

## PREFACE.\*

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WE are not going to usher in our publication with any pomp of prospectus. We mean to be very pleasant and ingenious, of course; but decline proving it beforehand by a long common-place. The greater the flourish of trumpets now-a-days, the more suspicious what follows. Whatever it may be our luck to turn out, we at least wave our privilege of having the way prepared for us by our own mouth-pieces,—by words with long tails, and antitheses two and two. If we succeed, so much the better. If not, we shall at all events not die of the previous question, like an honest proposal in Parliament.

But we are forced to be prefatory, whether we would or no: for others, it seems, have been so anxious to furnish us with something of this sort, that they have blown the trumpet for us; and done us the honour of announcing, that nothing less is to ensue, than a dilapidation of all the outworks of civilized society. Such at least, they say, is our intention; and such would be the consequences, if they, the trumpeters, did not take care, by counter-blasts, to puff the said outworks up again. We should be more sensible of this honour, if it did not arise from a confusion of ideas. They say that we are to cut up religion, morals, and everything that is legitimate;—a pretty carving. It only shews what they really think of their own opinions on those subjects. The other day a ministerial paper said, that “robes and coronations were

\* Author: Leigh Hunt / Transcribed and annotated by Diego Saglia.

the strong-holds of royalty.”<sup>1</sup> We do not deny it; but if such is their strength, what is their weakness? If by religion they meant anything really worthy of divine or human beings; if by morals, they meant the only true morals, justice and beneficence; if by everything legitimate, they meant but half of what their own laws and constitutions have provided against the impudent pretensions of the despotic,—then we should do our best to leave religion and morals as we found them, and shew their political good faith at least half as much respect as we do. But when we know,—and know too from our intimacy with various classes of people,—that there is not a greater set of hypocrites in the world than these pretended teachers of the honest and inexperienced part of our countrymen;—when we know that their religion, even when it is in earnest on any point (which is very seldom) means the most ridiculous and untenable notions of the DIVINE BEING, and in all other cases means nothing but the Bench of Bishops;—when we know that their morals consist for the most part in a secret and practical contempt of their own professions, and for the least and best part, of a few dull examples of something a little more honest, clapped in front to make a show and a screen, and weak enough to be made tools against all mankind;—and when we know, to crown all, that their “legitimacy,” as they call it, is the most unlawful of all lawless and impudent things, tending, under pretence that the whole world are as corrupt and ignorant as themselves, to put it at the mercy of the most brute understandings among them,—men by their very education in these pretensions, rendered the least fit to sympathize with their fellow men, and as unhappy, after all, as the lowest of their slaves;—when we know all this, and see nine-tenths of all the intelligent men in the world alive to it, and as resolved as we are to oppose it, then indeed we are willing to accept the title of enemies of religion, morals, and legitimacy, and hope to do our duty with all becoming profaneness accordingly. God defend us from the piety of thinking him a monster! God defend us from the morality of slaves and turncoats, and from the legitimacy

of half a dozen lawless old gentlemen, to whom, it seems, human nature is an estate in fee.

The object of our work is not political, except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect, the connexion between politics and all other subjects of interest to mankind having been discovered, never again to be done away. We wish to do our work quietly, if people will let us,—to contribute our liberalities in the shape of Poetry, Essays, Tales, Translations, and other amenities, of which kings themselves may read and profit, if they are not afraid of seeing their own faces in every species of inkstand. Italian Literature, in particular, will be a favourite subject with us; and so was German and Spanish to have been, till we lost the accomplished Scholar and Friend who was to share our task;<sup>2</sup> but perhaps we may be able to get a supply of the scholarship, though not of the friendship. It may be our good fortune to have more than one foreign correspondent, who will be an acquisition to the reader. In the meantime, we must do our best by ourselves; and the reader may be assured he shall have all that is in us, clear and candid at all events, if nothing else; for

We love to pour out all ourselves as plain  
As downright SHIPPEN or as old MONTAIGNE.<sup>3</sup>

