ON THE SPIRIT OF MONARCHY.*

"Strip it of its externals, and what is it but a *jest?*"[1]
Charade[2] *on the word* MAJESTY.

"As for politics, I think poets are *Tories*[3] by nature, supposing them to be by nature poets. The love of an individual person or family, that has worn a crown for many successions, is an inclination greatly adapted to the fanciful tribe. On the other hand, mathematicians, abstract reasoners, of no manner of attachment to persons, at least to the visible part of them, but prodigiously devoted to the ideas of virtue, liberty, and so forth, are generally *Whigs*.[4] It happens agreeably enough to this maxim, that the Whigs are friends to that wise, plodding, unpoetical people, the Dutch."—*Shenstone's Letters*, 1746.[5]

THE Spirit of Monarchy then is nothing but the craving in the human mind after the Sensible and the One. It is not so much a matter of state-necessity or policy, as a natural infirmity, a disease, a false appetite in the popular feeling, which must be gratified. Man is an individual animal with narrow faculties, but infinite desires, which he is anxious to concentrate in some one object within the grasp of his imagination, and where, if he cannot be all that he wishes himself, he may at least contemplate his own pride, vanity, and passions, displayed in their most extravagant dimensions in a being no bigger and no better than himself. Each individual would (were it in his power) be a king, a God: but as he cannot, the next best thing is to see this reflex image of his self-love, the darling passion of his breast,

* Author: William Hazlitt / Transcribed and annotated by Fabio Liberto.

realized, embodied out of himself in the first object he can lay his hands on for the purpose. The slave admires the tyrant, because the last *is*, what the first *would be*. He surveys himself all over in the glass of royalty. The swelling, bloated self-importance of the one is the very counterpart and ultimate goal of the abject servility of the other. But both hate mankind for the same reason, because a respect for humanity is a diversion to their inordinate self-love, and the idea of the general good is a check to the gross intemperance of passion. The worthlessness of the object does not diminish but irritate the propensity to admire. It serves to pamper our imagination equally, and does not provoke our envy. All we want is to aggrandize our own vain-glory at second-hand; and the less of real superiority or excellence there is in the person we fix upon as our proxy in this dramatic exhibition, the more easily can we change places with him, and fancy ourselves as good as he. Nay, the descent favours the rise; and we heap our tribute of applause the higher, in proportion as it is a free gift. An idol is not the worse for being of coarse materials: a king should be a common-place man. Otherwise, he is superior in his own nature, and not dependent on our bounty or caprice. Man is a poetical animal, and delights in fiction. We like to have scope for the exercise of our mere will. We make kings of men, and Gods of stocks and stones: we are not jealous of the creatures of our own hands. We only want a peg or loop to hang our idle fancies on, a puppet to dress up, a lay-figure to paint from. It is "THING Ferdinand, and not KING Ferdinand,"[6] as it was wisely and wittily observed.[7] We ask only for the stage effect; we do not go behind the scenes, or it would go hard with many of our prejudices! We see the symbols of majesty, we enjoy

the pomp, we crouch before the power, we walk in the procession, and make part of the pageant, and we say in our secret hearts, there is nothing but accident that prevents us from being at the head of it. There is something in the mock-sublimity of thrones, wonderfully congenial to the human mind. Every man feels that he could sit there; every man feels that he could look big there; every man feels that he could bow there; every man feels that he could play the monarch there. The transition is so easy, and so delightful! The imagination keeps pace with royal state,

> "And by the vision splendid
> Is on its way attended."[8]

The Madman in Hogarth[9] who fancies himself a king, is not a solitary instance of this species of hallucination. Almost every true and loyal subject holds such a barren sceptre in his hand; and the meanest of the rabble, as he runs by the monarch's side, has wit enough to think—"There goes my *royal* self!" From the most absolute despot to the lowest slave there is but one step (no, not one) in point of real merit. As far as truth or reason is concerned, they might change situations to-morrow—nay, they constantly do so without the smallest loss or benefit to mankind! Tyranny, in a word, is a farce got up for the entertainment of poor human nature; and it might pass very well, if it did not so often turn into a tragedy.

