

Choice 15
Walpole's Transcripts of His Letters to
Sir Horace Mann

The Mann correspondence is the great Andean range of the Walpolian continent, stretching from 1740 to Mann's death in 1786. Eight hundred and forty-eight of the letters are from Walpole, eight hundred and eighty-seven from Mann, a total of 1735 letters. The manuscripts of nearly all are at Farmington.

In my Introduction to these letters in the Yale Walpole I pointed out that "For sweep and variety and the procession of great events they are unrivalled in Walpole's correspondence." I might have gone further, I think, and said they are unrivalled in those respects by any other correspondence of the time. Walpole was aware of their historic value. As early as 1744 he wrote Mann that being "entirely out of all the little circumstances of each other's society, which are the soul of letters, we are forced to correspond as Guicciardini and Clarendon." Years later he exclaimed, "What scenes my letters to you have touched on for eight and thirty years!"; and a few years later still, "A correspondence of near half a century is, I suppose, not to be paralleled in the annals of the Post Office!" Towards the end he repeated that he was forced to write to posterity. "One cannot say, 'I dined with such a person yesterday,' when the letter is to be a fortnight on the road—still less, when you know nothing of my Lord or Mr Such-an-one, whom I should mention." He had moments of realistic disillusion with us: "If our letters remain, posterity will read the catastrophes of St James's and the Palace Pitti with equal indifference."

Walpole began getting his letters back in 1749 and thereafter they were brought him by friends every few years. He started transcribing them in 1754 to remove passages he didn't want us to see, such as the account of his quarrel with Gray at Reggio and the strictures on his one-time inti-

mate friend, Henry Fox. After a few years he let Kirgate do the copying, but resumed it for the last three years. The originals and copies were kept in separate houses and were left to different people. In a memorandum dated 21 March 1790 Walpole wrote: "I desire my executors to deliver to Sir Horace Mann the younger all my original letters to his uncle Sir Horace Mann the elder returned to me by the latter, and which letters are in the japan cabinet in the Blue Room on the first floor in my house in Berkeley Square; but the copies of those letters in six volumes which are in one of the cupboards in the Green Closet at Strawberry Hill, may be locked up in my library and remain there and devolve to those on whom I have entailed the house. But I desire they will never suffer them to be transcribed or printed." This memorandum is one of the manuscripts Sir Wathen Waller and I found in the attic at Woodcote. It was sold in the second Waller Sale in 1947 and is now at Farmington.

Why did Walpole and Mann go on writing to each other for forty-six years? Mann said that he "cherished" Walpole's letters and read and re-read them, for they were "necessary to my tranquillity." Although Walpole was the younger by eleven years one feels that he was the dominant partner in their friendship. His letters kept Mann informed of what was going on behind the scenes at home; he was a friend who was protecting Mann's interests with each succeeding Secretary of State and who helped him to proceed from resident to envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary, to become a baronet and a Knight of the Bath. This last honor was particularly welcome to Mann because its red ribbon was a constant rejoinder to the Italians who said he was of low degree. Mann's letters brought Walpole the latest foreign news; he liked quoting them and giving friends letters of introduction to the dean of the diplomatic corps in Florence, knowing his friends would receive a royal welcome. Mann was celebrated for his entertainments and hospitality, as visiting Englishmen and foreigners, including Casanova, bore witness. He also proved his ability in affairs by the skill with which he followed the activities of the Jacobites in Rome and the advice he gave the English naval officers in the Mediterranean.

Instead of sending the originals of Walpole's letters to the younger Mann as Walpole directed, Mrs Damer kept them and bequeathed them to her Twickenham neighbor, Sir Wathen Waller, the first baronet. We know Waller had them in 1833, but not what became of them later, apart from the first sixteen that got separated from the rest and are now mine.

The simplest explanation for the disappearance of family papers is that they were burnt and it may well be that Waller, a conscientious man, fearful that the originals might one day be printed contrary to Walpole's expressed wishes, did burn them. That Walpole really wanted the originals destroyed may be questioned since he did not destroy them himself, as his earlier editors thought he had done. He was of two minds about their fate, hoping for future readers yet shrinking from them. This illustrates the "inconsequence" that Miss Berry said marked his old age.

Mrs Damer followed Walpole's instructions about the ultimate disposition of the transcripts and turned them over to the Waldegrave family. The present Lord Waldegrave sold them to me in 1948. Lord Dover used them, not the originals, for his edition of Walpole's letters to Mann, which was published by Bentley in 1833. The original worn bindings of the six volumes were removed and Paget Toynbee told me with pride that he got the ninth Earl Waldegrave to have the letters rebound in their present red morocco. I would like, of course, to save all six volumes, but if the Almighty says "NO!" I'll rescue the first volume, which has 150 letters from 1741 to 1746 transcribed and annotated by Walpole throughout.