There are other things in the world besides kings, or even sycophants. There is one thing in particular with which we must help to bring the polite world acquainted, which is NATURE. Life really does not consist, entirely, of clubs and ball-rooms, of a collar made by Wilkins,<sup>4</sup> and of the west end of a town. We confess we have a regard for the Dandies, properly so called; not the spurious race who take their title from their stays; we mean the pleasant and pithy personages who began the system, and who had ideas as well as bibs in their head. But it was on that account. We liked them, because they partook of the ETHERIDGES<sup>5</sup> and SUCKLINGS<sup>6</sup> of old: and why were the ETHERIDGES and SUCKLINGS better than their neighbours, but because they inherited from Old Mother Wit as well as Mother West-end, and

partook of the prerogatives of Nature? We have a regard for certain modern Barons, as well as those who got the Great Charter<sup>7</sup> for us; but is it for those who would keep or for those who would give up the Charter? Is it for those who identify themselves with every feeble King John, or for those who have some of "GOD ALMIGHTY'S Nobility" in them as well as their own? Assuredly for the latter,—assuredly for those, who have something in them "which surpasses show," and which the breath of a puffing and blowing legitimate cannot unmake.

Be present then, and put life into our work, ye Spirits, not of the GAVESTONES<sup>8</sup> and the DESPENSERS,<sup>9</sup> but of the JOHN O'GAUNTS,<sup>10</sup> the WICKLIFFES,<sup>11</sup> and the CHAUCERS;<sup>12</sup>—be present, not the slaves and sycophants of King HENRY the Eighth<sup>13</sup> (whose names we have forgotten) but the HENRY HOWARDS, the SURREYS, and the WYATTS;<sup>14</sup>—be present, not ye other rascallions and "booing" slaves of the court of King JAMIE,<sup>15</sup> but ye BUCHANANS<sup>16</sup> and ye WALTER RALEIGHS;<sup>17</sup>—be present, not ye bed-chamber lords, flogging-boys, and mere soldiers, whosoever ye are, from my Lord THINGUMEE in King CHARLES's time,<sup>18</sup> down to the immortal Duke of WHAT'S-HIS-NAME now flourishing; but the HERBERTS,<sup>19</sup> the HUTCHINSONS,<sup>20</sup> the LOCKES,<sup>21</sup> the POPES,<sup>22</sup> and the PETERBOROUGHs;<sup>23</sup>—be present, not ye miserable tyrants, slaves, bigots, or turncoats of any party, not ye LAUDS<sup>24</sup> or ye LAUDERDALES,<sup>25</sup> ye Legitimate Pretenders (for so ye must now be called) ye TITUS OATESes,<sup>26</sup> BEDLOWS,<sup>27</sup> GARDINERS,<sup>28</sup> SACHEVERELLS,<sup>29</sup> and SOUTHEYS;<sup>30</sup> but ye MILTONS<sup>31</sup> and ye MARVELLS,<sup>32</sup> ye HOADLEYS,<sup>33</sup> ADDISONS,<sup>34</sup> and STEELES,<sup>35</sup> ye SOMERSES,<sup>36</sup> DORSETS,<sup>37</sup> and PRIORS,<sup>38</sup> and all who have thrown light and life upon man, instead of darkness and death; who have made him a thing of hope and freedom, instead of despair and slavery; a being progressive, instead of a creeping creature retrograde:—if we have no pretensions to your genius, we at least claim the merit of loving and admiring it, and of longing to further its example.

We wish the title of our work to be taken in its largest acception, old as well as new,—but always in the same spirit of

