

Choice 21

Manuscript of Walpole's Journal for 1769

The manuscript of Walpole's journal for 1769 came from Upton along with the manuscripts of Walpole's first and last memoirs, fragments of his printed memoirs, and many notes "written flying" for all of them. The title-page for the manuscript I am saving is, "Journal/of the most remarkable Events/ of/the reign of King George the third,/ from the beginning of the year/ 1769/ being a Supplement/to/The memoirs of/Mr Horace Walpole/carried on by Himself." It continues into 1771 with scattered jottings and newspaper cuttings. The whole runs to some 70,000 words, mostly on folio sheets. How Walpole used his journals is seen by the entry for 5 March 1770: "The House of Commons went on the affairs of America. Lord North proposed to repeal all the late duties but that on teas. Mr Conway was for the repeal of that also, as most men were persuaded a partial repeal would produce no content. Grenville so far agreed with the Rockingham part of the Opposition as to condemn a partial repeal, but too stiff to yield to any repeal, he went away without voting." This passage became in the *Memoirs of George III*, "On the 5th of March the House of Commons went upon the consideration of America. Lord North proposed to repeal all the late duties, but that on tea. *Mr Conway advised the repeal of that also*, most men believing that a partial repeal would produce no content. Grenville agreed in condemning, as the Rockingham party did too, a partial repeal; but, too obstinate to consent to any repeal, went away without voting, and the motion passed."

The manuscript of Walpole's first memoirs, which I believe he began in 1745, has the title, "Memoires. From the Declaration of the War with Spain," in 1739. The manuscript runs to about 7000 words with an epigraph that fits all the subsequent memoirs and journals, "Nothing extenuate nor set down aught in malice. Othello." Gray's letter of 15 December 1746 shows that he knew Walpole was engaged on this undertaking. "Among all the little folks, my godsons and daughters," he wrote, "I cannot choose but to inquire more particularly after the health of one; I mean

(without a figure) the Memoirs. Do they grow? Do they unite, and hold up their heads, and dress themselves? Do they begin to think of making their appearance in the world, that is to say, fifty years hence, to make posterity stare, and all good people cross themselves?"

"The War with Spain" has yet to be published, but when it appears readers will see that Walpole's intention in his later memoirs was already formed. "I write for Posterity, not for my contemporaries," he announced in this earliest of his memoirs, "and profess speaking my opinion for their information. . . . The intention of this work being to let my Readers rather into the character of the Actors, than into the minute Events of the Drama. The Laborious two hundred years hence may draw out a journal of what month the miscarriage happened before Toulon; or on what day the Battle of Dettingen was fought." Horace Walpole, who lived at the center of affairs and who knew all the chief persons in them, was revealing to us not only what happened, but how it happened. Let "the laborious," the drudges of history, look up the date of Dettingen, he would show us the characters of the men who brought it about.

He recorded in "Short Notes" that "about this time [1751] I began to write my memoirs. At first I intended only to write the history of one year." Gray wrote him in October 1751, "I rejoice to find you apply (pardon the use of so odious a word) to the history of your own times. Speak, and spare not. Be as impartial as you can; and after all, the world will not believe you are so, though you should make as many protestations as Bishop Burnet," who wrote in the Preface to the *History of His own Time*, "I writ with a design . . . to lay open the good and bad of all sides and parties as clearly and impartially as I myself understood it . . . without any regard to kindred or friends, to parties or interests. For I do solemnly say this to the world, and make my humble appeal upon it to the great God of truth, that I tell the truth on all occasions, as fully and freely as upon my best inquiry I have been able to find it out."

Far from ending his memoirs in 1751, Walpole carried them on forty years longer. Early in 1752 he recorded, "I sit down to resume a task, for which I fear posterity will condemn the author, at the same time that they feel their curiosity gratified. On reviewing the first part of these Memoirs, I find the truth rigidly told." They were, he said, his "favorite labor," yet only Gray, Bentley, Montagu, Mme du Deffand, and probably Conway knew he was writing them. He thought a great deal of their final disposition, ending up with a memorandum to his executors written less than a year before his death. A copy of it in Miss Berry's hand came to Farming-

ton in the second Waller Sale. Walpole directed, "Not to be opened till after my will." The memorandum begins,

In my Library at Strawberry Hill are two wainscot chests or boxes, the larger marked with an A, the lesser with a B. I desire, that as soon as I am dead, my Executor and Executrix will cord up strongly and seal the larger box, marked A, and deliver it to the Honourable Hugh Conway Seymour, to be kept by him unopened and unsealed till the eldest son of Lady Waldegrave or whichever of her sons, being Earl of Waldegrave, shall attain the age of twenty-five years; when the said chest, with whatever it contains, shall be delivered to him for his own. And I beg that the Honourable Hugh Conway Seymour, when he shall receive the said chest, will give a promise in writing, signed by him, to Lady Waldegrave, that he or his Representatives will deliver the said chest unopened and sealed, by my Executor and Executrix, to the first son of Lady Waldegrave who shall attain the age of twenty-five years; the key of the said chest is in one of the cupboards of the Green Closet, within the Blue Breakfast Room, at Strawberry Hill, and that key, I desire, may be delivered to Laura, Lady Waldegrave, to be kept by her till her son shall receive the chest.