That he had future readers of his letters in mind is clear from the Advertisement he prefixed to the first volume of the transcripts and by the epigraph he added to its title-page, "Posteris an aliqua cura, nescio! Plin. Epist," "*Whether there will be any concern about us on the part of posterity I do not know.*" Pliny, *Letters*. The late Professor Clarence Mendell of Yale kindly sent me a translation of Pliny's letter to Tacitus in which the epigraph appears, pointing out that Walpole omitted *nostri* between *cura* and *nescio*. This epigraph is less confident than the one already quoted in Choice 4 from Cibber's *Apology*. We can be certain, I think, of his satisfaction if he could have known that in the twentieth century his letters to and from Mann would be published in America in eleven substantial volumes with tens of thousands of footnotes and an index of over 100,000 entries to guide an ever-increasing number of delighted readers. The English friend who saw Walpole most clearly, "Gilly" Williams, wrote to George Selwyn, "I can figure no being happier than Horry, *Monstrari digito praetereuntium* [to be pointed out by those passing by] has been his whole aim. For this he has wrote, printed, and built." For this he wrote and kept his letters.

Here is his Advertisement to the transcripts.

A
Collection
of
Letters
from
Horace Walpole
Youngest Son of St Robert Walpole
Earl of Orford
to
Horace Mann
Resident at Florence
from
King George the Second:
transcribed from the Originals.
Vol. 1st

Posteris an aliqua cura, nescio!
Plin. epist.

The following collection of letters, written very carelessly by a young man, had been preserved by the person to whom they were addressed. The author, some years after the date of the first, borrowed them, on account of some anecdotes interspersed. On the perusal, among many trifling relations and stories which were only of consequence or amusing to the two persons concerned in the correspondence, he found some facts, characters and news, which, though below the dignity of history, might prove entertaining to many other people: and knowing how much pleasure, not only himself, but many other persons have often found in a series of private and familiar letters, he thought it worth his while to preserve these, as they contain something of the customs, fashions, politics, diversions and private history of several years; which, if worthy of any existence, can be properly transmitted to posterity, only in this manner.

The reader will find a few pieces of intelligence which did not prove true, but which are retained here as the author heard and related them, lest correction should spoil the simple air of the narrative. When the letters were written, they were never intended for public inspection; and now they are far from being thought correct, or more authentic than the general turn of epistolary correspondence admits. The author would sooner have burnt them, than have taken the trouble to correct such errant trifles which are here presented to the reader, with scarce any variation or omissions, but what private friendships and private history, or the great haste with which the letters were written, made indispensably necessary, as will plainly appear, not only by the unavoidable chasms, where the originals were worn out or torn away, but by many idle relations and injudicious remarks and prejudices of a young man; for which the only excuse the author can pretend to make, is, that as some future reader may possibly be as young as he was, when he first wrote, he hopes they may be amused, with what graver people (if into such hands they should fall) will very justly despise. Whoever has patience to peruse the series, will find perhaps, that as the author grew older, some of his faults became less striking.

Mann's letters to Walpole remained at Strawberry Hill until 1843 when they were acquired from Lord Waldegrave by Richard Bentley, the publisher whose grandson sold them to me with four of their original red morocco bindings from which the letters had been cut. Each volume still has a title-page in Walpole's hand, "Letters/From Horatio Mann/Resident at Florence/From King George the Second/To/Horatio Walpole/youngest Son/of/Sir Robert Walpole/afterwards/Earl of Orford/" and the numbers of the volumes. John Doran wrote a book for Bentley, drawn from Mann's letters in 1876, *Mann and Manners at the Court of Florence, 1740-1786*, a work as trifling as its title.