admiring and assisting, rather than of professing. We just as much disclaim any assumption in it before the wise, as we disclaim any false modesty before all classes. All that we mean is, that we are advocates of every species of liberal knowledge, and that, by a natural consequence in these times, we go the full length in matters of opinion with large bodies of men who are called LIBERALS. At the same time, when we say the full length, we mean something very different from what certain pretended Liberals, and all the Illiberals, will take it to be; for it is by the very reason of going to that length, in its most liberal extreme—“Ay, ay,” interrupts some old club-house Gentleman, in a buff waistcoat and red-face,—“Now you talk sense. Extremes meet. *Verbum sat*.<sup>39</sup> I am a Liberal myself, if you come to that, and devilish liberal I am. I gave for instance five guineas out of the receipts of my sinecure to the Irish sufferers; but that is between ourselves. You mean, that there are good hearty fellows in all parties, and that the great business is to balance them properly;—to let the people talk, provided they do no harm, and to let Governments go on as they do, have done, and will do for ever. Good,—good. I’ll take in your journal myself;—here’s to the success of it;—only don’t make it too violent, you rogues;—don’t spoil the balance. (God! I’ve spilt my bumper!) Cut up SOUTHEY as much as you please. We all think him as great a coxcomb as you do, and he bores us to death; but spare the King<sup>40</sup> and the Ministers and all that, particularly Lord CASTLEREAGH<sup>41</sup> and the Duke of WELLINGTON.<sup>42</sup> D——d gentlemanly fellow, CASTLEREAGH, as you know; and besides he’s dead. Shocking thing—shocking. It was all nonsense about his being so cold-hearted, and doing Ireland so much harm. He was the most gentlemanly of men. Wars must be carried on; Malthus<sup>43</sup> has proved that millions must be slaughtered from time to time. The nonsense about that is as stupid as the cry about the game-laws and those infernal villains the poachers, who ought all to be strung up like hares: and as to Ireland, it is flying in the face of Providence to think that such horrible things could happen there, and

be prevented by *earthly* means,—*earthly* means, sir. Lord CASTLEREAGH himself referred us to Providence in all these unavoidable matters, and he was right;—but to think of his cutting his own throat—Good God! so very gentlemanly a man, and in the height of his power! It is truly shocking! As to WELLINGTON, he's not so gentlemanly a man, certainly; but then neither is CANNING,<sup>44</sup> if you come to that. He cannot make speeches, I own; but no more can the King or my Lord MARYBOROUGH,<sup>45</sup> or a hundred other eminent characters; and he does not make such cursed awkward blunders as poor CASTLEREAGH used to do. He has not got a very wise look, they say; but—I don't know,—it's soldier-like, I think; and if you come to that, what a strange fellow old BLUCHER<sup>46</sup> looked, and SUWARROW,<sup>47</sup> and all those; and between ourselves, the reigning Monarchs are a set of as common-looking gentry, as you'd wish to see in a summer's day; so I don't know what people would have. No—no—you really mustn't speak against WELLINGTON. Besides, he prosecutes.”<sup>48</sup>

We beg the reader's pardon in behalf of our worthy interrupter. Whatever may be his right estimation of his friends, we need not say that he misinterprets our notions of liberality, which certainly do not consist either in making the sort of confusion, or keeping the sort of peace, which he speaks of. There are, if he pleases, very silly fellows to be found in most parties, and these may be good enough to be made tools of by the clever ones; but to confound all parties themselves with one another, which is the real end of these pretended liberalities, and assume that none of them are a jot better or worse than the other, and may contain just as good and generous people,—this is to confound liberality with illiberality, narrow views with large, the instincts of a selfish choice with those of a generous one, and in the best and most imposing instances, the mere amenities and ordinary virtues of private life (which may be only a graceful selfishness, unless they go farther) with the noblest and boldest sympathies in behalf of the human race. It is too late in the day to be taken in with this kind of cant, even by the jolliest of placemen in all the benevolence of

his bumpers. The Duke of WELLINGTON is a great officer, “after his kind.” We do not mean at court, where he is a very little officer, and condescends to change his Marshal’s staff for the stick of a Lord in Waiting.<sup>49</sup> But he is a good hunting captain,—a sort of human setter. We allow him all his praise in that respect, and only wish he had not confounded the rights of nations with those of a manor. What does he mean too by treating public meetings with contempt? and above all, what did he mean by that extremely odd assumption of the didactic, about teaching a “great moral lesson!”<sup>50</sup> As to Lord CASTLEREAGH, he was one of the most illiberal and vindictive of statesmen, if we must use that word for every petty retainer, whom a bad system swells for a time into a part of its own unnatural greatness. Look at his famous Six Acts!<sup>51</sup> Look at his treatment of BONAPARTE,<sup>52</sup> his patronage of such infamous journals as the *Beacon*,<sup>53</sup> his fondness for imprisoning, and for what his weak obstinacy calls his other strong measures. But he is dead, and people are now called upon to be liberal! Let us be so, in God’s name, in the general sense we have of the infirmities of human nature; but it is one thing to be liberal in behalf of the many, and another thing to be exclusively so in behalf of the few. Have the consequences of Lord CASTLEREAGH’s actions died with him? Are the Six Acts dead? Are thousands of the Irish *living*? We will give a specimen of the liberality of these new demanders of liberality. The other day, when one of the noblest of human beings, PERCY SHELLEY, who had more religion in his very differences with religion, than thousands of your church-and-state men, was lost on the coast of Italy, the *Courier* said, that “Mr. PERCY SHELLEY, *a writer of infidel poetry*, was drowned.”<sup>54</sup> Where was the liberality of this canting insinuation? Where was the decency, or, as it turned out, the common sense of it? Mr. SHELLEY’s death by the waves was followed by Lord CASTLEREAGH’s by his own hand; and then the cry is for liberal constructions! How could we not turn such a death against the enemies of Mr. SHELLEY, if we could condescend to affect a moment’s agreement with their hypocrisy? But the least we can do