We once heard a celebrated and elegant historian and a hearty Whig[10] declare, he liked a king like George III.[11] better than such a one as Buonaparte;[12] because, in the former case, there was nothing to overawe the imagination but birth and situation; whereas he could not so easily brook the double superiority of the other, mental as well as adventitious. So does the spirit of independence

and the levelling pride of intellect join in with the servile rage of the vulgar! This is the advantage which an hereditary has over an elective monarchy: for there is no end of the dispute about precedence while merit is supposed to determine it, each man laying claim to this in his own person; so that there is no other way to set aside all controversy and heart-burnings, but by precluding moral and intellectual qualifications altogether, and referring the choice to accident, and giving the preference to a nonentity. "A good king," says Swift,[13] "should be, in all other respects, a mere cypher."[14]

It has been remarked, as a peculiarity in modern criticism, that the courtly and loyal make a point of crying up Mr. Young,[15] as an actor, and equally running down Mr. Kean;[16] and it has been conjectured in consequence that Mr. Kean was a *radical*. Truly, he is not a radical politician; but what is as bad, he is a radical actor. He savours too much of the reality. He is not a mock-tragedian, an automaton player—he is something besides his paraphernalia. He has "that within which passes shew."[17] There is not a particle of affinity between him and the patrons of the court-writers. Mr. Young, on the contrary, is the very thing—all assumption and strut and measured pomp, full of self-importance, void of truth and nature, the mask of the characters he takes, a pasteboard figure, a stiff piece of wax-work. He fills the throne of tragedy, not like an upstart or usurper, but as a matter of course, decked out in his plumes of feathers, and robes of state, stuck into a posture, and repeating certain words by rote. Mr. Kean has a heart in his bosom, beating with human passion (a thing for the great "to fear, not to delight in!")[18] he is a living man, and not an artificial one. How should those, who look to the surface, and never probe deeper, endure him? He is the antithesis of a court-

actor. It is the object there to suppress and varnish over the feelings, not to give way to them. His *overt* manner must shock them, and be thought a breach of all decorum. They are in dread of his fiery humours, of coming near his Voltaic Battery[19]—they chuse rather to be roused gently from their self-complacent apathy by the application of Metallic Tractors.[20] They dare not trust their delicate nerves within the estuary of the passions, but would slumber out their torpid existence in a calm, a Dead Sea—the air of which extin[21] guishes life and motion!

Would it not be hard upon a little girl, who is busy in dressing up a favourite doll, to pull it in pieces before her face in order to shew her the bits of wood, the wool, and rags it is composed of? So it would be hard upon that great baby, the world, to take any of its idols to pieces, and shew that they are nothing but painted wood. Neither of them would thank you, but consider the offer as an insult. The little girl knows as well as you do that her doll is a cheat; but she shuts her eyes to it, for she finds her account in keeping up the deception. Her doll is her pretty little self. In its glazed eyes, its cherry cheeks, its flaxen locks, its finery and its baby-house, she has a fairy vision of her own future charms, her future triumphs, a thousand hearts led captive, and an establishment for life. Harmless illusion! that can create something out of nothing, can make that whichis[22] good for nothing in itself so fine in appearance, and clothe a shapeless piece of deal-board with the attributes of a divinity! But the great world has been doing little else but playing at *make-believe* all its life-time. For several thousand years its chief rage was to paint larger pieces of wood and smear them with gore and call them Gods and offer victims to them —slaughtered hecatombs, the fat of goats and oxen, or human sacrifices—shewing in this its love of shew, of cruelty, and

imposture; and woe to him who should "peep through the blanket of the dark to cry, *Hold, hold*."[23]—*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*,[24] was the answer in all ages. It was in vain to represent to them—"Your Gods have eyes but they see not, ears but they hear not, neither do they understand"[25]—the more stupid, brutish, helpless, and contemptible they were, the more furious, bigotted, and implacable were their votaries in their behalf.* The more absurd the fiction, the louder was the noise made to hide it—the more mischievous its tendency, the more did it excite all the phrensy of the passions. Superstition nursed, with peculiar zeal, her ricketty, deformed, and preposterous offspring. She passed by the nobler races of animals even, to pay divine honours to the odious and unclean—she took toads and serpents, cats, rats, dogs, crocodiles, goats and monkeys, and hugged them to her bosom, and dandled them into deities, and set up altars to them, and drenched the earth with tears and blood in their defence; and those who did not believe in them were cursed, and were forbidden the use of bread, of fire, and water, and to worship them was piety, and their images were held sacred, and their race became Gods in perpetuity and by divine right. To touch them, was sacrilege: to kill them, death, even in your own defence. If they stung you, you must die: if they infested the land with their numbers and their pollutions, there was no remedy. The nuisance was intolerable, impassive, immortal. Fear, religious horror, disgust, hatred, heightened the flame of bigotry and intolerance. There was nothing so odious or contemptible but it found a sanctuary

