this rejection of his offer, but he admired the spirit of independence that prompted it. "Well, I must say that I think you take the honourable course," he answered, "and I most sincerely wish it may also be the profitable one."¹

Cobbett had made up his mind to be entirely independent, and he had given proof of this immediately after his landing in England.

I had brought home with me a large trunk or two of old books (he told George Rose). These, when I arrived at Falmouth, the Collector, Mr. Pellew, told me I *ought not to pay duty for*, as they were merely library books and for private use, and not intended *for sale*; but

¹ "A New Year's Gift to Old George Rose" (*Political Register*, January 4, 1817).

that *he* could not remit the duty; that the trunks must go round to London; and that a memorial to the Treasury, addressed to *you*, would give the books *untaxed*. I addressed such memorial to you; and I received for answer that the *duty must be paid*, but that the *Treasury would give me the amount*. No, thank ye, said I. I wanted no communication of this sort. I paid the duty, and left you the money to lay out in some other way. This was a trifling sum; but it shows how scrupulous I was upon this head.¹

So soon as he was settled in London, Cobbett began to look round for some employment that would provide him with means to support his family. There were not many things he could do outside journalism, and it was, therefore, to journalism that he turned. He had been successful in this profession in the United States; why not in his own country? He decided to bring out a paper to be styled the *Porcupine*, and he published the first number on October 30, 1800.

The *Porcupine* never was, in America, nor shall it be in England, the *blind instrument* of party, the trumpet of indiscriminate applause. The wisest men may sometimes commit error, which the most ignorant may perceive. I shall, therefore, feel no restraint, but that of decency and candour, trusting to a liberal interpretation of my motives from the wise, and totally disregarding the displeasure of those who may be weak enough to prefer flattery to truth (so ran Cobbett's declaration of the principles upon which he intended to run the paper). Not a single *quack* advertisement will on any account be admitted into the *Porcupine*. Our newspapers have been too long disgraced by this species of falsehood,

¹ "A New Year's Gift to Old George Rose" (*Political Register*, January 4, 1817).

filth, and obscenity. I am told that, by adhering to this resolution, I shall lose five hundred a year, and excite the resentment of the numerous body of empirics; but their money I hope I shall never be so graceless as to covet, and as to resentment, I have nothing to fear from that, so long as I abstain from their death-dealing nostrums.

The *Porcupine* never secured any considerable circulation, although it attracted much attention in certain quarters.

The newspaper, which I set up, very soon failed (he remarked years later in "A New Year's Gift to Old George Rose"). It was not, I found, an affair of *talent*, but of *trick*. I could not sell *paragraphs*. I could not throw out hints against a man or woman's reputation in order to bring the party forward to pay me for silence. I could do none of these mean and infamous things, by which the daily press, for the far greater part, was supported, and which enabled the proprietors to ride in chariots, while their underlings were actually vending lies by the line and inch.

Cobbett had expected large sales in the United States and in the Colonies, but here, too, he was disappointed. Mr. (afterwards Sir Francis) Freeling, the Secretary of the Post Office, with a salary of £1200 a year, claimed that the exclusive privilege of forwarding newspapers and other periodical publications to the West Indies and America had been granted to him, as a remuneration for public services, and that his charge for forwarding a daily paper to either of these countries was five pounds a year. This Cobbett refused to pay, and then Freeling offered to accept three guineas, on condition that the amount was never revealed, as otherwise other pro-

prietors of newspapers might feel aggrieved. Cobbett declined to bind himself to secrecy, and Freeling became his determined foe. Freeling's first step was to withhold from the *Porcupine* the Post Office advertisements that had been promised, and so many other obstacles were put in Cobbett's way, that he, on June 15, 1801, preferred a complaint in writing to Lord Auckland, the Postmaster-General.¹

My American newspapers, which generally come by the merchant ships, and are deposited in the post office at Dover, Bristol, or Liverpool, were, previous to my rejection of Mr. Freeling's proposal, delivered to me at the rate of ten shillings and sixpence for a package; but since that time they have been presented me, as before, with the enormous charge of five or six guineas on them, and have not, upon a discovery of the contents of the packages, ever been, as before, offered to me upon lower terms. These papers are of great value to me; but the Secretary, doubtless, conceives that a greater "public service" is rendered by committing them to the flames than by delivering them to me, though about ten guineas a year would thereby be added to the Treasury of the Kingdom.

But, my Lord, these things are trifling compared with another species of hostility, which I have every reason to believe the Post Office is carrying on against my undertaking. The Clerks of the Roads exercise the business of newsmen; that is, they receive orders from the country, in consequence of which they send newspapers, by post, from London to the persons giving those orders. His Majesty's General Post Office is thus rendered a sort of newsman's rendezvous, by which means the Secretary, Clerks, &c., obtain a very great, though indirect influence over the press, which influence

¹ Add. MSS. 34455, ff. 393-414.

it would require an uncommon portion of charity in me not to suspect them to have employed to the detriment of my undertaking. Since it must have been known that I had resolved not to yield to Mr. Freeling's proposal, I have received, from almost every part of Great Britain, complaints of the irregular conveyance of the *Porcupine*. In many instances the complainants have stated that the paper was frequently replaced by the *True Briton*, the *Herald*, the *Times*, and, in certain instances, by the *Morning Chronicle*. Detection is next to impossible; but, when I compare this circumstance with the general conduct of the Post Office towards me, I can have little doubt as to the source of this cowardly hostility.

As to Hamburgh news, my Lord, the Clerks of the General Post Office possess an almost absolute control over the newspapers of the whole nation. When the Hamburgh mail arrives, an abstract translation of the news which it brings is made out at the Post Office. Copies of this translation are taken and carried to the several newspapers, from the proprietors of each of which the Clerks demand *a guinea each time*. Thus not only are the printers of newspapers laid under a heavy contribution by persons who are already paid by the public, but the news, with which that public is supplied, is left to the selection of men on whose judgment, or on whose principles, I can see no reason for placing such implicit reliance. If I am told that the receiving of the translation from them is the *voluntary* act of the proprietors of the several newspapers, I answer that it is not so. If the mail arrive previous to the time of delivery for that day, then, indeed, the morning papers may make a translation for the next day; but if the mail arrive too late for that day's delivery, then the proprietor of each morning paper must submit to give a guinea to these vendors of what ought to be regarded as the secrets of the mail-bag, or his paper must be ruined by the advantage which others will thereby obtain over it; so that

the purchasing of the translations is far from being a voluntary act on the part of the proprietors of newspapers, who yield to the extortion from necessity, and not from choice. The people of the Post Office may, in those cases, demand whatever sum they please. They have the exclusive privilege of selling; a complete monopoly; however exorbitant their price, or insolent their manner of demanding it, it must be submitted to. Were the Hamburg papers sent round to the several newspaper offices as soon as they arrive, be it when it may, then the translations would be left to the talent and industry of the several proprietors of papers, each of whom would thereby avoid an expense of about £30 or £40 a year, and it is certainly as easy to send round the foreign papers themselves, as to make out and send round a translation from those papers. The people of the Post Office would, indeed, by such reform be prevented from extorting about a thousand pounds a year from the proprietors of newspapers; but I am certain your Lordship would not regard that circumstance as a diminution of the credit of the office over which you preside. . . . But, my Lord, it is not the injury that my interests have sustained, and do yet sustain, from the regulations of the post offices and the conduct of its inferior officers, that would justify my having taken up so much of your Lordship's time; it is the more serious injury which I am convinced will arise therefrom to the cause of truth, of real liberty, and of unfeigned loyalty, that has urged me to take up the pen on this occasion. From what I have stated, it is evident that the Secretary of the General Post Office and his subalterns possess an influence over the press which no man, or set of men, ever ought to possess. We may talk about *the liberty of the press*, my Lord, but while the Secretary has the power, in virtue of his exclusive privilege of franking, to give one newspaper, or other periodical publication, a preference over another, in America and the West Indies; while

this privilege almost enables him entirely to exclude from those extensive and populous countries any paper or other periodical publication which he happens to dislike ; while his power of exacting the full postage for packets (from America or elsewhere), or of remitting that postage, at his will, places every newspaper at his mercy, in a very important branch of its foreign concerns, and while the discretion, vested in him, of giving, or withholding, as his interest or prejudice may dictate, the advertising custom of the General Post Office, creates, as it ever must do, a strong temptation in every news-printer to truckle to his will ; while the Clerks of the Roads, by carrying on the business of newsmen, have it in their power to add to the sale of one newspaper, and to diminish that of another, at the same time that the public purse supports them in a very unfair rivalry against the newsmen of London and Westminster ; while the Clerks in the foreign-letter office assume the sole proprietorship of the news that arrives by the Hamburgh mails, which news they compel the news-printers to publish, which they sell on terms that they themselves most insolently dictate, and that they can vary towards different persons, at their pleasure ; while some people in the Post Office (no matter who) are permitted to publish a newspaper without a stamp, to print it in, and issue it from, buildings appropriated to the public use, and to circulate it, through the medium of the Penny Post, postage-free, at the same time that all other news-printers are compelled to pay a heavy stamp-duty, to print and publish their papers in buildings provided at their own expense, and to allow a considerable percentage for the circulating of them ; while these things are, my Lord, we may talk about the *liberty of the press*, we may say we possess it, we may boast of it as the birthright of Englishmen ; but it will exist nowhere, except in the imaginations of those who are unacquainted with the facts, which I have here had the honour of submitting to your Lordship.

However Cobbett's complaint may have affected Freeling's perquisites, it assuredly did nothing to benefit the journalist. The *Porcupine* struggled against adversity, until its proprietor's antagonistic attitude towards the Peace of Amiens gave it its death-blow.

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, October 7 1802.

From the despair into which I and my friend Gillford were plunged by the Peace [of Amiens], and by the base disposition which appeared in all ranks of people on Saturday last, I have been, in some measure, recovered by a very favourable change, which has appeared within these three days. Before you read this letter you will have read the *Porcupine* of Monday. The article therein contained, on the Peace, produced a very great effect as far as it went, and its circulation was very wide indeed. Three or four hundred papers were called for after all the impression was sold off; and, though the same article was widely distributed through the *Heart of Oak* of the same evening, it was thought necessary to republish it yesterday (Tuesday), when, notwithstanding the impression was much above the usual number printed, the papers were all sold off, and others still called for. With the article before you, and with these facts, you will be able to judge of the opinions of thinking people on this dangerous measure. I have spoken with many persons, merchants, planters, and gentlemen, and I find the Peace, as a matter of *terms* in particular, universally condemned. Even the delirium of the multitude does not prevent them from perceiving the disgrace which these dishonourable terms have brought upon the country; and I am well persuaded that in a very little time the measure will be as unpopular as it is unwise and disgraceful.

The newspapers (which must never be forgotten when
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we are speaking of public opinion) are ranged thus : The *True Briton* and *Sun*, the *Herald*, and the *Times* justify the Peace, through thick and thin ; and the latter (the *Times*), which has been enlisted by the Foreign Office, extols my Lord Hawkesbury at the expense of Mr. Pitt ! This, all things considered, is humorous enough. These four papers, which are not the best possible supports that a cause can have, are opposed by the *Morning Chronicle* (which has retracted its approbation, too hastily bestowed on Friday last), the *Morning Post*, the *Courier*, the *Star*, the *St. James's Chronicle*, and the *Porcupine*. The superiority of force is evidently against the Peace (as a matter of terms), and, were there an Opposition in Parliament, such as England has formerly seen, the men who have made this Peace would very soon be driven from their places.

A rumour prevails that Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville are to come into place again. I cannot believe this ; but, unfounded as it may be, it has no small weight in the present discussion and tends to render the Peace still more unpopular than it otherwise would be. Mr. Pitt's city friends (except, perhaps, a few of the elect) deny that he has had any hand in the Peace, while his enemies contend that he has, and while we (I mean Gifford and myself) have proof positive of the fact, a fact which we shall boldly state at all times when we think it necessary.

In the *Porcupine* of to-day (Wednesday, 7 Octr.) you will see a letter from a correspondent, composing a great part of the main article, which is, I think, worthy of your attention. We do not exactly know who it comes from ; but it evidently comes from some members of Opposition, and is a pretty clear indication of the line of conduct which the Opposition mean to pursue, with respect to the Peace, in the ensuing session.

The *Morning Post* of yesterday is worth reading, and I therefore do myself the pleasure of enclosing it to you,

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along with the *Porcupine* of this day, which, agreeably to a letter from Mr. Coates, I have got from your house in Pall Mall.

The ratification of the preliminaries is not yet arrived (4 o'clock), but is hourly expected, and I am informed that a grand illumination is preparing at all the Public Offices. Two thousand lamps, I am told, are prepared for the War Office and the Horse Guards. The swinish multitude, having nothing better to do, have, all this day long, been assembled, to the amount of three or four thousands, in St. James's Park, waiting for the arrival of the ratification and for the consequent firing of guns.

I have yet to inform you of what you certainly do not know; to wit, the Article in the *Porcupine* of Monday, which has made so much noise in the world, is attributed to *you*; and thereupon an opinion is formed, amongst the silly ones of the city, that you and your ancient colleagues are to form the leading characters in the next winter's Opposition.

I shall expect *no answer* to this letter, except a line, when you have leisure, to say that you have received it. If hares are very plenty on your estates, I would beg leave to ask you for one, when your keeper has more than you want. While you are absent I shall take the liberty to inform you from time to time of what comes within my knowledge, relative to public affairs, taking it for granted that you will tell me when my communications give you more trouble than pleasure.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham, at Norwich

PALL MALL, October 10, 1801.

With that sort of dread which seizes on a man when he has heard, or thinks he has heard, a supernatural voice predicting his approaching end, I sit down to

¹ Add. MSS. 37853. ff. 12-13.

inform you, that the guns are now firing for the Peace, and that half an hour ago a very numerous crowd *drew the Aide-de-Camp of Bonaparte*¹ *in triumph through Pall Mall!* The vile miscreants had, it seems, watched his motions very narrowly, and perceiving him get into a carriage in Bond Street with Otto, they took out the horses, dragged him down that street, down St. James's Street, along by your house, down to White-hall, and through the Park, and then to Otto's again, shouting and rejoicing every time he had occasion to get out or into the carriage. The modest sansculotte bore all this with great complacency, as you may easily suppose; whether the *peacemakers* saw it with unconcern I know not, but I know that it has sunk my heart within me, and I look forward to a revolution with as great certainty as I do to Christmas or New Year's day. This is the first time an English mob ever became the cattle of a *Frenchman*; and they are willing to be such now, not because they love the Frenchman as such, but because he is one of those who have killed kings and queens and noblemen and have destroyed rank and property. This indication of the temper and sentiments of the lower orders is a most awful consideration. Whether it will make any impression on the peacemakers I do not know. You must remember, Sir, that previous to the revolutions in Switzerland and elsewhere, we always heard of *some French messenger of peace being received with caresses by the people*; the next post or two brought us an account of partial discontents, tumults, insurrections, murders, and revolutions always closed the history. God preserve us from the like, but I am afraid our abominations are to be punished in this way.²

The town went mad with joy over the Peace, and preparations were made for the general illumination of

¹ General Lauriston.

² Add. MSS. 37853, f. 14.

the street. Cobbett decided that nothing should induce him to light even a single candle, and he applied at Bow Street for protection. Mrs. Cobbett had been confined the day before, however, and for a moment Cobbett wavered.

On Thursday, about noon, I began to grow apprehensive of the consequences of resistance. To hazard the life of her who had been my companion and support through all the storms I had endured; to whose gentleness, prudence, and fortitude I owed whatever I enjoyed of pleasure, of fortune, or of reputation; to make this sacrifice was no longer to be thought of, and I had made up my mind to yield when she bravely determined to be removed to the house of a friend rather than her husband should submit to the mandates of a base and hireling mob.¹

Mrs. Cobbett was removed, her husband adhered to his resolve not to illuminate, and the mob smashed his windows and nearly broke down the front door.

*William Cobbett to Lord Pelham*²

PALL MALL, October 11, 1801.

From the scenes of violence and outrage which took place on Wednesday night last in some parts of the town not far removed from Pall Mall, I had reason to expect that, on the arrival of the Ratification of the Preliminary Treaty of Peace with Bonaparte, my dwelling-house here as well as my printing office in Southampton Street would be attacked; because my sentiments respecting that Peace were publickly known and because it could

¹ *Political Register*, vol. ii.

² Thomas Pelham (1756-1826), the eldest son of the first Earl of Chichester, succeeded his father in the title in 1805. In 1801 he was Home Secretary under Addington.

not be imagined that I should belye, by any manifestation of joy a night, the principles and sentiments which I had promulgated in the morning. Impressed, my Lord, with this belief, and still more deeply impressed with the ideas which I had imbibed in my childhood, that an Englishman's house was his castle and that every subject of his Majesty possessed that full portion of liberty of which he justly boasts as his birthright, which left him at perfect freedom to exercise his unbiased judgment on every occasion—so long as he paid implicit obedience to the laws of the realm—I made application to the Bow Street magistrates for legal protection. At their desire I went to their office, and was very politely received by the magistrates then sitting, Mr. Bond and Sir William Parsons, to whom I related the grounds of my apprehensions, and from whom I received a promise of all *practicable* protection.

It happened, my Lord, precisely as I had expected: about eight o'clock in the evening my dwelling-house was attacked by an innumerable mob, all my windows were broken, and when this was done, which occupied about an hour, the villains were preparing to break into my shop, where there was considerable property, and had actually made one of the shutters give way. Fearing that the cannibals might murder myself and my children, I now ordered my windows to be lighted; but even this, my Lord, did not satisfy this unlawful and ferocious rabble, who ever and anon howled out that I was the publisher of the *Porcupine*, and the attack continued at intervals till past one o'clock this morning. During the whole of this time not a constable nor peace officer of any description made his appearance, nor was the smallest interruption given to the proceedings of this ignorant and brutal mob.

The *Porcupine* Office in Southampton Street experienced a similar fate. The Clerk, the only person in the house, narrowly escaped with his life; and, in

obedience to the orders which he had received, before the attack had actually begun, and as soon as he saw a disposition to attack the house, went to the public office in Bow Street and there related the danger to the officers, who, so far from being disposed to render him any protection, literally pushed him from the door, saying that there were no magistrates there.

This is a very brief statement, my Lord, of the injuries of which I have to complain, and for which I mean to seek redress in a legal manner; but as there is every reason to suppose (and, indeed, as the rabble at this moment before my door are asserting) that there will be a repetition of these breaches of the peace to-morrow and the succeeding night (if not *this* night also), the object of this application is to submit to the consideration of your Lordship what measures it will be proper to take in order to prevent me from being reduced to the painful necessity of repelling force by force, or of yielding the throats of my wife, my children, and myself to the knives of this blood-thirsty rabble.¹

These scenes of violence were repeated in the following March, when the Treaty was confirmed. Again Cobbett's house was assailed, again the magistrate and his officers were powerless, and it was not until a troop of Horse Guards appeared upon the scene that the mob dispersed. Six men were arrested, and three of them committed for trial—Charles Beloe (son of the Rev. W. Beloe) and Charles Wagstaff, clerks in the General Post Office, and John Harwood, an amanuensis to the Rev. W. Beloe. The jury found the prisoners guilty, but recommended them to the mercy of the Court. Asked if he would join in the recommendation, "Certainly not," said Cobbett. "I came here to ask for *justice*, and not for

¹ The Cobbett MSS.

mercy." The men were fined, and bound over to keep the peace for two years. "My rescinding the capital charge," Cobbett wrote later, "was an act of clemency, and as such it was felt, and *publicly acknowledged*, by Mr. Mackintosh, the counsel for the prisoners."¹

The attack on Cobbett for not illuminating attracted attention. "The poor Porcupine's windows have been smashed for not rejoicing as you and I do. People are shocked by a want of sympathy—*redentibus arident*," Henry Bankes wrote drily to William Wilberforce. "However, he was not bound to rejoice, but he should have illuminated."² But Cobbett was not the man to pretend to be pleased when he was disgusted. "The Porcupine, indignant, suspends his publications for a few days," Lord Auckland noted after the first attack, "and will then, having charged his quills with a sufficient quantity of venom, discharge them in a series of letters to Lord Hawkesbury."³

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, October 20, 1801.

I hope you have received the deficient newspapers long before now, as I lost no time in ordering them to be forwarded to you. If you yet want a paper of the roth, I have one.

The *Porcupine* will convey to you all the political information I am in possession of, except the following, which, perhaps, you have already received from a more authentic quarter. The king, upon reading the preliminaries, lifted his hands and eyes to heaven, and, after remaining in that attitude for some moments,

¹ *Political Register*, ii. 60, 99.

² Wilberforce, *Diary*, iii. 47.

³ *Journals and Correspondence*, iv. 137.

dropped his hands upon the paper with a heavy sigh, since which he has not spoken to any living soul about the Peace. The Duke of Kent, and the Prince, and all the younger princes are shocked at the terms of this abominable Peace, and, with you, Sir, fully persuaded that the country and the monarchy is exposed to great and almost immediate danger. I am pleased to find that they are prepared for the worst, and are resolved to defend the crown with their lives.

My Lord Folkestone has authorised me to say that he reprobates the present Peace, and that he shall be glad to have this made known to any other members of the House of Commons who may be desirous of collecting together those who may agree with him in sentiment, for the purpose of acting more in concert, or for any other honourable and lawful purpose.

It is said that my Lord Grenville and Mr. Dundas will oppose the Peace, and I hope it is true. The people in the city are outrageous against Mr. Pitt, whom they accuse of the most abominable insincerity. The Preliminaries were received at Lloyd's Coffee-house with a *dumb holloa*, and I really believe that nine-tenths of the thinking people condemn the Peace.

Nevertheless the Ministers have the mob on their side, and it is, nowadays, so much the fashion to humour and to flatter this swinish beast that very few people *speak out*, and I am much afraid this fashion will prevail in the Parliament. If there were only a little courage left in the members of Parliament, if the whole nation were not become advocates for soup-shops and Sunday-schools, there would be some hope; but now there is none. The cant of humanity will drown the united voice of reason, of justice, and of self-preservation.

You have, doubtless, observed that the servile *True Briton* and *Sun* have at last thrown off the mask with regard to you? Those who know the influence under which Heriot acts must be assured that he has received

his *instructions* for that purpose. In the *True Briton* of yesterday they have had recourse to the old exploded misrepresentations of the Jacobins, against which this very *True Briton* has repeatedly defended you! Gifford intends commenting on the article, and I hope he will not spare them. When the *True Briton*, which receives its daily lesson from the Treasury, trumps up the old story about "cheese-parings" and "candle-ends," it is easy to imagine what are the wishes and intentions of its employers.

Cobbett had shown himself in the early days of the *Porcupine* entirely in harmony with Pitt, but he had found himself opposed to the great man on the subject of Catholic Emancipation, the advocacy of which measure was at least the ostensible reason of the Minister's retirement. Cobbett definitely broke with the Government on the subject of the Peace of Amiens, by the terms of which, he asserted, England would suffer heavy losses in territory and in commerce.

William Cobbett to the Rev. W. Polwhele

NORMANDY, FARNHAM, SURREY,
July 14, 1834.

You would have discerned, as I did very quickly, that to uphold Pitt and his followers was to assist in involving the nation in an expenditure and in debts and taxes, which must in the end enable the sons of mammon to overturn, bit by bit, all the ancient institutions of the country, or, which now appears to be very likely, to produce a state of things in which no man, however great his talent and his virtue, would be able to suggest measures calculated to save those institutions. This you would have discerned; this is what I saw and what I

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 16.

foretold from the beginning of my operations. This you would have foreseen also ; and foreseeing it, you would have acted as I did.¹

In the *Letters to Lord Hawkesbury* Cobbett stated his case very strongly and clearly and with unusual moderation. These *Letters* were the last articles of importance to appear in the *Porcupine*—latterly styled the *Porcupine and Anti-Gallican Monitor*—which paper was sold in November 1801, and on New Year's Day merged in the *True Briton*.

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, November 24, 1801.

The manuscript is in the hands of the printer, and in one day after he has the last of it you will see a proof of the whole, prepared in the manner of which I spoke to you.

My apprehensions respecting the *Porcupine* were but too well founded, and, before I could see Mr. Gifford, the transfer was agreed on *and signed*. Indeed, it appears that a rough draft of the agreement was signed on Saturday evening ; so that all interposition yesterday would have been too late. The paper is transferred to Mr. Redhead Yorke and a Mr. Bateman, of whom I know nothing, except that I have every reason to believe, that Yorke has *an allowance from the Ministry*. Mr. Gifford has lost about £300 and I about £450, which is enough, in all conscience, to reward me for all my exertions, dangers, and losses in America. The *light* is now extinguished completely. One half of the papers are devoted to France, and the other half to the Ministry. In all respects interesting to the safety and honour of the motion, they will perfectly agree. The French prints

¹ Rev. W. Polwhele, *Reminiscences*, ii. 88.

will extol the virtues of Bonaparte, and the Ministerial prints will nod assent. Well, I wash my hands of the consequences. I have done all I could do without exposing my family to beggary. The great base men of this country have drenched me with ingratitude, and I see no law, either moral or divine, that forbids me "to mock when their fear cometh," as it certainly will come at no very distant period. My resolution is taken. I will take the crown and the mitre from [the] house, and will efface the name of the princes; because the princes and the bishops approve of the infamous Peace. To do this without insulting the Church and the Throne, I must leave my house, which I am, therefore, resolved to do as soon as I can find me a convenient warehouse and counting-house in the city. My partner and I agreed to keep this house merely as a rallying-point for the loyalty and religion of the press; but as such it is now useless, and we have nothing to consult but our interests. I would scorn to lend my hand to support a government administered by the Hawkesburys, the Addingtons, and the Bragges. The very circumstance of such men ruling with uninterrupted sway is quite sufficient to dissuade every subject from all those duties that flow from a love of his king and country.

You, Sir, are the only person in the nation to whom I owe an account of my public conduct, and, therefore, I shall tell to nobody else what I have now taken the liberty to trouble you with.¹

The allusion in the preceding letter to the "Crown and Mitre" requires explanation. Cobbett's energies had not been entirely absorbed even in the task of editing, managing, and contributing to the *Porcupine*, and in March 1801, in partnership with his friend John Morgan, he had set up as a bookseller at the sign of the "Crown and

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 17.

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Mitre," No. 18 Pall Mall. The firm of Cobbett & Morgan was not content to be merely booksellers; it aspired, after the fashion of that day, also to be publishers. Its first great venture was the issue of the *Works of Peter Porcupine*, which, it has been mentioned, Cobbett had intended to bring out in the United States.

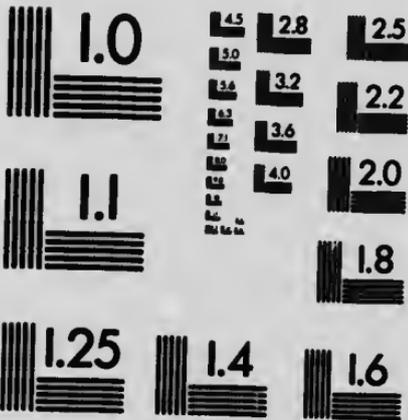
Things of no intrinsic value frequently become valuable when seen in a relative point of view (so runs a passage of the *Prospectus*). The Beacon that stands on the shore is in itself but a mean and insignificant falrock, composed of material the most common, and fashioned by hands the most rude; yet the salutary caution which, through its means the benighted mariner receives, renders it an object of his attention and his care, if not of his gratitude. Such are the lowly pretensions of the *Works of Peter Porcupine*; which, though they present neither grandeur, elegance, nor symmetry, will nevertheless serve to teach the wandering and bewildered politician to avoid the breakers, which surround the yawning and infernal gulph of democracy.

It was a brave venture to issue in England a set of volumes the contents of which were mainly devoted to affairs in the United States, but it was rewarded by success. The *Works of Peter Porcupine*, in twelve volumes, was issued by subscription on May 29, 1801, and the subscribers included the Prince of Wales, the Dukes of York, Clarendon, Kent, and Cumberland, Addington, Canning, Lord Hawkesbury, and many persons resident in the United States, Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Jamaica. From the "Crown and Mitre" appeared also, in November, Cobbett's *A Collection of Facts and Observations, relative to the Peace*



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with Bonaparte, including the Letters to Lord Hawkesbury, reprinted from the Porcupine; and in the following January Cobbett's Letters to . . . Addington, on the fatal effects of the Peace with Bonaparte, particularly with respect to the colonies, the commerce, the manufacture, and the constitution of the United Kingdom.

CHAPTER VI

COBBETT'S "POLITICAL REGISTER" (1802)

William Cobbett breaks with the Tories—He justifies his action—Letter to Pitt—Windham and Dr. Laurence assist him to start a weekly paper—The *Political Register*—An independent critic—Correspondence with Windham—Robson and Tierney—The Peace of Amiens—Bull-baiting—Windham at Norwich—St. Domingo—Windham rejected by the Norwich electors—Duane—Lutz—The English and French navies—Cobbett's appreciation of Windham.

COBETT'S breach with the ministerial party was now complete, but he maintained that the breach was not of his making.

At the preliminaries of peace a new question in politics arose. I remained upon the old ground; you departed from it (he addressed Pitt). The Treasury writers have accused me of "deserting Mr. Pitt, whom I had so highly extolled, and of going over to Mr. Fox, whom I had so severely censured." And thus I am, by way of allusion, charged with a crime as heinous as any man can commit. But, to desert, a man must first be enlisted, and, if I might be said to be enlisted, it was in the cause of which I regarded you as the champion; and not in your personal service. It is very true that while in America, and immediately after my return to England, I did highly extol you; but, Sir, it must be evident to every one that this my conduct arose from my regarding you as the great assister of the cause of my country and of monarchy. You were always defended and applauded by me as the person who was at

the head, who was the rallying point of all those who were opposed to the principles and the natural consequences of the French Revolution. In the course of my proposed enquiry I shall, I think, show, that want of true information (a deficiency that will need no accounting for, when my then situation, not only as to place, but as to various other circumstances, is considered) misled me; that you were not the champion of the cause of monarchy, and that it was chiefly owing to your wrong system of policy that that cause was finally ruined. But, to justify my *desertion*, there needs no enquiry into your measures during the last war. Your conduct relative to the Peace, contrasted with your declared principles and avowed object as to the war, are all I require to prove that, in ceasing to be your eulogist and in becoming your assailant, my conduct has exhibited a perfect consistency.¹

Of all his political friends, Cobbett now found himself in agreement only with William Windham, who also was opposed to the Peace of Amiens. "High-souled" Windham, who was a staunch friend, now saw an opportunity at one stroke to help Cobbett and the cause they had at heart. He and Dr. French Laurence, Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford and member of Parliament for Peterborough, invited Cobbett to start a weekly paper, and undertook to provide the means to set it on foot.

But (says Cobbett) these advances were made and extended upon the *express* and *written* conditions that I should never be under the influence of anybody. The money was to be looked upon as sunk in the risk; and *I was never to be looked upon as under any sort of obligation to any of the parties.* It was long before I would consent

¹ *Political Register*, September 29, 1804.

to the thing at all; but when I did, it was upon these express and *written* conditions. And never did any one of the persons who advanced the money attempt, in the slightest degree, to influence my opinions, which were frequently opposed to their own.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Sunday Evening [1801].

The project, now sent you, should be shown to *as few* persons as possible, and those few should be desired not to talk much about it. I am conscious my plan, particularly that part of it which relates to *circulation*, is extremely valuable. I have neither room nor time to speak of that at length; but when I have the honour to see you, I think I shall clearly show you that, with such a publication in our hands, we can at any time produce an almost instantaneous impression in every part of the nation, or in those parts only where we wish to produce it.

I promised you the Project to-night; but, as the night is already "borrowing a little of the morning," I must defer sending it [till] to-morrow.

Monday Morning.

I open this note to say that it is boldly asserted this morning, by the *Morning Post*, that it now publishes more papers than the *Times*, which assertion is offered to be proved upon oath. This is an interesting fact. The *Times* certainly published nearly twice as many as the *Morning Post* before the former began to defend the Peace, and the latter has constantly condemned the Peace as disgraceful and dangerous. The fact is interesting on another account. It proves what I have constantly asserted in conversation; that the daily papers are, upon the whole, declining in sale. The *M. Post*

¹ *Political Register*, January 4, 1817.

does not *now* publish more than 1250, and the *Morning Chronicle* not more than 900. The *True Briton* not more than 350.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

January 5, 1802.

Lest you should leave town soon, be so good as to let me have my Memoire on the newspaper plan, as it will help me in drawing up a set of prospectus, which is to be inserted in the 1st Number of the work.

While I think of it I will take the liberty to remind you, that Marat was a *chemist*, Le Bon a *lawyer*, Collet d'Herbois a *pluyer*, and not one of them a *bull-baiter*, I dare be sworn. It would be curious enough to make a selection of the names of the bloody villains who have lately appeared in the world, and find out their pursuits. Nota Bene—they who cut off the head of King Charles were, not bull-baiters, but *Puritans*, and it is really worth while to look back into Clarendon, or some other writer of those times, to see what regulations they adopted relative to *sports*, which, you remember, Sir, they almost totally abolished. Nor can you have forgotten that *Sir Hudibras* distinguished himself in a bear-baiting. Gifford is almost as bad as Dog Dent in this respect.²

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, January 17, 1802.

The first Number of the new work will be ready for delivery to-morrow, but the great number of copies will prevent its distribution taking place till Wednesday, which will too on some accounts be a better day for it.

Under the form of a letter to a friend at Philadelphia I have written an article on the rise and progress of the present race of Puritans in this Kingdom, concluding

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 19.

² *Ibid.*, 37853, f. 22.

with some remarks, which glance on the intended destruction of athletic exercises; but my matter is so bulky that I must this time leave it out. This will, however, enable me to make it fuller than I had time to do, and perhaps its effect will not be less for a little delay.

You will see that *Notices of Books* furnishes a most excellent means of giving variety to my topics, and of inculcating notions in short and striking articles. I have just heard of a sermon against bull-baiting, which I shall lay hold of for my next Number, and which will furnish me not only with the subject itself, but with a good and valid reason for taking it up, and for exposing the Motives of the Puritans. I shall also (in the third Number, perhaps) take up Mr. Bere's pamphlet, and animadvert on the conduct of the parties concerned in that transaction. These *Notices of New Books* is perhaps the most valuable head of the work. They must generally be short; but it requires not much room to say something pointed and efficacious on any of the topics, of which the works I shall notice will treat. You will see how I have acquitted myself in this critical department in my first Number, and I beg leave to request you to give me your opinion upon it in particular.

Mr. Elliot and Mr. T. Grenville called on me yesterday and informed me that the whole of the sum was raised, exclusive of the five thirties that I have obtained. If so, so much the better. The greater the fund, the greater will be my ability to render the work useful and of extensive circulation. My literary friends persist in treating my plan with coldness. They are full of doubts. I have had none; and, since I have seen a proof of the 1st Number complete, my confidence is stronger than ever. The Commissioners of Stamps regard me as a new species of lunatic; but as they are, in general, not conjurers, they by no means disheartened me. They did, tho', what was much better; they granted me a discount on the stamps to the amount of $8\frac{1}{2}$ per centum,

which was $4\frac{1}{2}$ more than I at first expected; but the law was, I found, on my side, and they very readily allowed that my claim was well founded. Indeed, I have always met with great civility, and even indulgence, at this office. My printing will be somewhat dear; but my printer is the very best in London. A man of letters perfectly conversant in French, of great attention, and great means of dispatch, from the number of hands he can at all times command. Ten per cent. for such advantages is no object. The French Government and the Politics of the Continent I shall leave to T[ierney] and R[obson]. The *Gazette* articles to a compiler. The Parliament, Notices of Books, and some other matters I shall take upon myself.

You are, Sir, perfectly right in wishing that such a vehicle may be at hand to give circulation to what you may say upon the Puritanical subject. Many things will never be attempted, which would be boldly pursued if no such vehicle were at hand.

My letters to Mr. Addington will be published tomorrow, and I shall, by the mail-coach, send you on one copy to Norwich, whither, if I knew any honest and well-affected bookseller, I would send a few for sale.

If the season for killing hares be not too far advanced, and if the sending me one would be attended with no other trouble than that of your speaking a word, I would beg leave to give you that trouble.