Mann sent lavish presents to Walpole despite Walpole's protests. Among

them were the bronze bust of Caligula with silver eyes at the beginning of his madness, a small ebony trunk for perfumes with bas-reliefs in silver "by Benvenuto Cellini" representing the Judgment of Paris, a marble head in alto relievo of John the Baptist "by Donatello," and a portrait "by Vasari" of Bianca Cappello, mistress and wife of Francesco de Medici Grand Duke of Tuscany. This last particularly delighted Walpole. "The head," he wrote Mann,

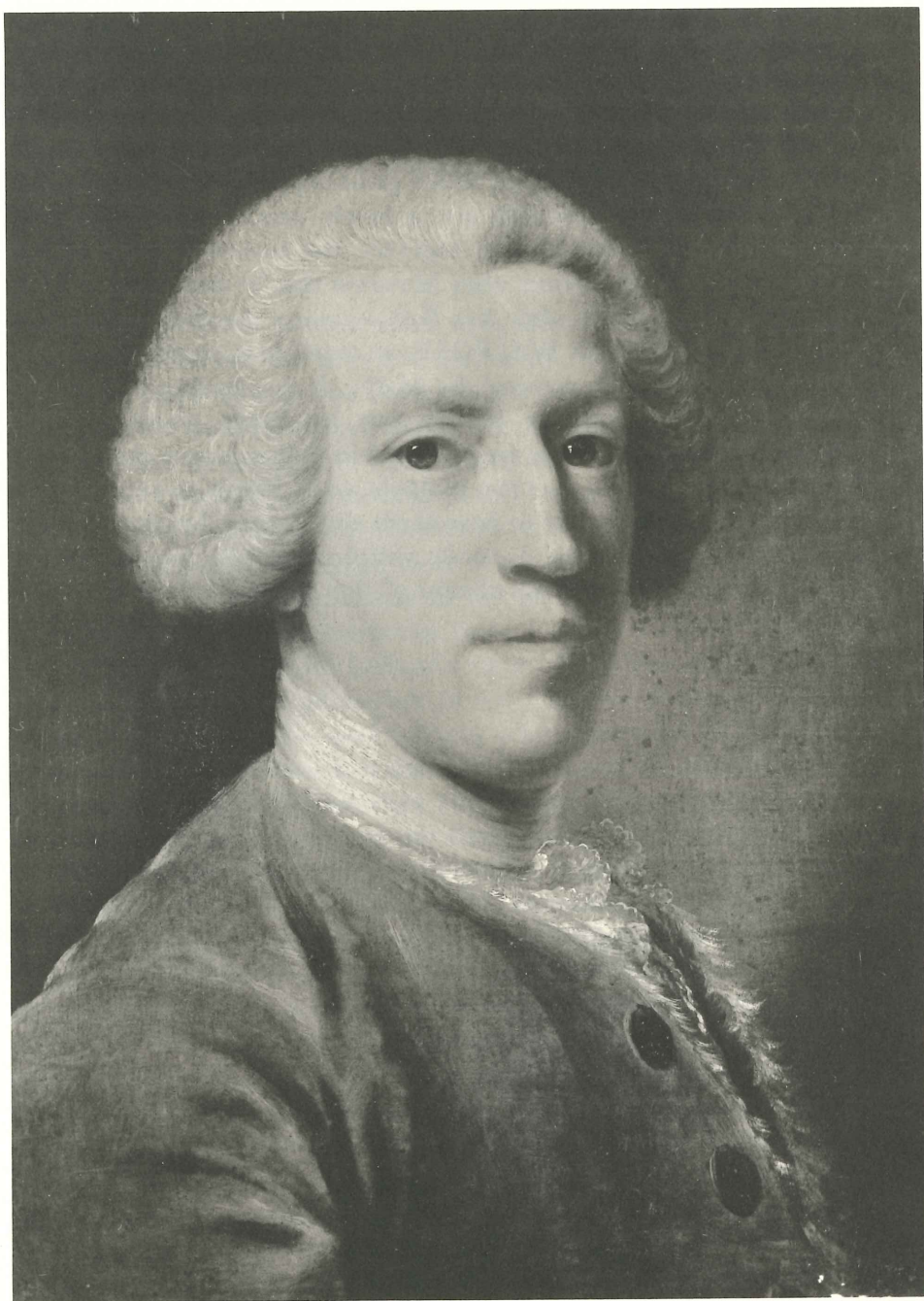
is painted equal to Titian, and though done, I suppose, after the clock had struck five and thirty, yet she retains a great share of beauty. I have bespoken a frame for her, with the grand ducal coronet at top, her story on a label at bottom, which Gray is to compose in Latin as short and expressive as Tacitus (one is lucky when one can bespeak and have executed such an inscription!) the Medici arms on one side, and the Cappello's on the other. I must tell you a critical discovery of mine *à propos*: in an old book of Venetian arms, there are two coats of Capello, who from their *name* bear a *hat*, on one of them is added a flower-de-luce on a blue ball, which I am persuaded was given to the family by the Great Duke, in consideration of this alliance; the Medicis you know bore such a badge at the top of their own arms; this discovery I made by a talisman, which Mr Chute calls the *sortes Walpolianae*, by which I find everything I want *à point nommé* wherever I dip for it. This discovery indeed is almost of that kind which I call *serendipity*, a very expressive word, which as I have nothing better to tell you, I shall endeavour to explain to you: you will understand it better by the derivation than by the definition. I once read a silly fairy tale, called *The Three Princes of Serendip*: as their highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of: for instance, one of them discovered that a mule blind of the right eye had travelled the same road lately, because the grass was eaten only on the left side, where it was worse than on the right—now do you understand *serendipity*?