* "Of whatsoe'er descent his Godhead be,
Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,
In his defence his servants are as bold
As if he had been made of beaten gold."—Dryden.[26]

in the more odious and contemptible perversity of human nature. The barbarous Gods of antiquity reigned *in contempt of their worshippers!*[27]

This game was carried on through all the first ages of the world, and is still kept up in many parts of it; and it is impossible to describe the wars, massacres, horrors, miseries and crimes, to which it gave colour, sanctity, and sway. The idea of a God, beneficent and just, the invisible maker of all things, was abhorrent to their gross, material notions. No, they must have Gods of their own making, that they could see and handle, that they knew to be nothing in themselves but senseless images, and these they daubed over with the gaudy emblems of their own pride and passions, and these they lauded to the skies, and grew fierce, obscene, frantic before them, as the representatives of their sordid ignorance and barbaric vices. TRUTH, GOOD, were idle names to them, without a meaning. They must have a lie, a palpable, pernicious lie, to pamper their crude, unhallowed conceptions with, and to exercise the untameable fierceness of their wills. The Jews were the only people of antiquity who were withheld from running headlong into this abomination; yet so strong was the propensity in them (from inherent frailty as well as neighbouring example) that it could only be curbed and kept back by the hands of Omnipotence.* At length, reason prevailed over imagination so far, that these brute idols and their altars were overturned: it was thought too much to set up stocks and stones, Golden Calves and Brazen Serpents,[28] as *bona fide* Gods and Goddesses, which men were to fall down and worship at their peril—

* They *would* have a king in spite of the devil. The image-worship of the Papists is a batch of the same leaven. The apishness of man's nature would not let even the Christian Religion escape.

and Pope[29] long after summed up the merits of the whole mythologic tribe in a handsome distich—

> "Gods partial, changeful, passionate, unjust,
> Whose attributes were rage, revenge, or lust."[30]

It was thought a bold stride to divert the course of our imagination, the overflowings of our enthusiasm, our love of the mighty and the marvellous, from the dead to the living *subject*, and there we stick. We have got living idols, instead of dead ones; and we fancy that they are real, and put faith in them accordingly. Oh, Reason! when will thy long minority expire? It is not now the fashion to make Gods of wood and stone and brass, but we make kings of common men, and are proud of our own handy-work. We take a child from his birth, and we agree, when he grows up to be a man, to heap the highest honours of the state upon him, and to pay the most devoted homage to his will. Is there any thing in the person, "any mark, any likelihood,"[31] to warrant this sovereign awe and dread? No: he may be little better than an ideot, little short of a madman, and yet he is no less qualified for king.* If he can contrive to pass the

* "In fact, the argument drawn from the supposed incapacity of the people against a representative Government, comes with the worst grace in the world from the patrons and admirers of hereditary government. Surely, if government were a thing requiring the utmost stretch of genius, wisdom, and virtue to carry it on, the office of King would never even have been dreamt of as hereditary, any more than that of poet, painter, or philosopher. It is easy here "for the Son to tread in the Sire's steady steps." It requires nothing but the will to do it. Extraordinary talents are not once looked for. Nay, a person, who would never have risen by natural abilities to the situation of churchwarden or parish beadle, succeeds by unquestionable right to the possession of a throne, and wields the energies of an empire, or decides the fate of the world with the smallest possible share of human understanding. The

College of Physicians,[32] the Heralds' College[33] dub him divine. Can we make any given individual taller or stronger or wiser than other men, or different in any respect from what nature intended him to be? No; but we can make a king of him. We cannot add a cubit to the stature, or instil a virtue into the minds of monarchs—but we can put a sceptre into their hands, a crown upon their heads, we can set them on an eminence, we can surround them with circumstance, we can aggrandise them with power, we can pamper their appetites, we can pander to their wills. We can do every thing to exalt them in external rank and station—nothing to lift them one step higher in the scale of moral or intellectual excellence. Education does not give capacity or temper; and the education of kings is not especially directed to useful knowledge or liberal sentiment. What then is the state of the case? The highest respect of the community and of every individual in it is paid and is due of right there, where perhaps not an idea can take root, or a single virtue be engrafted. Is not this to erect a standard of esteem directly opposite to that of mind and morals? The lawful monarch may be the best or the worst man in his dominions, he may be the wisest or the weakest, the wittiest or the stupidest: still he is equally entitled to our homage as king, for it is the place and power we bow to, and not the man. He may be a sublimation of all the vices and diseases of the human heart; yet we are not to say so, we dare not even think so. "Fear