On Friday I went to take my children to Croydon, where I learnt, from my friend Mr. Rose, that the Puritans have been working with all their might to destroy the *fairs*, which are the most famous pleasure fairs in England. Rose, who thinks with me on this subject, related me the history of their insolent proceedings. They had, whether by intimidation or by craft, succeeded in getting a majority of the resident acting magistrates on their side, and were going on swimmingly, when Mr. Rose took the matter up, set an inquiry on foot, procured a

copy of the Charter (which was granted by Edward II.), and set the Puritans at defiance. The Puritans have, however, greatly embarrassed the place by setting informations on foot against all publicans who have at fair time *dances* in their houses, and it is with a view to have some weight in opposing these, and other views of the Sect, that Mr. Rose wishes to be in the Commission of the Peace. The activity of such a man in the Commission would be of great importance, and I hope my Lord Onslow will have no objection to recommend him. He is rector of St. Martin's, Outwich, Master of Whitgift College, Croydon, and Chaplain to one of the Sheriffs of London.¹

The new paper, the first number of which is dated January 16, 1802, was styled *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*—the title was subsequently changed to *Cobbett's Weekly Political Pamphlet*, and again to *Cobbett's Weekly Register*—and it was continued week by week until the death of its founder, except for a short interval when Cobbett left England in 1817. The *Register* was from the outset a great success. It was read by all parties and by all classes, from the King downwards. Cobbett was still on the whole on the side of the Tories, and was strongly monarchical; but he became more and more independent. He discussed the questions of the day frankly and openly, and his virile style and arrant dogmatism made his articles delightful reading.

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, February 5, 1802.

I enclose you a letter from Baron Lamproius, of whom I spoke to you some time ago, and whose name I mention to no one else. It has some interest, and particularly

¹ Add. MSS. 37853. ff. 23-4.

for me, seeing that it notices, in so flattering a manner, the justice done to Lutz, as you will see towards the end of it, where two portraits are ordered for Prussia. The Scotchmen will never get their medal and cup so far, notwithstanding all the powerful eloquence of my poor unfortunate friend Mr. Arthur. Does not this circumstance, too, encourage one to proceed in well-doing, even though there were no conscience or God to reward? One is apt not to do so much as one might, because there is no hope of *immediate* effect. But, as my old friend Davies used to say to me when I was ready to throw down the pen in despair: "Write on, friend Cobbett, it will be bread thrown upon the waters." I afterwards had occasion to rejoice at having taken his lessons of fortitude and perseverance; and, if all should be useless at last, I shall have the satisfaction to reflect that the fault is not mine. I have not presumption enough to say this to stimulate you to exertion, Sir; but I do really hope much from that exertion. I do not say that the country cannot be saved without you, but I know it cannot be saved without your principles, and without a soul and a mind like yours. You perceive that I have spared neither the *safe* nor *small* politicians. One never loses anything by hardihood, when the adversary is of the baser sort:

"Tender-hearted press a nettle,
And it stings you for your pains;
Press it like a man of mettle,
And it soft as silk remains.

'Tis the same with vulgar natures:
Treat them kindly, they rebel;
But be rough as nutmeg-graters,
And the rogues obey you well."

These verses, which I learnt when I was a lance-corporal, I have never for one moment of my life forgotten. How often have I experienced the truth of the maxim they

contain! I am conscious that the small politicians would gladly make a *tune* with me at this moment. How great will be their dread of my *Mercure Anglois*! Their chief loves *fame*. Let him take care! He will see what danger that fame is in if he continues his malignant tricks. Let him leave them off, then. The road to fair fame is always open and plain. I do not know why I have troubled you with all this.¹

William Cobbett to William Win. 'ham

February 24, 1802.

Mr. Robson called here this morning, and talked to me about Parliamentary politics. He mentioned that Tierney told him yesterday that he (T.) had *nothing to do* with Mr. Addington; and R. added that the bargain was broken off by Addington, who had obtained allies elsewhere upon condition of giving up Tierney. What is of more importance, perhaps, R. told me that he and some others were about to bring forward a motion for a *call of the House*, and to allege as the ground for such call the critical state of public affairs, occasioned by the daring conduct of Buonaparte. He (R.) expressed his abhorrence of the Peace, from which he expected the ruin of the country, and said that in this opinion he was joined by all *his friends*. How *numerous* these may be I know not; but I think it may safely be said that the public opinion is very fast changing. Pye called here this morning, and from having been a most blind and obstinate defender of the Peace, declares himself as strongly on the other side. He does, indeed, ascribe his change of opinion to my letters to Addington, which few people, comparatively speaking, read; but if one man changes, another will change, and the whole *may* change at last; though there is every reason to fear that the change will come too late.

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 25.

I thought it might be worth your while to know these matters, and therefore I have taken the liberty to trouble you with them.¹

Richard Hart Davis to William Cobbett

BRISTOL, April 2, 1802.

. . . It will always give me pleasure to recommend your very valuable journal. It is carried on upon principles very congenial to my own mind, and you may depend that I will let no proper opportunity escape of extending its useful circulation. I received *two* of your papers *again* yesterday—whenever any publication comes out, either literary or political, which is your own production, or which you can thoroughly recommend, you will please to forward it to me with a letter of advice. The notes on Mr. Windham's speech are admirably written and awfully true; they are particularly well qualified to subdue that exaltation which some few still affect to encourage in view of our late *blessed* Peace. Sir, you are not so singular in your opinions as your enemies would have us believe. Go on boldly, and you will find *in the real and true Patriotic spirit* of your country your support. If the language of truth and Patriotism should provoke an improper and unjustifiable prosecution, you shall have support. We shall soon however see whether the Council is to direct our press. I have no doubt the attempt will be made and that you will be the mark.²

William Cobbett to William Windham

FALL MALL, May 1, 1802.

Mrs. Cobbett is well, but the child is dead, born so. The mother has had a very narrow escape. My gratitude to God for her preservation is, I hope, as great as ever

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 26.

² *Ibid.*, 37853, f. 46.

was felt for any human creature. I would not pass such another twenty-four hours for [the] whole world. My mind is exhausted with the conflict of passions; my heart is shaken from its place. The *Register* is coming out, God knows how, for I have not been able to read the proofs, or even to prepare the closing part of the matter. The distraction that I was in this morning is gone off, but I am yet full of anxiety. I want somebody to speak peace and comfort to me, and the Doctors are a hard-hearted race. Forgive this trouble, Sir, I have taken it as a means of giving some ease to my heart, and because I know you and Mrs. W. are anxious to be informed of the state of Mrs. C.'s health. She is as well as can be expected; but apprehension has so totally overpowered me, that I still am borne down with it.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

May 8 [1802].

The week, which is within a few minutes of ending, has been a week of great political inquiry amongst all ranks of people. I have seen and heard much, and the result of my observations is, that there is no one satisfied with the terms of the Peace, and very few who are not considerably alarmed for its consequences; but that a vast portion of even the sensible part of the people think, that a better Peace was not to be obtained by a continuation of the war, which continuation would have been *certain* ruin. It is useless to observe to them that this makes the Peace a Peace of *necessity*, a *capitulation*, and that it is in direct contradiction to the declarations of those who have made the Peace. The people trouble themselves not with this. They leave the Ministers to make out their consistency as they can. They reconcile themselves to the measure thus, and in the language of Scripture, "rejoice with trembling." It appears to me,

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 29.

therefore, that the discussion of this subject should not go off without including argument to prove that this is *not* a Peace of necessity, particularly as with the contrary opinion is necessarily connected another of most fatal tendency, to wit, that the admirers of the war and its continuation are, in fact, the authors of our present disgrace. This is the point at which Fox is evidently labouring, in which he is most insidiously and malignantly aided by Wilberforce, who, as you will perceive by the last night's debate, infers from the *present conduct* of Mr. Pitt, contrasted with that of yourself and Ld. Grenville, that the continuation of the war was to be imputed to you, and *not* to his Rt. Hon. friend. This is an inference that will be very generally drawn, and I think its effects should be warded off.

P.S.—Mr. Rose has not yet received his Commission as Justice of the Peace. I am afraid there is some mistake or neglect about it, and I shall be very sorry for many reasons if he should be disappointed.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

May 17 [1802].

After due consideration on the subject of the *Speech*, I am impelled to urge you to a publication of it. We have already had numerous applications to know *when* it will come out. Never did traveller thirst for the brook more than the public thirst for arguments against this abominable transaction. The victory is complete; but it remains for you to profit from it. I have read all the papers containing the report of your speech; but they all contradict each other, and are so very imperfect, that justice to yourself and the cause demands the publication. "*Now* is the appointed time"; I will not say that "*now* is the day of salvation," because I

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 31.

fear that day is gone ; but if it be not gone, it is *now*. The time will come when all your predictions will be verified, events will continually rise in support of them ; but, if the arguments themselves are not to be referred to, all the advantage to be derived from them will be lost. I shall not, I am sure, incur the suspicion of being a flatterer, when I say that it is my firm persuasion that you, and you alone, can save our country. This persuasion is founded, not only upon my own knowledge of your disposition and abilities, but upon the universal confidence in your integrity and patriotism, which at this time more than ever exists. I see and hear of men of all parties and principles, and I find the confidence of the nation to be possessed by you in a greater degree than by any other person. This, I must confess, has cast a gleam of hope across the gloom in which I have for a long time been plunged. Men now dread the *power* of France. He will be most esteemed who shall be thought most firmly resolved to prevent the increase of that power. Opportunities will not be wanted to oppose this increase, and such an opposition must finally be successful, or we become the slaves of France. The part of the speech which mentions the opinions you entertained *during the war* should be put on record. Those opinions become more and more fashionable, and even if for them alone the speech ought to be printed. He who makes the best use of the press will finally triumph. You have, Sir, during the last six months, seen striking proofs of the truth of this remark. Had not your speech been published, and had not the *Register* been established, the sentiments of the nation would have been very different from what they now are. The success of a great enterprise depends full as much upon *industry* and *perseverance* as upon wisdom and talents. A pamphlet would not do so well as the speech. It would be, in this case, not so congenial with the rank and character you hold. It would have more the appearance of an *extra-judicial*

proceeding, if I may so express myself, and would have less weight.

Forgive me, Sir, for taking this liberty, in which, I hope, you will perceive nothing but a zeal for the preservation of our country and our king, who must both be destroyed if the present system of politics is of any duration.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Monday [May 24, 1802].

Your morning paper will have informed you that Villant had, when the French dispatches came away, sailed for the United States of America. Twenty-five sail of ships of the line and frigates for flour, pork, beef, &c., were, when my letters (just recd.) came away from Philadelphia. The American *Government* had engaged to supply them on credit, and had nominated and appointed commissioners to attend to the fulfilment of the contract. This is what *we* could not have done with all our "credit, capital, and confidence." "None but the brave, none but the brave, deserve the fair." ²

William Cobbett to William Windham

Thursday [May 27, 1802].

In the course of a week, I forgot about a hundred things that I ought to tell you of. I last night saw Dr. Foster of Eton, who, in speaking of Sir Wm. Scott's Bill, said that he heard *you* would support it, at which he expressed great pleasure. What this put me in mind of was this: that, in my opinion, the opportunity of not only giving, but of being *known* to give support to the Bill, should not be missed by you and your friends. The Clergy are less powerful from their rank and industry than from their *locality*. They are, from necessity,

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 33, 34.

² *Ibid.*, 37853, f. 35.

everywhere; and their aggregate influence is astonishingly great. When, from the top of any high hill, one looks round the country, and sees the multitude of regularly distributed spires, one not only ceases to wonder that order and religion are maintained, but one is astonished that any such thing as disaffection or irreligion should prevail. It is the equal distribution of the clergy, their being in every corner of the kingdom, that makes them a powerful and a formidable corps. I should not like to see the *whole* credit of this Bill given to those who are bent on the ruin of the country.¹

Memorandum

May, 1802.

Of all the bull-baiting in England one half is carried on in Staffordshire and Lancashire. The best soldiers in the kingdom, the most brave and the most faithful to their colours, come out of those counties, particularly Staffordshire. The bravery and fidelity of Staffordshire men are proverbial through the army, and has been so for two hundred years past. The Staffordshire Regiment of Militia is not only the finest but best-behaved regiment of militia in the kingdom. Wherever this regiment goes, it is followed by a score or two of bull-dogs, no bad emblem of the character of the soldiers themselves. The King has had this regiment about his person, at Windsor and Weymouth, for several years past, and prefers it to any other. If the manners and morals of the people were injured by bull-baiting, the injury would certainly be rendered manifest in a regiment of militia, which is composed of the young men from every part of the country and from that class of the people who follow such sports.

I suppose you know, Sir, that Sheridan is requested

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 36.

by the magistrates and fanatics of Stafford to second the endeavour of Dent.

My Lord Holland made a speech against the "dung-cart legislation," which you will find in the *Mg. Post* of the 22nd inst., and which contains some very just and applicable observations. Great evil is daily produced by this frivolous legislation. The Election *Treating* Bill has been ousted by the Lords, to the great grief of Lord Belgrave, whose child it was, and who, with the best possible intentions, is labouring hard in the field of mischief. He is completely under the control of Wilberforce, and is using all his endeavours to suppress sports of every description. Gifford, now possesses undeniable proof, *juridical* proof, that Mrs. Hannah More has several times received the sacrament from the hands of a layman. This decides the controversy. The British Critics have had the same evidence conveyed to them, and have been called upon to give up their heroine, as they promised they would, the moment she was *proved* to be a Methodist. It is a fearful thing to think of, that this woman had under her tuition the children of a large portion of England.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, June 10, 1802.

I find that the Trial has been sent, but not before I had got *two* copies. This is no matter, if with all of them any good can be done, of which by this time you must be able to judge, or at least to guess. I am too well acquainted with the nature of public applause and public clamour to draw any favourable inference from your reception at Norwich.² The mass of the voters are so base, that I should feel much happier than I do if you were a candidate for Old Sarum, or rather if you had

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 38.

² Windham had been M.P. for Norwich since 1784.

that excellent borough at your command. I am afraid that the sort of treason, which may be fixed upon your opponent, would work as a merit in the minds of the voters, and, when this is the case, your loyal and honourable character will do little or nothing for you. After all, it is a most lamentable thing to have to appeal to such wretches, and yet it is necessary. I have read the Trial with care, and I really doubt of its making one single convert from the cause of the king-killer. I wait, however, to hear your opinion about this, and shall neglect nothing that lies in my power. Nothing material has arisen here, except some bad news from Dominica, where the Black Corps have revolted and killed some of their officers. Tranquillity was restored, and the revolters almost all killed. The scarcity in France wears a hideous aspect, more hideous, however, for Buonaparte than for us or for the people of France, who cannot starve, though they may be driven to revolt. This circumstance is a pretty comment upon the cry of "*Peace and Plenty.*" It cannot but do us good; for it will find the Consul some employment. Other details about Dominica have been just recd. The detestable blacks violated all the wives and daughters of their officers. These poor females almost all expired in their loathsome embraces. Never was there so shocking a scene, except amongst the same race in Guadaloupe and St. Domingo, at which latter place they violated children *ten* years old, and actually drank the blood of their mistresses and masters. And these are the monsters with whom our English women *marry!* This is the race with which we are to cultivate fellowship on the banks of Thornton River!

You will see, Sir, that Sr. Wm. Scott's Bill is put off. Indeed, it was very short of its object. My Lord Grenville said something, in the House of Lords, about a project of the *late Ministry* in behalf of the Church. If there be nothing improper in the request, I should like to have a hint of that project; for though it might

not be necessary for me to state what it was, it would be useful for me to *know* what it was. I should not like these men to carry off all the credit due to those who may have wished to effect something for the Church, which I imagine they will do. The Winchester faction, who were, and are, very closely attached to Mr. Pitt, had a project of *Compulsory composition*, to be fixed by a *survey of laymen*. This would soon grub up the tree to its last fibre. Sir H. Mildmay had counted upon a gain of about five hundred a year from this scheme, and I am afraid Mr. Pitt was not decidedly averse from it.

Mr. Elliot was absent from the House at the debate on the Peace Establishment; of course, nothing was said, except that Mr. Fox, who expressed his sorrow at not being present to vote for the Peace, objected to the establishment, as being *much larger* than was called for by the relative situations of Europe! They are mad. Mad or bent on the destruction of the country.

A most shocking affair has happened at Aberdeen. Some drunken officers have called their men out, and made them fire on the people for insulting them; several of the latter have been killed, and some of the officers are in prison, and will, I dare say, be hanged.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, June 26, 1802.

I have the very great pleasure to hear that things are, at Norwich, better than might have been expected. I sincerely hope, for the sake of our country, that your constituents are not so totally void of loyalty and of shame as to vote in any very considerable number for your opponents.

About public matters you have much better information than I can give you; and, besides, all that I know you will see in the *Register*, the first vol. of which will

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 39, 40.

be completed in a few weeks. I think the question about India of vast importance; but you have no leisure to be plagued about it at present. I have always thought as I do now on this subject. I may be deceived, but I scorn the motive which is attributed to me by Mr. Dundas. The fact is, if Dundas's scheme were adopted, India would be *independent* of us in less than ten years. The late conduct of the Governor-General¹ has excited much attention. I want to see Dr. Laurence to know how to think upon this point; but, at present, the impression on my mind is that the Governor-Genl. and his family have acted in a most tyrannical and rapacious manner. We are raising an edifice in that country, we are loading the feeble pillars with mass upon mass, and I greatly fear the whole will, by and by, fall and crush us.

It is a matter of no little triumph with me that the coward Toussaint has been so easily subdued. I believe I may say that, with the exception of some few Frenchmen, I stood alone in opinion as to this pair⁴. How I envy France such generals as Leclerc! How mortified am I when I compare his conduct with that of our generals! And how I despise the wretches who *affect not to fear* the progress of such men as those who have conquered St. Domingo! This is the most brilliant exploit ever performed. The armament sailed out so destitute of provisions as to be obliged to *begin* the voyage *upon short allowance*. Such a thing never was heard of before in the whole world. Never was there such an instance of discipline and of love of military glory. The *beating* of Toussaint is nothing. The negroes are such abominable cowards that there is no merit in defeating them, if you find the means of engaging; but the rapidity and resolution with which nine seaport towns were taken possession of, and with which a European army was led over the sands and mountains of the burning St. Domingo, excites in my breast a degree of envy that I cannot

¹ Lord Mornington (afterwards Marquis Wellesley).

describe. I declare to heaven I would sooner be Leclerc than possess all the wealth of all the world. Shall we, Sir, ever see the spirit of England revive? I fear not. The love of riches and of ease has taken complete possession of us. I find hardly a man who entertains the least notion of national honour. Liston pleased me very much the other day. He was speaking of the great dangers we had to apprehend; but expressed a hope that, by endeavouring to *gain the friendship of all other nations*, we might be prepared to take advantage of any circumstance that might offer for *renewing the war, and recovering our due weight in the scale of nations*. "Observe," said he, "that I do not approve of the Peace. Had it rested with me, I would sooner have given up my four thousand a year, and lived upon eighteen-pence a day as labourer on the roads, than my country should have made such a Peace." These were his very words, and they gave great pleasure. Before I saw him I had written the paragraph about the Scheldt, which you will see in this day's *Register*; and what he told me fully confirms my opinion: for he says that every effort was made, both by us and the Dutch, at Amiens, to obtain a restriction, at least, as to the navigation of the Scheldt; but all in vain. The French would not hear a word upon the subject.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, July 9, 1802.

I need not attempt to describe to you my feelings upon the receipt of the news from Norwich.² I was prepared for it, both by my own apprehensions and by your letter; but that preparation was not sufficient to arm me completely against the blow. Your mortification must

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 41-2.

² Windham lost his seat at Norwich. He was then returned by the Grenvilles for the borough of St. Mawes in Cornwall.

be tolerably great ; but it can hardly surpass what was felt by me and Mrs. Cobbett ; and, as to poor Gifford, he is absolutely crazy about it. I love and honour him at all times, but at times like these his heart overflows with goodness of that sort which endears him to me in a manner that I can hardly describe. You will have seen, in the *Morning Chronicle*, an account of the base triumph of Fox and his tavern associates. It bespoke a mind that would lead a man to cut your throat as you lay asleep. I have endeavoured to do the Act justice in my *Register* of to-morrow ; but I was not content with that. I honour you too sincerely to suffer you to be wronged without attempting, at least, to avenge you ; and, accordingly, I have sallied out against this Renard ; I have taken a crowd of people to vote against him, and have published a handbill and a large placard, entitled "The Fox and the Geese," in which, amongst other things, I have told the Geese to look into the reports of Parliament, where they will find that this man of *independence*, this enemy of *burthensome taxes* and of *place-men* and pensioners, has been a *sinecure place-man* from his childhood. The subject is popular, it is easily comprehended, and it is *new*. It has raised a great clamour, and though it came too late to have any material effect as to numbers of votes, it annoys him most furiously. He knows not what to say in reply to the blackguards, who cry out, and spare not, "No sinecure place-men, Charley !" Would to God I had set myself to work on this renegade ten days ago ! At any rate I have galled him for his baseness, and that is some satisfaction.

If you have time, Sir, I should be glad to be informed of the prospects you have now in view, particularly if you intend to stand for the county.

P.S.—My Lord Folkestone is in town. He came up on purpose to see if he could be of any service to you at this time, in any way that you might be able to point

out. He is much mortified; but relies with perfect confidence on still having the honour to fight under your banners.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Monday Evening [August 12, 1802].

The enclosed are sent with Mr. Cobbett's humble respects to Mr. Windham. The letter is from my old friend Davies.² It is full of good matter. The paragraph cut from a Baltimore paper will prove that we do not labour here in vain. I stand high with the good party in America, and shall certainly still do the French much mischief in that country.

You will hardly understand much of the enclosed without being informed that *Duane* is a traitor who fled from Ireland, and who, by great boldness and rare ability, has become the leading *editor* in America. He dines with Jefferson, whence an estimate may be formed of his importance to that cause. While I was in America, he was kept down by his fear both of my pen and my fist. Since my departure, he has grown up to a monstrous degree of influence. His influence is, however, still kept in check a little by my writings, which are, as I foresaw, *republished in all the American papers*. There is yet an opportunity of doing great things in America; but, Sir, those who can neglect and malign Sir Sidney Smith; those who can take £3000 and bestow it on a child at Westminster School, will never bestow a shilling on the American press.³

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, August 9, 1802.

Mr. Cobbett presents his compliments to Mr. Windham, and (after begging him to read again the letter from

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 43.

² Benjamin Davies, of Philadelphia, who published some of Cobbett's pamphlets in 1796.

³ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 45.

Stockholm, particularly the bottom part of p. 130) takes this opportunity to inform him, that the *treaty of partition* between *Russia, France and Prussia* has been actually announced to our Ministers through Mr. Merry! It is said *Hanover* makes part of the territory to be seized on. This news has just arrived.

William Cobbett to William Windham

Saturday Morning [August 14, 1802].

Pray excuse me for troubling you with the enclosed papers to read. The Ministers are upon their knees. Curious cloak for their cowardice to affect not to believe that Buonaparte is the author or authorizer of the article in the *Moniteur*! Sir, be assured that we approach the end of those liberties, which have so long been the possession of Englishmen. Buonaparte has nothing to do but to request a prosecution of some one printer; the Ministers will order it, and, if the Attorney-General represents punishment as necessary to the *preservation of peace with France*, the jury will find guilty; and the judge will not fail to make the punishment severe. One decision of this sort silences the press for ever. Let us not be deceived by commonplace maxims about the integrity of our courts. Experience has proved that those courts are nothing when the *State itself has lost its liberty*.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Monday Morning [August 22, 1802].

I think the Serjeant and Lutz may now go back to their regiment. We have got all the information that they can give us. I will order them to be ready to go off to-morrow, and in the meantime you may, probably, like to write to the commanding officer. I am now going into the city. On my return I will show you a

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 48.

² *Ibid.*, f. 49.

paper containing the questions, &c., which it will be necessary to put to some persons in the regiment. This paper can be enclosed in your letter, and sent by the Serjeant. I think the matter should now be got forward as fast as possible. We shall not get the print out in less than 6 weeks.

I take the liberty to send you another patch-book. Pray look into page 4. With these facts in one's hand, it may not be amiss to turn back to the debates on the definite treaty. I read them all over yesterday. I find that everything that you said about *commerce* and *manufactures* well guarded; and if you and Mr. Elliot failed as to Louisiana, *you did not go far enough*. You spoke, however, in such terms as will, by a fair construction, apply to the facts, which I now have to develop. Lord H. said that "as to the *value* of Louisiana, it was, at present, *almost nothing*." Maitland said that "long as it had been in the hands of Fr. and Spain, it was *still unimproved*." And all this of a country, the exports of which are nearly, if not quite, equal to those of Jamaica.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, September 28, 1802.

Before you went away this morning, I intended to ask your permission to get from your servants all the loose newspapers which are to be found in your house, and which are of a date subsequent to the month of April or so. I make up a volume, and have it bound, monthly; and your papers might be of great use in filling up some chasms which I have in my papers since March. The time will come when it will be of importance to be able to refer to these papers.

The portrait of Lutz is put into the engraver's hands, and will be finished in about three weeks. I hope to be

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 51.

able to have the narrative done by the same time, and I think it shall be hard if three hundred, at least, cannot be sold of the portrait : at half a guinea or 15s. each, which will leave Lutz a hundred pounds, at least, for pocket-money, *when the Duke has given him a Commission.*

P.S.—Harding, who is just come home from Stafford, where he has been with his brother, tells me that the people down there are full of execrations against Mr. Pitt, and that they are delighted at the visit which Fox is making to Paris. A tradesman, in full company, observed to Harding : " Ay, ay, Fox is the man. He'll do more with Buonaparte than all the rest of them put together. *He'll settle matters so that we shall have no more war* "!!! There is one source of comfort. This clan is the most cowardly of all God's creatures. If only a *fiftieth* part of the nation remains sound and united, this rabble of poltroons must be defeated.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, September 29, 1802.

By the enclosed you will perceive, that the sharp second-sight of some Scotsman has found out the little obscure article in the Supplement relative to our friend Lutz. Little does he dream what a dose is preparing for his clan. He is, however, *deceived*, or he would not have written to me thus. I shall, on Saturday, just observe that " A Briton, who writes from Scotland Yard, has our thanks for his caution, but we believe he will find, in the end, that we are perfectly correct in our statement "—without saying anything about the *subject* as yet. That the cunning, wary Scottish clan should have been caught *at all* is astonishing ; but it is doubly so that they should be caught by me.

I have a great desire to get Coke's address. I think

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 53.

I could make a tolerable thing of it. The little talent I have lies in the way of *plucking* and *tearing to pieces*; and I really feel a strong temptation to dissect the production of Dr. Parr. Wilberforce's address I have sought for in vain. Dare I trouble you, Sir, to obtain these precious morsels of eloquence for me? I know not where to *ask* for them. Could they be obtained by applying at Norwich and at York? They should not escape. The opportunity offers but once in seven years. I hope you will excuse the trouble I give you.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, October 4, 1802.

I have, from two different hands, received duplicates of the papers relative to Coke; and I have obtained a copy of Wilberforce's addresses. The former affords an opportunity of combating the notion, that *abstaining from taking a part in the war would have prevented the evils which war has brought on this country*; or, more correctly speaking, that to the *war* is to be ascribed the *present disgrace* of the country. The latter furnishes a most excellent opportunity for opening, and enlarging upon, the note of your Appendix relative to the wiseacres and their hostility against *continental connections*. This will, when I have finished my next letter to Ld. H., have been done tolerably well; but it would be done still better by a *direct answer to Wilberforce*, who has carried his notion, in this respect, farther than I thought any man, even amongst the wiseacres, would have had the assurance to carry it. He has said, in substance, "that the *Ministry* and *people* of this country are, by *their honesty and fidelity*, disqualified for any connection with other nation"!!! And this to a crowd of Yorkshire bites! And this in the face of the Stadtholder,

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 54.

the King of Sardinia, the Porte, Portugal, and the Vendéans!

I think, in the present temper of the public, much effect may be produced by a proper management of this subject. It is a good opportunity to expose the little Pharisee, and to make the nation perceive the mischief he has done. For this purpose I could wish to be furnished with a sort of summary sketch of his political life. I should like to point out what he did in bringing on the negociation at Lisle, &c. &c. To expose so close a hypocrite one must lay hold of the moment when the public feel the effects of measures which can be traced to him.

I never thought of committing the Lutz narrative to press till I had shown it to you. The beginning of *December* will be soon enough. It should not be published till the company are in town. . . .

I hope you will approve of the use I have made of the excellent article from the *Morning Chronicle*. Since I inserted it I have looked back, and have found passage upon passage, published since the Peace, *reprobating* in the strongest terms all *continental connections*.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, October 19, 1802.

I need make, *in this letter*, no comments on the enclosed. This, however, I will just state: that the independence of Switzerland is a mere *pretext* for our present proceedings, which is very evident from the enclosed article. The fact is, the peace-makers have been completely disappointed in *all* their expectations. The "experiment" has failed; and we have now to encounter, under all possible disadvantages, the war which cannot be any longer delayed. I am sorry you are not in town just at this time. But of this you must be a

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 55.

much better judge than I am. It will be necessary to preserve the articles that now appear on this subject in the *True Briton*, because you may rest assured that they are official, and that they will contain, first or last, all the arguments by which the conduct of Ministers is to be defended.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PALL MALL, October 22, 1802.

This being Friday I have only time to say that I have sent the whole book of newspapers to your house, with an order to forward it to you without delay. If the writing of your speech costs any great deal of time, and particularly if it withdraws your attention from the great matters of the present time, I should be sorry to press it; otherwise it would be very desirable to have it upon record. I am resolved, however, to have your *speech on the Preliminaries* [of peace] in the supplement to the next volume.

The letter which you have done me the honour to write me last (and a great honour, indeed, I think it) expresses precisely what I think on the subject. Another war (and a war there must be) conducted upon the same ever-shifting principle as the last, or rather upon no principle at all, *must* end in the subjugation of this country.

The *Register* of to-morrow is closed. I have written it *half* with my own hand. I have sometimes done worse, and sometimes a great deal better. The multitude of objects distracted me. [I wish] there was more time for handling such copious subjects; but no time is like *the present*. "Strike while the iron is hot" is a good maxim in everything, but particularly in politics.

When you have read my letter to Lord Hawkesbury, you will see, Sir, what part of the subject I have left

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 56.

untouched, and also the drift of my continuation next week, which, for obvious reasons, I intend to address to Mr. Pitt. If you should think of anything to suggest, I should have it by Tuesday's post.

The *True Briton* of to-day is as warlike as ever. News is just arrived that the Diet of Schweitze has yielded *en tout* to the Proclamation of Buonaparte.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Friday [November 5, 1802].

The *Morning Post* is mislaid somewhere, but shall be sent in a little time. If you can make the *revision* by to-morrow night or Sunday night it will do; but later than that it will greatly affect our work. Poet Coleridge, a not uncelebrated Jacobin, is the author, I am told, of the letter to Fox; and the writer of the excellent articles in the *Chronicle* is a Mr. Spankey, who is part proprietor of the paper, and who is, I believe, a Scotchman and a lawyer. Be he what he may, he holds no ordinary pen, and I would much rather have him for a friend than an enemy.²

William Cobbett to William Windham

Tuesday [November 23, 1802].

As I shall not have an opportunity to see you before you will probably have some use for the following information, I now send it without delay.

1. The eighteen *ships* launched by the French since the Preliminaries are 7 of the line, 6 frigates, and 5 of a smaller size.

2. According to the *Sound Lists*, which give an account of the ships and cargoes that come down the Sound, the French have imported, from Russia, *ten thousand tons of hemp*, since the ratification of the Definitive Treaty, which is nearly a year's importation for the British Navy

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 58.

² *Ibid.*, f. 60.

in time of war. And this hemp has been carried in *British ships*. This fact may be relied on. If necessary, I could furnish the names of the ships, Captains, and owners.

3. The French fleet and army in St. Domingo continue to be supplied with provisions, and other necessaries, by Willings & Co. of Phila., who draw on Barings & Co. for payment.

4. It appears by the news from Holland that the three thousand French troops, which are about to sail from Helvoetsluys, are to be furnished with *provisions by the Dutch*, and are to be conveyed in 12 *American merchant ships!* France has no *money!* She is *very poor!* "Credit, Capital, and Confidence" she has none of! She has, however, the means of sending armies about the world. I really think that the "pyramids of gold" might be shaken by stating these facts.

If the war were to break out between us and France just at the time that the latter are about to set foot in Louisiana, we should have the Americans on our side, because with our help they could prevent the sweep of the French settlement; but, if the French army be once safely landed and has solid possession of the mouth of the Mississippi, I should not wonder if America were to join in the war against us, and, when that takes place, Adieu to British Independence.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Monday Morning [December 13, 1802].

I thought you were in the country, or I should have done myself the honour of waiting on you yesterday. I am hardly settled here yet; but, if you are going this way, I shall hope to have the honour of a call. Everything, in politics, appears to me to go worse and worse; the *mal en pis* was never so fully and strongly exemplified. Hawkins Brown has laid down the Creed: he

¹ A. d. MSS. 37853, f. 61.

hoped no *change* would take place, lest it should be a *pretext* for war with an *ambitious neighbour!* This is precisely what Buonaparte wishes. This is the very sentiment that will kill us. He does, then, in reality, choose the king's servants.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, December 26, 1802.

As it will be impossible for me to see you at your house to-day, and as you may not go by here, I think it right to trouble you with the following translation of a part of a letter from a foreign nobleman, whom I have always found extremely well informed. "As to Malta, I have good reasons to believe that your Ministry is about to give it up. Russia has, at last, accepted of the guarantee, since it has been said that the word guarantee, according to the universal change in the political dictionary, must not be literally understood, and signifies no more in fact than a mere acknowledgment. But Russia makes two or three exceptions; I do not know to what; perhaps, to the paramount quality of Naples, which has, for ages, been acknowledged. Then, it is said, that Naples is to furnish troops, but France and Britain are to pay them, and, of course, that means Britain alone is to pay a garrison which is to be under the command of France. There seems to want only this to complete the infamy of your Ministers and the disgrace of your country." If you should hear of this from no other quarter, you will be pleased to keep it close till next Saturday, when, if I hear nothing by way of contradiction, I shall speak of it as a report, which may probably prove true. My correspondent has in another part of his letter the following sentence: "I have been told that Mr. Windham, prevented by the tricks of the Ministers from delivering in Parliament his warning to

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 63.

England and to Europe, is about to publish it in pamphlet, which I am certain would have a wonderful effect. He is the only man in England (I may say in the world) to rouse this tumbled and broken-hearted Europe." I am perfectly of this gentleman's opinion.

As to *flattery*, my dear Sir, I hope you are persuaded that my respect for you is too great to admit of the use of that. I take this liberty from a thorough persuasion that you would, or, at least, that you might, rouse the world. Look at all the great things that have been done: they have all originated with *individuals*. If this nation is to be saved, some *one man* must begin to work its salvation; and I know of no one but you. The effect produced by Mr. Burke in 1791 is an example of what may be done. Pray, Sir, think of this, there will be some materials wanted, perhaps, for *notes*, &c., and you have only to command me to search. A correct account of Louisiana and its commerce I can furnish, and will prepare it without delay, if you think it worth your acceptance. The materials for that part of the view, which should include *America*, I can furnish most amply; and *America* might be included with great effect. Pray excuse one word as to the *title*. I am afraid that an address to *former constituents*, or to any *constituents*, would not add to the dignity and weight of the thing. Its effect must not be looked upon as confined to *England*. The Courts of Europe must hear you, and listen to you. They must see what hope there is for them in you. For this reason I think an address to *constituents* would not suit. It is not that a view of Europe might not be introduced into such an address, but much depends upon a title. It is the pitch-pipe of the book; and, if the key be given too low or too high, all is out of harmony, and much of the effect is lost. All this in great haste, and with the utmost submission to your better judgment.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 64.

CHAPTER VII

COBBETT'S CORRESPONDENCE (1803)

William Cobbett to William Windham

January 20, 1803.