is to let these people see, that we know them, and to warn them how they assail us. The force of our answers will always be proportioned to the want of liberality in the assailant. This is a liberality, at all events, upon which our readers may reckon. The rest, which we were going to say, is this;—that although we condemn by wholesale certain existing demands upon our submission and credulity, we are not going to discover every imaginative thing even in a religion to be nonsense, like a semi-liberalized Frenchman; nor, on the other hand, to denounce all levity and wit to be nonsense and want of feeling, like a semi-liberalized German. If we are great admirers of VOLTAIRE, we are great admirers also of GOETHE and SCHILLER. If we pay our homage to DANTE and MILTON, we have tribute also for the brilliant sovereignties of ARIOSTO and BOCCACCIO.

Wherever, in short, we see the mind of man exhibiting powers of its own, and at the same time helping to carry on the best interests of human nature,—however it may overdo the matter a little on this side or on that, or otherwise partake of the common frailty through which it passes,—there we recognise the demi-gods of liberal worship;—there we bow down, and own our lords and masters;—there we hope for the final passing away of all obscene worships, however formalized,—of all monstrous sacrifices of the many to the few, however “legitimatized” and besotted.

## EDITORIAL NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Untraced quotation.
- <sup>2</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley.
- <sup>3</sup> Alexander Pope, "First Satire of the Second Book of Horace", ll. 51-2. The Tory politician and MP William Shippen (1673-1743) relentlessly criticized the Walpole administration, attacking it in particular over the financial corruption of the South-Sea Company. Thanks to his *Essais*, Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) became a model for honest self-examination and open discussions of social, political, moral and religious issues.
- <sup>4</sup> Arnold Wilkins, a fashionable tailor with premises off Oxford Street.
- <sup>5</sup> Sir George Etherege (c. 1635-91), Restoration playwright.
- <sup>6</sup> Sir John Suckling (1609-41), Cavalier poet and playwright.
- <sup>7</sup> The Magna Charta, granted by King John in 1215.
- <sup>8</sup> Piers Gaveston (1284-1312), favourite of Edward II.
- <sup>9</sup> Hugh le Despenser (1261/2-1326), favourite of Edward II.
- <sup>10</sup> John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (1340-99), son of Edward III and father of Henry IV.
- <sup>11</sup> John Wyclif (c. 1329-84), philosopher and Biblical translator. A protégé of John of Gaunt's, he was strongly critical of the Catholic establishment.
- <sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340s-1400), poet and civil servant.
- <sup>13</sup> King Henry VIII (1491-1547, reigned 1509-47).
- <sup>14</sup> Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-47) and Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42), poets and courtiers at the time of Henry VIII.
- <sup>15</sup> King James VI of Scotland (1567-1625) and I of England (1603-25).
- <sup>16</sup> George Buchanan (1506-82), Scottish scholar who promoted a doctrine of resistance to royal usurpation.
- <sup>17</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1554-1618), poet, adventurer and courtier of Elizabeth I.
- <sup>18</sup> Possible reference to Charles II (1630-85), who created a significant number of new peers during his reign.
- <sup>19</sup> The poet and clergyman George Herbert (1593-1633) or possibly the poet and politician Edward Herbert, first Baron of Cherbury (1583-1648).
- <sup>20</sup> John Hutchinson (1614-64), Parliamentary soldier and regicide.
- <sup>21</sup> The philosopher and political thinker John Locke (1632-1704).
- <sup>22</sup> The poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744).