line of distinction which separates the regal purple from the slabbering-bib is sometimes fine indeed; as we see in the case of the two Ferdinands. Any one above the rank of an ideot is supposed capable of exercising the highest functions of royal state. Yet these are the persons who talk of the people as a swinish multitude, and taunt them with their want of refinement and philosophy." [34]—*Yellow Dwarf, p.* 84.[35]

God, and honour the King,"[36] is equally a maxim at all times and seasons. The personal character of the king has nothing to do with the question. Thus the extrinsic is set up over the intrinsic by authority: wealth and interest lend their countenance to gilded vice and infamy on principle, and outward shew and advantages become the symbols and the standard of respect in despite of useful qualities or well-directed efforts through all ranks and gradations of society. "From the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness left."[37] The whole style of moral thinking, feeling, acting, is in a false tone—is hollow, spurious, meretricious. Virtue, says Montesquieu,[38] is the principle of republics; honour of a monarchy.[39] But it is "honour dishonourable, sin-bred"[40]—it is the honour of trucking a principle for a place, of exchanging our honest convictions for a ribbon or a garter. The business of life is a scramble for unmerited precedence. Is not the highest respect entailed, the highest station filled without any possible proofs or pretensions to public spirit or public principle? Shall not the next places to it be secured by the sacrifice of them? It is the order of the day, the understood etiquette of courts and kingdoms. For the servants of the crown to presume on merit, when the crown itself is held as an heir-loom by prescription, is a kind of *lèse majestè*,[41] an indirect attainder of the title to the succession. Are not all eyes turned to the sun of court-favour? Who would not then reflect its smile by the performance of any acts which can avail in the eye of the great, and by the surrender of any virtue, which attracts neither notice nor applause? The stream of corruption begins at the fountain-head of court-influence.[42] The sympathy of mankind is that on which all strong feeling and opinion floats; and this sets in full in every absolute monarchy to the side of tinsel shew and iron-handed power, in contempt and defiance of right

and wrong. The right and the wrong are of little consequence, compared to the *in* and the *out*. The distinction between Whig and Tory is merely nominal: neither have their country one bit at heart. Phaw! we had forgot—Our British monarchy is a mixed, and the only perfect form of government; and therefore what is here said cannot properly apply to it. But MIGHT BEFORE RIGHT is the motto blazoned on the front of unimpaired and undivided Sovereignty!——

A court is the centre of fashion; and no less so, for being the sink of luxury and vice—

> —"Of outward shew
> Elaborate, of inward less exact."[43]

The goods of fortune, the baits of power, the indulgences of vanity, may be accumulated without end, and the taste for them increases as it is gratified: the love of virtue, the pursuit of truth, grow stale and dull in the dissipation of a court. Virtue is thought crabbed and morose, knowledge pedantic, while every sense is pampered, and every folly tolerated. Every thing tends naturally to personal aggrandisement and unrestrained self-will. It is easier for monarchs as well as other men "to tread the primrose path of dalliance" than "to scale the steep and thorny road to heaven."[44] The vices, when they have leave from power and authority, go greater lengths than the virtues; example justifies almost every excess, and "nice customs curtesy to great kings."[45] What chance is there that monarchs should not yield to the temptations of gallantry there, where youth and beauty are as wax? What female heart can indeed withstand the attractions of a throne—the smile that melts all hearts, the air that awes rebellion, the frown that kings dread, the hand that scatters fairy wealth, that bestows titles, places, honour, power, the breast on which the star glitters, the head circled with a

diadem, whose dress dazzles with its richness and its taste, who has nations at his command, senates at his controul, "in form and motion so express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a God; the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!"[46] The power of resistance is so much the less, where fashion extends impunity to the frail offender, and screens the loss of character.