I SHALL pay due attention to the contents of your note, as I do to everything you say and write. The inclosed is worth reading for *fun*, if one can laugh at such times. Almost all my Summary will be taken up with remarks on the finances; for you must know that *they* have sent a paragraph to *all* the papers to anticipate the remarks which I promised last week. There are really some parts of their statements which would have disgraced a mountebank. When I see a "safe politician" hampered in his indiscretions, I experience much about such feelings as my little boy enjoys when we catch a mouse in a trap. Poor Bowles, who has been boring me with his puritanical advice for these twelve months past, who has put me to five shillings expense for *cautions* against "violence" and "impudence," poor Bowles is himself caught by those cruel dogs, the Jacobin Mayor and Aldermen of Nottingham, and Mr. Birch, their election candidate. The fact is, that Bowles did stretch a little about the *Goddess of Reason* at the Nottingham election. While he was crying out against bare bosoms, while he was begging and praying all other women to put upon their breasts a covering as thick as the shield of Achilles, he was actually employed in stripping the poor Goddess of Reason *stark naked*, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot!!! While he was contemplating this object, like the Elders peeping

at Susannah, pop comes the Mayor and Aldermen upon him, and threaten that, unless he will *retract*, publicly retract, what he has said, they will not give him the bastinado, but, what is infinitely worse, send a writ for him to answer; and I do not know that they will not proceed by *indictment*. He has done, what such a man always does, precisely the worst thing he could have done. He has refused to retract in the *newspapers*, where they require it; but has been shuffling to their lawyer, and promising to contradict his assertion in a *new edition* of pamphlet. In the meantime he is, I see, writing poor cowardly anonymous letters in the *True Briton*, complimenting himself, and dwelling particularly on his inviolable attachment to *truth*; while, on the other hand, the abominable law-suit is hanging over him. I begin to pity him, for he is exposing himself in a most shocking manner; and in the main he is a good man. This is one of your true "*prudent* men, and *safe* politicians," who seldom know how to keep out of mischief, and when they are in it, never know how to extricate themselves. Since the fates had ordained this job for Bowles, I am sorry it did not happen about the time of Dulwich *fair*. It would have prevented the breaking up of many a joyous party. Mrs. Bowles, who frets at everything, will be half mad. If you look into the *Register*, vol. ii. p. 764, you will perceive that I did not like the story about the Goddess of Reason from the beginning. I had heard nothing in contradiction from any quarter; but I felt it was false, as it now appears to be.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, Friday [February].

I beg leave to point out to you an article which appears in the *Morning Chronicle* of this day, and which will appear in the *Register* to-morrow. I mention it in

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 66.

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WILLIAM COBBETT
From a print in "The Amusing Chronicle"

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case you should be able to get the *Chronicle* to-day, which, I believe, you may do from Mr. Elliot. It is on the subject of *our* standard, all the honour of which is now said to belong to *Lutz!!!* The article is a most excellent one, in every point of view, and, I think, it decides the point completely. It so exactly agrees with what I had before sent to the press, that were not the paper in which it appears a protection for me, I should be afraid that it might be attributed to myself. I burnt what you saw here, and am very glad I did so. This is the sort of influence which you have over me, and I flatter myself that you will, more frequently than you have done, condescend to exercise it. . . . About four o'clock I must go to my printer's.

P.S.—The *Mercure Anglois de Cobbett* is begun to be composed by the printers.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, Tuesday Morning.

Poor Peltier's affair has ended as I foretold. He was very ill at, and, indeed, *betrayed* by, McIntosh, whose speech was little more than a second edition of *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*. *Ferguson* was the other Counsel, the *same* Ferguson who attempted to rescue O'Connor. Peltier despised my advice, and he is justly served. Lord Ellenborough and the Attorney-General both told the Jury that, *if they did not find him guilty*, we should have *war* with France!!! Precisely as I foresaw; the same motive would have made them find a verdict against a commentator on the Bible. I am so very ill as to be unable to do anything but rave about Peltier. I had no sleep last night. My youngest child is very ill: my French boy has an abscess come on his thigh, which has just been opened, and I have a tremendous cold, limbs

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 67. The *Mercure Anglois* was a reprint of articles in the *Political Register*, translated into French and circulated abroad.

ache, headache, and everything else that is bad. If, therefore, you should be passing this way, it would be a great act of charity to look in upon me.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Friday Morning.

I return Capt. Walsh's Book,² which I borrowed for the purpose of giving some account of it; but of which I find I extracted the *most valuable part* in the first leaf of my last week's number. In short the work is worth nothing to any one but the bookseller and the author, who will, I dare say, get a good deal of *money* by the edition, and as to reputation, they have, I suppose, already such an overstock, that an addition would be injurious in the market. But, seriously, it is something truly astonishing that a man should be found willing to set his name to a work which is nothing more than a mere log-book of the army, and that might have been made by any serjeant as well as not. And to trick out a log-book with antiquarian prints too! And to charge 3 guineas too for the book! The Appendix is made up of the *official papers*, which we possessed before. And, besides the Appendix, how much *letterpress* do you think there is? Try to guess. You cannot, sir. You never would suppose that you had paid 3 guineas for just as much letterpress as is contained in *three numbers of the Register!* The young gentleman had not a mind to over-load you.

I had almost forgot to say, that the very sheet that I wanted to read is left out in your copy. It must be returned back to your bookseller immediately, or you will never have it completed; which, to say God's truth, is of very little consequence.³

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 68.

² *Journal of the late Campaign in Egypt, including description of that country, and of Gibraltar, Minorca, Malta, Marmora, and Macri.*

³ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 70.

William Cobbett to William Windham

Tuesday Morning [March 22, 1803].

I enclose you a number of the *formidable British Patriot*. It is astonishing how exactly all the tribe echo each other's cant! The police Magistrates have dragged before them about 50 respectable persons comprising the company at a dancing-master's *ball*. They were crammed into the filthy watch-house all night, previous to their being brought before the petty tyrants, who have extorted the penalty of £100 from the dancing master. Is the Police Bill passed annually? If it is, some occasion ought to be taken to show the injustice of rendering *nugatory* all *appeal* from these men, by allowing them to sit at the *general quarter-sessions of the peace* for the counties where they act as police magistrates. To these quarter-sessions, when they have any point to carry, they bring their whole body, and beat and vote the magistrates of the county out of countenance. It is an abominable system of oppression. A set of thief-takers have actually usurped all the powers of the county magistrates. No mischief could possibly arise from excluding them from a voice at the general quarter-sessions of the peace. Indeed their going there must take them from their duty. It is a shocking innovation to place men on that bench who hold their places *during pleasure*. Observe, too, that it is a hardship and disgrace peculiar to *two counties* of the kingdom. I can see no reason to object to an alteration of the law in this respect, and every reason for it. It will be said, that every justice of the peace may go to the quarter-sessions and sit upon an appeal from his own decision. But first I believe that he cannot sit upon an appeal from *himself*, nor, perhaps, can a particular police magistrate; but then, the rest of the *brethren of the letters* can sit, whereas the justice of the peace *has no brethren*, no persons stimulated to support him from an esprit de corps. It is somewhat

hard, deny it who will, that Middlesex and Surrey should be loaded with twenty or thirty intruders who can vote away the money of those counties, and who, in fact, do actually take the county business out of the hands of the gentry. I should like to have your opinion upon all this.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, Sunday Evening [March 27, 1803].

I have spent great part of this day in reading papers, &c. &c. lately received from America. In these the affair of Louisiana is further and more fully developed. They consist, 1. of official documents, 2. Congressional debates, and 3. of Essays in the newspapers. From the first it appears that the Western Settlers have intimated to the General Government, in no very unintelligible terms, that the "duties of *allegiance* and *protection*" being perfectly reciprocal and co-existent, when one ceases so does the other, and that, therefore, if they are not protected against the prohibitory regulations of the Spaniards, *they must cast off their allegiance and seek for protection in themselves.* "This shows," says my Lord Hawkesbury, "a good disposition in these people, whom we shall set to war with the French." No; but it shows that they are what I have described them, totally *disconnected* with the Atlantic States, having a very *different interest*, and having *an allegiance to dispose of to whomsoever will guarantee to them the uninterrupted navigation of the Mississippi.* How exactly my predictions are fulfilling on this score in particular! The Congress have made some stir; but the government party, that is to say, our enemies, have obviated all discussion as much as possible, and to pacify, or rather to benumb, the country, Jefferson has sent off Munro to *negociate.* I have read the government papers with great attention, and I am fully

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 72.

persuaded, that the President and his party have only sent off Munro for the purpose of keeping the people quiet, till the French arrive and take possession of the country! Now, even now, would be the time for us to recover our weight, and to overset this abominable republic of France. The people of America, I think a majority of them, *call for war, a war with Great Britain against France!* Oh! what a glorious opportunity! We ought to be cautious; but, with caution; with a proper use of the press, and with wise measures of government, *here*, and here alone is the lever wherewith to overset the republic of Buonaparte. But it is life or death to us; kill or cure; for, when once the French have gotten complete footing, all is over for ever. Compared to this object, Sir, Malta, the Cape, Egypt, and Jamaica, are trifles light as air. If you will appoint some evening this week, I will be at home to show you these papers, which, to save time and trouble, are all arranged in excellent order. I beseech you to bear with me and to listen to my representations on this subject; for, from New Orleans, as from Elijah's *little cloud no bigger than a man's hand*, will come the living waters that are to cherish, or the streams of fire that are to destroy, the British Monarchy.

P.S.—There were rumours about change of Ministry to-day.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Sunday Morning.

I now send you my selection again. If I am not the most mistaken of mortals, the fate of Louisiana will decide the fate of Great Britain. The colonizing of it and the Floridas must produce one of two things; an open rupture between America and France, or a sort of family

¹ Add. MSS. 37853. f. 73.

compact between those two most dreadful nations : if the former, Great Britain may retrieve all by joining America ; if the latter, it is by no means inconceivable that France should evacuate her new dominions in America, and give up the whole Northern Continent to the United States, upon condition that they will first join her in ruining and subjugating Great Britain. The idea of dividing the world between two great powers is worthy the mind of Buonaparte ! The final consequence would be, indeed, that all the English would go to America, carrying with them their hatred for the French ; but it is very probable that the philanthropists will say that such a change would be for the better, as the distance between the hostile powers would prevent the frequent return of *war*. I wish you may find time to read my selection through. You cannot but observe what effect the speeches and writings *here* have on the minds of the Americans. What a poor foolish government is ours ! How easily might that continent have been won to our views ! Don't you perceive, Sir, what a bustling scene it is ? How much depends upon activity with the press ! And how shamefully we have neglected this powerful means of security against France ? Mr. Pitt has always said, " Let them alone. You see no harm comes of our inactivity." No : while *my* activity made up, in some sort, for the want of *his* activity, things went on pretty well. No harm, it's true, came of this neglect at the time ; but what harm has come of it *now* ? If I had been properly seconded, or rather, if government had done what it ought to do without me, the French never would have gone to Louisiana. What, in short, ought now to be said to the Minister who, when a company of Americans would have taken New Orleans in the name, and for the use, of England, refused to accept of their services ? He did not know what New Orleans was. He knew nothing about it.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 75, 76.

*William Cobbett to William Windham**Sunday Morning [May 17, 1803].*

Soon after I left Pall Mall yesterday, I was at Guildhall, where I found the citizens in great lamentation about the news, which had already brought down the value of their property $2\frac{1}{2}$ per centum. It must be very great patriotism that will stand this! I know nothing of news but what I heard last night, in common with everybody else. If anything more *decisive* as to war or peace is known by you, proper to communicate to me, before 10 o'clock to-night, I shall be greatly obliged to you to let me know it.

P.S.—The account which my friend Mr. Dyckman brings me out of the city confirms all my notions. I shall be slow before I am explicit as to these notions (I mean in print); but I am fully convinced of their correctness. D. met a Scotch jew yclept Sir William Douglas, who once actually carried a pack, who afterwards cleared £40,000 by retailing rum to the Army at New York, who has since gambled in the funds, and who now is a considerable dealer in *stocks* and in *boroughs*. This man, if one can so call him, cursed *the war*, which is about to take place, said it would be very *unpopular*, and being asked whether he would rather incur ruin in peace, replied, "*Why did they make peace, then?*" When he himself was the most loud of any man in the kingdom *for peace!!!* Not a bad comment upon the notion of *consulting the people*.¹

On May 18 war was declared against France, and Cobbett made a rousing appeal in an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Important Considerations for the People of this Country*. This was reprinted in the *Political Register*, but Cobbett preserved his anonymity, which

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 77.

indeed he did not disclose until he was being prosecuted in 1809. It was attributed to Lord Hawkesbury, to Dr. Horsley, and to Dr. Rennell, while at a Drawing-room Queen Charlotte thanked John Reeves for having written it. Through Yorke¹ Cobbett offered the pamphlet to the Government, which accepted it and suggested payment, which was declined. An official circular was sent "To the officiating Ministers of the several Parishes in England and Wales," and with the circular two copies of the *Important Considerations*, one of which was to be placed on the church door and another in a public place in the parish.

And shall we submit to misery and degradation like this, rather than encounter the expenses of war; rather than meet the honourable dangers of military combat; rather than make a generous use of the means which Providence has so bounteously placed in our hands? (Cobbett asked in his pamphlet). The sun, in his whole course round the globe, shines not on a spot so blessed as this great and now united Kingdom. Gay and productive fields and gardens, lofty and extensive woods, innumerable flocks and herds, rich and inexhaustible mines, a mild and wholesome climate, giving health, activity, and vigour to fourteen millions of people; and shall we, who are thus favoured and endowed; shall we, who are abundantly supplied with iron and steel, powder and lead; shall we, who have a fleet superior to the maritime force of all the world, and who are able to bring two millions of fighting men into the field; shall we yield up this dear and happy land, together with all the liberties and honours, to preserve which our fathers so often dyed the land and the sea with their blood; shall we thus at once dishonour their graves, and stamp

¹ Charles Philip Yorke (1764-1834), First Lord of the Admiralty.

disgrace and infamy on the brows of our children ; and shall we, too, make this base and dastardly surrender to an enemy whom, within these twelve years, our countrymen have defeated in every quarter of the world ? No ; we are not so miserably fallen ; we cannot, in so short a space of time, have become so detestably degenerate ; we have the strength and the will to repel the hostility, to chastise the insolence of the foe. Mighty, indeed, must be our efforts but mighty also is the need. Singly engaged against the tyrants of the earth, Britain now attracts the eyes and the hearts of mankind ; groaning nations look to her for deliverance ; justice, liberty, and religion are inscribed on her banners ; her success will be hailed with the shouts of the universe, while tears of admiration and gratitude will bedew the heads of her sons who fall in the glorious contest.

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, *Friday Evening.*

I have left an engraving with your servant, with a request that he will show it to his Mistress, and send it to me to-morrow. Passing by Colnaghi's, in Cockspur Street, very fast, I saw the likeness so strong that I stopped ; and, upon enquiry, I found that this portrait was just come in from the engraver's, and that *two others*, from other paintings or drawings, are just about to be published, or, at least, are in hand. When one considers what base wretches these artists are, the satisfaction at this circumstance is lessened ; it is, nevertheless, a remarkable sign of a change in the public opinion, in the *taste* of politics. Almost everything is, in some degree, subject to the fluctuations of *fashion*, and who knows but you but honour and wisdom may become *d la mode en Angleterre* ? If these print-makers did not see a moral certainty of selling you, they most assuredly would not make you. With them you may be truly said to have

a just *value* set on you; they ask, not what you are as to virtue and talents, but what you will fetch in the market. Doctor Laurence, whom I unfortunately missed, has left word with Mrs. Cobbett that the Ministers have been hauling over my papers this evening. I hope they were merciful, for, if they are yet loaded with the cares of government, I call my conscience to witness that it is not my fault.

I shall not return from Croydon to-morrow till about eight o'clock, and I propose doing myself the honour to call on you at nine to speak to you about Louisiana, respecting which the Ministers have the most daring effrontery to *boast*.

1. What becomes of the advantages of *placing the French on back of the Americans*?
2. France has received about 30,000,000 of dollars, nearly 7,000,000 sterling, in payment for the session.
3. Who will guarantee us, that the agreement extends any further than merely to leave the country in the hands of the Americans *to protect it from us during the war*, which would have enabled us to take it from the French or Spaniards?
4. Who will say that stipulations of armed neutrality and others injurious to our trade are not amongst the things given in payment to France?

The two last would have been obviated by preventing the original cession to France, or by beginning war a month ago. The Ministers have in this, as in everything else, been completely outwitted, or have basely betrayed their master. I think the latter.

If you will give me leave to see you to-morrow night, which may be signified by a note left here to-morrow at any time, I have some other observations to make on

this matter, which is a very delicate one, I allow, but which may be so touched as to bear heavily on the Ministers, and, at the same time, to awaken the apprehensions of the sound part of the American people against the French influence which this arrangement will create in their country.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

CROYDON, *Saturday Evening* [August 6, 1803].

Before this reaches you, you will have seen, in the *True Briton*, that the scoundrel Heriot has said that I am worthy of "the pillory or the gibbet" rather than the reward which you assign me. You will allow that, if I had borne this, I should not have been worthy of your praise, and, therefore, I seize this opportunity to inform you that, before the libel had been published three hours, *I chastised the scoundrelly libeller with my own hand.* He roared most lustily, and gave every symptom which, I hope, is not characteristic of a "True Briton." I am not yet satisfied; he shall beg pardon of me, or I'll flog him out of the world.²

William Windham to William Cobbett

AUDLEY END, *September 13, 1803.*

Since the date of my last letter from this place I have had the *Register*, which I think an excellent one. The article about the P[rince] of W[ales] is admirable: so is the discussion about the war. A little inconclusiveness in one of the arguments about the P. of W. (that in which it is said that if the acceptance of his service would not have been an honour, there could be no honour in his making, which I think does not follow) is of no consequence, and would hardly even weaken the effect of the passage, where a smart turn rather than a convincing

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 79, 80.

² *Ibid.*, f. 81.

argument might be supposed to be the object. But in the others any error of position or reasoning is more to be attended to.

I doubt whether your opinion is quite correctly placed, and stands on a perfectly right footing, on the question of offensive and defensive war. What you say is perfectly true as to the present war, but I doubt whether generally speaking it is not rather to be said that wars are offensive or defensive by the mode of their being carried on, than by the end which they have in view. At least if it is not so, defensive wars cannot be much a subject of blame. Taking things upon their largest view, considering the end of ends, wars ought to be defensive. It would be difficult to show that any others were legitimate. Accordingly, the last war, even if it had been conducted as I think it ought to have been, would have been strictly defensive. But this would not have prevented its being perfectly offensive and in the highest degree in all its operation. Either therefore we must confess that wars are offensive and defensive according to the general tenour of their immediate objects, and not according to their ultimate ends, or we must cease to give a preference to offensive wars. In the present instance the war is defensive on our part, and in the bad sense of that word, because the principal operation of the war is of that description; and it is not the little paltry offensive operations, which the writer whom you are combating advises to be carried on, that can change its nature in that respect. Even in my view of the question, the war must be offensive or not according to its principal operation; and the principal operation in the present war must clearly be allowed to be, the defence of the country—a besieged war could be said not to be in a state of defensive hostilities, because the garrison occasionally made a sally: nor Great Britain while closely besieged herself, because part of her forces might during the time be making some trifling attack in the West Indies.

With this distinction in your mind, if you adopt it, you will easily get back in a future paper; and recover your balance from any little slip, should there have been any such, which you may be thought to have made in the present.

I expect to leave this place to-morrow, and shall proceed then through the Essex district on my way to Norfolk. It is a certain fact, which I believe I had not room to mention in my last letter, that to this moment no distribution of arms has been made, beyond those which the original volunteer corps had, in this maritime and most exposed country. It is only within these two days that arms to the amount of their actual numbers have been promised them. This you may state, avoiding only the particular date of this last promise, or anything that shall have the air of special information. The general fact must of course be notorious. There are at this time no volunteer corps armed but those of the old establishment: and it is only now that to the rest arms have been even promised.

To-morrow I shall leave this to proceed through some of the principal points of the district on my way to Norfolk. A letter sent to-morrow directed to the Marquis of Buckingham, Gosfield Hall, should you have anything particular to communicate, will reach me probably before I set out in the morning, or directed to the Post Office, Colchester, will meet me in the course of the day. After that, Norwich will be the best place.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, September 27, 1803.

SIR,—I have duly received your letters of the 10th and 13th instant, and am really ashamed when I compare their dates with that of the one I am now writing. But, so barren is the time of events, and so little have I to

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 90-1.

say worth your hearing, that I was at loss to determine whether I ought not, even now, to begin with an apology for writing at all, instead of for not writing sooner. Dull, however, as is the time with respect to everything else, it is far from being so with regard to *invasion*. You must have observed that, about three weeks ago, the newspapers, which are the oracles of the Ministry, assumed a tone of bravado and insolence almost unparalleled. They dared Buonaparte to come, telling him they were prepared, and swearing most desperately that they would beat him to a mummy. Now, however, they are again growing cool, for they again really believe that he is coming. Whether he will invade England or Ireland at all; whether he will invade the former or the latter first; or whether he will take both at once—are all questions which the Ministers cannot, of course, determine, but as to each of which events they ought to be prepared *beforehand*; for, when once a serious invasion has taken place, farewell to reflection and deliberation. I remember you very wisely observed, that, in our present circumstances, the Ministers ought to be *prepared with a set of measures*, so as not to be taken by surprise, and to be thrown into confusion by any unexpected and disastrous event, such as the defeat of the army, the burning of a town or two, or even by the investiture and capture of the metropolis. But, Sir, there is another event, which would unquestionably arise out of the one here to be provided for, and for which other I have, as yet, heard no one talk of making provision: I mean the utter discredit of the Bank-note! If, Sir, people are already beginning to hoard up gold and silver, and this is the case to a very alarming extent, what will be the consequence of an invasion? Nay, what will be the consequence of an armament appearing off the coast, and messenger upon messenger, or rather “pidgeon upon pidgeon,” flying into the Stock Exchange from Essex or Sussex? If, in the year 1745, the bank-notes were

nearly overthrown; if, at a time when there was no notes under £20, and when twenty pounds were equal to £50 at present, if then the danger was so great, what must it be now? Then no one but a person of considerable property and resource could possess a bank-note; now the day-labourer receives his wages in notes. In *forty-five* the bank-notes were to the cash as 1 is to 4, now the cash is to the notes as 1 is to 5! And this is giving the gold and silver credit for about twice if not three times their real amount. Judge you, Sir, of the effect of a sudden destruction of the value of the paper! Trace this effect through all its stages; ask how the poor are to be fed; how contracts are to be fulfilled or enforced; how debts are to be paid or recovered; how taxes are to be *instantly* levied; how the expenses of government are to be defrayed; how *the army and irregulars are to be paid*? "God be our shield and our defence"! for never was there a nation in such tremendous danger. The effect would be as quick as lightning. A mail-coach would carry the bubble from London to Exeter in a night. It would literally sweep the bank-notes along before it. At best, the monarchy will be shaken to its centre, and whether it shall stand or fall will depend upon those who shall hold the reins of government; for, as to the present poor creatures, death is certainly its fate if it depends upon them. The object of all this, Sir, is to engage you to turn your serious thoughts to this great and terrible object. It will require all your wisdom and all your courage to devise and to execute a plan for insuring the safety of the throne and that country, to which every hour of your life has, for so long a time, been devoted. A provision of *hard money to pay the troops* should be made. Without this, they must be instantly disbanded, or set to forage upon the people, who will be, at the same time, all in confusion and strife. Some people will laugh at this; and I most heartily wish that I could laugh too, which I should

be more disposed to do if I had about 1000 guineas buried in my cellar, but of which I never shall have one. When this time comes, my intention is to go instantly *into the army*, taking wife and children to some tolerably secure place first; for, in such a crisis, that man will be best off who has a sword in his hand, and certainly he will be more like to serve his king as a soldier than as a writer, of which latter tribe there will be but very few wanted when force, physical force, is become all in all things. I am, Sir, your most humble and most ob. svt.,¹

WM. COBBETT.

William Windham to William Cobbett

AUDLEY END (SAFFRON-WALDEN),

October 9, 1803.

The best account I can give you of the employment of my time, and the best excuse for having done nothing of what I had intended is to send you the enclosed copies of two letters which I wrote lately to Mr. Yorke; and which will at the same time give you some idea of the state of our country, and of the foresight and vigilance of our Governors. By a letter from Mr. Yorke of the 6th, I find they mean to pay immediate attention to what I have said about Yarmouth; to the other object of the defence of the line of coast, they answer by that most foolish and most shabby wish, which I have heard of on other occasions, that it may be done by the country itself. By a letter to-day from Mr. Woodford, I find that an officer has been sent to Yarmouth, and by another letter received here from Harwich, the Enemy are said to be actually embarking. In short, if we are to be saved, it must be Providence, or fortune, that saves us, for such a mass of folly, ignorance, and weakness as we have to defend us, contrasted to the wisdom, talents, ability, and energy by which we shall be attacked, leaves really upon

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 92.

any rational calculation our destruction almost inevitable.

My life since I saw you has been almost a continual journey, for besides the circuit I took through the Eastern district, I have been since I got into Norfolk in a continued course of going backwards and forwards to attend county meetings, and promote whatever little disposition there has appeared in the county to exert itself. The last thing was to prevail upon the Justices assembled at the Sessions to come to some resolutions, which I was quite surprised at their adopting, to the effect of what is contained in my first letter to Mr. Yorke. As they begin now, though too late, to be a little alarmed, they become much more tractable and docile. From there, *i.e.* from the meeting at the Sessions, I set off to this place, in order to pass a couple of days with Mrs. W., but shall hasten back to Norfolk, in case Mr. Yorke, in consequence of my letter to-day, *i.e.* of the 8th, should send any one to examine the coast in my neighbourhood. Perhaps the view to Yarmouth alone would be a reason for my going back; but otherwise were nothing done in either of the respects which I have mentioned, I should feel the state of Norfolk so desperate as to render it unnecessary for any one to stay there; and London would then be the place most satisfactory.

Your letter inclosing the Newspapers I received as I was quitting my own house, and till yesterday, when I was employed among other things in writing my letter to Mr. Yorke, have never been in a situation in which I could sit down to work upon them. I will try to do it, in the remainder of to-day, or will delay my going till the day after to-morrow; but I have really another business, which I have foolishly neglected, but must delay no longer, which is to prepare a duplicate of my Will, for in the confusion likely to ensue, I do not like to trust to a single copy.

The thought of all this business is a reason for not

enlarging on the thousand topics that present themselves ; but I cannot forbear saying how much I like the *Register* of to-day. Their clan has got deeper wounds than ever, and such as he can never entirely recover of ; and the Summary of Politics is hardly less valuable. About the Depreciation of paper, on which I received your letter, I am altogether at a loss to know what can be done. Mr. Woodford thinks the Bank shd. pay in cash, in order to save the cash from being taken at one great haul, and Buonaparte be the only money-holder in the country, to what a state have our British besotted counsels and conduct reduced us ! Oh ! how if you had heard at our meeting of Justices the representative of one of the first families of the County, one who values himself as being of the true Patrician race, the descendant of one of the Champions of Agincourt, one who wanted when he got his peerage to take the title of Agincourt, if you heard him deprecating the mention of the dangerous state of Yarmouth, because it conveyed a reflexion on the Ministers, you would have been tempted to exclaim, as I remember to have done once with respect to this same person (Ld. Wodehouse), " what worms creep from the bodies of these dead heroes ! " Your correspondent Anjou should attend more to the actual character of our provincial gentry, and men of high birth, before he pushes quite so far the principles that he lays down upon the subject. The fact certainly is, that notions of high birth seem to be used as often to support men under a sense of their own meanness, as they do to inspire them with a character, which should render such a support unnecessary. They seem to think they have a sort of claim of credit, and may be as shabby as they please in virtue of the high qualities which they ascribe to their ancestors. Your Country Gentleman of the present day is apt to be a very stupid and spiritless creature.

These letters to Mr. Y[orke] I will be obliged to you to keep till you may have convenient opportunity of

returning them. There is no objection to stating the contents to any of our friends, though as he has manifested a disposition to attend to their suggestions, I would proclaim the having written it. The substance must be publick enough, as it is contained in the Resolutions which I mentioned, and which, though not inserted in the County paper, must of course be generally known.

I was sorry that you were provoked by some reflections in the *Morning Chr[onicle]* to seem to countenance the attacks on Granville. They have shown themselves to be very foolish things in all ways: but promised originally to be quite in the spirit of the present Ministry, and not quite unlike part of that of the last. A further objection to the bombardment of Granville was that a great part of the inhabitants were Royalists.

The first delivery of arms to the county of Norfolk took place on the 1st of this month, except perhaps a few at Yarmouth, and which were not attended with accoutrements. The delivery of arms here is not yet complete. It was promised when I was here last, almost three weeks ago. The same in Suffolk: no delivery, when I was there. Where there are no arms, of course, there has been no ammunition, so that in the most essential part of training by the Loading and firing, and firing with ball, almost the whole body of the Volunteers to this moment are altogether unpractised. In Norfolk the signals are not yet arranged, nor the signal-posts completed. The whole force in Norfolk, exclusive of Volunteers—one Regimt. of Militia, four six-pounders and two Howitzers. In this state of preparation are we going to meet such an invasion as that with which we are now threatened. God grant us a good delivery!

What sort of situation have you thought of for yourself in the Army? It is a matter of some consideration, and in fact, whether you cannot be otherwise better employed, I should wish that we could be somewhere together.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 95-8.

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, WESTMINSTER,
 Wednesday, October 19, 1803.

. . . I have had as pleasant a journey as I could possibly have, under the present circumstances of the country. Plenty of game and plenty of sport ; and the first coursing I have seen for 20 years, though I found, upon trial, that I had forgotten neither how to find a hare nor how to gallop over hedge and ditch after her. To-day Mrs. Cobbett has received a brace of birds and a hare from your house. Pray, Sir, accept of our thanks. I am paying great attention to your speeches. . . .¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, November 21, 1803.

You have seen my project of a *Parliamentary Register*, and, I trust, you will easily perceive the great *political* importance of it. It will be a great check upon the newspapers, and will most powerfully aid, in every way, the objects which we have in view. But you will easily perceive, that a considerable portion of its excellence and superiority must depend upon the corrections and amplifications which the speeches of our friends will receive from *their own hands*. Doubtless you will all be anxious to appear well in this work ; but it must be remembered that your aid must be given to us instantly, for the work must appear regularly ; one failure in point of time will destroy it ; whatever is sent must be sent us the next day, or two days, after the debate takes place ; and it must be left to us to correct proofs. I hope we shall have *your* speeches, at any rate ; and your *replies*. It should be recollected, that if *you* fall short of your *wishes*, you will do better than you could

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 99.

have done without this work. *Quickness* will be one great thing. As you will be busy to-night, I shall not trouble you; else there does appear to be something necessary to be settled upon as to the mode of conducting this work. I shall be constantly at home, and *alone*; and this is a very convenient road to the House. I am very full of the notion of these Parliamentary debates; and I think the work will soon be *felt*. Not to make any profane use of the figure, I cannot but contemplate with great wonder and with no small pride the progress of the *Register*, which has really and truly spread like a grain of mustard seed. It is now a newspaper, an Annual Register, and a Parliamentary Register, each of the two former surpassing in circulation any other works of the kind. But, as you have certainly something better to do than to listen to my vapouring, I shall conclude with a request, that you will be so good as to send me over an order for a person to go into the gallery of the House to-morrow, as *Mr. Wright*, who is my reporter, must be there very early, or he will not get a place.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, Monday Even. ne

I enclose you the *Times* of to-day containing a letter to you, the most dull dog of a writer, assuredly, that ever existed. Would to God that one might hope that the shots of Buonaparte's soldiers would be as harmless.

On the third page of the same paper is another *stabbing*, precisely of that sort which has arisen out of the disuse of boxing. This question should, somehow or other, be brought to an issue. How shall we *collect* the facts of stabbings? It would be well to watch for a year. This is one of the reasons why I dislike the addition to our

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 101-2.

population made by foreigners ; particularly the crying, canting, passionate, cut-throat Italians.

I hear that Saturday's *Register* has produced effect, particularly the *close* of the Summary. When you can spare 5 minutes in going to or coming from the House, pray call in here, and give me a hint for my guidance. I wrote the last number *rather in the dark*. I entertain no hatred to Fox, which does not completely give way to the desire of seeing such a Ministry as would give us a chance of saving our country and our king from the fate that seems to await them ; and as to any *inconsistency* that may be attributed to me, I shall hold meet that charge, if indeed it is worthy of being combatted. Fox the friend of France had me for an enemy : Fox the enemy of France has me for a friend.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, December 11, 1803.

. . . Suppose a regular regiment to be quartered where there is a volunteer corps. It is clear that the men must frequently meet at public-houses ; nay, that they must, as journeymen carpenters, shoe-makers, &c., be frequently in conversation, and even at work together. What must be the consequence of such conversation ?

The *degradation of the military character*. A gentleman spends half of a hard life to get to be a captain, and he is now upon a level with the [word omitted] who makes his servants' shoes. Can the soldiers of the regular army respect their officers at a time when those soldiers can at any time go and get drunk in the same bench with a captain of Volunteers ? And, let it be remembered, that these volunteers, in their intercourse with the *lower classes* of the army, are not likely to refrain from endeavouring to *avenge themselves* for the contempt they experience at the hands of regular officers. All these things must be left to your better judgment ; but they

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 103.

appear to me to form the grounds of some very powerful arguments against this at once fearful and inefficient system.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, December 19, 1803.

I have seen Mr. Elliott to-day, who has given me an account of what passed on Friday night in the House of Lords, from which I gather two things; 1st, that the Parliament is, at last, alarmed at the thought of what our *committees* may effect, in case of a favourable opportunity; and 2ndly, that the Ministers wish to draw as close as possible to Mr. Pitt, in order to obtain his aid, permanently perhaps, but certainly as far as relates to the dreaded discussions of the present winter. In the House of Commons they persisted, no longer ago than Wednesday last, that *no material alteration* in the Volunteer System could possibly take place; but their minds changed very suddenly; for, on Friday they had discovered that a *revision* of the system was necessary, and stated that, after the recess, it should take place. I find, indeed, that in the Lords no doubts seemed to be entertained of the existence of the committees, notwithstanding the assertion of "my right honourable relation"; and that the wise Lord Romney said that he would rather be without the Volunteers than without their committees. I can assure him that he will not have one without the other. Their anxiety to obtain Mr. Pitt will be greatly increased by the financial difficulties, which are pressing upon them on every side, and which *they think*, tho' vainly, that he will be able to remove. It seems that *Dollars* are again to be thrust into circulation, but this will produce but very little effect; and, indeed, if the war should continue for three years, I think the crash must come. Since I had the pleasure to see you last, I have read Hume's *Essay*

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 106-7.

on *Public Credit*; I have never seen it before, nor any account of it; and you will easily guess how I was elated at finding that I had been arguing upon all the main principles of this celebrated writer. I now send you the book with my humble but earnest request that you will read the few pages contained between p. 372 and p. 385 both inclusive. Pray look particularly at the bottom of p. 381 and top of p. 382, where the author seems to have exactly foreseen that there would arise a projector like the Bp. of Llandaff. Pray read from 382 to the end with particular attention, especially the two last paragraphs. Forgive this earnestness. I cannot forbear pressing this important, this all important, topic on your consideration. You will see our case by the symptoms described by this able physician. God avert from us the fate described towards the close of the last paragraph but one! When I think of these things I must confess that I hang away from Mr. Pitt. Have the goodness to send back the book some time in the course of to-morrow, or next day. To-morrow, indeed, I should see you; because, at this time, not one word should be uttered till it has been well weighed.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, Friday Morning.

The whole camp is in movement at last; I mean the camp at Whitehall. I send you the *Morning Post*, which I will thank you to return to-night. The powers of the political press, as *for and against the Ministry*, are balanced thus.

| For. | Against. |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| The <i>Times</i> | The <i>Register</i> |
| <i>Morning Post</i> | The <i>Oracle</i> |
| <i>Courier</i> | The <i>Sun</i> |
| <i>Morning Herald</i> | The <i>True Briton</i> |
| | The <i>M. Chronicle</i> . |

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 108-9.