- <sup>23</sup> Charles Mordaunt, third Earl of Peterborough (1658-1735), soldier and politician.
- <sup>24</sup> William Laud (1573-1645), Archbishop of Canterbury.
- <sup>25</sup> John Maitland, Duke of Lauderdale (1616-82), one of Charles II's principal ministers.
- <sup>26</sup> Titus Oates (1649-1705), Anglican clergyman and fabricator of the 'Popish Plot' (1678), a fictitious but widely believed Jesuit conspiracy aimed at assassinating Charles II and placing his Catholic brother, the Duke of York (later James II), on the throne.
- <sup>27</sup> The adventurer William Bedlow (1650-80), who provided the English government with an account of the 'Popish Plot'.
- <sup>28</sup> The clergyman and politician Stephen Gardiner (1482-1555), who supported Henry VIII's antipapal policies.
- <sup>29</sup> The Anglican preacher Henry Sacheverell (c. 1674-1724), whose incendiary sermon delivered on 5 November 1709 facilitated the Tory landslide victory in the general election of 1710.
- <sup>30</sup> Robert Southey (1774-1843), appointed Poet Laureate in 1813 by the Prince Regent (later George IV).
- <sup>31</sup> John Milton (1608-74), poet and Secretary for Foreign Tongues to the Commonwealth Council of State.
- <sup>32</sup> The poet and satirist Andrew Marvell (1621-78).
- <sup>33</sup> Benjamin Hoadly (1706-57), physician and dramatist.
- <sup>34</sup> Joseph Addison (1672-1719), essayist, politician, poet, and playwright.
- <sup>35</sup> Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729), politician, writer, and playwright.
- <sup>36</sup> Lawyer and politician John Somers, Baron Somers (1651-1716).

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<sup>37</sup> Poet and courtier Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset (1638-1706), patron of the poet and diplomat Matthew Prior (1664-1721).

<sup>38</sup> The poet and diplomat Matthew Prior (1664-1721) who was 'discovered' by his patron, the poet and courtier Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset (1638-1706).

<sup>39</sup> (Latin) "One word is enough".

<sup>40</sup> George IV (reigned 1820-1830).

<sup>41</sup> Robert Stewart (1769-1822), Viscount Castlereagh and second Marquess of Londonderry, Chief Secretary for Ireland (1798-1801), Secretary of State for War and the Colonies (1807-09) and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (1812-22).

<sup>42</sup> Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852), first Duke of Wellington.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), clergyman and scholar of political economy and demography.

<sup>44</sup> George Canning (1770-1827), Foreign Secretary between 1822 and 1827.

<sup>45</sup> William Wellesley-Pole (1763-1845), brother of the Duke of Wellington, first Baron Maryborough.

<sup>46</sup> Prussian field marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher (1742-1819).

<sup>47</sup> Russian military commander Aleksandr Vasilievich Suvorov (1729-1800), responsible for attacking the Turkish fortress of Ismail (see Lord Byron's *Don Juan* VII).

<sup>48</sup> Reference to Wellington's strong support for the measures against social unrest contained in the Six Acts of 1819.

<sup>49</sup> The Duke of Wellington was made field marshal in 1813. A Lord-in-waiting is a peer who holds office in the Royal household.

<sup>50</sup> Untraced quotation.

<sup>51</sup> Repressive legislation passed in 1819, after the Peterloo Massacre (16 August 1819) and the subsequent wave of disturbances, and aimed at limiting the radical press and suppressing seditious meetings in favour of parliamentary reform.

<sup>52</sup> Hunt may be referring to Castlereagh's statement, after Napoleon's defeat, that the French emperor would have deceived Britain into signing a peace treaty only in order subsequently to invade and defeat the country.

<sup>53</sup> Rabidly Tory paper published between 6 January and 22 September 1821.

<sup>54</sup> *The Courier*, 5 August 1822, p. 3.