"Vice is undone, if she forgets her birth,
And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth;
But 'tis the fall degrades her to a whore:
Let greatness own her, and she's mean no more.
Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess,
Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless.
In golden chains the willing world she draws,
And hers the Gospel is, and hers the laws."*[47]

* A lady of quality abroad, in allusion to the gallantries of the reigning Prince, being told, "I suppose it will be your turn next?" said, "No, I hope not; for you know it is impossible to refuse!" What a satire on the court and fashionables! If this be true, female virtue in the blaze of royalty is no more than the moth in the candle, or ice in the sun's ray. What will the great themselves say to it, in whom at this rate,

——"the same luck holds,
They all are subjects, courtiers, and cuckolds!"[48]

Out upon it! We'll not believe it. Alas! poor virtue, what is to become of the very idea of it, if we are to be told that every man within the precincts of a palace is an *hypothetical* cuckold, or holds his wife's virtue in trust for the Prince? We entertain no doubt that many ladies of quality have resisted the importunities of a throne, and that many more would do so in private life, if they had the desired opportunity: nay, we have been assured by several that a king would no more be able to prevail with them than any other man! If however there is any foundation for the above insinuation, it throws no small light on the Spirit of Monarchy, which by the supposition implies in it the *virtual* surrender of the whole sex at discretion; and at the same time accounts perhaps for the indifference shewn by some monarchs in availing themselves of so mechanical a privilege.

The air of a court is not assuredly that which is most favourable to the practice of self-denial and strict morality. We increase the temptations of wealth, of power, and pleasure a thousand-fold, while we can give no additional force to the antagonist principles of reason, disinterested integrity and goodness of heart. Is it to be wondered at that courts and palaces have produced so many monsters of avarice, cruelty, and lust? The adept in voluptuousness is not likely to be a proportionable proficient in humanity. To feed on plate or be clothed in purple, is not to feel for the hungry and the naked. He who has the greatest power put into his hands, will only become more impatient of any restraint in the use of it. To have the welfare and the lives of millions placed at our disposal, is a sort of warrant, a challenge to squander them without mercy. An arbitrary monarch set over the heads of his fellows does not identify himself with them, or learn to comprehend their rights or sympathise with their interests, but looks down upon them as of a different species from himself, as insects crawling on the face of the earth, that he may trample on at his pleasure, or if he spares them, it is an act of royal grace——he is besotted with power, blinded with prerogative, an alien to his nature, a traitor to his trust, and instead of being the organ of public feeling and public opinion, is an excrescence and an anomaly in the state, a bloated mass of morbid humours and proud flesh! A constitutional king, on the other hand, is a servant of the public, a representative of the people's wants and wishes, dispensing justice and mercy according to law. Such a monarch is the King of England! Such was his late,[49] and such is his present Majesty George the IVth.![50]——

Let us take the Spirit of Monarchy in its highest state of exaltation, in the moment of its proudest triumph—a Coronation-day.[51] We now see it in our mind's eye; the prepa-

ration of weeks—the expectation of months—the seats, the privileged places, are occupied in the obscurity of night, and in silence—the day dawns slowly, big with the hope of Cæsar[52] and of Rome—the golden censers are set in order, the tables groan with splendour and with luxury—within the inner space the rows of peeresses are set, and revealed to the eye decked out in ostrich feathers and pearls, like beds of lilies sparkling with a thousand dew-drops—the marshals and the heralds are in motion—the full organ, majestic, peals forth the Coronation Anthem—every thing is ready—and all at once the Majesty of kingdoms bursts upon the astonished sight—his person is swelled out with all the gorgeousness of dress, and swathed in bales of silk and golden tissues—the bow with which he greets the assembled multitude, and the representatives of foreign kings, is the climax of conscious dignity, bending gracefully on its own bosom, and instantly thrown back into the sightless air, as if asking no recognition in return—the oath of mutual fealty between him and his people is taken—the fairest flowers of female beauty precede the Sovereign, scattering roses; the sons of princes page his heels, holding up the robes of crimson and ermine—he staggers and reels under the weight of royal pomp, and of a nation's eyes; and thus the pageant is launched into the open day, dazzling the sun, whose beams seem beaten back by the sun of royalty—there were the warrior, the statesman, and the mitred head—there was Prince Leopold,[53] like a panther in its dark glossy pride, and Castlereagh,[54] clad in triumphant smiles and snowy satin, unstained with his own blood[55]—the loud trumpet brays, the cannon roars, the spires are mad with music, the stones in the street are startled at the presence of a king:—the crowd press on, the metropolis heaves like a sea in restless motion, the air is thick with loyalty's quick pants in its monarch's arms