All the rest of the public prints are of no earthly consequence. The *Sun* and *True Briton* go with Mr. Pitt; the *Chronicle* with Mr. Fox; the *Oracle* with whoever will give it most money, or the best hopes of getting money. The *Register*, the *Sun* and the *Chronicle* have certainly more readers than the four papers on the opposite side. The Ministers seem to feel the danger of their situation. In the *Times*, where I know that Lord Hawkesbury sometimes writes himself, they are furious. The cry of coalition is, however, very flatly received; and, in short, the camp trembles. God send their fears may prove to be well founded. The article in the *M. Post* seems to have been written by Tierney or Sheridan.

Tierney, Peltier tells me, has a share in the paper; and you know, I believe that the Prince's friends watched Sheridan to the office of that paper at 12 o'clock at night.

You have persevered most heroically in the speech. If we are to be saved, be yours the merit. If you had not kept the flame alight, the fire would, long ago, have been extinguished. This need not be said; for it must be felt.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 110.

CHAPTER VIII

COBBETT'S CORRESPONDENCE (1804)

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, February 10, 1804.

MY cough and cold are very little altered for the better; but I have, nevertheless, been writing a good deal of stuff for the *Register*. Stuff I call it, for it is certainly very poor. My principal object has been to dissuade from proposing any volunteering *plan*, or even any *amendment* to the Ministers. I am decidedly of opinion that this should be avoided; because I see that they are fairly stuck in the mud, and that, under a show of wanting to do nothing, they are waiting to see what they can get the Opposition to propose and to urge them to do. In the *soupe maigre* dish of Mr. Yorke I see, too, a possibility of a very cunning scheme; to wit, the throwing out of something, to which you will object *because it tends to make the Volunteers too much like regulars*, and to which Mr. Pitt will object *for precisely the contrary reason*. If they can thus create discord between you, they will like it much better than any good they could have done to the system by a different course of proceeding. Far am I from imagining that Mr. Pitt is disposed cordially to co-operate with you; but they, perhaps, fear that he may be so disposed. The course proper to be pursued, therefore, appears to me to be to avoid, as much as possible, all recommendations and suggestions, which, if adopted, may fix on

those who recommend or suggest any degree of responsibility. Dillon told me that Mr. Pitt would come and oppose the Ministers with *all his force*; but I doubt of this, and never shall believe it, till I see it. I so dislike all the fundamental principles of Mr. Pitt's politics, that I have no hope of his ever doing the country any good. His system of funding is always uppermost in his mind; all his actions and all his words smack of it; and I am convinced that, till that system is destroyed, the work of our salvation cannot be begun. There is the cause why men *vote* for Mr. Addington in the House, while they *curse* him out of it. He has the power of withholding food and raiment from so many of the people, that, do what he will, he must remain till death, or fear, or force of arms overthrow him, or till a destruction of the debt takes place. In consequence of the operation of the taxing system, one half of the people receive, either directly or indirectly, their daily bread from the hands of the Minister. The nation is considered as a whole, and in a mere *pecuniary* point of view, no worse for this; but such is the effect of the extended system of taxation, that it makes all men bring a very considerable portion of their income (about one half of it), and give it to the Minister, who distributes it amongst those who have the good luck to please him best; and one way of pleasing him certainly is to abstain from attacking his administration. Nothing is so well calculated to produce a death-like torpor in the country as an extended system of taxation and a great national debt; and, therefore, all Ministers who, like Mr. Pitt, have no notion of governing but by means of the baser passions, have regarded "a *public debt as a public blessing*." For the purposes of *subjection*, taxes and debts are excellent; but something besides *subjection* is wanted to preserve the independence, the liberties, the honours, and the power of a nation; and *this* want we *now* experience. Something in this way I have written in the *Register*; and while I am

sitting here waiting for the proofs, *and coughing*, I write to you.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, *Sunday Evening, March 11, 1804.*

The French memorandum, which you had the goodness to send me, I neither had the time to read nor the grace to thank you for. I suppose you will want it for some days yet to come; when you have done with it, I should like you to let me look at it. The events of last week are full of interest. Hope really seems to revive. Bad measures have now some obstacles in their way, at any rate; and, Sir, I think we may hope that, as the Parliament rises in spirit, so will the nation. "Bad," said Doctor L[aurence] one day, "allow *that House* to be; but, if the country ever revives, it must be by the means of *that House*." He was right, I believe; but the means must yet be very different indeed from what they have been for some time past. Much good, however, may arise from what is now growing up; and it is you, Sir, and you *alone*, that the nation will have to thank for it. It is your public spirit, your resolution, your fortitude, your perseverance through difficulties and mortifications unparalleled that have given us a *chance* of salvation. That the nation *will* thank you for it, I am, however, far from either saying or supposing. But you will have the consolation to know that you deserve its thanks, and you will, I am certain, have the fortitude not to be mortified at its ingratitude. Nothing is more dangerous than a hobby-horse opinion; you ought, therefore, to be, and I daresay you are, upon your guard against mine, relative to the consequences of the finance system, and their effect upon the internal and external policy of this empire. But I cannot refrain from beseeching you to give them due weight in your consideration. A year ago you hardly thought that subjects of

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 112-3.

the nature here alluded to would have attracted the attention which is now given to them. You hardly thought that, in the face of the Minister and Mr. Pitt, young lads with downy chins would have talked so boldly as they now do on these subjects. I may be deceived; and it becomes me, when I am writing to you, to urge my opinions with great diffidence, but I am strongly impressed, and the impression becomes every hour more strong, that we are upon the eve of a great change in all matters connected with finance. If you, and men like you, are duly aware of its approach, I doubt not your powers to resist its dangerous effects; but God forbid that it should come upon us *unawares!* Here, and here only, is the *real* danger.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

Friday Morning [March 24, 1804].

Lest you should think me inattentive to you, I write this to inform you, that my poor little daughter has, ever since you called here, been extremely ill: I think her in great danger, and, as on her life depends one string of my heart, I am sure you will excuse any omission of those marks of that respect which I entertain for you and for Mrs. Windham. I am prepared for the stroke, but, notwithstanding that, it will, if it come, go near to bend me to the earth. Mrs. Cobbett, who is nurse at the same time that she has a child at the breast, bears it all with her usual fortitude. Her health does not fail her yet, and I trust it will not; but there is no knowing what may be the effect of a fatal termination of my daughter's disorder.²

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, Wednesday Morning [May 2, 1804].

There is a Bill before the House of Commons which, under disguise, is intended to eradicate *boxing, bull-*

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 115.

² *Ibid.*, f. 117.

baiting, and everything that Mr. Bowles, or his coadjutor Mr. Perceval, chooses to call a misdemeanour. I have not time to communicate what I wish to say; but I have the Bill here, and, if you will be so good as to call any time to-day or to-morrow, I will point out the danger. There is no time to be lost; because I dare say that this Bill, which goes to the rearing of puritanism into a system, would, if you did not lay hold of it, pass unnoticed. Pray give my respects to Mrs. W[indham] and remind her, that when you sat upon the Opposition bench with four, or indeed *three* others, I told her that you three would swell into three hundred or else the country would be enslaved. In a short time I shall see you, 1st, a minister; or, 2nd, a member of a numerous opposition of which you will be one of the leaders; or, 3rd, at the head of another little band of half a dozen; and, if the first cannot be obtained upon the terms that I have in view, I would much rather see you in the last. The prospect of a change has caused universal joy amongst that same base rabble, both in high and low life, who, but the other day, were cursing you for your opposition, without which opposition the change never would have been produced.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, Tuesday, May 7, 1804.

To avoid taking up your time this morning, I write this to inform you, that the pious Mr. Perceval, taking advantage of every power vested in him by his office, has pressed the information forward, and is actually bringing it to trial *next week*, instead of June, as was expected, and is the custom in similar cases. Now, Sir, I really stand in need of help; and the first thing to be done, without loss of time, is to engage counsel. I am for Mr. Adam for one. I will call at your house this evening at 9 o'clock, if you are at home; but, in the meantime,

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 119.

I beg you to remember that we have not an hour to lose. I am not going to the Attorney's, and I will have all the papers ready by to-night.

Weighty as this affair is, it is light in comparison of that which weighed upon my mind yesterday morning. A year's imprisonment will be nothing compared to the pain of seeing you all make yourselves over to the system of meanness and degradation. No; it is all as it should be, unless Mr. Pitt would have consented to act a secondary part. The *cure* must come, or we are enslaved; and the cure never could have come if you had all lent yourselves to the system. Mr. Fox has behaved nobly in advising you and his own Opposition friends to take part in the Ministry; but the most noble part of his conduct was his offer to take part in it himself, to take upon his own shoulders so considerable a portion of burdens which he never contributed towards making.

Lord Folkestone has just called here, and is delighted at the news. What effect this news will have on the people I know not, but it is out in the *Morning Herald*.¹

The allusions in the correspondence to a trial refer to the action for "maliciously intending to move and incite the liege subjects of his Majesty to hatred and contempt of his royal authority," brought by Government against Cobbett in respect of a certain letter signed "Juverna," which had appeared in the *Political Register* in the course of the preceding year, and in which attacks were made on Lord Hardwicke, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland; Lord Redesdale, Lord High Chancellor of Ireland; the Hon. Francis Osborne, a Judge of the Court of King's Bench in Ireland; and Alexander Marsden, an Under-Secretary in the office of the Chief Secretary of the Lord-Lieutenant. The case was heard on 24th May

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 121.

before Lord Chief-Justice Ellenborough and a special jury, and although Cobbett called Lord Henry Stuart, William Windham, Charles Yorke, Lord Minto, John Reeves, and others to testify to his loyalty, he was nevertheless cast in damages in the sum of £500. Another action, brought by William (afterwards first Baron) Plunket, then Solicitor-General for Ireland, was also successful, and the defendants incurred a second fine of £500. Cobbett delivered up to the Attorney-General the original manuscript of "Juverna's" letter, which had come to him by post, and it then transpired that the author was the Hon. Robert Johnson, a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, in Ireland.¹ The Attorney-General protested that this could not alter the consequences of the conviction; but at the same time he caused an action to be entered against Johnson, the hearing of which was postponed again and again until Trinity Term 1806, when a *nolle prosequi* was entered upon the indictment, and Johnson retired from the Bench with a pension for life.

William Cobbett to William Windham

June 22, 1804.

Enclosed are, 1, the little pamphlet relating to the non-commissioned officers of the Artillery, of which I spoke to you when I had the honour to see you last. I have had time to read the preamble only, but that is quite enough. I dare say, however, that in the clauses many curious particulars will strike you. 2, I send a letter which I have just received from Mr. Rose relative to the parochial effects of the *military Bill*. I desired Miss Rose to write to her father, and this is his answer. I think the case of the *Clergy* should be mentioned in the

¹ *Diary of Lord Colchester*, i. 518.

Lords, and I am sure the Lord Chancellor would be greatly hampered by it. R.'s letter is full of excellent information on the subject; and, if you find any use for it, I beg you will use it. I am going early to-morrow morning to the Grange, and shall be back on Tuesday at farthest. Your first Speech on the military project will now be wanted as soon as possible. Mr. Wright will wait on you respecting it at ten or eleven to-morrow morning. It is of vast importance that your opinions upon this subject should be well recorded; the advantage will be immense.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

July 15, 1804.

While what I had the honour to speak to you about the other day is still in your mind, I will just state to you in writing the outline of my plan. The object is to set men to thinking upon the subject of Mr. Pitt's principles and measures. Much has already been done in this way; but the efforts have been partial, and their effect of course partial and transitory. As yet there has been nothing like system in the exposition. The discussion has not assumed a regular shape; and very many persons, for want of being in possession of the whole matter, for want of seeing all the parts of the argument, form but incomplete notions, and are not able to meet the bold assertions that are opposed to them, upon these two points in particular: 1, that Mr. Pitt is the greatest financier in the world, and that public credit and national wealth are dependent upon him; and, 2, that to him we owe our escape from revolution; that he is the "pilot who weathered the storm," and that without him we must now perish. I would set out with an introductory letter, stating, and giving proof, how much I once was his admirer, showing what efforts I made

¹ Add. MSS. 37853. f. 123.

to defend his character and his measures when attacked in America, and that too by no feeble opponents; and then I would state in general terms the reasons for my change of opinion, thereby showing that the change has been produced by a sincere conviction of the evil tendency of his political principles. Hence I should naturally proceed to show by fact and argument that I am right in this change; and then the subject would divide itself into observations, 1, on his internal, and, 2, on his external policy. Under the former head it would behove me to lead the reader along through the errors, and through the low shifts arising from the love of rule, which have produced our present difficulties in finance; and, under the latter, to lead him to our present state with regard to the Continent. All along, without seeming to aim too much at the point, care must be taken to make the reader trace the misfortunes of the country to the source of selfish ambition; and the remedy will then not need pointing out. I would not mention the circumstances under which he *first* came into power; neither those of the dispute about the *regency*. Many persons who are to be conciliated are committed upon both. But the general turn of the observations, the conclusions everywhere to be drawn, would make even the friends of his conduct upon these occasions look back, and even secretly regret the part they then took, which will be productive of much greater advantage, perhaps, than the most able discussion upon the subjects themselves. We are now in a state of things which, in all human probability, can never be altered for the better, while Mr. Pitt retains his political reputation or any considerable share of it; and we must go on from bad to worse, whether we have peace or war, unless our state be *radically* altered. We go downward, too, very fast indeed. The remedy must come soon, or it will be of no use. There is, therefore, no time to be lost. The session of Parliament ended, men's minds will settle down into a sort of cowardly

resignation before Parliament meets again, unless something like a regular plan is adopted for keeping them awake to the danger, and to direct them to the means of averting it. I shall be able to acquit myself tolerably well as to every part of my proposed task except that of *showing the causes of the failure of the last war*. There it is that I want assistance. To trace these causes to Mr. Pitt, and place them fairly and clearly to his account: this it is in which I implore your aid. In about six weeks' time, probably, will be soon enough for me to receive any remarks upon this subject. But mere hints and facts wil. not be sufficient. I might *re-write* the thing; but it should proceed nearly as a whole from some mind to which all the chain of statement and of reasoning is familiar.

I beg pardon for troubling you with this long letter. I am going out with Mrs. C. and the children to-morrow. Perhaps you could call in next day? Since I had the pleasure of seeing you, I have received £50 from Oxford, from gentlemen unknown to me, towards paying the expenses of my law persecutions. There remains £471 to pay, and, without selling stock or goods at auction, raise this I cannot. They insist, too, as far as Plunket is concerned, to be paid in a very short time. It is a shame for me to ask for anything; and I only want to be furnished with the money upon my bond or note at 8 or 9 months, when I shall be well able to pay, if please God I live and have my health; and if not, why then I am sure my wife and children would find merciiul creditors.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

July 20 [1804].

Pray, Sir, look at an article in the *Register* to-morrow under the head of *Corn Laws*. I have there taken occasion

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 127-8.

to remind them of the cry of "peace and a *large loaf*." War has now made the loaf so large that part of our taxes are to be laid out in bounties to get the wheat sent out of the country. I have given an account of the price of bread for the last two years and a half, and shown that it has been upon the fall ever since the war began. I think the good folks at St. Stephen's might have been gently reminded of this fact.

You knew that one of my nephews was here waiting for his discharge from the militia, in order to his going into the army. I have just got a letter informing me that the man who was enlisted, attested, and sent down in his room, *deserted before the officers could have time to look at him!* And I am well assured that this, or something very much like it, takes place in one half of the cases of enlistment into the militia.

I have had Mr. Johnstone *here* about the finance resolutions; and I should like to submit my opinion to you about that. I am afraid this business is in bad hands. To-morrow I suppose you are to have a grand display from Mr. Pitt? What a pity that nobody that *can* will take up the gauntlet! I am sure that this is the weak part. Events may aid in other departments; but in this they *must* aid. I have not seen anything poorer than Mr. Johnstone's resolutions. They are a mere echo of the Minister's own accounts; "thus hath the Duke inferred." They really put me in mind of Buckingham's speech repeated to the rabble by the mouth of the Lord Mayor. Mr. Pitt will laugh at opponents of this sort. But, the truth is, this is a subject from which men of all parties *sink*. They say we may destroy the Minister, but then we destroy the stocks. And thus does he stand in virtue of the dangers which he has brought upon the country. However, Sir, this cannot last long. Men must speak out, or we shall sink without an attempt to save ourselves. There is an excellent book upon the subject of our paper money just

published by a Mr. Foster, a nephew of the gentleman of "prodigious" fame. You will see it noticed in the *Register*. This gentleman openly asserts the fact of a depreciation of the *English* paper. All these writers seem to agree that a great change, of some sort or other, is at hand, unless a diminution of the paper can be effected, and that can never be without destroying the whole of it. The project of the two Chancellors, I mean Mr. Pitt and Mr. Foster, is to unite the Irish with the English bank. I think the attempt would sink them both. Men are upon this subject under a more potent infatuation than upon any other. They will not see. Because destruction is not come, they will not believe that it can come. I have a letter from Ireland which gives a description of the consequences of the depreciation of the paper money, which description convinces me that that country is as it were a barrel of powder with a train laid to it, and only waiting for the match. When things are in such a state, a mere trifle produces an explosion. The kicking over of an apple-woman's barrow in a quarrel about a silver note is quite sufficient to unhinge society. Such is my view of things; and I am sure you will forgive me for thus trespassing upon your time, when you must know that the liberty I take arises from my settled opinion that *you*, or some one like *you*, can alone save us in the approaching storm.¹

William Cobbett to John Wright

GRANGE [ALRESFORD, HANTS],

Thursday, August 9, 1804.

This is merely to inform you that we are all well. We made two days' route of it, sleeping at Farnham on Tuesday night, and getting here to dinner yesterday. We shall leave this place on Saturday morning; on that day or on Sunday I shall have fixed the family, and

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 130-1.

on Tuesday I shall be in town. If not, you will hear from me before that time. I hope you have succeeded in getting the books from Wilson, and that the binding will be completed before I get back, so that we may send off the books without delay. I forget whether I repeated my request, that you would take up the carpet and use the parlour for the purpose of sorting the books. But the weather has been so fine that the yard would do very well. By the time that I come you will have digested in your mind the plan of the *great work*, and I will then endeavour to put a description of it on paper. This will reach you to-morrow morning about 10 or 11 o'clock. You will then pack up all the *Morning Chronicles* since Monday last, inclusive, as *newspapers*, and direct them, with a member's name upon them in the usual way, to the Rt. Hon. Lord Henry Stuart, Grange, Alresford, Hants. You may of course send a letter *to me*, directed to the same place. But these things must go off by Friday night's mail. We shall then get them on Saturday morning before we set out, which will not be till after breakfast. Be sure not to fail to send, because a man will be sent to Alresford on Saturday morning on purpose for them. . . .

The pony came on very well indeed. Mrs. Cobbett and I are going to Winchester races this afternoon.¹

William Cobbett to John Wright

SOUTHAMPTON, *Monday Afternoon,*
August 13, 1804.

I received the newspapers and your letter safe. By the enclosed you will perceive that I mean not to go up for this next *Register*. The reason is I have not got Mrs. Cobbett and the children settled to my mind; and, besides that, I want to take them all to the Pony races at Lindhurst on Friday next. They have begun to

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 11.

breathe. We have seen the school at Twyford. The master is a noisy hawbuck. He is a Burdettite, and so is his wife. I like the place very much; and not the worse because it is that very identical school that *Pope* first went to. Of this circumstance the master failed not to apprise us. The boys are all very well, and very desirous to see you: William in particular, who says you must come and see him every Sunday. The pony is an excellent bargain. I shall take the whole off from here, bag and baggage, next Saturday, and go to Wickham; and, on Sunday night or Monday morning, I shall leave Wickham for London, where I shall stay during next week, and then set off to fetch home the brood for the winter. I am in the midst of a pony country, and I think I shall pick upon another to take home with me. I shall write to you again to-morrow with another parcel, and again on Wednesday, so that you will have all my copy by Thursday's post; and, that you may know how to calculate, I now inform you that my copy will make exactly 25 columns, or 26 at most. I have several interesting articles, and they all must come in. I shall touch the Middlesex election. The miscreants shall not escape in that manner. Send me by return of post, All the *Chronicles* and any other important newspaper that you think I should have. If there be anything worth relating, pray give me a line upon it. My address is at—Mr. Harris's China Warehouse, Southampton. Damn the *China ware*! William was out walking with me by the beach yesterday morning, and, after a long and pensive silence, he said: "Pa, why do you have a china-shop in your house?" He is by no means reconciled to the crockery ware yet. The house and things in it put me in mind of the observations of Gil Blas about his father-in-law the silversmith. Gil said that everything, whether to eat or drink out of, or to sleep in, seemed to be silver.¹ . . .

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 13.

William Cobbett to William Windham

SOUTHAMPTON, August 15, 1804.

After staying four days at the Grange, and after having seen and fixed upon the school at Twyford, I arrived here on Saturday last, and have been bathing the children every day since. From the Grange we went to Winchester races and saw very poor sport though on the best day. We promise ourselves more at the pony races at Lyndhurst on Friday, where also there are Jack-ass, oxen, men, and women races! I have been over at Lyndhurst, and could not help lamenting to see the King's House and Stables present a scene of decay and dilapidation such as is quite disgraceful to the name of royalty. This is the reason why the royal family took up their lodging at George Rose's, which is close by; and thus is the King sunk in the eyes of his subjects. It is quite impossible for the peasants of the New Forest to look at these buildings and not regard the monarchy itself as being in a state of decay. The ideas are absolutely inseparable. While I was at the Grange I collected from Lord Henry [Stuart]'s library materials for extending my comparative statement of the price of bread back to the year 1750, and of showing in the most satisfactory manner that *war* has no effect whatever on the price of that first article of the poor man's subsistence. It is of great importance to put this position beyond all dispute at this time. But I will not here draw upon that patience, the whole of which I shall stand in need of in your perusal of my next *Register*. You will see a notification of my intention to take up the subject of the *Middlesex Election*, and I trust I shall do it in a way that will afford satisfaction to every man who is really a friend to the monarchy and to the country. I propose to be in town about Monday next, but it is hard to shake off these load-stones. I am *learning* them to ride too, and two of them are going to school. Mr. Wright's attention and ability will prevent

the *necessity* of my going, and perhaps I may not go. If I should not, I will do myself the honour of writing to you again about Monday. I leave this place on Saturday to return to it no more, and therefore, if you should have anything to communicate, the letter must come off by Friday's post, addressed, if you please, to me at Mr. Harris's, Southampton.

P.S.—I cannot forbear to tell you, that the school to which the boys are going is in that identical house where *Pope* first went to school, a circumstance of which the master failed not to apprize us, and, strange to tell, I could not refrain, notwithstanding the loud remonstrances of reason, from being *pleased* at it.¹

William Cobbett to John Wright

ITCHEN, August 31, 1804.

. . . I thank you for sending the selection of newspapers; they afford me excellent matter for comment. I think I have *posed* them about the car project. They know not what to say. There are some very good things in the *Chronicle* upon the subject. The little letter in Wednesday's paper is delicious. The Methodist meeting is not less so. That's the tone to take. I cannot enough abhor the wretches who would revive, at this critical moment, the hideous cry of Jacobinism. This is a subject upon which the selfish dogs ought to be incessantly lashed till all the nation hates them, and the time is most proper for it. I wish you would endeavour to inculcate this notion with all whom you know. Nothing would tend more to the subjugation of the country than the revival of this most mischievous cry. I shall not cease my endeavours; but do you use yours also.

Before you come down, which will be about the 7th of September, I suppose, I will tell you what we do about

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 132.

leaving the house. I like your idea very well. In order that you may be quite clear by Saturday, or the Friday afternoon, you shall have the *last* of my copy for the next *Register* on Wednesday morning. But *you* must read the *proofs*.

P.S.—Send me as follows : 1. Davenport's *Selections from Burke*. 2. All the pamphlets in my lower drawer. 3. The remainder of the parliamentary debates. 4. A copy of Goldsmith's *Poems*. 5. A woman's stirrup, which you will find in the little room by the parlour. These with, 6, the letter upon Irish Currency, you will please to put into a strong brown-paper parcel, and send by Collier's Southampton Coach (booked, mind) from the Old White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly. I shall want some of the things without delay.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, near SOUTHAMPTON,
September 24, 1804.

As you have sprightly conversation enough at Beaconsfield and elsewhere, it may not be amiss for me to give you some account of my pilgrimage, by way of a change. I returned to Southampton the day on which I had last the honour to see you. At Southampton I left the people exercising their sea-fencibles upon the quay, while they were actually pulling down the noble old gateway under which the army of Henry V. marched to embark for Agincourt. "What worms," said you once, "creep out of the bodies of these dead heroes!" Alas! the sentiment may be applied to the whole nation! I took my family the next week to a little hamlet on the banks of the Itchen, called Bittern, the spot which Warner has *proved*, they say, to have been the famous Roman Clausentum. Here in the same parish, I believe, that

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, ff. 20-1.

contains Netley Abbey, founded by one of the first of the Henrys, I remained three weeks. The Abbey is a most noble ruin. The finest I ever saw, that of Glastonbury not excepted; and, at the foot of the declivity which runs from the Abbey to the edge of the water of the arm that runs up to Southampton, being at only two miles from that important place, is a battery, which appears to have been built in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, which battery wants but very little to put it in complete repair, and to enable a skilful engineer to defend one half of the arm by means of it. It has a ditch to landward, and is, in all respects, a most valuable means of defence. This battery is covered almost all over with ivy, and with the trees which have grown up on its sides, in its ditches, and all about it. No military man appears to know that there is such a thing in Hampshire, though it has embrasures for about 30 pieces of cannon, and though it might, with forty or fifty men, be defended for weeks. But they are exercising the sea-fencibles on the *quay* at Southampton! From the Roman Clausentum I came to Botley, and am lodged in the *same house* that a lady of recent newspaper fame eloped from to go to Winchester, where the Doctor, her husband, caught her in bed with the lawyer her gallant. That I have written something as to *quantity* at least, you know, and perhaps to your great fatigue; but I have done something else. I have put my daughter to a very good school at Winchester, and William and *Louis* to Pope's school at Twyford, which really appears to have the hereditary misfortune of having ill-natured masters. But we shall stay a week longer to see how this suits, the boys being too young to be left to a cross master. They say they like it, however, and if they say so once more, at a week's distance, it will do. Then, at Hursley, of which parish Sir William Heathcote is king, and which together with Twyford and Winchester form the three corners of a triangle exactly equilateral, I have put four

nephews to another school, there to learn just enough to qualify them for the army, the merchant navy, or something else whereby they shall be able to bustle through the times that are approaching. My nephew that was in the militia has joined the 61st Regt. (Genl. Hewitt's) at Barham Downs camp, and writes me word that he likes it very well. It cost 25 guineas to get him from under the hands of Tommy Onslow!¹ He receives 19 [guineas] from the 61st. There is another brother of the same family, whom I have endeavoured to persuade to go into the Regular army; but he hangs off, so that I am *practising* my doctrine as well as I can. Mr. Elliot said you would be so good as to write to the Colonel commanding the 61st Regt. 2nd battalion on behalf of my nephew George. All that is wanted is merely to say who he is, and to ask that he may be treated according to his deserts. I wish to see him a serjeant, but not too soon. You will know what to say better than I, and it only remains for me to beg pardon for giving you so much trouble. I have now under my hands Sir R. Wilson's pamphlet.² Anything *new* was not to be expected. No man should touch that subject but yourself, Sir. If we are ever to have an army, you must give it us. I am sure you may make the attempt soon with great prospect of success.³

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, Thursday, October 4, 1804.

This is the first time I have had to regret my being out of reach of town. Your letter of the 2nd, which, owing to the situation of this place with regard to the

¹ Thomas Onslow (1755-1827), M.P. for Rye 1784-1806, succeeded his father in 1814 as (second) Earl of Onslow.

² *An Enquiry into the Present State of the Military Force of the British Empire, with a View to its Reorganisation*, 1804.

³ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 134-5.

post, did not reach me till about an hour ago, would certainly take me to London were it thereby possible to prevent the appearance of the letter,¹ though I am perfectly satisfied that it contains not one single sentiment that you would wish either to suppress or to weaken, of which you will be well persuaded, when I say, that it has been written upon the supposition that all the party principles, of which it treats, will be imputed to the members of the New Opposition. This I regard as a subject very different indeed from that of the Middlesex Election, of which I shall speak in my next letter. I am here deliberately describing my creed; and I have not only taken care to say nothing that may be construed into recantation, but have expressly stated that, as to the French Revolution and as to the justice and necessity of the war in which this country was last engaged against France, as also with respect to the Peace and all the subsequent great public questions, up to that relative to the necessity of the present war, inclusive, I *still retain*, in their full extent, all those principles and opinions in which I was, and of course am, directly opposed to Mr. Fox. As to my opinion relative to Mr. Pitt's *mode of conducting the war*, as well as my opinion relative to the principles, or rather expediencies, by which he was guided in making war, in continuing it, and in making peace, that remains to be given in some subsequent letter; for the misconducting of that war is certainly amongst the causes of our decline and, I fear, of our approaching fall. Being upon that topic, it will become me to show how he betrayed the cause in various ways; and, amongst others, in basely sparing the Jacobins, in order to keep, as it were, within the pale of forgiveness. In the present letter I have had no occasion to resort to this sort of matter; my objects being, first and chiefly, to declare that I still retain every principle as to which I formerly

¹ Letter II. to the Right Hon. William Pitt, on the Causes of the Decline of Great Britain.

differed from Mr. Fox, and to show that I am ready, if it should be necessary, again to oppose him upon those principles ; and, secondly, to prove that my joining with Mr. Fox in a *new question*, in a cause which, not to join him, I must have *abandoned*, having already espoused it, and with honour, that it not only is no departure from any principle I ever entertained or professed, but that it perfectly corresponds with those which I have entertained and expressed, at the same time that it is commanded by public duty, and is countenanced by the example of great and sound politicians of all times. This, Sir, is the main drift of the letter ; and I feel confident that, neither in the manner nor the language, will anything be found to give even *an appearance* of my having departed from any principle that I ever professed, or any one that *you* ever professed ; for, having an eye constantly upon all the New Opposition, I have taken care to forego every advantage that I might have derived from the pleading of local or other circumstances of my situation during the late war. I am, and I was, well aware of the general delicacy of the subject ; but I was fully persuaded (and, I think, you will agree with me), that it was one the discussion of which could not be delayed without great hazard, and, indeed, without certainty, of injuring the cause of the country. The mass of the nation (I mean even the well-informed part of it) look only at the naked facts of *separation from one leader*, and *joining with another*. They do not see the *reasons* for the change. They look only at the two ends of the matter. Though they may still respect personally the party so "going over," as it is called, their minds are not satisfied as to his political consistency, much less are they furnished with arguments whereon to defend his conduct. To be the party thus "going over" is to be in a most disadvantageous predicament ; and such, in a great degree, was the predicament in which the New Opposition stood, and must necessarily

stand, till the ground upon which they joined Mr. Fox was described in a way at once to silence their enemies and to put arguments into the mouths of their friends. This I have endeavoured to do; and, it appeared to me, that the best and safest way to do it was under the form of a defence of my own conduct; for, as to any *real* interest of mine, either of future or fame, it would have been a very insufficient reason for requesting the public to read twenty or thirty volumes of the *Register*, though such request might be, and I think is, justified, or at least excused by way of preface to such a discussion as I am about to enter on. Once more, Sir, I repeat that I have neither given up, nor *appeared* to give up, any principle; and, if there be any fault, it is, that I have not had the fortitude to go further than merely to *seem* to acknowledge that some of my most *personal* assaults upon Mr. Fox might possibly be too violent. All this description might have easily been spared by begging you to look at the proof sheets of the letter itself, which will all be composed by to-morrow morning early, and will not go to the press till about 6 or 7 in the evening. But there is a reason against that too powerful to be got over. Mr. Wright is a person in whom I would confide as much as I ought to confide in any man in the world, in his state of life and in such a case. But, considering the subject and tendency of the letter; considering that its *professed* object is to defend the New Opposition, and considering also that, though there is nothing that ought to be called personal, there are some allusions which, though very proper for me to make (as being material to the success of the truths I had it in view to establish), might not be proper to be sanctioned by you, in the manner that they must be sanctioned in the revisal of a proof. Considering all this, we must not, upon the question of confidence in Mr. Wright, talk of *probabilities* but of *possibilities*; it is much better to run the risk of the effect of some blunder of mine than to

hazard, even in the slightest degree, that which I deem the most precious possession of the country, *your fame*; for the reading of *such* a proof would be quite sufficient to furnish subjects of misrepresentation and calumny for half a dozen years. The same reason convinces me that, lest any charge or suspicion of this sort should be thrown out now, it will be a *great* advantage to be able to say that I never conversed with any one of the new Opposition, and particularly yourself, on the subject previously to the writing of the letter. I thought of all these things before I wrote a word upon the subject, and I am persuaded that, for me to leave wide open the door of disavowal, on your part, was the safest of all possible courses. I am convinced there is nothing that you will not approve as to *matter*; but I must confess that I shall anxiously look for *Sunday morning* for one line, merely to say what you think of the letter. For the reason last mentioned, it would not be advisable to suspend the appearance of the letter, but, were I now to go to London, it could not be suspended without leaving a blank to be filled up with matter totally uninteresting to the readers; and I leave you to guess, Sir, at the effects of the conjectures and suspicions that would be awakened and spread abroad by such an unexpected omission! Had your letter come a day sooner, the suspension might have been smoothed over by a long article or two on the subjects of the day; but it was kept at Southampton a day and a half in consequence of the letter-man at this place having discontinued his occupation, and no agreement having been made with another, this village having no regular post. It is now five o'clock on Thursday; all I write must be at Southampton by seven, in order to reach London to-morrow, and the *Register* goes to press to-morrow night. Were I to go to town by the mail-coach to-night, there would be neither mind nor time to write anything to-morrow. After all, however, this letter will leave me

in very low spirits; for, as to the affairs of *this* world, I know nothing that would give me greater pain, nothing that I should more anxiously avoid, nothing that would lie heavier on my mind or my heart, than your disapprobation.

P.S.—Sir, if it be true, as I hear it rumoured, that Malta is to be given to Russia, I beseech you to look at Mr. Dundas's speech, *Register*, vol. iii. p. 1662!!!¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, Friday, October 5, 1804.

I was obliged to close my letter without answering that part of yours which relates to the Middlesex Election, or rather to my writing relative thereunto. If, in the several papers, or any one of them, relating to Sir Francis Burdett and his opponents, I have seemed to recede from the principle of the propriety and necessity of former opposition to Jacobins, I have certainly appeared in a light in which I did not intend to appear; and, though others are better judges than myself of this fact, I cannot but hope that, wherever the *whole* of my sentiments and reasoning is fairly considered together, as a whole, I shall stand acquitted. I have repeated, even in words, my former strong censure of Sir Francis Burdett; I have said that the former contest was a contest between the thieves and the magistrates, and that he was the leader of the former; I have said that his former conduct was seditious, bordering upon treason, and that, as far as I can consider his present defeat as a punishment for his former conduct, I heartily rejoice at it. All along I have represented his present opponents as a set very far from friendly to the cause that I have always endeavoured to maintain, the cause of the monarchy, the Church, and the higher and better principles of policy.

¹ Add. MSS. 37853. ff. 136-8.