The "old book of Venetian arms" is now at Farmington, given me by E. P. Goldschmidt, the London bookseller, from his own library. Walpole pencilled a small cross opposite the significant crest. How far "Serendipity" has entered into our language may be gauged by the menu of a Farmington coffee shop whose *specialité de la maison* is a "Serendipity sandwich."

Mann is seen at Farmington through the eyes of Thomas Patch who spent the last twenty-seven years of his life at Florence painting visiting Englishmen and romantic landscapes for grand tourists. Our collection of him started in 1939 when William Randolph Hearst began selling his

vast collections that were stored in two New York warehouses, each of which covered a city block. Perhaps a tenth of one percent of them was offered by Parish, Watson and Co. of 57th Street. When I asked them if Hearst had anything from Strawberry Hill they said they had no idea and invited me to come and see for myself. I wandered through six floors crowded with Spanish choir stalls, porphyry jars and Etruscan vases, French cabinets and English chests. I was ready to give up on the sixth floor, but my guide urged me on for one more, which was the attic. Against its walls leaned a fragment of a Tiepolo ceiling, a Meissonier battle scene, and Frederic Remington cowboys. Among them was a large conversation piece with "Hogarth" on its ample frame. Thanks to Francis Watson, the expert on Thomas Patch, I knew better. I was certain that the chief figure in the picture before me was Mann from its resemblance to a small portrait of him by John Astley that Mann sent Walpole and that was reproduced in Cunningham's edition of Walpole's letters. He was older in the Hearst picture, more rugose, but with the same broken nose and air of a capable esthete. The case for the figure being Mann was settled by his vice-regal chair with the royal crown and supporters. I urged my guide to send a photograph of it to Francis Watson at the Wallace Collection in London for his opinion and after Francis confirmed Patch as the artist a zero was chopped off the Hogarth price, the remainder was divided by five, and the picture was the first of five Patches to come to Farmington. A year later Astley's portrait of Mann emerged from hiding and arrived with the companion portrait of his twin brother Galfridus that Mann had also sent Walpole. When "dear Gal" died Walpole had Bentley design his tomb, the drawing for which is at Farmington.

Mann appears in two of the other Patches at Farmington, the very large conversation piece that we shall come to in our Print Room and another that was painted for Lord Beauchamp, Lord Hertford's heir and Walpole's first cousin once removed. Walpole saw and admired the picture. Mann is seated at the right listening to a comical Dutch singer whom he is trying out for one of his musical entertainments. The Dutchman is singing eagerly while Patch himself bursts into the room from the left bowed under a basket filled with the *Vocabulario della Crusca* and distracting nearly all of the auditors. Beauchamp, very tall and elegant in the center of the picture, has turned to regard the disturbance with amused superiority. We shall come to the fourth Patch at Farmington when we get to Henry Bunbury and Hogarth. A fifth one is a riverscape that I got to show the sort of thing Patch painted for the Grand Tourist



Astley's portrait of Horace Mann.

trade. An ancient round tower looms beyond a bridge over which peasants and an ox-cart are passing; a shepherd and his modest flock are resting on the bank; in the distance are blue mountains. It is a scene to bring back smiling Italy to northern travellers at home. Walpole asked Mann to send him two Patches of the Arno and Florence, which he kept in his town house and bequeathed to his great-nephew, Lord Cholmondeley at Houghton, where they still are, a lovely pair. One marvels at Patch's versatility, for he was also an engraver, the author of a sumptuous folio with twenty-six engravings after Masaccio that he dedicated to Mann and of twenty-four prints after Fra Bartolommeo that he "dedicated to the Honorable HORACE WALPOLE, an intelligent promoter of the Arts," an honor no doubt inspired by Mann. It is pleasant to have the two friends brought together in this way by Patch, whose pictures, like Mann's letters to Walpole are now held in higher esteem than ever before.

When on 15 January 1777 Walpole asked Mann to return his letters, he added, "I should like to have them all together, for they are a kind of history." Readers of the *Memoirs* will be especially grateful to them because they add "the touches of nature" that the *Memoirs* lack.