—all eyes drink up the sight, all tongues reverberate the sound—

> "A present deity they shout around,
> A present deity the vaulted roofs rebound!"[56]

What does it all amount to? A shew—a theatrical spectacle! What does it prove? That a king is crowned, that a king is dead! What is the moral to be drawn from it, that is likely to sink into the heart of a nation? That greatness consists in finery, and that supreme merit is the dower of birth and fortune! It is a form, a ceremony to which each successor to the throne is entitled in his turn as a matter of right. Does it depend on the inheritance of virtue, on the acquisition of knowledge in the new monarch, whether he shall be thus exalted in the eyes of the people? No:—to say so is not only an offence in manners, but a violation of the laws. The king reigns in contempt of any such pragmatical distinctions. They are set aside, proscribed, treasonable, as it relates to the august person of the monarch; what is likely to become of them in the minds of the people? A Coronation overlays and drowns all such considerations for a generation to come, and so far it serves its purpose well. It debauches the understandings of the people, and makes them the slaves of sense and show. It laughs to scorn and tramples upon every other claim to distinction or respect. Is the chief person in the pageant a tyrant? It does not lessen, but aggrandise him to the imagination. Is he the king of a free people? We make up in love and loyalty what we want in fear. Is he young? He borrows understanding and experience from the learning and tried wisdom of councils and parliaments. Is he old? He leans upon the youth and beauty that attend his triumph. Is he weak? Armies support him with their myriads. Is he

diseased? What is health to a staff of physicians? Does he die? The truth is out, and he is then—nothing!

There is a cant among court-sycophants of calling all those who are opposed to them, "the *rabble*," "*fellows*," "*miscreants*," &c. This shews the grossness of their ideas of all true merit, and the false standard of rank and power by which they measure every thing; like footmen, who suppose their masters must be gentlemen, and that the rest of the world are low people. Whatever is opposed to power, they think despicable; whatever suffers oppression, they think deserves it. They are ever ready to side with the strong, to insult and trample on the weak. This is with us a pitiful fashion of thinking. They are not of the mind of Pope, who was so full of the opposite conviction, that he has even written a bad couplet to express it:—

> "Worth makes the man, and want of it the fellow:
> The rest is all but leather and prunella."[57]

Those lines in Cowper[58] also must sound very puerile or old-fashioned to courtly ears:—

> "The only amaranthine flower on earth
> Is virtue; the only lasting treasure, truth."[59]

To this sentiment, however, we subscribe our hearts and hands. There is nothing truly liberal but that which postpones its own claims to those of propriety—or great, but that which looks out of itself to others. All power is but an unabated nuisance, a barbarous assumption, an aggravated injustice, that is not directed to the common good: all grandeur that has not something corresponding to it in personal merit and heroic acts, is a deliberate burlesque, and an insult on common sense and human nature. That which is true, the understanding ratifies: that which is good, the heart

owns: all other claims are spurious, vitiated, mischievous, false—fit only for those who are sunk below contempt, or raised above opinion. We hold in scorn all *right-lined* pretensions but those of rectitude. If there is offence in this, we are ready to abide by it. If there is shame, we take it to ourselves: and we hope and hold that the time will come, when all other idols but those which represent pure truth and real good, will be looked upon with the same feelings of pity and wonder that we now look back to the images of Thor and Woden![60]

Really, that men born to a throne (limited or unlimited) should employ the brief span of their existence here in doing all the mischief in their power, in levying cruel wars and undermining the liberties of the world, to prove to themselves and others that their pride and passions are of more consequence than the welfare of mankind at large, would seem a little astonishing, but that the fact is so. It is not our business to preach lectures to monarchs, but if we were at all disposed to attempt the ungracious task, we should do it in the words of an author who often addressed the ear of monarchs.