I am aware that though politicians, those who have their eye constantly fixed upon the progress and revolutions of opinion, will find nothing to blame, in substance at least, numbers of very good persons will, because they take up Burdett where they left him two years ago, and take up me along with him. Some consideration, as you justly observe, was due to these persons, and, perhaps, more than I have shown towards them. I wish I had shown them more; but, as to party or public effect, I am persuaded the evil will be small; because those persons, and all my readers will now have perceived, as well from my last article upon the subject as from the date of my letters to Mr. Pitt, that, whatever faults the several articles contain, they must be ascribed entirely to myself. On the other hand, Sir, there was really something due, if not to Sir Francis Burdett and his friends, to the cause of the kingdom (for such is the cause of the Opposition), to the cause of our safety at this time; for, when I wrote my first article, there was an evident design, on the part of the ministerial writers, to make a diversion by means of the cry of Jacobinism, and, which was of more importance, they had not scrupled to connect the whole of the Opposition with Sir Francis Burdett and his friends, a connection for which the appearance of the Cavendishes and Russells openly in the cause of Sir Francis furnished a tolerable good ground. The question with me was, then, whether, as far as my silence could be regarded as a mark of remaining enmity to Burdett and to his friends, it was not likely to be injurious, in its degree, to the public cause. Having determined this question in the affirmative, the next question was, whether it was not best in affording them all the support they at present merited, and in calling for an oblivion of their past errors, upon the same principle that the Ministry had granted acts of oblivion to such as had joined them; whether it was not best in doing this not to repeat too often and *in words* insist upon

the necessity of my former opposition to them; letting them see, however, at the close of every sentence, that friendship with me was not now, or at any future time, to be had upon any terms other than those upon which I would at any former time have insisted, other than an adherence to, or rather a coming over to, the principles I had always professed. This appeared to me to be the best course at once to defend all that was good in their present cause, to silence the cry of Jacobinism, and to prevent that cry *from becoming just*, of which last there was some danger. If they became friends, it was upon honourable terms for me; if they remained enemies, I had done my utmost to reclaim them. I think the success has been complete; and I am only sorry that any one with whom I fought in the war against Jacobins should suspect me of having turned my back upon him; and still I cannot but hope that reflection will get the better of such suspicions, especially when I have now so explicitly stated my adherence to all the principles and opinions entertained or professed by me relative to the French Revolution and our war connected therewith. In speaking of the extinction of Jacobinism (which by the by Lord Hawkesbury and Mr. Pitt, and indeed all of them, declared to be extinguished in October 1801) I have taken special care to forget *no former declaration*, nor any circumstance thereof, whether as to the fact itself, the cause, the manner, or the time. To prove my consistency and exactness, I have, upon this subject, only to refer the reader to the remarkable passage in the *Register*, vol. i. p. 604 to the end of 606. I do not quote it nowadays, because it would be gratifying my vanity at the expense of the public cause, but I will venture to request you to read it over. It really would seem that, at that particular moment, I was endowed with the Scotch gift of second sight. The whole passage seems to have been written with the present events and times in view. Pray read the last sentence of the second

paragraph which ends in page 606!!! Upon this subject I am perfectly safe. When *they* said Jacobinism was extinguished, it by no means was: it was gloriously active in the summer of 1802; and, though the Consulship for life gave it a cruel stab, its death was not consummated in this country till within this year or eighteen months; nor would it be at all difficult even now to revive it; but such revival would be the certain destruction of the country; because it would at once perpetuate the Ministry of Mr. Pitt and cripple his warlike measures, and what such measures must be when *crippled* the mind may conceive, but I have not words to describe. Upon such a subject it was desirable that every word should be well weighed; but those who will not, upon reflection, make allowance for the circumstances under which the articles in question must necessarily have been written, are, I hope, but very few in number.

I wished to say a few words upon Sir Robert W[ilson's] pamphlet, but my letter is already too long. I cannot, however, refrain from expressing my regret that he did not abstain from proposing *his* army of reserve project; because he not only commits himself, but will be the occasion of committing others. Me, however, I am sure he will not; for I shall never bestow a *general* encomium upon his pamphlet, and I am almost afraid that I flinch from my duty in not openly controverting a part of it. His army of reserve project would never do *in this country*, I am thoroughly persuaded. To have a large number of veterans always ready to call out, in case of necessity, is what I would aim at; but his plan would never do, if I understood him rightly; and whatever there is of good in it has been proposed over and over again. It did not, indeed, become him to be so bold as I am on the topic of privileges for the army; but as to this he has behaved very well. Sir Robert has not *thought*, or cannot think, much upon this matter; and, indeed, it is a pity that any hasty sketches should thus be thrown

out before the public has *your* plan entire before them, which I hope they will have at no distant day. What Sir Robert says about the Slave Trade is the mere effusion of a weakly girl of sixteen. It can, in fact, be excused only upon the ground of total ignorance of the matter, or that of feebleness of mind. Believe me, too, Sir, that his notions about flogging are not the offspring of mature reflection in a strong mind; and that the fault, in almost every case, arises from the *stuff* of which our army is recruited, and not from the harsh disposition of the officers. I could cite instances exactly opposed to those cited by Sir Robert; and I would, were I a general, rather have anything under my command than a *coaxed* regiment. The Duke of Kent *did not flog!* The fact is, that military discipline is to be enforced only by the *fear* of the consequences of disobedience. There are different ways of keeping alive this fear, and I do not recommend the lash; but the punishment must be *severe*. The Germans run the gauntlet: how that would be relished in England those may say who saw General Fox try it in the 38th Regiment! The French *shoot* offenders at once. Would that be liked better? It is the mode of recruiting that renders the lash necessary, absolutely necessary; but no mode of recruiting could prevent the necessity of very severe punishment. Be assured, Sir, that all we are told about gaining the *affections* of soldiers, and supporting discipline by means of indulgence, is visionary. Such a system would destroy itself in a very short time, because so much must depend upon the temper and manner of the several commanders: whereas military discipline should be regulated upon fixed principles, and enforced in a way that is no more dependent upon the character of the commander than the enforcement of an Act of Parliament is dependent, or ought to be dependent, upon a judge. As to time, too, I think it very dangerous to broach these philanthropic notions, which I see have already found their way into the news-

papers, and may thus probably do much mischief, especially when we consider that they naturally extend themselves to the *fleet*, where I greatly doubt of the possibility of supporting, without the lash, that discipline which is without an equal in the history of man; which and which alone makes us superior in sea combats, and on which, therefore, our safety does so materially depend. For these reasons I think you will agree with me that this part of Sir Robert's work was ill-timed. It *may* do great mischief, and I do not see that it can do any good. . . .

I hope to have settled everything here in about five or six days, and then I shall hasten back to town, where I hope still to find you.

P.S.—You must certainly not “steal back to former pursuits,” howsoever much better you may like them. You cannot be spared by the nation; in fact, you are no longer *your own*. Just looking into a newspaper at Gosport (whither I have been since I began this letter) I see a paragraph which seems to infer that Buonaparte's rival, finding the meeting upon our own shores put off, is *gone over* to the French coast!!! Does he really mean to become *a general*? I have long had doubts of this sort. But, no: the conception is too profound, the object too distant. Else I should really think my doubts strengthened by his recent conduct.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, October 27, 1804.

. . . Lowton the lawyer has given me *a week* longer, so that if I have *one half* by that time, and the rest by the 1st of December, the whole matter will be most conveniently and happily arranged. . . .²

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 140-3.

² This refers to the payment of fine and costs in the “Juverna” case. See vol. i. pp. 207-8.

Lest, by any strange chance, you should see, or hear of, a Volunteering Pamphlet, entitled "A Few Penn'orth of Instruction, &c. &c.," and which contains a most foolish, bombastical, and ludicrous eulogium on the Volunteer System, together with something in the same style, but in the language of disapprobation, respecting Sir Robert Wilson and others; lest you should see or hear of this pamphlet, I think it right to tell you that the author is young De Bloquière, whom I have heard, since he has been, *long since* he has been, an Inspecting field-officer, repeatedly declare that the system would ruin the country! He called upon me with a copy, observing, *very candidly*, that I should certainly disapprove of his performance. What might be his motives for this I shall not pretend to say; and, most assuredly, he will have prevented me from mentioning, or even alluding to, the author of the pamphlet. But I must "flap this bug with paper wings"; and if he lives and I live, he will, much about six o'clock next Saturday night, have reason to exclaim, and not ironically—

"Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
Dipt me in ink, my parents' or my own?"

Yesterday I had a letter from L[ord] F[olkestone] who tells me, that from his brother, who is at Portsmouth, he hears that Lord Castlereagh has been there, and has informed the Spanish Captains that they may go where they will with their *ships*; but that they must *leave the money!* I say, this is like the comrades of Gil Blas: steal the doubloons, but carry back the bags, in order to prevent the further pricking of their consciences.

At Oxford you should be amongst some of my unknown friends. If they have a friend amongst the political writers, I am certainly that friend. I think the day is not far distant when the friends of the Church will be put to the test.

If Mrs. Windham be at Oxford, I beg you will have

the goodness to present my humble respects to her, and to say how happy I am to hear that her health has so much benefited by the country life which she has led. Mrs. Cobbett is grateful for your inquiries ; and all our family are very well. Only Louis remained at Twyford. We thought William too young. Nancy is at Winchester, where she will now and then be looked at by Lady Henry Stuart.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, *Friday evening*
[November 16, 1804].

You will see, to-morrow, that I have been writing upon these rumours that are afloat, and industriously circulated by the ministerialists, relative to the renewal of the coalition project ; which project, if it were attempted to be put in execution, would, I am fully persuaded, surpass in ridiculousness, and very far surpass in mischief, the projects of cars and of catamarans. I have been, as you will see, compelled to break off abruptly, or I was proceeding to show what I should anticipate as the unavoidable consequences. The first of which would be the shaking of Mr. Fox's influence amongst what one may call the popular part of the nation, who now look towards him, and those who act with him, as their last foundation for hope. Mr. Pitt's system, by which I mean the whole of that set of principles and sort of measures whereby he has so long governed, and whereby, or not at all, he must continue to govern : this system is worn out, and with it the spirit of the people, as well with regard to military glory as with regard to domestic liberty. To the jealousy and watchfulness, which formerly existed as to these things, has succeeded a torpid and almost a brutal indifference ; and, if the mass is ever again to be animated by anything worthy

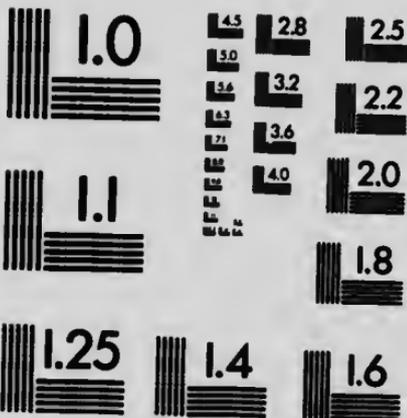
¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 144.

of the name of patriotism, it must be by a total change, an entire renovation, which implies an utter destruction of the system so long and so pertinaciously adhered to. But is this to be effected by a junction with him, who was the author, and who will, to the last moment of his ability, be the supporter, of that system? I am sure you will answer in the negative. Out of such a coalition as was proposed last spring (it was in March, when I believe from my soul that men are to the full as mad as hares) would arise one of three cases : *First*, a breaking up of the Ministry, which would leave Mr. Pitt in power, having with him a part of his present opponents, sending the rest back to the Opposition benches, deprived of a considerable portion of their political reputation, and with their lips in a great measure sealed. This general system they could not attack with very perfect consistency, having, under the actual circumstances, given it their support, or at least their countenance; and, indeed, countenance is, to all intents and purposes, support. With many of his particular measures they would be strangely and ridiculously hampered; and, in short, would be a set of poor creatures compared to what they now are. Thus the destructive system would go on with less interruption than ever; it would seek new resources in sacrifices of the Aristocracy and the Church; new and unthought-of laws and regulations would be invented to prop it; every vestige of our ancient rights and usages would vanish; the very ideas of political and civil liberty would be effaced from our minds; and, in a time much shorter than, at first sight, would appear probable, we should tender our necks to the yoke of either foreign or domestic slavery with as much good manners as my father's old mare used to tender her neck to the collar. *Second*, Mr. Pitt and his friends would get out, leaving the affairs of the nation to Mr. Fox, yourself, I shall suppose, and all those to whom we now look for political salvation. And *what* affairs, good God! what a bequest



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would he make you! Your difficulties would increase daily and hourly: he would still be strong: he would always have a certain number of persons closely and firmly attached to him; every day would afford him matter whereon to ground his attacks; failures of every sort, from whatever causes, always create discontent: all the embarrassments of the nation, of whatever sort, would, by his partizans, and, indeed, by the people at large, soon be ascribed to his being out of place: he would insist upon the goodness of his system and attribute all the misfortunes of the country to your bad management, in which he would be most boisterously backed by all the numerous swarm of traders of every description. I am not disappointed that most people think my notions about the paper-money somewhat of the alarmist description; but can any man look at the state of Ireland in this respect, can any one consider the quantity of paper now afloat all over the empire, can he at the same time look back upon the fate of such issues in other countries, and then say that he apprehends not very great dangers, tremendous shocks, from the effect upon prices, upon fixed incomes, upon contracts, and, indeed, upon everything immediately and deeply affecting the great mass of the people? I have betted you a guinea, you know, Sir, that the quartern loaf will sell for 30 pennyworth of paper-money before the month of November next. I will bet another that, if the paper-money exist so long, it will sell for five shillings' worth of that money in three years from this day. I may be mistaken; but do not appearances back my opinion? and can any one contemplate the prospect before us without dreading the idea of being regarded as the author, or in part the author, of the approaching troubles and calamities? The fault would, most assuredly, not be fairly imputable to you: but, fair or foul, it would be imputed to whomsoever should hold the helm at the time; and your principal accuser would

not fail to lay all the sins of his system upon you. If, indeed, you were now to take the helm from his hands, and, as I have frequently taken the liberty to suggest to you, were to begin your administration, not with anything vengeful or harsh against him, but with a strict inquiry into, and an ample and simple exposition of, the affairs of the nation; then, indeed, you would have none of the sins of his system to answer for; then you might at once set about the good work of renovating the spirit of the nation; then should I hope once more to see my country great and glorious; then should I be cheered with the prospect of being able to say to my sons, "I leave England to you as I found it, do you do the same by your children." This, speaking of sublunary things, I can, as I often have to you, most sincerely declare to be the first wish of my heart, and the very thought of it now almost brings tears of joy from my eyes as the boys are playing round the table. *Third*, this coalition administration would hang together for some considerable time; suppose for two, or three, or four years. It might, and would, excite confidence abroad, if not counteracted by events and opinions at home. But here, let affairs abroad go almost how they will, events are rolling on towards the disgrace and overthrow of Mr. Pitt's system; and, as to changing the system while he is Minister, the thing is quite out of the question. You would, then, at the very best, be fighting against time. You might retard the hour of convulsion; but, in my opinion, would only render it more dreadful when it came. The popular voice, which by such a coalition with Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox would lose, would be soon raised in favour of some other. At first, indeed, there would be a dead calm amongst all classes. But events would again set the waves in motion; and, as the coalition would have utterly discredited the Foxites, and, along with them and you, the Aristocracy also, the people, when again put in motion, as they would be by events, would

seek new leaders : new leaders would not be wanting ; the very refuse amongst politicians would then become the favourites of the people : a new race of uncouth but bold orators and statesmen would step forward, and would triumph over you all, and the only question with one is whether they would not triumph over the *monarchy* also. God knows, whether in spite of everything, this must not at last be the case ; but, if we mean to endeavour to prevent it, or to prevent the subjugation of the country, I am fully persuaded that a Ministry such as the Ministers' people are recommending is the very thing that will completely defeat our efforts. All *personal* considerations I have left out of sight. The circumstance of Mr. Fox's coming, at last, under Mr. Pitt, and that, too, without the possibility of doing anything but assist in prolonging the system which he has always condemned ! And yourself too ! But I have already made this letter long enough ; and therefore I conclude with my most hearty prayer, that you may all keep steadily on till you obtain the sole possession of that power, which, in your hands, might rescue us from our dangers and our disgrace. I am afraid you have left town.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, Sunday [December 9, 1804].

As everything in which my happiness is deeply concerned is, I know, of some importance in your mind, I take the liberty to inform you that Mrs. Cobbett has this morning added another to the long list of boys that it is my pride and my duty to preserve and cherish. Both mother and son are very well. To-morrow I shall beg you to frank three letters for me. If they are beyond your number, I hope you will not hesitate a moment to

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 149-51.

say so ; for they will be letters of very little importance. I beg leave to present my humble respects to Mrs. Windham.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, December 28, 1804.

Seeing how punctual I always am in availing myself of the liberty you are pleased to give me of waiting on you, it is hardly necessary for me to say that there has been a sufficient cause to prevent me from waiting on you agreeably to the last appointment. The young child *died* that evening, and is to be buried to-morrow. "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord!" But this is not always sufficiently impressed on our minds, especially when we are already in a state of debility ; and it has required all the powers of soothing and persuading that I possess, together with all the mighty confidence of the person to be soothed and persuaded, to prevent this event from having a dangerous effect on Mrs. Cobbett. She is now, however, thank God, tranquil in mind and pretty stout in body. The anxiety and watching that this has occasioned, together with the task of breaking the matter to the children, and of answering their simple though cutting inquiries, have so engrossed my mind, so completely withdrawn it from public matters, that I have written but very little, and that little, I dare say, feebly and confusedly enough. I have, however, attempted to draw the outline of what I would have said about the new junction ; and, as far as I have gone, have taken care to give the impression that I think the public ought to receive from it. The first thing is to show that the parties conjoining naturally belong to one another, and that the leading principle of them and their adherents

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 521.

is to perpetuate their power, their possession of the honours and emoluments of the state: 2nd, that the junction is a proof of the weakness of the present incumbent: 3rd, that it is what the Opposition ought above all things to desire. An *Addingtonian* called here to-day (by no means a steed of high blood), yet he talked of "this glorious occasion to trample upon Pitt"!!! They view the event as a complete victory; and they are preparing to assume an air and a tone accordingly. The *Times*, which is the paper of Mr. Addington and Lord Hawkesbury, talks of the "*vigour* that will *now* be felt in public measures"; while the *Sun*, which is the paper of Rose and Long, represents the reconciliation as an act of "*magnanimity* on the part of Mr. Pitt," and seems to say, that the intention is to confer, as a *grace* from Mr. Pitt, some reward upon A. for his service "*in the chair*"! This is loudly complained of by the *Times*, where the writers in the *Sun* are called "reptiles" for their malignity towards Mr. Addington. There will be sad heart-burnings amongst the underlings on both sides; but I think nothing will ever separate the principals again. Amongst all of them C. is certainly the least to be envied! And D., too, who is now anti-catholic! He who wrote a pamphlet to show that poor A. ought to be *impeached*! I am really at a loss to know what they will say, or how they will look. For the honour of human nature, I should hope that a considerable number of them will keep out of sight, except it be on muster-days. My *Addingtonian* told me that his chieftain would not be *peered*; that he was resolved to stay below; and that his reason was, that his Majesty should not be left without the power of again having recourse to him as Prime Minister, if Mr. Pitt should prove *refractory*. I do not think there is much fear of this; for your Mr. Pitts, when they are once well pulled down, are not apt to rise again. I should think that the Northern swarm must evacuate some of their horrid cells to make

room for the newcomers. This will go hard; but it must, I should think, be submitted to. Rose will hardly be able to hold where he is; William Dundas will, probably, be called on to march; and, oh! poor C. ! must he give up Tierney? That gentleman, I mean C., will now begin to think that ambition is not to be gratified by low acts, except in certain cases.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 156-7.

CHAPTER IX

BOTLEY

Cobbett's dislike for London life—His desire for a country home—John Wright—Cobbett finds a home at Botley—His house and grounds—His plans for the future—His love of gardening and farming—Purchases more farms—Personal description of Cobbett—Cobbett in private life—His hospitality—His kindness to his dependents—He encourages rural sports—His quarrels with "the Botley Parson"—His attitude towards the system of tithes—His theory of the education of children, expressed in a letter to Everard Tunno—Happiness first to be secured, and then health—His children's garden—Teaching by example and reward and trust—Book-learning—The essential studies—Moral precepts.

WHEN Cobbett returned from the United States, he settled in London, at No. 15 Duke Street, Westminster, not because life in a city had any attraction for him—indeed, he felt "cribbed, cabined, and confined" in such an environment—but because there alone could he as a journalist make a start on the road that he hoped would lead to the amassing of a competence for his wife and family. Within the short space of three years, however, he had made for himself an assured income—the *Political Register* in 1805 had already a steady circulation of four thousand copies a week—and he then decided to migrate to the country. He had indeed nothing to keep him in London, for the bookselling business in Pall Mall had been disposed of in March 1803 when John Morgan returned to the United States. Cobbett could, of course,

write his articles as easily in the country as in town, and for work that must be done on the spot in connection with the *Political Register* and other publications there was his factotum, John Wright. In 1802 Wright had failed in business as a publisher and bookseller, and shortly after this he became Cobbett's right-hand man. He took rooms over a tailor's shop at No. 5 Panton Square, Westminster, and there, when he had disposed of his house in Duke Street, Cobbett also used to put up when he came to the metropolis. Wright not only saw the *Political Register* through the press and took charge of the publication of that periodical, but he was also entrusted with the editing of the *Parliamentary History*, of which the first volume appeared three years later. In fact, he practically controlled all Cobbett's ventures, even the *State Trials*, which were started in 1809, although the actual editing of this series was done by Thomas Bayly Howell, with whose name, rather than that of Cobbett, they are now usually associated.

When Cobbett was staying in 1804 with Lord Henry Stuart at Alresford, he wandered over Hampshire, and at last found a suitable place for himself near Botley, a village about five-and-a-half miles from Southampton. There was a house, and attached to it four farms, Fairthorn and Raglington, and two other and smaller ones, all lying together, within a mile of the village. The house stood on a hill, and was high, massive, red, and square, and it had a lawn and gardens sweeping down to the Bursledon River, which divided his property from that of his friend, the squire of the place. The little estate was beautifully situated, and, Miss Mitford thought, might have been shown to a foreigner as a specimen of the richest and loveliest English scenery.

William Cobbett to John Wright

BOTLEY, August 1805.

Botley is the most delightful village in the world. It has everything, in a village, that I love, and none of the things I hate. It is in a valley; the soil is rich, thick-set with wood; the farms are small, the cottages neat; it has neither workhouse nor barber nor attorney nor justice of the peace, and, though last not least, it has no volunteers. There is no justice within six miles of us, and the barber comes three miles once a week to shave and cut hair! "Would I were poetical," I would write a poem in praise of Botley.¹

Exactly when Cobbett took possession of his new home is not quite clear, but there is a letter dated therefrom on September 24, 1805. Apparently he set to work without delay to get the place in order, but this was a matter of time, for his idea of order was very thorough. "I have got my trees planted, and shall have done completely in one week from this day," he wrote to John Wright, on November 4, 1805. "Excuse all this gardening plague, and look forward to the time when you are to find compensation in the fruit."² It was not until the end of the year, however, that his plans of living were settled.

William Cobbett to John Wright

BOTLEY, Sunday, December 1, 1805.

Mrs. Cobbett and I have now fixed upon our plan and scale of living, and we mean to carry it into effect directly. We intend to live here from the first of May to the Queen's birthday in every year; to take a lodging in town for the three winter months; to put 3 of the

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 177.² *Ibid.*, 22906, f. 97.

children to school almost immediately; and, of course, to get rid of the house and furniture in Duke Street as soon as I can get to town and put up the curtains so as to make the House look neat and handsome. Of this you are to speak to *nobody*. I tell it you for your own information, and that you may be thinking of a place for a *store-house*. Suppose a winter lodging for 13 weeks to cost us 3 guineas a week; that makes 40 pounds. Suppose my coach-hire to cost 20 pounds a year (*ten* trips between London and Alton); that makes £60. Suppose £20 a year for a store-room (it will not be above half that); that makes £80 a year. Very well; the house rent, the taxes, the water-duty, and the interest of money upon goods and wear and tear of goods in Duke Street (besides the interest upon what I paid for the house) amounts to more than 240 pounds a year. The garden stuff is worth 25 pounds a year, exclusive of fruit of all sorts. The milk will not cost us above a third part of what it costs in town; bread is *one-ninth* cheaper (an immense sum in the year), the meat about an 8th cheaper. In short, I am fully convinced that, exclusive of the consideration of *health*, and taking into the account *postage, &c., &c.*, attendant upon this distant situation, that the *saving* would be at least 300 pounds a year. Fuel at Botley is little more than *half* the price of fuel in London. So much for that.¹

Cobbett was very happy to be settled in the country. He loved the fresh air and the greater freedom of the life, and, above all, he revelled in the opportunity now vouchsafed to him of indulging in his favourite hobby of farming.

To this taste [for farming], produced in me by a desire to imitate a father whom I ardently loved, and to whose

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 103.

very words I listened with admiration, I owe no small part of my happiness, for a greater proportion of which very few men ever had to be grateful to God. These pursuits, innocent in themselves, instructive in their very nature, and always tending to preserve health, have been a constant, a never-failing source of recreation to me; and, which I count amongst the greatest of their benefits and blessings, they have always, in my house, supplied the place of the card-table, the dice-box, the chess-board, and the lounging bottle. Time never hangs on the hands of him who delights in these pursuits, and who has books on the subjects to read.¹

Cobbett delighted in his farm and garden, and was up and at work in them at daybreak. "Few persons excelled him in the management of vegetables, fruit, and flowers," Miss Mitford has recorded. "His green Indian corn—his Carolina beans—his water-melons could hardly have been excelled at New York. His wall-fruit was equally splendid, and, much as flowers have been studied since that day, I never saw a more glowing or a more fragrant autumn garden than that at Botley, with its pyramids of hollyhocks, and its masses of china-asters, of cloves, of mignonette, and of variegated geranium."² Cobbett, though greatly occupied with his weekly article for the *Political Register* and with other literary work, always found time to devote to outdoor labour, and he superintended even the most minor operations both in the garden and on the farms, mowing his own lawn in the early morning, and excelling his gardener, Robinson, the best mower, except himself, in the parish, at that fatiguing work.³ He was always planning improvements. He

¹ *A Year's Residence in the United States*, par. 9.

² *Recollections of a Literary Life* (ed. 1885), p. 199.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

built a portico to the house, and he made a turnpike road from Gosport to Winchester, through Botley, to the great joy of his eldest daughter, who thought that it would "make this place more lively." Subsequently he increased his holding.

William Cobbett to Lieutenant Reid

BOTLEY, May 22, 1810.

. . . I have, this very day, closed the bargain for an estate as large as all I now possess; one-half of the parish of Durley. Three fine farms, two small ones, and some detached parcels of property, some in house and some in land, including a fine chalk-pit, and having as much timber upon it as I already have. The leases of the farms will be out in 4 years' time. Some of the land is let at will.¹

I got to Botley [from Titchfield, seven miles distant] about nine o'clock, having stopped two or three times to look about me as I went along (he wrote in August 1823); for I had in the first place to ride, for about three miles of my road, upon a turnpike-road of which I was the projector and, indeed, the maker. In the next place I had to ride, for something better than half a mile of my way, along between fields and coppices that were mine, until they came into the hands of the mortgagee, and by the side of cottages of my own building.²

A personal description of Cobbett at this time is, happily, extant. "There was something of Dandie Dinmont about him, with his unfailing good-humour and good spirits—his heartiness, his love of field sports, and his liking for a foray. He was a tall, stout man, fair,

¹ The Cobbett MSS.

² *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), i. 237.

and sunburnt, with a bright smile, and an air compounded of the soldier and the farmer, to which his habit of wearing an eternal red waistcoat contributed not a little. He was, I think, the most athletic and vigorous person that I have ever known." Thus Miss Mitford,¹ whose account is supplemented by John O'Connell. "He was habited, as I recollect, in a kind of pepper-and-salt coloured garb, in fashion something between that of a Quaker and of a comfortable farmer; and wore rather a broad-brimmed white hat, a little on one side, and thrown back, so as to give the fullest view of his shrewd though bluff countenance and his keen cold-looking eye."²

The truculence, that was a marked feature of Cobbett in his public career, dropped from him in private life, when, according to all accounts, he was an exceedingly pleasant companion. As Leslie Stephen put it, the domestic Cobbett is invariably charming. In his house, indeed, he rarely talked politics before a general company, and when a visitor introduced the subject, the host would always turn the conversation as quickly as possible. He was an hospitable soul, and was never more happy than when he was entertaining. "From the manner in which Cobbett wrote his *Register*, one might have supposed that he lived as an English yeoman, eating a leg of mutton, a dish of bacon and beans, and drinking a glass of home-brewed ale," so runs an anonymous account of the author-politician at home. "I know not how this may have been on ordinary days; but this I can state, that when Cobbett entertained, he did so in good style, sensibly and solidly. There was on the table, and well-served, every-

¹ *Recollections of a Literary Life* (ed. 1880), p. 200.

² *Recollections and Experiences*, i. 2.

thing that any man of wholesome appetite in the station of a gentleman or a gentleman-farmer could require—a good soup, a good fish, a good roast, and wholesome vegetables. I never saw a finer baron of beef at any nobleman's county ball at Christmas time than I have seen at Cobbett's table, and he seemed to have a peculiar pleasure and pride in standing up before it, a large carving-knife and fork in hand, ready to give a prime cut. He drank pretty freely of ale out of a large tankard." The ale, however, was not home-brewed; and the host provided wine for his guests.

When Miss Mitford visited Cobbett, she found the house filled almost to overflowing. Lord Cochrane was there, with his ship's surgeon, and two literary men from London. This was the house-party, but there was a constant flow of visitors for the hour or for the day, and the visitors were of all ranks, from the Earl and his Countess to the farmer and his dame. "The house had room for all, and the hearts of the owners would have had room for three times the number," Miss Mitford has written. "I never saw hospitality more genuine, more simple, or more thoroughly successful in the great end of hospitality, the putting everybody completely at ease. There was not the slightest attempt at finery, or display, or gentility. They called it a farm-house, and everything was in accordance with the largest ideas of a great English yeoman of the old time. Everything was excellent, everything abundant, all served with the greatest nicety by trim waiting-damsels; and everything went on with such quiet regularity, that of the large circle of guests not one could find himself in the way."¹

To his servants Cobbett was always kind and invari-

¹ *Recollections of a Literary Life* (ed. 1883), p. 200.

ably just. "My house was always open to give them victuals and drink whenever they happened to come to it, and to supply them with little things necessary to them in case of illness," he said; "and in case of illness their wages always went on just as if they had been well." He was willing to do all in his power for them, but, of course, he expected them to work hard, and he had scant sympathy with those who tried to shirk their duty. Some of his political opponents stated that he was "the oppressor of his miserable dependents," and it gave him particular pleasure to be able to refute this accusation, not in general terms, but with definite proofs.

My people, though *never* hired but by the week, lived with me for years; and, indeed, no man that I recollect ever quitted me by choice. Robinson, you know, was my gardener for years; Bob Hammond, who worked for me occasionally, has come up, three summers, to work for me at Kensington; Mr. Dean, who became my bailiff, lived in one of my cottages as long as the cottage was mine, has since kept my shop in London, is now a newsman in London, was with me through my tour in the counties last spring, is, *this very day*, managing my affairs at Barn-Elm in Surrey, and is become, as you know, a man of considerable property, which, as I know, is the just reward of his industry and fidelity.¹

These facts were conclusive, but there is other and independent testimony to show the terms on which master and men lived. Alexander Somerville has related how one of Cobbett's servants told him that "he would never wish to serve a better master";² while Sir Richard

¹ *Two-penny Trash*, October 1, 1830: "To the Industrious Classes at Botley."

² *The Whistler on the Plough*.

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HENRY HUNT ESQ. M.P. FOR PRESTON.

Engraved by William L. Cutler & Son, 25, Edgewood Hill.

HENRY HUNT

Phillips, who was more than once at Botley, put it on record that he had "never anywhere seen such excellent cottages, gardens, and other comforts appropriated to the labouring classes as those which Cobbett erected and laid out on his estate."¹ Henry Hunt, too, bore testimony to the fact that Cobbett was "one of the kindest, the best, and the most considerate masters" that he ever knew. This tribute to Cobbett as a master Hunt could not apply to Mrs. Cobbett as a mistress. He declared that while for years and years together the same tenant occupied the same cottage, the same carter drove the same team, the same ploughman held the same team, the same thrasher occupied, the same shepherd attended the flock, on the other hand, he did not remember ever going to Botley twice and seeing the same indoor servants, and those he did see were, in his opinion, "not always the best mannered in the world." Mrs. Cobbett, he added, was what was called amongst the gossips "unfortunate" in getting maid-servants: "they seldom suited long together." This is not surprising, for the art of managing servants is a gift not often vouchsafed to women brought up in a sphere where servants are not employed.²

It was in the interests of the villagers that Cobbett encouraged rural sports, and that he organised that single-stick contest at Botley to which he referred in his letters to William Windham.³ Miss Mitford was staying with the Cobbetts when it took place, and she has related an amusing story of a Mrs. Blamire who told Cobbett that in her opinion such sport was barbarous. "In my life I

¹ *Public Characters of all Nations.*

² Hunt, *Memoirs*, iii. 21.

³ See the letter dated October 6, 1805 (pp. 284-6 of this work).

never saw two people in a greater passion," Miss Mitford wrote. "Each was thoroughly persuaded of being in the right; either would have gone to the stake upon it, and of course the longer they argued the more determined became their conviction. They said all manner of uncivil things; they called each other very unpretty names; she got very near to saying, 'Sir, you're a savage'; he did say, 'Ma'am, you're a fine lady'; they talked, both at once, until they could talk no longer; and I have always considered it as one of the greatest pieces of Christian forgiveness that I ever met with when Mr. Cobbett, after they had both cooled down a little, invited Mrs. Blamire to dine at his house the next day. She, less charitable, declined the invitation, and we parted." Miss Mitford's father had once paid his addresses to Mrs. Blamire, and she might have been the author's stepmother. Cobbett, remembering this when the lady had gone, made no reference to the dispute, save to remark to Miss Mitford with a twinkle in his eyes: "She'd have been the death of you."¹

With most of his neighbours at Botley, Cobbett was friendly, but with the Rector of Botley, the Rev. Richard Baker, he was at open enmity. Baker was a strong anti-reform politician, and delivered political sermons so distasteful to Cobbett that the latter declared that "he longed to horsewhip him in the pulpit for talking such nonsense"—which, as the Rev. Pitt Cobbett says, is at least evidence that Cobbett attended the church services.²

The people in the village have told me some most ridiculous stories, about his [Baker] having been hoaxed in London (Cobbett related in later days). It seems that

¹ *Recollections of a Literary Life* (ed. 1833), p. 202.

² *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), i. 65 n.

somebody danced him up from Botley to London, by telling him that a legacy had been left him, or some such story. Up went the parson on horseback, being in too great a hurry to run the risk of coach. The hoaxers, it appears, got him to some hotel, and there set upon him a whole tribe of applicants, wet-nurses, dry-nurses, lawyers with deeds of conveyance for borrowed money, curates in want of churches, coffin-makers, travelling companions, ladies'-maids, dealers in Yorkshire hams, Newcastle coal, and dealers in dried night-soil at Islington. In short, if I am rightly informed, they kept the parson in town for several days, bothering him three parts out of his senses, compelled him to escape, as it were from a fire; and then, when he got home, he found the village posted all over with handbills giving an account of his adventure, under the pretext of offering £500 as a reward for a discovery of the hoaxers! The good of it was, the parson ascribed his disgrace to *me*, and they say that he perseveres to this hour in accusing me of it. Upon my word, I had nothing to do with the matter.¹

It was, indeed, extremely unlikely that any clergyman would be on friendly terms with Cobbett, for the latter was an inveterate opponent of the system of tithes. In those days there was frequently trouble in the matter between the parson and his parishioners, and Baker seems to have made himself particularly obnoxious, as a man could do when a farmer incurred a penalty for not reporting to the clergy that he had hops growing. "There is a fellow at Botley who would soon let you know that your fine apple-trees do not belong to you," Cobbett during his second visit to the United States told the Americans, who with difficulty could be brought to believe that he was not romancing. "He would have his nose in your

¹ *Rural Rides* (ed. Pitt Cobbett), i. 238.

sheep-fold, your calf-pens, your milk-pails, your sow-bed, if not in the sow herself. Your girls would have no occasion to hunt out the hen's nest; he would do that for you." It was one of his aims to have payment of the clergy by tithes discontinued, and in his writings he frequently reverted to the subject.

But, my Botley neighbours, you will exclaim, "No tithes! Why, then, there can be no churches and no parsons! The people must know nothing of God or devil, and must all go to hell!" By no means, my friends. There are plenty of churches. No less than three Episcopal (or English) churches; three Presbyterian churches; three Lutheran churches; one or two Quaker meeting-houses; and two Methodist places—all within six miles of the spot where I am sitting. And these, mind, not poor shabby churches, but each of them larger, and better built, and far handsomer than Botley church, with the churchyards all kept in the neatest order, with a head-stone to almost every grave. As to the Quaker meeting-house, it would take Botley church into its belly, if you were first to knock off the steeple. Oh no! Tithe are not necessary to promote religion. When our parsons, such as Baker, talk about religion or the church being in danger, they mean that the tithes are in danger. They mean that they are in danger of being compelled to work for their bread. This is what they mean. You remember that, at our last meeting at Winchester, they proposed for us to tell the Prince Regent that we should support the church. I moved to leave out the word *church* and to insert the word *tithes*, for, as there were many Presbyterians and other dissenters, they could not, with clear conscience, pledge themselves to support the church. This made them furious. It was lifting up the mask; and the parsons were enraged beyond measure.