(Signed) Hor. Walpole, Earl of Orford.

August 19, 1796.

These directions were carried out by his executors, Mrs Damer and her uncle Lord Frederick Campbell.

When Chest A was opened by the sixth Earl Waldegrave in 1810 it was found to contain twenty-three folio volumes of memoirs and journals from 1746 to 1791, a total of some three million words.

Memoirs of the Last Ten Years of the Reign of George the Second was published by John Murray in 1822. I have the drawings Bentley and Müntz made for them, thanks to Mrs Hallam Murray and the good offices of John Hodgson. Walpole describes the frontispiece, "The Author leaning on a globe of the world between Heraclitus and Democritus, presents his book to the latter. In the Landscape is a view of the Author's villa at Strawberry Hill near Twickenham, where the Memoirs were chiefly written." Richard Bentley brought out *Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Third* in 1845 and *Journal of the Reign of King George the Third from 1771 to 1783* in 1859. The manuscripts of them from 1784 to 1791 are at Farmington and will appear for the first time in the Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Memoirs.

The memoirs have suffered from their editors who cut out passages they thought indelicate, offensive to living persons, or just plain dull, and although they said they had indicated these omissions they often failed to

do so. Doran, the editor of Walpole's Last Journals, printed newspaper cuttings Walpole pasted on the manuscript as if they were written by Walpole himself. One of Doran's footnotes is a classic of nineteenth-century editing. Walpole wrote of a naval engagement in which the English attacked the French with nineteen sail, the correct number. Doran printed the *nineteen* as *thirty-nine* and then accused Walpole of gross exaggeration. The reader flounders about in the *Memoirs* without the help of dates or references. The easy style of the letters is abandoned for historical austerity as may be seen by comparing Walpole's lively letter to Hertford of 15 February 1764 about the great debate on general warrants and the commitments of Wilkes to the Tower with Walpole's stark report of the session in the *Memoirs*. But help for the reader is on the way. Fortunately, Walpole preserved earlier drafts, or what he called "foul copies," which are with the final draft at Chewton. The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's *Memoirs* is being edited by the man best qualified to do it, John Brooke, the co-editor with the late Sir Lewis Namier of the *History of Parliament, House of Commons, 1754-1790*, and the official biographer of George III. He is editing from Walpole's original manuscripts, the "foul copies," and notes that have been miraculously preserved. About eighty-five percent of the manuscripts belong to Lord Waldegrave; the remainder were inexplicably kept by the first Richard Bentley at Upton instead of being sold with all the memoirs and journals after publication to Frances, Lady Waldegrave and they are now at Farmington.

When the new edition of the memoirs appears students of eighteenth-century politics will know at last what Walpole actually wrote. He made stylistic amendments, but did not bring his views and prejudices up to date. He did add "characters" of leading personages and reflection and comment. Some of these insertions are at variance with what he had written earlier, but instead of trying to conceal his altered views he states that the *Memoirs* are full of "contradictory opinions" that are accounted for by their having been written at different periods and by his changing his mind about the persons described. There is sometimes a lapse of three or four years between the events and his report of them. "If I had any personal causes for changing my opinion," he wrote, "I have told them fairly that the fault may be imputed to my passions, rather than to those I speak of." He might, he admitted, have made his book "more uniform by correction; but the natural coloring would have been lost; and I should rather have composed than written a history. As it stands an original

sketch, it is at least a picture of my own mind and opinions. That sketch may be valuable to a few who study human nature even in a single character." The *Memoirs*, you see, are as much a "sketch" of Walpole as of his time, the great events of which tend to become merely the background of his life and its leading actors supporting members of his cast.

When *The Memoirs of the Reign of George the Second* came out in 1822 Walpole was criticized for the severity of his judgments on his contemporaries. They seem savage to us also, but we must remember that he was following the tradition of his time, when, as he wrote, "Similes and quotations, metaphors" in the House of Commons "were fallen into disrepute," but "it was not the same with invectives. . . . Debates, where no personalities broke out, engaged too little attention." There was also what Virginia Woolf calls, "the presence of obsolete conventions inherited from an earlier and still more ferocious time." One of these conventions was unbridled personal abuse and the memoirs are less remarkable for their savagery than for Walpole's uneasiness about the effect of his savagery on us. That concern is something new.

The interest of us non-specialists in the memoirs flags because Walpole assumed that his readers would be thoroughly familiar with the politics of the time and because, apart from his "characters," he was not writing at his best. We become confused and bored by the detailed accounts of the dismissal, resignation, and appointment of ministers, the reports of debates, and the passage or defeat of bills that mean nothing to us. We may read Walpole's letters with ease and pleasure even if we know little or nothing of the people and events in them because they were written with wit, grace, and, for the most part, good nature. This is not true of his *Memoirs*. He wrote them for us, posterity, yet only for those of us who would be the historians of the period, a small but formidable jury.