"A man may read a sermon," says Jeremy Taylor,[61] "the best and most passionate that ever man preached, if he shall but enter into the sepulchres of kings. In the same Escurial[62] where the Spanish princes live in greatness and power, and decree war or peace, they have wisely placed a cemetery where their ashes and their glory shall sleep till time shall be no more: and where *our* kings have been crowned, their ancestors lie interred, and they must walk over their grandsire's head to take his crown. There is an acre sown with royal seed, the copy of the greatest change from rich to naked, from ceiled roofs to arched coffins, from living like Gods to die like men. There is enough to cool the flames

of lust, to abate the height of pride, to appease the itch of covetous desires, to sully and dash out the dissembling colours of a lustful, artificial, and imaginary beauty. There the warlike and the peaceful, the fortunate and the miserable, the beloved and the despised princes mingle their dust, and pay down their symbol of mortality, and tell all the world, that when we die our ashes shall be equal to kings, and our accounts shall be easier, and our pains for our crimes shall be less. To my apprehension, it is a sad record which is left by Athenæus[63] concerning Ninus,[64] the great Assyrian monarch, whose life and death is summed up in these words; "Ninus, the Assyrian, had an ocean of gold, and other riches more than the sand in the Caspian sea; he never saw the stars, and perhaps he never desired it; he never stirred up the holy fire among the Magi; nor touched his God with the sacred rod, according to the laws; he never offered sacrifice, nor worshipped the Deity, nor administered justice, nor spake to the people, nor numbered them; but he was most valiant to eat and drink, and having mingled his wines, he threw the rest upon the stones. This man is dead: behold his sepulchre, and now hear where Ninus is. *Sometime I was Ninus, and drew the breath of a living man, but now am nothing but clay. I have nothing but what I did eat, and what I served to myself in lust is all my portion: the wealth with which I was blest, my enemies meeting together shall carry away, as the mad Thyades carry a raw goat. I am gone to Hell; and when I went thither, I carried neither gold nor horse, nor a silver chariot. I that wore a mitre, am now a little heap of dust!*"[65]
—Taylor's Holy Living and Dying.[66]

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] "*Strip it … a* jest?": probably, a recollection of Edmund Burke's (1729/30-97) remark on the word 'majesty' during a conversation with James Beattie (1735-1803), quoted in Charles McCormick's *Memoirs of the Right and Honourable Edmund Burke* (1797): "'Ah! Doctor,' said he, 'strip Majesty of its exteriors,' [the first and the last letters] 'and it becomes a jest.'", (McCormick 1797, 33; see also Gilmartin 2015, 274).

[2] Charade, enigmatic description or riddle which can be solved by combining or rearranging the different syllables in a word or phrase.

[3] Tories, members of one of the two principal political factions in Britain, succeeded by the Conservative Party after the Reform Act of 1832. They supported the monarchy, landed gentry, and the Church of England.

[4] Whigs, members of one of the two principal political factions in Britain, succeeded by the Liberal Party in the 1860s. They advocated social and economic reform, the reduction of the power of the monarchy, and the right to religious dissent.

[5] William Shenstone (1714-63), writer, collector and editor. During his studies at Pembroke College, Oxford, he began his friendship with novelist Richard Graves (1715-1804). The letter "To Richard Graves" is dated April 6, 1746 (Shenstone 1939, 78).

[6] The reference is to Ferdinand VII of Spain (1784-1833). He reigned briefly (March-May 1808) before Napoleon forced him to abdicate his throne and confined him in the castle of Valençay, France, from 1808 to 1813, during the Peninsular War. Uprisings all over Spain followed Joseph Bonaparte's accession to the throne of Spain. Ferdinand was later restored in 1814 and reigned until his death in 1833.

[7] The joke was Leigh Hunt's. Hazlitt used the same joke in his essay "Definition of Wit" (1829), which Hunt annotated in his copy of Hazlitt's *Literary Remains* (1836): "I beg leave to say (and to be proud of saying, seeing it thus spoken of by such a man) that this joke was mine." (Hazlitt 1967, 20:440).

[8] William Wordsworth, "Ode: Imitations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1804), ll. 73-74.

[9] William Hogarth (1697-1764), painter and engraver. In Plate 8 of his series of paintings *A Rake's Progress* (1732-34), Hogarth portrays a hospital for lunatics. Hazlitt is referring to the inmate in cell 55, a naked man wearing only a crown and urinating while watching himself in the mirror.

[10] The allusion is to the historian, poet and patron of the arts William Roscoe (1753-1831). Hazlitt, who was a regular presence at Roscoe's soirées at his home in Liverpool, recalls the writer's opinion on George III and Buonaparte in his *Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A*. (1830), "Conversation the Ninth" (Hazlitt 1967, 11:241).