Oh no! Tithes do not mean religion. Religion means a reverence for God. And what has this to do with tithes? Why cannot you reverence your God without Baker, and his wife and children, eating up a tenth part of the corn, and milk, and eggs, and lambs, and pigs, and calves that are produced in Botley parish? The parsons in this country are supported by those who choose to employ them. A man belongs to what congregation he pleases.

"Your religion seems to be altogether *political*," said a parson to Cobbett, who promptly retorted: "Very much so, indeed; and well it may—since I have been furnished *with a creed which makes part of an act of Parliament.*"

When I see the good and kind people here going to church, to listen to some decent man of good moral character and of sober, quiet life, I always think of you (so runs a passage in a letter to his old Hampshire neighbours, written when he was in America in 1817, and printed in the *Register*). You are just the same sort of people as they are here; but what a difference in the clergyman! What a difference between the sober, sedate, friendly man, who preaches to one of these congregations, and the greedy, chattering, lying, backbiting, mischief-making, everlasting plague that you go to hear, or stay away from church. Parsons always put me in mind of the magpie.

"The magpie, bird of chatt'ring fame,
Whose tongue and hue bespeak his name:
The first, a squalling, clam'rous clack;
The last, made up of white and black;
Feeder alike on flesh and corn;
Greedy alike at eve and morn;
Of all the birds, the prying pest
Must needs be parson o'er the rest."

Thus I began a fable when I lived at Botley. I have

forgotten the rest of it. It will please you to hear that there are no magpies in America ; but it will please you still more to hear that no men that resemble them are parsons here. I have sometimes been half tempted to believe that the magpie first suggested to tyrants the idea of having a tithe-eating parson. The magpie devours the corn and grain—so does the parson. The magpie takes the wool from the sheep's back—so does the parson. The magpie devours alike the young animals and the eggs—so does the parson. The magpie's clack is everlastingly going—so is the parson's. The magpie repeats by rote words that are taught it—so does the parson. The magpie is always skipping, and hopping, and peeping into other nests—so is the parson. The magpie's colour is partly black and partly white—so is the parson's. The magpie's greediness, impudence, and cruelty are proverbial—so are those of the parson. I was saying to a farmer the other day that, if the borough-mongers had a mind to ruin America, they would another time send over five or six good large flocks of magpies, instead of five or six of their armies ; but, upon second thoughts, they would do the thing far more effectually by sending over five or six flocks of their parsons, and getting the people to receive them and cherish them as the bulwark of religion.

When Cobbett was settled at Botley he found one of his principal interests in life in conducting the education of his children. Education was, indeed, one of the subjects that were very near to his heart, and his ideas on that, as on most things, differed widely from the notions generally accepted in his day.

William Cobbett to Everard Tunno

[Undated.]

By *Education*, in the true sense of the word, is meant *breeding up*, taken in all its parts ; and not merely *book-*

knowledge, which, after all, comprises but a very small part of the *making of a man*. In this letter, however, I shall have to confine myself principally to that part of education which consists of the acquirement of knowledge from books or from teachers, in the usual way, at schools or colleges.

When we intend a young horse for a coach or a gig, we begin by putting him into a plough or a break, and not by putting a saddle upon his back. If we wish to have a real, good, perfect nag, we take special care not to initiate him in the art and mystery of tugging at the collar. If we would have a nag to amble well, we take care never to let him trot; if we wish him to be a trotter, we never suffer him to amble. The boy that we intend to teach to make shoes we never set to tailoring. The weaver, so surprisingly expert with his shuttle, would miss the head of a nail three times out of four, if you were to put him at the carpenter's work; and the carpenter, who will drive you a nail in the dark, would, by daylight, tear a loom to pieces at his first attempt to weave.

If this mode of proceeding has been pointed out to us by nature; if the interests and wants of mankind, in all ages, have shown that perfection is attained by the confining of the limbs, or the mind, to particular lines of exertion, or branches of study, why should any of [us] suppose that our sons are to be made perfect in any department of knowledge, any course of mental exertion, by a mode precisely the opposite?

These observations have occurred to me at the outset from the impression left on my mind after reading the Preceptor's letter. According to that letter, your son was to be *taught everything*. Natural Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Astronomy, Geography, Mathematics, Mechanics, History, Law, Political Economy, besides Greek, Latin, and French, and, as the showmen say, many other things too tedious to mention, Physic and

Divinity, Drawing and Music, perhaps making part of the collection. Almost every hour of his day was to have its peculiar department and its particular preceptor. The mornings were to be spent amongst the wheels and valves of machines, and his evenings amongst the signs of the zodiac.

I allow that this is the usual course of education in the Schools; and here it is that we see such multitudes of men, in *public life* too, who know a *little of everything* and *much of nothing*; who shine at a tea or dinner-table and who are silent everywhere else. Look at the men who have shone at the Bar or on the Bench. Look at the eminent Physicians, Mathematicians, Historians, Politicians; you will find that their attainments and their powers, their eminence, their fame, have arisen from their having, either from necessity or strong predilection, confined themselves almost wholly to their particular lines: from their having constantly kept one main object in view, leaving other branches of knowledge to fill in, or not, as chance might determine. Parsons, indeed, are less pertinacious in this abhorrence, which they safely may, because they are aided by *divine inspiration* (at least so they say, and upon their *oaths*, too). But, the Lawyer, or the Physician, who must look to his knowledge and talents, in his profession, for his fees, that is to say, for his bread as well as his fame, takes special care to study *Law*, or *Physic*; or, if he does not, he passes through life wholly unknown.

If, Sir, you intended your son for *Parson*, I should say, let him learn what his numerous preceptors choose to teach him, seeing that inspiration, aided by your purse, would, to a dead certainty, put him, in a very few years, in possession of a good benefice for life. But it being your wish, your very natural and very laudable wish; it being the desire now nearest your heart to see your son an *English gentleman*, occupying in a becoming manner the place which a prudent and just distribu-

tion of your wealth may be reasonably supposed to allot him in the country; it being your desire that this, your only son, should not spend his days merely in consuming food or raiment; it being your desire that he should possess ability and inclination to rise above that crowd, that immense mob, of wealthy men whose names are never heard by the nation except in conjunction with the names of their huntsmen, their grooms, or with those of some singer or play-actor; it being your desire that he should not be huddled and elbowed along through life as a member of the populous *Aye* and *No* congregation, it appears to me that the system of education traced out in the Preceptor's letter is the best that human invention could have fallen on to defeat that rational and paternal desire.

You will bid me remember that I am assailing the mode of education pursued in all our great schools and universities, whence come nine-tenths of the men who fill the seats of the Legislation. And, in return, give me leave to request you to look at the persons who fill those seats. Look at the *thousand* men who sit upon those two sets of Benches; and, if you find *one man out of a hundred*, leaving out the *Lawyers*, who is at all *known to the public* from any effect of his *knowledge or labour*, I will then say that your son has, at least, put his' name into a lottery pretty nearly as good as that of Biche's. Look at the *thousand*, and, after reflecting, tell me seriously whether you believe that the first thousand men (capable of reading and writing), stopped in their way along Bishopsgate Street, would not possess more useful knowledge and make more capable legislators. A *thousand* men! a thousand men, comprizing all that is most able amongst the Nobility and Gentry of this populous, rich, and well-informed nation! Why, they ought to present a mass of knowledge and of eloquence to dazzle the whole world! Instead of this, what do you see? a score of *Lawyers*, and half a score of *Ministers* (who,

by the by, for the greater part are Lawyers too) leading by the nose 980 poor, silent, insignificant persons, who, if any of them ever attempt to open their lips, only do it to excite the ridicule, or compassion, of their hearers, and whose stammering effusions are only rendered not perfectly unintelligible to the public by the friendly aid, or forbearance, of a reporter, paid at the rate of 4 or 5 guineas a week.

Yet these lads, gentlemen, have all been at college. They have all worn black gowns and trencher caps. They have all been taught all sorts of sciences. They have all been taught *Logic* and *Rhetorick*. They have all at their tongues' end the majors and minors of propositions, and can talk as learnedly about premises and conclusions and about exordiums and perorations as if they were the most able orators. The truth is, their heads are so stuffed with *words* that there is no room for *ideas*; they have been taught to pay so much attention to the *art* of reasoning and of speaking, that their minds are deprived of their *natural bent* and *force*, in like manner as their legs would never have sustained their bodies if they had always been compelled to make use of crutches. Rules are of use, and of great use, in making men great reasoners, great orators, or great in anything. And so are the rules by which the young horse is brought to his paces. But, in the case of the horse, the rules are not applied till the limbs have attained their full strength; whereas, in the case of the boy at school, the rules come and enchain the mind in its [MS. illegible] of native feebleness. Besides this, the College education is generally carried on by *pedants*; by persons secluded from the world; by a species of monks; or men effeminate and narrow-minded from the very nature of their calling. We are creatures of imitation: and it is impossible but the pupil shd. imbibe something of the character, and the cast of mind, of the preceptor.

There is enough, you will say, in the way of *finding*

fault. Let me hear what you have to recommend. You shall, my dear Sir, and with that frankness with which your good sense emboldens me to speak.

Returning, then, to the main position, which I wish to impress upon your mind, namely, that to rear up the mind in vigour the objects of acquirement must not be very *numerous* and especially *not heterogeneous*; taking this position to have [been] proved to your satisfaction; and supposing that you wish to see Mr. E. Tunno take his fair share in those political discussions, deliberations, and other public proceedings which, as you must clearly see, are the real business of a gentleman's life in a state of society like that of England, I would recommend that he shd. be induced by every possible encouragement to turn his mind towards studies and pursuits calculated to qualify him for acting such a part, and to leave, for a while at least, the Mechanics to use their own levers and the Astronomers to calculate eclipses.

Precisely where he shd. begin, or where *end*, is not so easy to point out. It is a *mass of knowledge* that he wants to acquire, and the *aptitude of applying that knowledge to the cases daily and hourly arising before him.* He has, I daresay, been taught a sufficiency of Geography to know enough of the situation, positive and relative, of the different states of the world. Ancient history he has read, I daresay, and the *common* history of England. But there is *another* history of England, which is of more consequence to him than all other studies in the world. I mean the history of its *laws* and of its *political, civil and ecclesiastical state.* This is to be gathered not from any one work. But *The Use and Abuse of Parliaments*, by Ralph; Blackstone's *Commentaries*; *Plurality of Livings Indefensible*, by Dr. Hawes; Oldfield's *History of Boroughs*, lately published; Belsham's *History of the Reign of George the Third*; Sir Robert Filmer's *Works*; Algernon Sidney's *Works*. These books, with the Parliamentary Debates, the Statutes at large, Gant's *Law Dictionary*

and the State Trials on his table, and with a resolution in himself *to refer to them and read them as he proceeds*, will put him in possession of a stock of knowledge useful to him every day of his life. He will here see how our government, in state and church, arose, and how they have proceeded onward to be what they now are. He will here see *how there came to be* kings and nobles and priests and manors and parishes and privileges and rights.

Having thus a full knowledge of the nature of the raw material out of which the institutions of England have been made, he will, with so much ease and pleasure, come to history of modern events and contests.

The two revolutions of France and America ought each to become a separate course of reading; and let me beg of you to enjoin on him to read *both sides*. All *prejudices* are not only foolish in themselves, but mischievous in their consequences. He shd. read, with great attention, the *constitutions* and the *Laws* of America. And, while he is so doing, or at the close, accounts of the population and other objects of political economy in that country, now becoming of so much importance in the world. He should do the same with regard to France, and attend particularly to her *Laws* and study the manner in which the people are affected by those laws.

After this come Books on the Law of Nations; Treaties; and the works which have been published as to particular disputes, especially where a contested point has been a ground of war.

Statistical works are of use, as relating to other countries; but, as to population and resources of England, he must collect all his facts from official documents, and, with these before him, he should read carefully and slowly some good works upon *political economy*, which is at once the most intricate and most important of all the subjects that can present itself to, and the best calculated to enlarge, the mind of man. To know the true

causes of the happiness and the misery, of the rise and of the decline, of nations, is in my opinion worth all the other branches of knowledge that man ever possessed. This is the true study of a *gentleman*, whose business it is to care for his country and for mankind, and whose mind ought not to be engrossed with Greek and Latin ; which never, by any *possibility*, can extend the sphere of his usefulness, or tend to give him the smallest consequence in the eyes of the world.

But to *acquire* knowledge—¹

Here, unfortunately, the letter (which probably was never sent) breaks off abruptly, and it is necessary to go to other sources to discover the methods that in Cobbett's opinion were best calculated to enable young people "to acquire knowledge." His chief endeavour before all else was to make his children happy, and so well did he succeed that in 1830 he was able to write that "happy lives they did lead, if ever children did in this whole world."² Health, of course, was the first consideration, and this, under Heaven, was to be secured by living in the country, and by following the old adage of early to bed and early to rise, supported by plain food and plenty of open-air exercise.

Children, and especially boys, will have some out-of-doors pursuits ; and it was my duty to lead them to choose such pursuits as combined future utility with present innocence. Each his flower-bed, little garden, plantation of trees ; rabbits, dogs, asses, horses, pheasants and hares ; hoes, spades, whips, guns ; always some object of lively interest, and as much *earnestness* and *bustle* about the various objects as if our living had solely depended upon them. I made everything give way to

¹ The Cobbett MSS.

² *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 282.

the great object of making their lives happy and innocent. I did not know what they might be in time, or what might be my lot ; but I was resolved not to be the cause of their being unhappy *then*, let what might become of us afterwards.¹

Cobbett never issued commands to his children ; he taught by example and by reward. A confirmed believer in early rising, even in this matter he gave no orders, but the first child who was downstairs in the morning was called "The Lark," and for that day had the honour of sitting at his father's right hand at dinner. Miss Mitford in her *Recollections* states that among other indulgences accorded to the child first downstairs was the pretty privilege of making the nosegays for his mother and any lady visitors that might be in the house. To secure these prizes, to be sure of rising early, the children found out for themselves that they must go early to bed. They were taught by trust to be trustworthy, and by precept to be merciful and humane.

I effected everything without scolding, and even without *command*. My children are a family of *scholars*, each sex its appropriate species of learning ; and I could safely take my oath that I never *ordered* a child of mine, son or daughter, *to look into a book* in my life. My two eldest sons, when about eight years old, were, for the sake of their health, placed for a very short time at a Clergyman's at Micheldever, and my eldest daughter, a little older, at a school a few miles from Botley, to avoid taking them to London in the winter. But, with these exceptions, never had they, while children, *teacher* of any description ; and I never, and nobody else ever, taught any one of them to read, write, or anything else, except

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 283.

in *conversation*; and yet no man was ever more anxious to be the father of a family of clever and learned persons.¹

Cobbett was particularly careful not to overburden the young minds with learning. Childhood, he contended, should be the period of observation, albeit unconscious observation, assisted only by such oral instruction as might be introduced naturally in the course of conversation. Nothing disgusted him so much as exhibitions of precocity on the part of children, and he could not find anything too harsh to say of parents who encouraged and instigated such things. It was, he contended, unjust to the children, who were puffed up by the applause that was the outcome not of appreciation of the youthful effort but of a desire to be agreeable to the parents, and had sooner or later to learn their lesson and find their level.

I was, as I am, of opinion that it is injurious to the mind to press *book-learning* upon it at an *early age*; I always felt pain for poor little things, set up, before "company," to repeat verses, or bits of plays, at six or eight years old. I have sometimes not known which way to look when a mother (and, too often, a father), whom I could not but respect on account of her fondness for her child, has forced the feeble-voiced eighth wonder of the world to stand, with its little hand stretched out, spouting the *soliloquy of Hamlet*, or some such thing. I remember, on one occasion, a little pale-faced creature, only five years old, was brought in, after the *feeding* part of the dinner was over, first to take his regular half-glass of vintner's brewings, commonly called wine, and then to treat us to a display of his wonderful genius. The subject was a speech of a robust and bold youth, in a

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 290.

Scotch play, the title of which I have forgotten, but the speech began with, "My name is Norval : on the Grampian Hills my father fed his flocks. . . ." And this in a voice so weak and distressing as to put me in mind of the plaintive squeaking of little pigs when the sow is lying on them. As we were going home (one of my boys and I), he, after a silence of half a mile perhaps, rode up close to the side of my horse, and said, "Papa, where *be* the *Grampian Hills*?" "Oh," said I, "they are in Scotland ; poor, barren, beggarly places, covered with heath and rushes, ten times as barren as Sherril Heath." "But," said he, "how could that little boy's father feed *his flocks* there, then?" I was ready to tumble off the horse with laughing.¹

In the meantime, and by almost imperceptible degrees, book-learning crept in. Children naturally want to be like their parents and to do what they do, Cobbett pointed out ; and as he was always reading or writing, in the course of time they began to desire to learn to read or write.

You have now arrived at the age of fourteen years without ever having been bidden, or even advised, to look into a book ; and all that you know of reading or of writing you owe to your own unbiassed taste and choice (Cobbett addressed his son James Paul in 1818). But, while you have lived unpersecuted by such importunities, you have had the very great advantage of being bred up under a roof beneath which no cards, no dice, no gaming, no senseless pastime of any description, ever found a place. In the absence of these, books naturally became your companions during some part of your time : you have read and have written, because you saw your elders read and write, just as you have learnt to ride and hunt and shoot ; to dig the beds in the garden, to trim

¹ *Advice to Young Men* (ed. 1837), par. 283.

the flowers and to prune the trees. The healthful exercise and the pleasures, unmixed with fear, which you have derived from these sources, have given you "a sound mind in a sound body," and this, says an English writer, whose works you will by-and-by read, "is the greatest blessing that God can give to man."¹

What Cobbett desired his children to learn he stated in one of his letters to William Windham.

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, December 6, 1805.

. . . My three eldest children I shall now put to school. Spring was the time intended; but this unexpected stoppage here alters the plan. Bishop's Waltham is the place to begin with. My intention is to make the boys fit to *fight* their way through life; for who can be so weak as to imagine that we shall, or, that they will, ever see many days of tranquillity! To write English, to speak French; to read a little Latin, perhaps; to ride, to play at single-stick, and, above all things, to *work at husbandry*, it is my intention to teach them, in all by precept and in the most instances, if please God to spare me, by example. I have seen too many proofs of the inefficacy of riches to the obtaining of happiness and too many instances of the misery to which a dependence upon patronage leads, to think of making them either rich men or pretenders to distinction through favour. They may have minds that will bear them upwards from the humble walk that I have in view; if so, it is well. I shall do nothing to stifle genius; but, if it be not of a stamp to rise of itself, there is no raising it.²

It was not, however, only these qualifications that he desired his children to acquire. He told his son James

¹ *A Grammar of the English Language*, Letter I.

² Add. MSS. 37853, f. 191.

Paul that with English and French at his command he had a resource not only valuable of itself, but a resource of which he could not be deprived by any adverse degree of fortune, and by which he could always earn his bread. It was moral qualities, however, that this father was most anxious to inculcate.

It is the mind that lives ; and the length of life ought to be measured by the number and importance of our ideas, and not by the number of our days. Never, therefore, esteem men merely on account of their riches or their station. Respect goodness, find it where you may. Honour talent wherever you behold it unassociated with vice ; but honour it most when accompanied with exertion, and especially when exerted in the cause of truth and justice ; and, above all things, hold it in honour when it steps forward to protect defenceless innocence against the attacks of powerful guilt.¹

¹ *A Grammar of the English Language*, Letter XXIII.

CHAPTER X

COBBETT'S CORRESPONDENCE (1805)

IT has been mentioned in an earlier chapter that Cobbett on his return to England was hailed as a Tory, but that he broke with Pitt over the Peace of Amiens. At that time he quarrelled with the Government but not the party, but in due course he severed his connection also with the party. He did not, however, throw himself into the outstretched arms of the Whigs; henceforth he regarded all questions, not from the standpoint of a party, but, so far as in him lay, from the point of view of the good of the country; and soon he stood alone against the English Government, as in earlier days he had stood alone against its foes in the United States. There was then no political society pure enough to be able to induce him to become its constant supporter. In the present day, when there is an ever-increasing cry for a business Government, it will be seen that those who contend for this are but echoing the demand that Cobbett set forth for thirty years at all times and in all places. He pretended to hold the extreme doctrine that all public men of his time were corrupt. He did not mean that they could all be bribed—he knew, for instance, that there was not enough money in the world to buy William Windham—but that they worked for the aggrandisement of their party instead of serving the interests of the poor and thereby benefiting their country. The great object of his life was to overthrow the Venetian constitution that

had been imposed upon the country by the Whig oligarchy, and which in spite of all efforts survived until 1832. The rich, he declared, battered upon the poor in the most disgraceful way, and he was at pains to show that a great part of the money raised by taxation was expended in pensions and salaries for sinecures, bestowed upon scions of noble houses and the connections of Ministers. He attacked Lord Melville's administration of the Navy; he attacked the pensioners and the pluralists; he protested against the payment of Pitt's debts and pensions to the junior branches of his family. He was righteously indignant at the publicity accorded to the Duke of Clarence's *liaison* with Mrs. Jordan; and later took a hand against the Duke of York in connection with the disgraceful army scandals exposed by Colonel Wardle.

William Cobbett to William Windham

Monday Morning, January 7, 1805.

Just after I saw you yesterday, I saw R[obson] who had, on Saturday, been with Lord L[iverpool] from whom he learnt the enclosed. I have much more to tell you from this source. The old man and his son are enraged against Mr. P[erceval]. A very little matter would set them in a blaze. The remark from this quarter too, is, "how sadly he *is fallen*." There appeared to be no objection to my stating in print all I was told. To say the truth, I suspect it was told me with that view.

[ENCLOSURE]

1. That my statement relative to Mr. Canning and Lord Hawkesbury is correct as far as it goes; but that Mr. Canning called twice at Lord Hawkesbury's and *was not admitted*. He was admitted the third time. Lord

Hawkesbury was not, and is not, reconciled to him, and still says that he ought to be turned out, but upon *public grounds*.

2. That the *explanation to be given in Parliament* by Mr. Pitt is yet to be given, and is promised. But this is not on Mr. Canning's, but on Mr. Pitt's *own account*, he having said something that displeased Lord Hawkesbury. I think it was in the speech of 18th of June last, where he said there were "*some things* in the foreign department that he disapproved of." This is yet to be unsaid.

3. That Mr. Pitt will be greatly *hampered in the Commons* notwithstanding all he can do.

4. That Addington is to be a peer, he believes; and that Addington has said that Canning ought to be *turned out upon public grounds*; but that, at any rate, he will have *no intercourse* with him.

5. That the *beginning* of the reconciliation was, by a letter from P. to Lord Hawkesbury, *to be shown to Addington*. In consequence of which they met at Ld. H. twice, and the 3rd time at A.'s in the Park of Richmond. That Mr. P. had not, on Saturday last, seen the king *since the reconciliation*; and that the story of shaking hands in the king's presence is a mere invention of the newspapers.

6. That the king, and still more the queen, had long been endeavouring to produce a reconciliation between A. and P., fearing that by their keeping separate, the Opposition and the Prince as regent would soon take the command.

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, February 4, 1805.

. . . There are two views of our force, as considered relatively to that of our enemy, his means and designs, which I think (with great submission) you may take.

Our army, including ordnance and extraordinaries, was estimated at £19,000,000 sterling for the last year. The expense will be found to exceed the estimate. The present year will be greater in expense. But take it at £19,000,000 sterling; and then it is to be observed, that the whole of the department of war in France, as stated by D'Ivernois, including ordnance, and indeed, *everything*, costs only £13,000,000 and about £300,000. And, probably, the expense of that portion of force, *by which we are kept in awe*, does not cost more than £4,000,000. To our *defensive* force, in this view, we must also add the far greater part of our navy, amounting in expense to £12,000,000 a year; while the *whole* of the French marine costs only about £7,000,000. But the material point I wish to call your attention to is this. Our force, such as it now is, is evidently *an expedient for the moment*. We see that the present position of our enemy, and our dangers, have begun with the war, and the general notion is that they will end, or, at least, cease, with the war. Every day we hear people talking, and see the newspapers printing, that the *project* of invading this country is *given up*. Unfortunately for us, the enemy acts upon principles more fixed, upon plans more maturely weighed, upon views more extensive, and upon a policy less transient, than we do. There appeared in the 1st Volume of the *Register*, p. 937, an extract translated from a French pamphlet, published *just after the Peace of Amiens*. I thought the work extremely important, and translated that part of it that I had time to translate. I beseech you to read it. There you will see the principle upon which France is *now* acting. Nothing has she done which is not there chalked out, even to the letter! But I have the pamphlet itself. It is very curious, and, at this time, very interesting. The plan upon which England is to be conquered is most ably laid down. It is full of most interesting matter, as connected with the subject of our defence; and I very much

wish you to see it. If you have not time to call here, I will send it over, upon receiving a line to that effect. The argument it furnishes for forming a stout regular and permanent force is irresistible.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, April 6, 1805.

The bearer will carry Mrs. Windham 2 heads of beautiful Hampshire Broccoli, which I beg her to accept of, none such being to be obtained anywhere else.

In the *Courier*, of the evening before last, there appeared an article upon the subject of Lord Melville's Letter, in which article, after some severe invectives against the conduct of the Opposition, it was said: "Let Lord Spencer and Mr. Windham be asked *what share they had* in obtaining from Lord Melville the advances from the Naval Money. They could certainly give some account of the employment of those advances." This should be kept in memory; for it certainly renders an *active* part the more necessary. Men's suspicions are roused; and it requires great care to prevent their receiving a wrong direction, if it be only for a single hour. To give them such a direction; to weaken their force by extending their limits, will very naturally present itself to those who are now the object of them.

I am rejoiced at the success of Mr. Francis. Success he certainly has obtained; for look at the *numbers* he was able to collect and to hold together! and, Mr. Elliot tells me, that it was owing to a want of a right understanding as to a division that he did not divide 20 more. He has, too, brought out the Directors against the Board of Control; and, if you look at Huddleston's speech, you will there find precisely the statement that was wanted from such authority, namely, that the famous Bill of 1784, which was to *preserve the rights and power*

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 160.

of the East India Company, has, in fact, *reduced them to a mere cypher!* This is exactly what you expressed your wish to have well pointed out by me. Huddleston will give us his speech written out, if you will ask Mr. Francis to get him to do it. And I take the liberty to beg you to mention it to Mr. Francis. This is a most important point. *India* must now become a subject of deep interest. Well managed, it will run collaterally with the tenth report, and will be a powerful aid to it. Before the end of the session the India Budget must come out; and then this declaration of Huddleston will count well. It is, to be sure, a famous confirmation of all that you said in 1784! It has required 20 years to make the discovery! It seems that the Pitt system of deception is at an end. It is somewhat like a set of teeth. The enamel is worn off; and, all at once, we see the different parts rotten and dropping to pieces. Lord Folkestone says it is like an old bawd; as long as she can keep her skin whole she looks hale and florid; but that once broken, though but by the scratch of a pin, and all the virus is instantly set in motion; she soon becomes one general ulcer, and expires a rotten and disgusting carcase.

To-day I have been honoured with a letter from my friend Dillon, who is at Ditchley Park, and who requests me to send him Pitt's speech (at the time of his resignation) relative to the Catholic Question, *thanking me*, at the same time, for the part I have taken relative to that question. Taking this as a broad indication of a desire on his part to return from the error of his ways, I have lost no time in writing to him; and I have expressed my deep regret at perceiving that it is not his intention to be in town on *Monday next*, which, not to make a profane allusion, I have desired him to remember, will be the political day of judgment; the sheep begin then to be separated from the goats, the former to be regarded as the friends of justice and their country, and

the latter to be marked out for everlasting reprobation and exclusion. I have told him that not to be amongst the first is to be amongst the last; for that, upon this occasion, those who are not with us are *against* us. Whether all this, and a good deal more that I have said, will have any effect on him is more than I can say; but if he does not act right, he will not have to blame me for his acting wrong.

Lord Folkestone comes up from Coleshill on Monday morning or to-morrow night; and if he takes my hint, and thinks he has any power over Dillon more than I have, he will go by the way of Ditchley, and may, possibly, drag Dillon into the chaise with him. If Dillon comes *at all*, he will go right. But I greatly fear he will not come. At any rate, I think the result of Monday's debate will prove fatal to the Pitt Ministry. It has been tottering for a long time. Its days are numbered. I have long thought I saw this; and many hundreds and thousands *now* see it, who have hitherto been most obstinate in their attachment. What will *follow it*? As to the revival of the Doctor, that can be only for a very short space. The danger is *after* that; and that danger consists in the risk of a *wrong course being adopted at the outset*. Even now we should look back to the awful warning given by Mr. Burke, at the moment when Lord North announced to Parliament that his Ministry was at an end. A wrong course at the beginning would not only prevent any good, but it might make the nation sigh for the return of Mr. Pitt; and it really might bring him back again, and put him in possession of the axe to give the last blow to the country. It is an awful crisis. The day of the renovation, or of the total destruction of English liberty and honour, is at hand. Excuse my giving you all this trouble, and believe me to be, with a due sense of that gratitude which all the country owes you. . . .¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 164-6.

William Cobbett to William Windham

DUKE STREET, April 19, 1805.

I am glad my idea is approved of. I am sure it is the way to ensure success. I think the resolutions and the petition of the Common Hall will prove a bitter dose. The best of it is, it is all amongst their own people, and is all their own work.

I think I can tell you some news. Lord Hawkesbury declines the Admiralty, upon the ground of the change being a *degradation*, particularly as it will have the appearance of his being a man to be *used*; a mere bolt to be shoved backwards and forwards. And, to say the truth, he *is* that thing already. Mr. Yorke stayed only one day in town, and is now with his regiment at Feversham. He has not been directly solicited; he wishes (he says) to avoid the thing talked of; and he is of opinion that he could not accept of it upon any other terms than those of having all his *own people* about him (I do not know who those are) and of prosecuting the plans of Ld. St. Vincent, which plans he has always approved of. If such be his terms, and I really think they are, it is not very likely that he will wield the Trident for us.

William Cobbett to William Windham

Friday Morning, June 14, 1805.

You did not say positively that you would not do me the honour of going with me to Baron Maseres's.¹ It would do you a great deal of good. Will you be so good as to send me word whether you can go or not, as I must fix my mode and time of setting off.

¹ Francis Maseres (1731-1824), Cursitor Baron of Exchequer, author of several works on social and political subjects.

I do not know the particulars of Sir John Newport's motion ; but it should embrace, I think,

1. The annual improved value of each living, specifying whether the said living be a rectory, a vicarage, or a perpetual curacy.
2. Who has the presentation, or at least, whether it be in the Crown, the Bishop, or some Ecclesiastical Body, or in a Lay person, or persons.
4. The name of the incumbent.
5. Whether he has any other church preferment, and if he has, what other, and the annual value of it.
6. Whether the incumbent be resident or not.
7. If the duty be done by a curate, whether the curate reside.
8. Name of the curate. (Whence will be seen how many parishes are left to one man.)
9. Place of curate's residence. (Whence will be seen how far he is from the parish or parishes he serves.)
10. Amount of stipend paid to the curate.
11. Annual improved value of the impropriated tithes, where they are impropriated.
12. Who are the impropriators, specifying whether Lay persons, Bishops, Ecclesiastical Bodies, or other Corporations.
13. Annual improved value of the income of each Bishop.
14. Whether the Bishop be resident.
15. How often, and where, visitations and confirmations have taken place in each diocese respectively in the last ten years.
16. How often the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper has been publickly administered in each church during the last ten years.

There are other heads of inquiry ; but the above would sufficiently show that, in that miserable country, the Holy Gospel is made a scandalous job. They would

show that, were it not for the abused Roman Catholic priest, the people of more than one half of Ireland would "live without God in the world."¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

July 9, 1805.

I have spoken to Reeves, who instantly promised you his own vote, who will write and speak to other persons, and who is in a rage to think of your being opposed by either Richards or Hibbert. You have heard, I dare say, that the French fleet is hastening home in dread of Nelson, who arrived at Barbadoes the very day that they left Martinico (4th of June). They were seen last in a latitude north of Bermuda. They must be coming home. They *may* drop upon Ireland. My news is from Sir Evan Nepean, who also told me for certain that Sir William Scott² is *not* to have his peerage.³

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, near SOUTHAMPTON,
Friday, July 19, 1805.

I arrived here last night, having left town about one o'clock, after sending the *Register* to press. The haste in which I left home prevented me from telling you what I had just heard from a quarter that you will easily guess at; namely, that the king had said to the *Lord Chancellor*, upon the subject of the resignation of Ld. Sidmouth, &c.; "I find there is no regard or thought *for me* in these resignations." And, in short, that the king was *angry* with the Addingtons. It has been, by Long and others, but particularly by Long, positively said that the Addingtons went out upon the score of loaves

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 170-1.

² Sir William Scott (1745-1836), Judge of the High Court of Admiralty, was created Baron Stowell of Stowell Park in 1821.

³ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 172.

and fishes; and that the point on which they actually split was that Ld. Sidmouth insisted upon the place of Judge Advocate for *Bond*, which Pitt refused! This I do not quite believe; and can easily guess at a pretty good reason for such a statement being put in a channel to reach me.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, LEAR SOUTHAMPTON,
July 28, 1805.

. . . What I had more to tell you was relating to the person who once said that Mr. Pitt was like a fine woman that had become a whore; that his *reputation* was gone, but that he was still a good *piece* in debate. You will remember who this person was; and I can tell you for *certain* that he exults at having kept aloof from Mr. Pitt. I understand, and from the best possible 2nd hand authority, that Lord Hardwicke complained chiefly of the powers with which Sir Evan Nepean was vested to treat with the Catholics, &c. &c., *independent* of the Ld. Lieutenant. This, you know, is *assez la manière* of Mr. Pitt. Lord H. expressed his resolution to come home, unless that *imperium in imperiis* was immediately discontinued. I am certain that his Lordship, and, indeed, all his family, are convinced that Mr. Pitt has no friendship for them. Lord H. looks upon his present power as being held in *spite* of Mr. Pitt; and I should imagine that the latter will endeavour to supply his place. If he *can* do it, he will. It would be useful for me to know whether Foster has *really* resigned. I think the Yorkes have, upon the whole, acted a part that must be approved of by honourable men. They have certainly escaped the doubtful state of the Addingtons. It really is not safe to commend these latter. They are as "tricky" as Yankees. It is with me still a question

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 173.

whether they did, or did not, resign because they were refused what they demanded in power and emolument. That being the case, I shall not be in haste to approve of their conduct, particularly as they may resume their old cant about "supporting the king's government," by which they mean the Ministry, let them be, or do, what they will.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, Monday, August 12, 1805.

. . . I am anxious to know *how long* you will be in town from this time; because we catch here some of the finest fish in the world; and Mrs. Cobbett as well as myself are very desirous that you should taste them. We can send by the Southampton night coach, and you will have for dinner the fish caught *the evening before*. The fish are called *Salmon Peel*; that is to say, *young salmon*, from 1 to 4 pounds in weight, and the most delicious fish, the eaters say, in the world. So stupid am I in all these matters, that I never thought of sending any to you till being, on Saturday, invited to dine at Eling, on the other side of Southampton, at the parsonage house, there to meet Mr. O'Brien and Dr. Parr, and taking some of the fish with us, in order to convince O'Brien that I caught salmon at the foot of my garden, I, to my utter astonishment, saw the fish packed up and sent off to Southampton, hence to go to St. Ann's Hill, as a present, from our host, worthy of the acceptance of Mr. Fox! With a net that Wright, amongst other marks of his attention, was so good as to send me, I catch the fish at the bottom of my (for I venture to call it mine, and I trust it will be so next year at this time) garden, and at about 50 yards from my door, in a river just about as wide as your parlour! We seldom put in the net without success, and sometimes with very great

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 175.

success. I care very little about fish; but I shall be very glad to send some that Mrs. W. may think worthy of her acceptance. Shall I hope for a line from you by return of post? Just a line to say whether you will be in London for some days longer or not? If you were at Beaconsfield, they would reach you fresh, by my instructing Wright to send them from London. I need not say how much I am obliged by, and how sensibly I feel the honour of, the letters you have had the goodness to write me; and I can only add that I shall ever regard, as amongst the most fortunate moments of my life, that in which commenced the attachment with which I remain, Sir, your most obedient and most humble servant,

WM. COBBETT.¹

William Cobbett to John Wright

BOTLEY, Tuesday, August 13, 1805.