Today, the common reader's interest in the memoirs picks up when he comes to a cadenza on an individual such as the one on Walpole's uncle, "Old" Horace Walpole. "He was still," his nephew tells us,

one of the busiest men in Parliament; generally bustling for the Ministry to get a Peerage, and even zealous for them when he could not get so much as their thanks. With the King he had long been in disgrace, on disputing a point of German genealogy with him (in which his Majesty's chief strength lay) whose the succession of some Principality would be, if eleven or twelve persons then living should die without issue. He knew something of everything but how to hold his tongue, or how to apply his knowledge. As interest was in all his actions, treaties were in all his speeches. Whatever the subject was, he never

lost sight of the peace of Utrecht, Lord Bolingbroke, and the Norwich manufactures; but his language and oratory were only adapted to manufacturers. He was a dead weight on his brother's Ministry; the first to take off that load on his brother's fall; yet nobody so intemperately abusive on all who connected with his brother's enemies; nobody so ready to connect with them for the least flattery, which he loved next to money—indeed he never entirely forgave Lord Bath for being richer. His mind was a strange mixture of sense alloyed by absurdity, wit by mimicry, knowledge by buffoonery, bravery by meanness, honesty by selfishness, impertinence by nothing.

The 1822 edition of the *Memoirs* indicates a passage has been omitted at this point by two lines of asterisks. Macaulay's copy of that edition is at Farmington. In the margin at this point Macaulay wrote, "The words omitted might as well have been published 'His body was more uniform; for that was throughout burlesque and uncouth.' The asterisks led [John Wilson] Croker to suspect, not altogether without reason, that something very gross had been left out. See the *Quarterly Review*. Except in very rare cases, a hiatus is more injurious to all parties than the whole text would be."

Here is another of Walpole's characters.

The Countess of Northumberland was a jovial heap of contradictions. The blood of all the Percies and Seymours swelled in her veins and in her fancy, while her person was more vulgar than anything but her conversation, which was larded indiscriminately with stories of her ancestors and her footmen. Show and crowds and junketing were her endless pursuits. She was familiar with the mob, while stifled with diamonds; and yet was attentive to the most minute privileges of her rank, while almost shaking hands with a cobbler. . . . She had revived the drummers and pipers and obsolete minstrels of her family; and her own buxom countenance at the tail of such a procession gave it all the air of an antiquated pageant of mumming. She was mischievous under the appearance of frankness; generous and friendly without delicacy or sentiment.

How do you feel about that? If the blood of all the Percys and Seymours swells in your veins it doubtless strikes you as being in bad taste, but if you have never heard of the lady before, you may be entertained and not care whether it is just or not. If you have read her *Journals* after she became Duchess of Northumberland you will find confirmation of Walpole's "character" of her, and if you pursue your study of her further you will not find him contradicted anywhere. You may feel that, even so, this is not the way for a man to talk about a woman. If you are annoyed *and* an historian you may re-examine other passages in the spirit that filled

Walpole himself when he set out to prove established historians prejudiced and untrustworthy. In his *Memoirs* he threw off the restraint that guarded his letters. When writing Lady Ossory or Cole he wanted to keep their respect. They and others were saving his letters and one day they would be printed. That was a sobering thought. He did frequently let himself go in his letters, particularly when writing to Mason who brought out his worst side, but he usually ended by apologizing or laughing at himself and so toned down his asperities.

Although he was under no such restraint in the *Memoirs*, he feared for their reception. He did not worry about his statements of fact because he knew "the laborious" would verify them; the Duke of Grafton when Prime Minister said that there was no one from whom he "received so just accounts of the schemes of the various factions" as from Walpole or "had so good means of getting the knowledge of what was passing." What Walpole worried about were his "characters." They had honorable precedents in Clarendon and Bishop Burnet who had also written in passion. Some of Walpole's readers would enjoy his severity, but "I am aware," he wrote, "that more will be offended at the liberty I have taken in painting men as they are: and that many, from private connections of party and family, will dislike meeting such unflattered portraits of their heroes or their relations." He warded off criticism on this score. "Few men," he pointed out, "can sit for patterns of perfect virtue." He had taken posterity into the secret councils of the time and exposed its principal actors, yet he feared his strictures might hurt him as much as the people he was exposing and he longed for our approval of his work and himself. He was like a man who has written many letters in anger that he prudently did not send, but who on re-reading them later is torn between shame of his intemperance and admiration of his force. The *Memoirs* gave him a sense of power. In the library at Strawberry working secretly at night, he was settling the reputations of his more powerful political contemporaries. He could not make history, but he could write it, and posterity would learn from him how the events of his time came about.