Mr. Rose, his daughter, and his 2 pupils are just arrived here. They set off to-morrow, and I must give up this day to them. For this reason you will get nothing from me till Thursday, which will be productive of the less inconvenience, as I have sent you already such abundance of copy for the double number. I can see no reason why you should not come down *previous* to the actual publication of the last volume of the *Debates*. Think of this, and try if you cannot so manage matters as to come off on Friday night next. The Gosport coach will bring you by six o'clock in the morning to Wickham, 4 miles from here, where I will take or send the Ponies to meet you.²

William Cobbett to William Windham

GRANGE PARK, Saturday, August 24, 1805.

I came here yesterday, with Lord Folkestone, who brought me from Botley, and who will have the goodness

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 177.

² *Ibid.*, 22906, f. 68.

to send this to your house. This morning, while Lord Folkestone was abed (the host and hostess being in town) I read Dr. Bradesley's pamphlet, presented by him to you, and sent apparently by you to me. He approves of boxing, but not of the stage fighting. Have you read the pamphlet? You must, if you have read it, be astonished at the coincidence in his and my arguments in *defence of boxing*. As neither of us could have seen what the other had written, and as we had had no previous communication with one another, the coincidence is truly astonishing. I shall write an article upon the subject of his pamphlet; and I wish to know something about him. He is probably connected with *Dent*, and hence his *condemnation* of bull-baiting. He has quoted some notable instances of the effects of the want of the practice of boxing, and concludes with a proposition for its *encouragement*. I hope this will find you and Mrs. Windham well after the fatiguing *pleasures* of Stowe, and you will be glad to hear that all my children are perfectly recovered from the whooping-cough.

P.S.—I return instantly to Botley.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, near SOUTHAMPTON,
September 15, 1805.

. . . I was aware of the Anti-Bourbon feeling, which would find some degree of gratification in my remarks upon the proposed plan of warfare against the person of the new Emperor; but to afford such gratification was, in such a case, almost unavoidable; for such a plan of warfare *now*, unless *impression was first* made upon Buona-parte, *must* fail. Your letter has, however, put me upon my guard; and it will be a very great inadvertence in me, and in direct hostility to the feelings of my heart,

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 179.

if I ever let drop an expression tending to sanction the justice of the Usurper's cause. It does, however, nevertheless, appear to me that, for the *present*; that, while Buonaparte *lives*, and without a material *reverse of fortune*, the cause of the Bourbons is hopeless, particularly in consequence of the events which have taken place within the last two or three years. *Peace* with him, *real* peace, I think we never shall have; but to declare a war against his person, in our present relative state, would be to repeat the folly, so wisely and so eloquently deprecated by Mr. Burke, of issuing a big-sounding Manifesto just after the disgraceful occurrences at Toulon and Dunkirk.

Your hints relative to the war in the Mediterranean are invaluable to me, and I hope to be able to profit from them. You will not, I trust, be displeased to have found, before this reaches you, that, at the very moment you were writing those hints, the same train of thinking, respecting the "serpentine course," was in my mind, and was thence passing into the *Register*. The new war, which is now apparently beginning in the Mediterranean, will come in to illustrate what is there said. Indeed, this war *must* be a woeful commentary on the last. You will have seen that I am resolved to do justice (as far as my ability goes) to our former principles and opinions, and especially to them as laid down by Mr. Burke; for it shall always be maintained that it was *as a Minister supported by him* that Mr. Pitt was approved of by me.

I trust that your really humane efforts in behalf of Dillon, the boxer, will be attended with success. I think they will; and that good will be brought out of evil. Your argument against Dr. Bradesley's distinction is excellent; but so good, so very good, is the cause, that I only refrained, for a week or two, from completely oversetting his objections, lest, by too suddenly showing his weakness in one point, I should too much and too soon impair his authority as to another. The truth

probably is, that from some before-expressed opinion, from some connection of friendship, or some other such motive, he was led into the inconsistency to which I allude; and it certainly is consummately absurd to reprobate prizes fought for by the *fists*, while he recommends them in combats with *mufflers*. I think I shall take up the subject in my next [*Register*]; and then you will perceive that, upon the point of the *political* effects, as far as relates to a quiet conduct with regard to government, what appeared wrong in my last essay arose merely for want of a distinction, which I shall now be careful to make. *Turbulence* may be engendered by boxing matches, but never *treason*; and it seems to me next to impossible that there should not, at times, be one or the other.¹

William Cobbett to John Wright

BOTLEY, September 30, 1805.

I am this day going to take possession of the place at Droxford, in virtue of the notes you sent me the other day. But there will be wanted a good deal of money for the purchase of stock there and for the payment of my bills here, and this I am desirous of doing as soon as may be. You will, therefore, by return of post, send me an account of the payments made by Bagshaw² since I left town, up to the present time. In short, an account of your receipts and disbursements on my account. I shall then see what I am able to rely upon. But I want *immediately* 20 pounds to pay here. The person has asked me for it, and I have positively promised it to him for *Wednesday*. So you must send it by return of post. I shall lay on upon the *Report Reviewers* to-morrow morning, have got rid of my workmen,

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 182-3.

² Richard Bagshaw, publisher of the *Political Register*, &c.

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MAJOR CARTWRIGHT IN HIS 81ST YEAR
Drawn and engraved by Henry Meyer from the life. 1821

and being able now to sit down in quiet and neatness. You will come off on Thursday, the 10th; and on that day, or the day before, if possible, the materials for that number will be sent. Immediately, or almost immediately, after the revels are over, I shall go to London to get my trees; and I beg you will go to the old man at the *Five Fields, Chelsea*, whose roses, &c. &c. I am to have, and tell him *the time* I shall be there. He lives in the little old wooden house, just after you get through the turnstile place at the end of that walk which leads from Eaton Street to Chelsea. I forget his name, but you will easily find him. He is going to quit his place, which must be pulled up, and his things will be sold very cheap.¹

Major Cartwright² to William Cobbett

October 1805.

SIR,—It was only lately I became a reader of your *Weekly Register*. Your energy, your indignant warmth against speculation, your abhorrence of political treachery, and your independent spirit command my esteem. As a token of it, I beg to present you with a few essays written to serve our injured country, which has too long lain a bleeding prey to devouring factions, and which cannot be preserved unless that public spirit and courage which were once the characteristics of England can be revived.

Your efforts to that end deserve every praise. The national feeling in the case of Lord Melville and the approbation of your writings are good symptoms of convalescence in the public mind. We must not therefore despair.—Your obedient servant,

JOHN CARTWRIGHT.³

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 89.

² John Cartwright (1740–1824), political reformer.

³ *Life of Major Cartwright*, i. 327.

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, October 6, 1805.

Your letters of the 1st and 2nd accompanying the circular of Lord H. I have received. The circular exhibits a complete confirmation of what you foretold relative to the *crimping* effects of the Parish Project. I shall endeavour to make the proper use of it; but, as to a motto, I think there is a better to be found in a speech of Mr. Pitt, who stated, as one of his objects in the Bill, the "*putting a stop* to the nefarious practice of crimping."

Indeed, it is very hard to refrain from affixing the epithet *baseness* to Dr. Bradesley's defence of, or apology for, *hunting*. I perceived and felt all the force of what you have been enraged at, and I knew it would set your just mind in a flame; but I thought it best to take him first as an auxiliary. My difficulty, too, consists in the almost impossibility of refuting his arguments against bull-baiting, without falling upon his meanness with regard to the sports of the rich.

I propose being in town by the 20th instant at farthest, when I hope to have the honour of seeing you, and of thanking you by word of mouth for all the instances of condescension which you have shown towards me during the summer. I have not the confidence to hope that you will come all the way to Botley to see the sport, of which the enclosed paper speaks; but, if you should, I think you will be highly gratified. We expect 5000 people. Certainly 4000 more than there are houses to hold. But *my* house (for such I shall soon be able to make it) will contain a room for you, with everything about it tolerably decent and comfortable. At any rate, Southampton is very near. This is an exercise that requires great strength and very great fortitude.

The players use a stick three-quarters of an inch in diameter, $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, and having a basket hilt to defend the hand. They are stripped to the shirt; and the object is to break the antagonist's head in such a way that the *blood may run an inch*. The blows that they interchange, in order to throw one another off their guard, are such as require the utmost degree of patient endurance. The arms, shoulders, and ribs are beaten black and blue, and the contest between two men frequently lasts for more than an hour. Last Whitsuntide there was a match at Bishop's Waltham, where one of the players, feeling that he had a tooth knocked out, and knowing that if he opened his mouth the blood would be perceived, *swallowed both blood and tooth*, and continued the combat (with two others driven from their places in his gum) till he obtained the victory. And this only for a *prize of a guinea!* And would Dr. Bradesley call this *mercenary?* Let him ask Dr. Laurence if the sea captains are not, some of them, *full as mercenary* in their views of making prizes. We expect players from All the Western Counties on this side of Cornwall. Our advertisements have roused all this part of the country completely. The prizes and other expenses are to be defrayed by about 18 farmers and millers and myself. The whole will amount to about two guineas each. What a miserable sum wherewith to produce such an effect! The *justices* here are rather a harmless caste; and, at any rate, they love their comfort and the goodwill of their neighbours too much to attempt to interfere with us.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 184.

[ENCLOSURE]

SINGLE-STICK PLAYING

AT BOTLEY, NEAR SOUTHAMPTON

On Friday, October the 11th, 1805
(Being old Michaelmas-day)

Will be played in the village of

BOTLEY

A Grand Match at Single-Stick.

The prizes will be as follows :

1st Prize.—Fifteen Guineas and a Gold-laced Hat.

2nd Prize.—Six Guineas and a Silver-laced Hat.

3rd Prize.—Four Guineas.

4th Prize.—Two Guineas.

The Terms, as to playing, and the Ties, &c., will be announced upon the spot. Those who have played for, and lost, the First Prize, will be allowed to play for the Second: Those who have lost the Second, will be allowed to play for the Third; and those who have lost the Third will be allowed to play for the Fourth. The Playing will begin at Eleven o'clock in the Morning, and, if possible, all the Prizes are to be played for on the same Day. For any further Information that may be required, application may be made, either in Person, or by Letter, to Mr. RICHARD SMITH, of Botley. Gentlemen coming from a distance will find Excellent Accommodations, of every kind, at and in the neighbourhood of Botley, which is situated at only about Five Miles from Southampton, and at less than Four Miles from Bishop's Waltham; the distance from London, through Farnham, Alton, and Bishop's Waltham, is a short day's journey, being barely Sixty-Eight Miles.

BOTLEY, *September 23, 1805.*

J. Brettell, Printer, Marshall Street, Golden Square, London.

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, October 15, 1805.

Before this reaches you, you will probably have seen, in the *Morning Chronicle*, a pretty full account of our sports; and, therefore, I will only say here, that there has not been, in the memory of any one here, such a match at Single-stick in Hampshire. You will see that we had seven players up from the West. They carried off three of our prizes, but they have also taken away some most memorable proofs of Hampshire hardihood. You would have been delighted to witness the peaceableness and even the silence of the people. The village was full; and, which was matter of no small satisfaction to me, several gentlemen of the neighbourhood, amongst whom was Sir Joseph Sidney Yorke (Mr. Yorke's brother), after having been spectators of the sport, begged to be admitted as patrons of it. I took the most effectual way. *First*, I published my advertisement, resolved that the playing should take place, and then I sent round to offer people an opportunity of partaking with me in the patronage of it. The overplus money thrown in upon us was very considerable in amount, and the farmers agreed with me in giving it to the players of the West who won no prizes, and who did, indeed, stand in need of something to comfort them. I am glad that the person named in your last has had nothing to do with "the Review of the Reports"; and I will take an opportunity of saying so; for, though I am resolved to punish, if I can, all those who employ such base weapons against me, or against the cause, I would wish not to be unjust. I have now completely defended both myself and my supporters; and amongst good men, there will hereafter be, as to what I say, no deduction on the score of motive and character. *I*, it is I, who have been *libelled*. Never was a man so libelled. Never were such foul and base means made use of to sink any man in the world.

To my friends I owe a good deal ; but to my enemies I owe less forbearance than ever man owed to his enemies. I am fully persuaded that there is, for me, *no law* as to matters of libel ; and so think the persons that attack me, or they would never publish the things that they do. In one of their pamphlets, published about a year ago, and addressed to the Lord Chief Justice, it is asserted that I am in the pay of Buonaparte. Many other charges equally infamous are as boldly preferred. Yet I am convinced that the law would give me no redress. There is no way left, then, but for me to take vengeance on the *employers* of these villains ; and that vengeance I hope I shall be able to take, though, in doing it, I will never knowingly be guilty of an act of injustice. As to the person particularly spoken of by you, I must confess that I view his unjustifiable exaltation with indignation. The keeping of his sisters, the sinecure for himself, the place lately given to an obscure relation of his, all come into my mind along with his malicious insinuation with respect to me, turning the eyes of the harpies of the law upon me. Here it is that I feel, because by this base way alone can he or any one foil me and pull me down, while it pleases God to give me health. I am very much obliged to you for your news, and for all the information you have been so kind as to give me, and which is, as you will have perceived, of the greatest use to me. Wright will set off from this place for London in 2 days' time. I hope the cause of the "distress" to which you alluded will not prevent you from writing the Letter about the Gloucestershire parson-magistrates. These gentlemen had better look after, and put down, by "their preaching and living," the Methodist meetings. The Duke of Richmond will not suffer any parson to be a magistrate in his county ; that is by his recommendation ; and there are a thousand reasons in support of his practice.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 187.

*William Cobbett to John Wright*BOTLEY, *Sunday Evening, November 10, 1805.*

As Lord Folkestone will be here again to-morrow, I defer sending my packet (of 4 letters) till I have his frank. I thank you for your letter of yesterday. I am afraid Mrs. Cobbett *must* leave this place in about ten days. The trees are all come safe. The news of the sea victory will, I fear, very shortly be counterbalanced by what we shall hear from the continent. It is folly to suppose that Prussia will act as we could wish; and, were she to do it, I am afraid that Buonaparte would beat them all. He knows precisely what they *can* do, and what he will do in order to counteract their efforts. As to *our* expeditions, they will, I am afraid, be in the end something like poor MACK'S! God knows where it will all end; but let us hope for the best.

By the next post send me 20 pounds more to purchase farming stock with, &c. &c. I have a letter to enclose to-morrow containing 2 orders for the *Register*. The letters I have written upon the subject of the Jamaica shipments all contain a general account of our intended work. Let come what will, we must push *that* on, at any rate. Life's short; and it is time to plant, if you and I mean to gather the fruit. If we buy upon mortgage, or in whatever way, it will be good.¹

*William Cobbett to William Windham*BOTLEY, *Friday, November 29, 1805.*

Though I have not answered your two first letters, I have duly attended to them. Your hints as to Boulogne were very useful. I had no inclination ever to *mention* even the affair of Judge Johnson,² who, be he what he

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 102.
VOL. I.

² See vol. i. pp. 207-8.

may, is not worse than his prosecutors. Mr. *Holt* has written to me, and I shall certainly do all in my power to aid his work. I was so disposed from the moment I saw his paper. It will be a good thing as a check upon the Mr. C. Mr. H. is an *Englishman*, I should suppose, which is a great thing with me. The Scotch have $\frac{4}{5}$ ths of the press in London at this time. So Vienna is gone! Austria, as you predicted, has gone by the board at the first heave of the sea! A portrait of Maria Theresa, now hanging before me, calls to mind what Austria once was! But this result is quite natural. There is nothing surprising in it. We shall *now* see what avail naval victories are of!

This day I should have set out for London; but my wife is just taken almost in labour! Here I am, therefore, for a fortnight longer; for, as to my quitting her till this is completely over, that is next to impossible. She is very well. Never was better in her life; but she cannot stir from here.¹

William Cobbett to John Wright

BOTLEY, Sunday, December 1, 1805.

My present intention is to *fill* the next sheet with an *address to the people of England*, calculated to make a deep and lasting impression upon them. I shall endeavour to show them what has been *the cause* of all their present dangers, and shall tell them that, in a *future sheet*, I will endeavour to convince them that such and such are the means of salvation. The time is most favourable for making such an impression; and, please God, I will not let it slip. The crisis, which I have always foreseen, is approaching, fast approaching, and it will require all the vigilance and all our courage to save our country and at the same time to maintain the throne of our beloved and gracious old king.²

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 189.

² *Ibid.*, 22906, f. 103.

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, December 6, 1805.

I have the pleasure to tell you that my hours of anxiety may, for the present, at least, be said to be over, for Mrs. Cobbett was, early this morning, delivered of a girl; and both are as well as is usual in similar cases. I was very much alarmed, some most ominous appearances having taken place for several days back. . . .

With regard to the cause of your *fall*, I should have been more uneasy, if I did not remember that, 20 years ago, after long application to reading and drawing plans, particularly by night, I used sometimes to *reel with giddiness*, nearly to falling.

I propose, if all is tolerably well, to be in town early in the next week. But I must come back again; for we have been so constantly beside each other, that I am sure that my absence, except in case of indispensable necessity, would be taken not kindly; and I owe her too much ever to risk the suffering of such a thought to enter her mind. . . .

I have not been to see Ad[miral] Villeneuve. I have been restrained by a fear, perhaps a cowardly one, of furnishing the Arguses of the Treasury with the groundwork of some base misrepresentation. I should like to know what are your sentiments upon this subject; for, I must confess, that, living so near him as I do, I feel a little ashamed of not having already called on him, particularly as I hear he is very poorly lodged, badly attended, and not in good health. Admiral Stirling, who lives about the same distance from B[isho]p's Waltham that I do, has, I hear, called upon him. Whether he has invited him to his house, or whether that would be permitted, I know not. The general feeling of the people here is *merely* that of *triumph over him*. A very bad one; but I am afraid but too general. I

am pleased, however, that Adml. Stirling called upon him. *He* can sympathise with a captured Admiral! There is time enough, and I should very much like to have your opinion upon this point.¹

*William Cobbett to Alderman George Hibbert*²

BOTLEY, December 29, 1805.

I should have returned you the paper sooner, but was desirous of waiting till an opportunity offered of getting it to you free of all expense except that of the Twopenny post. The paper, if well circulated, cannot fail to do a great deal of good. To alter it would not be to *improve* it, especially to alter it by the introduction of matter suggested by others. Every writing is best, in point of effect, that proceeds from *one mind*; for very much indeed depends upon the *unity* of thought. This paper embraces, perhaps, too many great topics, starts too many profound inquiries, and does in some places push too far into detail for a paper of so short a length; it is not, in fact, so much in the manner of a speech as one might wish, in order to obtain a very attentive perusal; but upon the whole it is excellent; it will set many thinking men to inquire; and, after all, it is by men of that description that your fate must finally be decided. As an *invitation to inquiry* I do not know anything that would [be] more likely to succeed. A number of valuable authorities are referred to; enough is said to induce people to make the reference, and this must lead to good consequences. The application of Malthus's doctrine (a doctrine which never can be shaken) is most happy. I had, if you remember, broached the same course of

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 191.

² George Hibbert (1757-1837), West India merchant, Alderman of the City of London, 1798 to 1803, M.P. for Seaford, 1806 to 1812. In 1807 he published his speeches on the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

arguing; and I have to thank you for pointing out to me so able a supporter. Malthus is becoming, with regard to this subject, what Newton is with regard to Astronomy. He will be found a most powerful supporter of our opinions. Indeed, after having read his book, the visionary nonsense about the population of Africa slides gently and imperceptibly out of the mind. I am decidedly against leaving out the passage marked in the margin. It is, beyond all comparison, the best of the whole. It is sound in philosophy, correct in statement, perspicuous in collocation, and at once energetic and elegant in expression; and as to time and place, nothing in the world could be more suitable; it being, at the outset of such an address, above all things necessary to imprint upon the mind of the reader a persuasion, that *our councils have been unwise as to the government of the colonies*; and here this is done in the best possible way, there being nothing of the appearance of party spirit, and the whole being scrupulously free from personality. It conveys a reproof most assuredly, and so must anything that is intended to produce a change of councils. In short, I think it is [the] very thing for producing a change of conduct in those who have *the power* to do us good or harm. As I make no doubt of your publishing the address, and as I would wish to see the distribution well executed, I beg leave to recommend to you, for that purpose, *Mr. Wright*, whom I have sent to you lately, and whom I pronounce to be one of the cleverest men in England. He is a good scholar, writes well, has great good taste, and is conversant with everything of this sort. You would, with his aid, have no trouble at all with the matter, and without such aid you would have a great deal. He corrects all my writings, and manages the whole affair of bringing everything completely from the press. He lives at No. 5 Panton Square, Haymarket, and has my directions to wait on you at any time and place that you may appoint. Per-

haps you may have some other person, and in that case there is no harm done by this recommendation, which proceeds only from my wish that you may lose as little time and may have the thing done with as great advantages as possible. When you have published it in your way, I can insert it in a double number of the *Register*, and by purchasing a number of those, you would have them at hand to send about *by post*, cost free, which could not be the case with paper *without a stamp*. Each of you who take a deep interest in the thing might have a hundred or [more] lying upon your table, ready folded up, with a member of Parliament's name upon the cover, ready to be sent off to any one in any part of the kingdom. Mr. Wright would also undertake to use the means for getting the address into all the *country papers*, which is a very important object; and it is one that you would, yourself, find it very difficult to accomplish. If the thing be done at all, it should be done well. How long have you suffered for want of a little, a very little, well-prepared and well-executed exertion of this sort! I shall go on with *my* address. But it will come, in a month or six weeks' time, very seasonably to the support of yours. You will see some pencil marks in the first page. That is what I would do by way of alteration, merely to make the outset as little verbose and as strong as possible. But this is mere matter of taste; and, perhaps, nine persons out of ten would prefer the thing as it now stands. As this letter is intended for Mr. Hughan as well as yourself, I shall only add my compliments to him, and beg you to believe me, dear Sir, your most humble and most obedt. Sert.,

WM. COBBETT.

P.S.—There are in the paper much to do in the way of *printing*. There are also a few grammatical errors. But all this, as well as some little matter in the transposition of the members of some of the sentences, would

be perfectly safe in the hands of Mr. Wright, who would, after he had done with them, send you the proofs to receive your last perusal. If you commit it to the care of any other person, pray let it be some one accustomed to such things.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, ff. 119-20.

CHAPTER XI

COBBETT'S CORRESPONDENCE (1806)

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, January 7, 1806.

A HAPPY new year, happier than ever, to you, to Mrs. Windham, and to Dr. L[aur-ence] and Mr. Elliot, if they are with you. While I think of it, I beg you to tell Dr. L[aur-ence] that I have an anecdote about the conduct of W. Dundas that may be of great use to him. I have to thank you first for your own letter, which, however, has excited some fears in my mind of the very worst sort. But yet I cannot, for my life, perceive how there can be any danger of the kind alluded to, seeing that *all, yea all*, the circumstances are completely changed. Who now fears the effects of an enthusiastic and wild attachment to liberty? The danger, God knows, and we most grievously feel, is on the other side. A prostration at the feet of France no man will be base enough to propose, or to approve of, unless he be both a fund-dealer and a Pittite; but, as I observed in the last conversation I had the honour to have with you, I would not say that a peace might not, for certain purposes, even of successful warlike resistance, be proper. *For the total reorganization of the military system*, for instance. Can that *now* be effected without a peace? *Can* the volunteers be put down during *this present contest*? I have mentioned this to nobody but yourself; but I have long thought of it. But, for the honour of our country, I do most anxiously hope that there can be nothing to

prevent the reign of the Pitts and the Smiths and the Huskissons and the Roses and the Cannings and the Dents from being put an end to. The letter which you have had the goodness to *convey* to me has given me great pleasure. It lets me into the subject that must now very soon be seriously discussed. The writer labours under great infatuation if he supposes that *few* persons think with me. My opinions have gained great ground; and they daily and hourly gather strength from the circumstances of the times. The only question is, whether the thing *can* be done by any of our present public men, or whether it must be the work of a *new set*. I foresee the great probability of being hooted down by almost all men of all parties; but I shall rise again, or the nation will fall, never more to rise. This is my firm opinion. Those who think with me will be afraid to speak out, for a long time, at least; and I fear that, when they do think, it will be too late. As to Duke Street, all my reasons would tire you; but be assured, Sir, that, in every one of my arrangements, I have constantly kept in view the *great purpose* for which I live; and that, as long as I have health, you will never see me, even for one moment, neglect anything that may contribute to it. You will always find me vigilant, industrious, zealous, and everything else that I think is likely to serve the cause which I have espoused. Nothing but a want of physical powers shall ever make me *secede*. So much for the present: when I have the honour again to see you, I will give you all my reasons in detail. I hope you have been well since I had the pleasure of seeing you; and I am now more anxious than ever that your health should remain uninterrupted. Of course, I learnt with great satisfaction that you were *out of town*. For my part, you will have seen that I have had no Christmas *holidays*. Indeed, I never want any. I have been *reading* (a thing much wanted by me), and I have been collecting some materials, upon various subjects, that I hope will

prove of some use. Have you yet asked yourself seriously, and set your great mind to consider, *what is to be done to save England from slavery?* It is high time, not only to put the question, but to give the answer, and *begin to act*. Time is precious. There is very little to lose upon the Huskissons and the Pitts.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, January 8, 1806.

I write this merely to tell you that Mr. Bagshaw (Wright being here) has written to tell me, that the extraordinary demand for the *Register* has induced him to order an additional number to be printed of 150, and to ask my permission to have 100 or 200 more printed. This in every way, particularly as it is a sign of the good effect upon men's minds, gives me great pleasure; and I cannot refrain from communicating the circumstance to you.²

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, January 11, 1806.

If Mr. Wright arrives in London to-morrow morning early, as I hope he will, he will send you this together with a small parcel, containing 4 wood-pigeons, which are, in my opinion, the best bird that the country produces, abundant as it is in birds of all sorts. I should make a great effort at disguise, if I were to attempt to conceal the uneasiness which your letter of the 8th has given me. Conscious that I have never had in view any object not perfectly consistent with those great principles, for the having imbibed which I am so much indebted to you, I was really surprized, and mortified

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 195.

² *Ibid.*, 37853, f. 197.

beyond description, that my New Year's appeal to the people should have excited those fears, of which you speak in a manner so well calculated to make me doubt of my prudence. I have read that Appeal again and again; and, even now, I cannot help hoping that that delicate sense of honour, that scrupulousness as to points of consistency, to which you are always so tenderly alive, and which so distinguish you from the *crowd* of patriots and of courtiers; but which may, nevertheless, be sometimes inconvenient in their effects; I cannot help hoping that, from this honourable feeling, you have been led to suspect that for which time will convince you there is no foundation. But I must not leave to *time* the task of endeavouring—(Your letter of yesterday is just come; but I will proceed as I was going on)—to convince you, that my late articles will tend to none of the effects which you appear to apprehend from them. First of all, I have always, amongst the friends of Mr. Fox, decidedly expressed an opinion that no salvation can come out of *yielding*. It is really a question, and a serious question with me, whether from policy we ought not, if the occasion offers, make peace (the mere *name* only it would be) for the purpose of completely reorganizing the military force of the country, and particularly for that of putting down for ever the volunteer system, which *cannot* be put down during the present contest; and, in the making of a peace, the *Mysore* and the other late conquests in India would be a most excellent thing to give up for the obtaining of some object conducive to *real power*; but, Sir, though these are my thoughts, they have never been communicated to *any one but you*; and there are a thousand reasons why they should not. Next, I cannot see anything in the late articles, bearing upon the point in view, which tends to be discouragement of a continuation of exertion against France; and, as to combinations upon the continent, all that I have censured (and surely it is worthy of

censure) is the precipitating of Austria into the war; a charge of which the whole country, with very few exceptions, is ready to acknowledge the justice. In quoting Mr. Fox, I have taken care to *omit* those parts which were rather hostile to *all resistance*; and, in so doing, have I not, in the best possible way, left *him* to gather my sentiments, and to see *how far* I am willing to go, without, at the same time, letting the world into my views? If I had spoken to him in his closet, I could not have spoken more distinctly and with more safety; at least, so it appears to me. And, if in pitting *him* particularly against Mr. Pitt, if I have thereby encouraged him to place some little reliance upon my support, have I not, by the same means, done what will induce him to pay some small attention to what shall be found to be my further news of things, and which he will not readily suppose to be very different from the views of my oldest and most valuable friends? I remember O'Brien saying once that the two valuable things brought to the common stock by the New Opposition were Mr. Windham and the *Register*; which, though a *compliment*, certainly expressed the truth and an opinion entertained. As to the *past*; as to any principles entertained during the French revolution, I can see no grounds of apprehension. The past *must* be forgotten. It must be knocked down as soon as conjured up. We must begin *anew*, in talking both of war and of peace, and that upon the broad, the fair, the honest, and the honourable ground, which I have endeavoured to trace out in an article which you will, doubtless, have read before this reaches you. If we cannot stand upon this ground; if we suffer ourselves to be shoved off from it by any recollections of our own, by any artifices of the Pitts or their bickering friends (now apparently friends of ours), we may as well secede at once, and let the storm take its course. We are now in a *new* state of things. Every question of peace or of war is a question for discussion

amongst ourselves. We cannot, upon any fair principle of reasoning, be at all bound by any opinion expressed at a time when none of the present circumstances were in existence; and, if so to bind us any attempt were made, I have the vanity to think that I alone am able to expose it to the contempt and derision of the public. These are my reasons for hoping that your fears are groundless, and that you will soon be convinced they are so; but, though at the hazard of putting you to the trouble of writing me a letter when your time might be much better employed, I cannot help saying that I shall not feel perfectly easy on this account until I have the honour of hearing from you again.

With our best thanks to you and Mrs. Windham for your inquiries, we beg her to accept of the wood-pigeons as a mark of our respect. Pray have the goodness to tell Dr. Laurence that we will send him some when we have good luck again. All my family are very well. As a proof of the advantages of retirement (occasionally, and I mean nothing more), look at the last week's *Register* (to-day's), and then consider, for such is the case, that it was, as far as my part (about 15 columns) goes, every word of it written after 9 o'clock in the morning of Wednesday last, and was *in the post office at Southampton* 6 miles off before $\frac{1}{2}$ past 7 o'clock at night. This rapidity of execution, so favourable to the *spirit* of writing, is owing to previous reflection, and to that reflection nothing is so favourable as health and tranquillity.

The additional sale of the *Register*, last week, that I spoke of was *not at Budd's*.¹ I was before apprized of that. It was in the *general sale*; and, therefore, I cannot help hoping that it ought to be regarded as an auspicious circumstance.

I should further observe that the order for 1000 copies at Budd's was given to Mr. Wright, in consequence of his having told Mr. O'Brien of my intention

¹ J. Budd, the bookseller, Pall Mall.

to write an address to the people; so that the address was written without my knowing anything about the order, and the order was given without the orderers knowing anything about the purport of the address. This circumstance is not unimportant, especially as referring to the fears expressed in your letter.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, January 15, 1806.

Nothing can exceed the satisfaction your three lines of letter have given me. It were indeed a pity that anything should now stand in the way of our exertions in the cause of our king and country against that of baseness and corruption. Carefully to abstain from a *cry for peace* would disconcert the selfish faction more than can be conceived by any one who knows not them and their views. They would, upon a cry for peace on the part of Mr. Fox, instantly swear that he was prepared to surrender everything for the purpose of obtaining the indulgence of Buonaparte. But, as this danger does not exist, it is useless to dwell upon it. Holt is certainly mad or is a most unprincipled man. He has done precious mischief in many instances; and, if all be trusted, will do a great deal more. One would think that he had in view to make a set-off to the Ministerial lies. He has really surpassed them. What in all the world could possess him? Wright, who somehow or other gets at the bottom of all the printing secrets, always said that this establishment would be supported by nothing but *trick* as long as it lasted. Holt has written to me to bespeak my forbearance (requesting me not to divulge the contents of his letter); but I shall say *nothing at all about the matter*.²

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 199-200.

² *Ibid.*, 37853, f. 201.

William Cobbett to John Wright

ALTON, January 21, 1806.

I shall be at Brooke Street about 4 or 5 o'clock to-morrow, where, if possible, I shall be glad to see you. I propose to go to Pall Mall immediately, and then back again. And, the next morning, I propose to go and write at *your house* all the day and all the next day. In the meanwhile, let the Official Papers *about Nelson*, in the *Saturday's Gazette*, be set up, and also the *American President's Speech*. I shall get a sight of the papers to-morrow, and shall see what has been done; but, if the Houses have not *divided*, the folly will be reported of. The Charlatan is, then, *really ill!* It may be so; but cannot believe it upon the authority of the Bulletin-makers.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PANTON SQUARE [January 31, 1806].

Where I shall be till about 6 o'clock, when I must close the *Register*, unless you should send me word (perhaps now by Wright) that you will see me or send to me, either *here* or at your house, before 8 o'clock, which is the latest moment we can keep open. As to the subject upon which your former part of the note was written, I *had* written on it yesterday; and, in such a way as to convince the public, as far as my word goes with them, that neither you nor Mr. Fox went nearly *far enough* in the way of opposition. My second article (there will be but two) is upon the change of Ministry. I shall first *suppose* a change without looking upon it as certain. Then describe the terrible difficulties that the new Ministry will have to encounter. Then, in terms somewhat general, point out what I think ought to be their

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 132.

line of conduct. I should like to say, just before I conclude, whether a change will take place, and, if quite proper, to give the list as far as it has gone. But about this latter I am not very anxious.¹

At the beginning of February, Grenville formed a Government known as "All the Talents," and in this Windham accepted the office of Secretary for War and the Colonies, with a seat in the Cabinet.

William Cobbett to William Windham

PANTON SQUARE [February 1806].

I shall be here till half past 2 o'clock. Your man was off before the note could get upstairs to me; but I immediately wrote a note and sent it to my Lord Folkestone. I am exceedingly sorry (and must express it), that Dr. Laurence has no place; more for the public and for the honour of the Ministry than for himself. He is so worthy a man, so valuable every way, and has been so steady and so true! Creevy, I see, is *not* your Secy. But, in fact, these newspapers appear to know little or nothing about the matter. I shall, sometime before 10 o'clock to-night (I shall go from here at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 2), be glad to know something about the *appointments* for certain. If I *do not* hear from you before $\frac{1}{2}$ past 8, I will then go down to your house.²

William Eton to William Cobbett

NO. 1 SUFFOLK STREET, CHARING CROSS,
February 4, 1806.

This morning I recd. the inclosed from an acquaintance who has lately been at Malta. It wd. seem, if his information be true, that Ld. Castlereagh had given away a

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 202.

² *Ibid.*, 37853, f. 208.

place *before he went* out of office. Mr. Windham will, however, be in time to rectify things. The evil is not removed; it lies in the civil government.

I wish you, yourself, may have time to read the copies of a few of my letters to Mr. Canceorn at Malta, wh. you have among the papers. They are curious indeed.

I do not wish to send papers, and the pamphlets to Mr. Windham respecting the civil govt. of Malta until he has his *own* secretaries, but I hope you will lose no time in speaking with him—and informing him of the worth of the place of govr. genl. of Malta—which will be (tho' £10,000) less than the *worth* of the office of civil commissioner. To all speculation an end must be put. But no time shd. be lost in informing the public of the necessity of keeping Malta. No peace will be secure or honourable that dispossesses us of it.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

UPPER BROOK STREET, February 4, 1806.

This day 22 years ago I 'listed as a soldier; to-morrow 14 years ago I was married. This month of February has always been a lucky month for me; for I can truly say, that the news of this morning (I allude to the List of new Ministers) has given me as great pleasure as I ever before felt in my whole life, especially as I see that Dr. Laurence's learning and integrity and industry and public spirit have not been forgotten in the new arrangements. The fear that this might not be the case gave me more mortification than I can express to you. *Your* under secy. is a most excellent choice. Persevere in that line, and you will have much less toil than you imagine. Upon the principle of calling forth men of talents, I think the *writer in Scotland* is worth your

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 206.

remembering. He has great talents in various ways, and, I dare say, would prove a most valuable man. But there is time enough to think about that. I merely mention him because he was in my mind. *Eton* has written me a letter, and has given me some papers relative to Malta which are very well worthy of your attention. Indeed, they are *intended for you*. I am to see him to-day, or to-morrow, and then I shall tell him that I will *mention* the papers to you. I can see what he wants; but his papers are worthy of notice, and you will be able to judge of his facts as well as of his opinions. Upon 2nd thought it would, perhaps, be better for me to tell him that I cannot presume to be the channel of any such communication to you, and advise him to apply to yourself at once. To-morrow I intend to write, for the *Register*, an article upon the composition of the new Ministry, and there to make a transition to the great difficulties in the various departments which they will have to encounter. Here I shall, of course, speak of the army, and if there be any point about which you are anxious that something should be said, you will be pleased to signify it to me, in some way or other, either this evening or to-morrow. I do not know that I shall do much before Thursday. But, on Wednesday night, I must have all my subject in my mind.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

UPPER BROOK STREET, *Saturday Morning*
[February 7, 1806].

I never passed five such miserable hours as those which followed after our interview yesterday. I have since heard, in part at least, of what has been done, and I write this to say that I can see no objection whatever to giving it my hearty support. There are things

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 204-5.

which one would have wished not done ; but everything appears to me to be well done for the purpose of rooting out the influence of the Pitts and Dundases. It will now be torn up. Other bad influence may come ; but it can never again be so deeply rooted. This was the first, the very first object. I will wait on you in the evening, if I can ; but I could not delay assuring you that what you appeared to apprehend was groundless, at least, if there be nothing bad more than I have heard of.¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

UPPER BROOK STREET, February 10, 1806.

When you are ready to bestow an hour upon my notions relative upon *the army*, I will carry them, or rather *send* them, to you. And here it may as well be laid down as a rule, that, while you are a Minister (which, I hope, will be many, many years) *I* shall never intrude upon your time by personal application to you upon any occasion whatever. Your time is now too precious to be spent in *parler pour parler* ; and be assured that I shall never feel any pain from your having none of it to bestow upon conversations with me. There are many amongst those of the new opposition, as it was called, who *never* noticed me personally. They did not, I dare say, dream that I cared so little about it ; and that when I saw them *fêteing* the pretender, Gentz, that I looked on them with pity for the weakness of their preference rather than with envy towards Gentz. It is quite natural and just for a man to like those by whom he is liked personally ; and assuredly I do not like the persons here alluded to the better for their coldness towards me ; but this is a consideration which will never have any weight with me in the performance of that which I look upon as my public duty. From the

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 209.

Foxites I have met with personal civility and kindness, such as never appeared at all in the conduct of the Grenvilles; and, therefore, I like them better; and, therefore, to them, if I had any favour to ask, I should certainly address myself; but I have, at present, none to ask; and, at any rate, this feeling never shall influence me in the performance of what I consider as my duty. I have said all this in order to lay bare to you the state of my mind upon the score of personal considerations; and in order to convince you that it is upon deliberate reflection that I have now pointed out that which I think will be the proper mode of communication between us, if, at any time, you should think it advisable to communicate with me; and, if you never should, you will soon be convinced that I shall attribute your determination to anything rather than a want of friendship towards myself, of which friendship I have experienced so many proofs. To your *office* I will on no account go. I foresee many reasons against that, particularly the *possibility* of exciting in the Grenvilles certain suspicions that ought not, for harmony's sake, to exist.

As to appointments I know nothing, except with regard to those of the *Cabinet*. If Ld. Auckland be at the Post Office, and particularly if *Freeling*¹ remain, much of what I hoped from the new Ministry, *very much*, I shall be disappointed in. This old slave of the Pitt faction is the worst of its slaves. The most dangerous, because by far, very far indeed, the most powerful. He has a complete control over the exportation of periodical works. He has the appointment of an active and powerful political partizan in *every town* in the kingdom. His patronage to the press; his powers of suppression or of circulation; his more than a battalion of clerks and runners; his facility of influencing and of directing popular assemblies in London; all these give to Freeling a degree of power that ought not to remain in such hands.

¹ See vol. i. pp. 125-9 of this work.

If it does, it will, to me, be an earnest of no good. This office should be committed to the hands of some steady, staunch adherent of the present Ministry; and I know of no one who is half so fit for it as O'Brien. He is the very man of all men for the office; and it would be hard indeed were his usefulness to Mr. Fox to be an obstacle; for, indeed, where could he be a hundredth part so useful to him? And, besides, it is the very office which would, without any invidious appearance, enable him to continue to be useful to him in *all manner of ways*. But whoever may be the successor, Freeling ought to be removed. I have *proved* him to have been guilty of "a gross violation of the law"; and I have now at hand all the means of proving Lord Auckland to have been his protector therein. If he remains, Mr. Plummer of Hertfordshire I hold engaged to me to bring the matter forward; if he be removed this will be avoided. But I feel myself, in common with the other persons concerned in the press, as being most cruelly oppressed by this man's use of his power; his illegal power; and that I should endeavour to obtain redress is perfectly natural; in which endeavour I shall be joined by more than 200 printers and newsmen. This is in all probability the only request, upon a subject like this, that I shall ever presume to trouble you with; and if even this should be refused, the refusal will in no wise diminish that respect and attachment, with which I remain, . . .¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

PANTON SQUARE, *Friday Morning*
[February 14, 1806].

As you called here last night just after I went home, and as there may be something about which you would wish to signify your wishes to me, I shall be here all day till about 5 o'clock. I see the *M[orning] Post* is

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 211-2.

beginning in advance to attack my scheme relative to a reduction of the Volunteers. I shall endeavour to counteract this. Dillon, who called here yesterday, told me that your speech upon Pitt had produced an unfavourable impression as to yourself. Well, therefore, did you do to correct that speech. Dillon is both fool and liar as a politician; but, what he attributed to others, he would say, and had said, himself. I have a most curious paper about Pitt's debts. £20,000 to Ld. Carrington!! But all this is much blacker than you can imagine. Eton has plagued me half to death. I am sure he has written a good honest volume. I will to-day send you all his papers, and I have made a vow never to see his Scotch face again. I do not think his invectives against Mr. G. Penn¹ well founded; he can give no good reasons for them; and I rather think he wants the place now filled by Mr. Penn, who is certainly an honest and an honourable man, and one that I have always heard speak well of you, besides the circumstance of his brother being the most zealous advocate of your opinions that I have ever met with in my life.²

William Cobbett to William Windham

PANTON SQUARE, February 20, 1806.

The *precursors* to the enclosed Letter must have put you in mind of Swift's *Introduction* to the Bp. of Sarum's *Preface*, which, as we learn from Swift, was preceded by notice upon notice, following one another at shorter times as the day of publication approached, and which practice he gravely represents as having been borrowed from a

¹ Granville Penn (1761-1844), second son of Thomas Penn, a son of the founder of Philadelphia, became a clerk in the War Department, and subsequently retired on a pension. He was the author of several books. On the death of his elder brother in 1834, he inherited the estate of Stoke Pogis Park in Buckinghamshire, and Pennsylvania Castle, Portland, U.S.A.

² Add. MSS. 37853, f. 213.

certain French nobleman, who, in order to enhance his importance upon his entry into a certain city, sent couriers forward, galloping up to the gate, and calling out in a loud voice, "*Monseigneur vient!*" And then riding back again, and so on, quicker and quicker upon one another's heels, till Monseigneur actually arrived. Whether the judicious part of the people were cheated out of their admiration by this trick I know not; but I hope your expectations will not have been too highly raised by my *avant-couriers*. There is much of novelty, at least, in my plan. It will, doubtless, admit of modifications; but I am fully convinced that if something quite equal to it in point of value and of honour to the soldier be not adopted, we shall have no army to be relied on; and that we shall never again see an hour of real *peace* and *independence*. For the *execution* I have all the means in my mind. Nothing can be more easy; and, what is more, the execution would be such as to render the measure itself even more efficient and amiable than it, at first sight, appears to be. With an anxious hope that your solicitude and your labours for the prosperity and the glory of the country may be crowned with success. . . .¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, February 23, 1806.

I have just received a letter from Mr. Wright stating the substance of a communication from you, intended to be made to me, in order to save you the trouble of writing a letter to the same purport. The man who brings the letters to this village does not stay here above half an hour. He is now gone back to Southampton, and was indeed gone before my arrival here, which was not half an hour ago; but, such is the impression upon

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 217.

my mind produced by the letter of Wright, that I cannot help sending off something to-night, in the hope that by the means of a parcel sent to Wright by the mail-coach, it may have the good fortune to reach you to-morrow. I propose setting off back again to-morrow, or on Tuesday; but I cannot lay my head down upon the pillow until I have given an expression to those feelings with which my mind is impressed.

As to the *Plan*, as it was submitted to your wisdom, to your superior understanding and judgment, I leave it entirely to you; reserving to myself the right of stating, in my *Register*, the reasons whereon I could have desired to see the whole of this plan adopted. I regret that you should have thought it necessary to say that there was "no intention to *deprive me of the merit* of the suggestion." I am not aware that any part of my conduct has been calculated to cause a belief, either that I was likely to entertain such a suspicion, or that I should be anxious to appropriate to myself any such merit. In communicating the plan I had no other view than that of rendering a service to the country, and of saving you some little trouble; and in the note, which I, in great haste, and too great carelessness perhaps, wrote to you on Friday evening, I really only meant to get the plan back as an article for the *Register*, upon the supposition, which I sincerely entertained, that, upon the whole, it had been thought to be of no use. I no less sincerely rejoice to find that you approve of some parts, at least, of the plan. Of course, it remains with you, and with my anxious wish to see it adopted.

The other parts of your communication give me great pain; because, though Wright merely repeats what was said to him, there is, running through the whole of his language and his manner, such an evident appearance of sorrow, that, when I consider his personal regard for me, his profound respect for you, and his pride at having been occasionally the channel between us, I cannot help

concluding that the impression upon his mind was, that, on account of the article relative to Lord Grenville, I had incurred your serious displeasure. The existence of this truth would, whatever and however momentary might be the cause, have deeply affected me, whose chief pride it has been to endeavour to further your views, and whose almost sole consolation has been the possessing of your countenance and your friendship. What, then, must be my feelings, when, upon a deliberate consideration of all I have said with respect to Lord Grenville, and even after having heard your sentiments upon the subject, I cannot think myself justified, either in justice or in policy, to retract one word of what I have said, or so to act in future as if I had fallen into error; being fully convinced that all I have said is perfectly true, and perfectly proper to be said. The question relating to the Auditorship is open to the judgment of the world. With regard to the fact on the point of talents, that is matter of mere opinion; and, as to the motive for stating it, I will not disguise, either to you or to the world, that it was to begin preparing the public mind for a watchfulness over him, for a hesitation in applauding his measures relative to finance and other matters; and this because, I think, I clearly perceive, from the manner in which he has begun, and from the retention of so many of the Pitt sect about him and in every department within the reach of his influence, an intention, by no means equivocally indicated, to preserve, in spirit at least, the accursed system, which I hope to see annihilated, and which, if not annihilated, I am fully persuaded will annihilate the liberties of the people first, and next the independence of the country. Besides, Sir, there really does appear to me, and I cannot help saying it, something like inconsistency in attaching any degree of importance to my promulgated opinions, at the very time that my opinions communicated in private seem to be looked upon as entirely unworthy of notice;

an instance of which last is strikingly afforded in the fate of my application with regard to Freeling. I have proved this man to have been guilty of a gross violation of the law; I have proved him to be the oppressor of myself and of every man connected with the press and not of the Pitt faction or race; you and Lord Grenville and every one else must know that we have long and patiently laboured under the tyranny of this man's partial execution of his most important office; and now, when we had a right to expect redress, or, at least, relief, must it *not* be thought galling to meet with a refusal, or with silence and neglect ten thousand times more humiliating than a refusal? My application was made upon public and perfectly fair and honourable grounds. I asked for nothing but common justice for myself and others; I asked for relief from oppression exercised by the most wicked of the Pitt agents; and, if I asked for benefit in the new appointments, it was in favour of a man most eminently entitled to it, on the ground of his public services—services, in the oversetting of the Pitts, surpassed by those of no one man in the kingdom. But, leaving all these circumstances out of the question, supposing that, upon the mere ground of my own pretensions, I had asked for the dismissal of Freeling for the sole purpose of making way for a person of my recommending—was this request too high for me? Was it above the level of my fair pretensions? Was the making of it a mark of presumption that merited no other answer than that of significant silence? Perhaps it was. I do not say that it was not. I do not say that I have not overrated the value of my talents and my services and my political friendship; but this I do say, that if this object was above the worth of my friendship, my hostility (supposing me to have discovered it) must be far too contemptible to be worthy of notice. I have mentioned this instance, Sir, merely as an illustration of my meaning, and as a specimen of those

thoughts which have been passing through my mind, begging leave to add, however, that, by nothing of this sort have I been, or will I suffer myself to be, influenced in anything that I have said, or shall say, of the characters of the Ministry, or of the nature or the tendency of their measures.

Wright states that you appeared extremely vexed at the prevalence, or supposed prevalence, of an opinion, that "all the most *violent* parts" of the *Register* were either written or suggested by you; and that this fact had been corroborated by the observation of Mr. Amyot.¹ Without wishing to detract in the smallest degree from the critical judgment of Mr. Amyot, I must confess that I am vain enough to think that, having so long been obliged to listen to the cant of the most despicable of our opponents, he has mistaken *strength* for *violence*; and I must further confess myself proud enough to hope that, from having my writings imputed to him, no man's character has ever suffered an injury. You will, moreover, I am sure, do me the justice to allow, that I have neglected nothing calculated to remove every such impression; and, in this way, I am ready to do anything further that you may think necessary.

In conclusion I have only time to beg you to excuse the slovenliness of this letter; that you will, as you peruse it, bear in mind the haste and the other circumstances under which it has been written; and that you will, above all things, believe that I cherish the hope, always amongst the dearest to my heart, that I shall still be thought worthy of your friendship. With this hope, I remain, Sir, your most humble and most obedient servant,

WM. COBBETT.²

¹ Thomas Amyot (1775-1850), antiquary and solicitor. He acted as Windham's agent during the election of 1802, and when Windham went to the War Office became his private secretary. He collected Windham's speeches, and published them, with a memoir, in 1812.

² Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 218-9.

William Cobbett to William Windham

PANTON SQUARE, *Friday, February 28, 1806.*

Had the part of your letter, relating to what I ought further to do in justice to myself, been as explicit and as opposite to my way of thinking as the other parts of it, the utter improbability of our opinions ever being reconciled would have saved you the trouble which I now give you. But you say: "You can do more, too, than you have done to show that your opinions are your own, &c. &c." Now, Sir, I am here with paper before me, with pen in hand, and with the *Register* of to-morrow yet open, waiting to know *what more* I can do in this way, and ready to do it, provided that it does not contradict what I think to be true and right. Having troubled you with what may, perhaps, be regarded as an answer to your letter, I cannot refrain from observing that, in the hurry in which you evidently wrote, you fell into an important error in representing my letter as containing *complaints*; the object of it not being complaint, but defence against complaint, and the affair of Freeling being introduced merely for the purpose of showing that the friends of Lord Grenville were somewhat inconsistent in appearing to attach any importance to my opinions. This I am desirous to have recollected, because common justice to myself requires that there should remain nothing whereon to found against me the charge of acting from feelings of disappointment.¹

The receipt of this letter is noted by Windham in his *Diary*, where he mentions that he replied, saying that, instead of the passage being "You can do more," it should have been "You can do no more." "Came away in carriage with Fox," so the entry goes on; "got out

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 221.

at end of Downing Street, and went on to office, thence to Cobbett. Probably the last interview we shall have." ¹

William Cobbett to William Windham

BOTLEY, March 2, 1806.

Loath as I am, particularly after the remark at the close of your last letter but one, again to trespass upon your valuable time, there was, in our conversation of the 28th ultimo, one fact that dropped incidentally, which I cannot refrain from noticing by letter: to wit, the proposed dismissal (which I had hoped was not to take place) of Mr. Granville Penn. In the case which had just been the subject of explanation, you urged the supposed naturally insuperable objection of Lord Grenville to consent to my wish of removal, and this supposition you grounded chiefly upon the existence of a custom of adhering to a rule of not displacing persons in situations of a certain degree of inferiority. In one of these situations, you observed to me that Mr. G. Penn was placed, and that on this account it was that you found some difficulty in displacing him. Now you can hardly have forgotten that, both by letter and verbally, I expressed myself to you in a way to convince you, that the suffering of Mr. G. Penn to remain would be highly gratifying to me; and, indeed, you must have been convinced that it would, having so lately seen me declare in print that his brother had been "my preserver." In our recent conversation upon the subject, I did, too, take the liberty to remind you of the evidence of talent, as well as of public spirit, that Mr. G. Penn had given. If I had thought it necessary, I could have added the sacrifices to the public good made by his family, and

¹ *Diary*, February 28, 1806, p. 460.

particularly by his brother, and which, in proportion to their means, have been surpassed by none of his Majesty's subjects, let them be who they may. Yet you assure me (and without thinking necessary any observations whatever as to the cause of dismissal) that you have to struggle with some difficulties in accomplishing the dismissal of this gentleman from a place, which, according to the usual custom, is not liable to feel the effects of ministerial revolutions! It is quite unnecessary to trouble you with any conclusion drawn from these facts; and the facts themselves would not have been stated had they not been such as to render complete my defence against your former complaints, by exhibiting in a light still stronger the inconsistency, before noticed, of attaching any importance whatever to the public expression of my opinions. So radically differing as we do upon so many matters of feeling, an agreement in which is absolutely necessary to an harmonious and useful intercourse, I now put an end to that intercourse, with an expression of my unfeigned thanks for the many marks of friendship and of kindness which you have shown towards me, and with praying that your health may enable you so to exert the powers of your great and enlightened mind as to render the merit of having largely contributed to the salvation of England, a subject to be inscribed upon your tomb. With these sentiments, sincerely felt, and thus solemnly expressed, I remain, Sir, your most humble and obedt. servant,

WM. COBBETT.

P.S.—When you have described your plan in Parliament, mine, I will thank you to return to me, at No. 5, Panton Square, because from the papers I have I could not make out a re-statement, without, perhaps, material omissions.¹

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, f. 223.

William Cobbett to William Windham

PARSON'S GREEN, March 9, 1806.

Your letter of yesterday, which Mr. Wright has just brought me hither, imperiously demanding an answer from me, I will just observe, first, as to the statement relative to Mr. Penn and Freeling, contained in your letter of the 6th instant, it left my feelings as well as my opinion upon the subject just what they were at the date of the letter which I last troubled you with from Botley; and, in adverting to the proposed removal of Freeling, I shall dismiss that subject for ever with observing, that I wish with all my heart that Lord Grenville may never be "guilty of baseness" greater than that which would have been visible in a measure so pertinaciously recommended by me; to which I will add an expression of my utter astonishment, that, in your opinion, the having been an over-active, zealous, and officious partizan of the Pitt administration is, and ought to be, a ground whereon to claim protection from the person at the head of a Ministry of which you form a part.

In answer to your letter of yesterday, I beseech you to dismiss from your mind the idea, if there it be, that the acknowledgment you have now made was at all necessary; for, though I am now by no means anxious to prevent a diminution of that gratitude which you so explicitly avow, justice to myself calls upon me to declare that, in nothing which was said at the close of the *Register* referred to, was an allusion made to you; but that I had in my mind, generally, the haughty and arrogant family who are now finishing to swallow up the state, and, particularly, the most haughty and arrogant of them (Temple) who had, I had heard, been so foolish and so insolent as to speak of me in a manner which called aloud for the declaration that I made.

Upon a survey of all that has passed since the change

of Ministry, I perceive little that now remains to be said. The causes of my dissatisfaction, other than those stated in print, have been freely stated to you ; and, as to the private part of this statement, it has been made by way of defence rather than from complaint. Had there been no remonstrance as to my publications, I should not have condescended to complain of neglect ; but, as it became necessary to speak upon the subject, it behoved me to speak out, and to say that which I will now repeat in one short sentence ; namely, that, when I consider what I have done and what I am able to do, and when I compare the treatment of myself with that which is experienced by such men as—who shall I say ?—Cranford, or Elliot, for instance ; when I thus consider and thus compare, conscious superiority beats at my breast, and bids me turn from such treatment with disdain.

For myself I not only *ask nothing*, but I took the earliest possible opportunity of apprising you of my resolution to *accept of nothing* ; and this, too, upon such grounds as must have put you quite at your ease upon my account. You very well knew that my wife had a brother and a father in the army, both of them fair objects of promotion ; you knew that I had expressed, formerly, an anxiety to see them promoted ; and you would be at no loss to perceive how grateful it must have been to me to be the cause of their promotion. Yet, even here, one of the points nearest to my heart, I forbore to awaken your recollection. I never should have attempted to do it, and do it now only because the time for its having effect is forever past. What I asked was asked upon grounds purely public and disinterested, and the refusal, especially when joined with the avowed motive and the manner, gave rise to those feelings which I have expressed to you, which I still entertain, and of which, unless experience should prove a great teacher of humility, I shall never divest myself. In my public conduct, however, I shall, I hope, always

have virtue enough to prevent those feelings from having, towards any one, a very powerful effect, and, with regard to you, my heart very much deceives me if I shall not always act under the impression of those sentiments, which I expressed at the close of my last letter. . . .¹

Cobbett's letter of March 9 is the last preserved in the Windham MSS., and it is probably the last that passed between them. When honest men fall out, rogues come by their own, and it is a pity that these two men, each with the interests of the country at heart, should have disagreed. At the time it was thought by many that the breach arose because Windham did not use his influence to secure the offer of some post for Cobbett, but this clearly was not the case.

When the Whigs, as they were called, came into power, and when Mr. Windham came to fill the high office of Secretary of State for the War and Colonial Departments, every one thought that *my turn* to get rich was come (Cobbett wrote in 1817). I was imperturbed by many persons *to take care of myself*, as they called it. But as soon as I found from him that he actually *was in place*, I told him, "Now, Sir, to make all smooth with regard to me, I beg you to be assured that it is my resolution to have no place, and not to touch one single farthing of the public money, in any shape whatever"; and justice to his memory demands that I should say that he, upon that occasion, told me that I never should forfeit any part of his esteem by opposing the Ministry; "no," said he, "not even by any censure that you may think it your duty to pass upon my own conduct."²

¹ Add. MSS. 37853, ff. 225-6.

² *Political Register*, January 1817. "A Letter to Old George Rose."

There is, then, no reason to suppose that Cobbett wanted office, or that he would have accepted it even if it had been offered. He must have realised that he was a man entirely unsuited to be fettered by the traditions of any administrative department. Popular with the people, with the governing classes he was already vastly unpopular, his attack on pensions in the *Political Register* of July 27, 1805, having been a blow too direct to be overlooked or forgiven. As his letters show, however, while he asked nothing for himself, he certainly thought more attention should have been paid to his recommendations by Windham, and that when in what he thought to be the public interest he demanded the dismissal of Freeling, that official should have been removed from his post. In no department of state were there greater abuses than in the War Office, over which Windham now presided, and against these in March Cobbett tilted with great vigour in his paper, being careful, however, to display no animus—and, in truth, he felt none—against Windham. The last reference to Cobbett in Windham's *Diary* is on February 19, 1809, and thus runs: "Nearly the whole time from breakfast till Mr. Legge's coming down, employed in reading Cobbett. More thoroughly wicked and mischievous than almost anything that has appeared yet."

Cobbett was able to address a vast audience through the medium of the *Political Register*, but he was desirous to do more than promulgate opinions: he desired to be able to take a leading part in the making of laws that should enforce his views, and he had for some time cast longing eyes at Parliament. A chance offered in June 1806, when Cavenish's Bradshaw, one of the members for Honiton, vacated his seat by accepting an office of

profit under the Crown, to wit, the office of Teller of the Irish Exchequer. Bradshaw offered himself for re-election, but Cobbett, "merely because I could find no other independent man to oppose Mr. Bradshaw," entered the field against him, not so much with any great hope of winning the seat as with the view of drawing attention to the corruption rampant in the House of Commons. Colonel Bosville, one of the early supporters of reform, drove Cobbett into Devonshire, and used all his influence on behalf of his friend, and Cobbett endeavoured to influence the election by exposing the Government's abuses of the public purse in the *Political Register*, in the pages of which he reprinted his address to the electors.

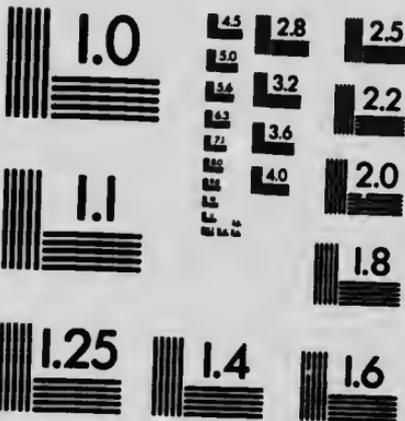
"Fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery."—JOB, ch. xv.

GENTLEMEN,—Perceiving that Mr. Cavendish Bradshaw has, since by your voice he was constituted one of the guardians of the public purse, taken care to obtain a place by the means of which he will draw into his own pocket some thousands a year out of that purse, and this, too, at a time when the load of indispensable taxes is pressing his honest and industrious constituents to the earth; perceiving this, and being fully persuaded that, whenever the electors of any place re-choose representatives under similar circumstances, the cause is not so much in their own disposition as in the apathy and lukewarmness of those independent men who may have the ability to rescue them from such hands; with this truth being deeply impressed, I did, upon hearing of the approaching vacancy, use my efforts to prevail upon other men of this description to afford you an opportunity of evincing your good sense and uprightness, and having failed in those efforts, I have thought it my duty to afford you this opportunity myself; it being manifestly true that, unless men of independence and of



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public spirit will offer themselves as candidates, to rail at electors for choosing and re-choosing the dependent and the mercenary is, in the highest degree, unreasonable and unjust.

As to professions, Gentlemen, so many and so loud, upon such occasions, have they been; so numerous are the instances, in which the foulness and shamelessness of the apostasy have borne an exact proportion to the purity and solemnity of the vow; so completely, and with such fatal effect, have the grounds of confidence been destroyed, that it is now become necessary, upon all occasions like the present, to give a pledge, such as every man can clearly understand, and such as it is impossible to violate without exposing the violator to detection and to all the consequences of detected hypocrisy and falsehood; and such a pledge I now give in declaring that, whether you elect me or not, I never, as long as I live, either for myself, or for, or through the means of, any one of my family, will receive, under any name, whether of salary, pension or other, either directly or indirectly, one single farthing of the public money; but without emolument, compensation, or reward of any kind or in any shape, will, to the utmost of my ability, watch over and defend the property, the liberties, and the privileges of the people, never therefrom separating, as I never yet have, the just and constitutional rights and prerogatives of the crown.

This declaration, Gentlemen, is not made without due reflection as to the future as well as to the present, as to public men in general as well as to myself. It proceeds, first, from an opinion that the representatives of the people ought never to be exposed to the temptation of betraying their trust; secondly, from long observation that those who live upon the public are amongst the most miserable of men; and, thirdly, from that experience in the various walks of life, which has convinced me of the wisdom of Agur, who prayed for neither

riches nor poverty; not riches, lest he should forget God; not poverty, lest he should be tempted to steal; and to receive the public money unjustly is not only stealing, but stealing of the worst and basest sort, including a breach of the most sacred trust, accompanied with the cowardly consciousness of impunity. From reflections like these, Gentlemen, it is that the declaration now made has proceeded, and, when I depart, in word or in deed, from this declaration may I become the scorn of my country; wherein to be remembered with esteem, I prize beyond all the riches and all the honours of this world.

But, Gentlemen, as it is my firm determination never to receive a farthing of the public money, so it is my determination, equally firm, never, in any way whatever, to give one farthing of my own money to any man in order to induce him to vote, or to cause others to vote, for me; and being convinced that it is this practice of giving, or promising to give, money, or money's worth, at elections; being convinced that it is this disgraceful, this unlawful, this profligate, this impious practice, to which are to be ascribed all our calamities and all the dangers that now stare us in the face, I cannot refrain from exhorting you to be, against all attempts at such practices, constantly and watchfully upon your guard. The candidates who have resorted to such means have always been found amongst the most wicked of men; men who having, by a life of adultery or of gambling, or of profligacy of some sort, ruined both their character and their fortunes, have staked their last thousand upon an election, with the hope of thereby obtaining security from a jail, and of selling their vote for the means of future subsistence drawn from the sweat of the people at a hundred-fold; and thus expecting to pocket the profit of the corrupt speculation, sneering at their bribed and perjured constituents, as Satan is said to have sneered at the reprobate with whom he had bargained for his soul.

Far from you, Gentlemen, be credulity so foolish !
 Far from you, disgrace so deep, infamy so indelible !
 Far from you, so flagrant a violation of the law, so daring
 a defiance of the justice and the power and the wrath
 of God : But, were it otherwise, and did I find in Honiton
 but as many righteous men as were found in Sodom and
 Gomorrah, I would tender them my hand to lead them
 from the rest. Very different, however, are my hopes ;
 these hopes forbid me to believe it possible that there
 should be, collected upon one spot, four hundred English-
 men, having the eyes of all England upon them, who
 will not, by their votes, freely and cordially given, sanction
 the right principle upon which I now stand ; and, in
 these hopes, I will, if I have life, do myself the honour
 to meet you on the day of election. In the meanwhile
 I am, with great respect, Gentlemen, your most humble
 and most obedient servant,
 WM. COBBETT.

June 1, 1806.

At the last moment Lord Cochrane was nominated and Cobbett withdrew. Bradshaw was, of course, returned, and all that Cobbett obtained in return for his exertions was the knowledge at first hand that the electorate was as rotten as the men sent to Parliament. "The electors tell you there is no bribery," Cobbett said, and he pointed out that while perhaps this was true in the letter, it was most disgracefully false in the spirit. "They take a certain sum of money each according to their consequence, their degree of influence, and their services to their candidates respectively ; 'but this,' they say, 'comes in the shape of a *reward* after the election, and therefore the oath may be safely taken.'" Those electors whom Cobbett asked to support him told him plainly that they depended for their means of subsistence upon the price paid for their votes ; and, as a commentary

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TOM PAINE DISTRIBUTING
HALFPENCE AMONG THE MOB
Vide Election at Houlton.
—"Tom Paine fore: er"

AN OLD MONK FROM BRENTFORD
LEADING POOR GOOSE IN A STRING!
Vide Paul's address to the Electors of Westminster

WILLIAM COBBETT A
From a caricature by C



TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION OF LITTLE PAUL.
THE TAYLOR UPON HIS NEW GOOSE.

PORCUPINE DIRTYING HIS ROOTS, IN
ATTEMPTING TO GIVE POOR GOOSE
A SHOVE OUT OF THE KENNEL.

BALLAD SINGERS AT 5
SHILLING A DAY CLOS-
ING THE PROCESSION.

Westminster

OBETT AND THE WESTMINSTER ELECTION OF 1806
icature by Gilray in the possession of A. M. Broadley, Esq.



upon this, he remarked that "from election to election, the poor men run up scores at the shops, and are trusted by the shopkeepers, *expressly upon the credit of the proceeds of the ensuing election.*" Not all troubled to plead their poverty or to make excuses: some said frankly, "the *member* took care to get *well paid*, and they had a right to do the same if they could." Some even told Cobbett that by soliciting their votes he was endeavouring to "take the bread out of poor people's mouths," while the supporters of Bradshaw took for their motto, "Bread and Cheese, and *no empty Cupboard!*" It is not surprising that after Cobbett returned from Honiton he preached the purity of elections and the reform of the House of Commons.¹

William Cobbett to John Wright

BOTLEY, July 7, 1806.

As to Mr. Robson's re-election, I verily believe he would carry it for Westminster; and I would go up, and aid him with all my might, if he would stand upon my principle. He would surely carry it. Let me know *when* the dissolution is to take place. Give me, in your next letter, the very *best intelligence you can get* upon the subject, for I must begin, without loss of time, to address the electors all over the kingdom. Between you and I, my opinion is, that *I* should not come forward *now*, unless some body of electors were to *call* me forward. Most men like me have been ruined in reputation by their *haste* to get forward. If the great objects which I have at heart could be accomplished without my being in Parliament, I should greatly prefer it. I should first attend to my own family; I am perfectly sincere in all my public professions. But I will flinch from nothing

¹ *Political Register*, June 1806.

that may tend to effect the great purposes of saving the country, which is now every day in more and more danger.¹

Cobbett thought that the easiest and best way to effect such reform was from inside the House, and he announced his intention to offer himself for the City of Westminster at the next election, unless the other candidates made a declaration that they would not under any circumstances accept public monies. Fox died in September 1806, and Earl Percy was returned in his place unopposed; but at the subsequent general election Cobbett and James Paull stood as independents against the Tory Lord Hood and the Whig Sheridan.

To the Electors of Westminster

GENTLEMEN,—Having, some time ago, publicly stated, that, at the general election then looked for, and in the case then supposed, it appeared to me that I ought to offer myself to you as a candidate; having now been informed that, in consequence of that statement, a very general expectation has been entertained that, upon this accidental occasion, I should so offer myself; and having, by many individuals of your respectable body, been pressingly urged to fulfil that expectation: thus situated, I think it my duty, *first*, explicitly to declare that, for the present, I relinquish the honour intended me, and for this sole reason that, at this time, I find it would be next to impossible for me to devote myself wholly and exclusively to the discharge of the great duties, which, by your suffrages, would necessarily be imposed; and, *secondly*, to warn you against the calamity, the shame, the deep disgrace, that await you and your country,

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 168.

if, yielding to venal solicitations of the Stewards and Butlers of Noblemen, you condescend to become the menials of menials, the la[c]quies of la[c]quies, and suffer the populous, the industrious, the enlightened, the public-spirited City of Westminster, hitherto considered as the ever-burning lamp of the liberties of England, to be handed to and fro like a family-borough. Confidently trusting that you will, with indignation, resent any project for thus extinguishing the fame of your city and degrading the character of her electors, confidently trusting that, when you consider that it is to you all other *free* cities and boroughs look for an example, you will tear in rags the gaudy livery now tendered for your backs; confidently trusting that, when the question is *freedom or bondage*, you will suspend all animosities and differences, and act with a degree of energy and unanimity that shall at once and for ever blast the hopes of all those who would make you the instruments of your country's ruin; thus trusting, and with a mind full of gratitude for the good-will which many of you have taken occasion to express towards myself,—I remain, Gentlemen, your most humble and obedt. Sert.,

WM. COBBETT.¹

BOTLEY, September 16, 1806.

Cobbett's energies were directed mainly against Sheridan, for whom as a man and a politician he had the greatest contempt. "What a liar and deceiver Sheridan is!" he wrote to John Wright;² and when Sheridan spoke contemptuously of the origin of Paull, whose father had been in trade, he gave Cobbett an opportunity that was taken advantage of up to the hilt.

Whence sprang the Sheridans? From a *play-actor*; from a person of that profession (if it can be called a

¹ Add. MSS. 22906, f. 188.

² *Ibid.*, 22906, f. 200.

profession) the followers of which are, in our wise laws, considered and denominated vagabonds (Cobbett wrote). The prohibition of the exercise of this calling is the *rule*; the toleration of it merely the *exception*; and most wise is the law, for, if there be any calling lower than all other callings; if there be any one beyond all comparison the most degrading, is it not that wherein the operator, for the purpose of obtaining food and raiment, exhibits his person, displays his limbs, and strains his voice for the *amusement* of the spectators, to whose occasional and often capricious hissings and peltings it is a part of his profession to submit with a smile and a bow! ¹

Sheridan was furious at this onslaught, and his son Tom went to Cobbett's house, armed with a cane, to thrash him, and fortunately for himself found him not at home. There were few men who could have met Cobbett on equal terms when it came to fighting. Sheridan had the satisfaction, however, of being returned with Lord Hood for Westminster.

¹ *Political Register*, November 22, 1806.

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