[11] George III (1738-1820, reigned 1760-1820), king of Great Britain and Ireland, known for his long and turbulent reign. From 1788, he suffered recurrent bouts of mental illness, until he became unfit to rule in November 1810. In 1811 his son George became Prince Regent (1811-1820).

[12] Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), French general and statesman who played a pivotal role in the French Revolution. He served as first consul of France (1799-1804) and later became the first emperor of France (1804-14).

[13] Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), Anglo-Irish writer, clergyman and one of the greatest satirists of the early eighteenth century. His masterpiece, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), is an example of his satirical style as well as an important contribution for the emergence of the novel as a literary genre. Other satirical works by Swift include *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729), which address the hypocrisies of religion and political tyranny.

[14] Untraced quotation. In "The Lex Talionis Principle" (1814), Hazlitt also attributes a similar opinion to Swift: "It was remarked by Swift that a perfect king should be a figure stuffed with straw." (Hazlitt 1967, 19:124).

[15] Charles Mayne Young (1777-1856), actor. After playing in Liverpool, Glasgow and Bath, he made his debut in London as Hamlet in June 1807 at the Haymarket Theatre. In *A View of the English Stage* (1818), Hazlitt expresses some serious reservations on Young's acting, especially in Shakespearean roles, which he qualifies as "indescribably bad" (Hazlitt 1818, 64).

[16] Edmund Kean (1787-1833), actor. He debuted on the London stage in 1814 playing Shylock at Drury Lane, receiving a "general, loud, and uninterrupted" applause, according to Hazlitt's famous account of the performance [*Morning Chronicle*, January 27, 1814, republished in *A View of the English Stage* (1818), (Hazlitt 1818, 2). Kean was one of the leading tragic actors of the day, renowned for his Shakespearean roles, which included Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, Richard III, and Iago. Hazlitt was one of the few reviewers who immediately recognised Kean's radical and revolutionary contribution to nineteenth-century acting practices.

[17] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* I.ii.85. All references from Shakespeare are from the Arden Edition, Third Series.

[18] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, I.ii.71.

[19] The Voltaic Pile was the first electric battery. It was developed in 1799 by the Italian physicist Alessandro Volta (1745-1827), and it consisted of a succession of alternating discs of zinc and copper separated by round pieces of cloth soaked in either acidulated or saline water.

[20] Metallic Tractors, medical device invented in 1795 by the American physician Elisha Perkins (1741-99), consisting of two metallic rods designed to be passed or rubbed over the aching parts of the body. Perkins claimed the device could treat inflammatory and rheumatic pain. It became extremely popular in Britian, being frequently advertised in British magazines and newspapers. In 1801, the device and its inventor were satirised in a caricature by James Gillray.

[21] Misprint: hyphen is not present in the copy-text.

[22] Misprint for *which is*.

[23] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.v.53-4.

[24] Biblical reference. *Acts* 19:28.

[25] Biblical reference. *Matthew* 13:13.

[26] John Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), ll. 100-3.

[27] Possible allusion to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): "he holds his crown in contempt of the choice of the Revolution Society, who have not a single vote for a king amongst them" (Burke 2014, 16). See also Howe (Hazlitt 1967, 19:363) and Mee and Grande (Hazlitt 2021, 375).

[28] Biblical reference. The golden calf and the brazen serpent are used in the Bible (*Exodus* 32, and *1 Kings* 12:25-33; *Numbers* 21:8-9) as symbols of the distinction between idolatry and true worship.

[29] Alexander Pope (1688-1744), poet, satirist, and critic of the English Augustan period. His most renowned works include the mock-heroic poems *The Rape of the Lock* (1712, 1714) and *The Dunciad* (1728-43), the didactic poem in heroic couplets *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), and the philosophical essay *An Essay on Man* (1733-34).

[30] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle III, ll. 257-8.

[31] Adapted quotation, likely from memory, from Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*, III.ii.45: "A fellow of no mark nor likelihood".

[32] The Royal College of Physician of London, established in 1518.

[33] Heralds' College, or College of Arms, one of the oldest heraldic institutions in Europe, originally established in 1484. It controls the use of coats of arms in England and Wales.

[34] Hazlitt quotes his own essay "What is the People?", originally published in the *Champion*, October 1817, and reprinted in the *Yellow Dwarf*, March 1818 (Hazlitt 1967, 7:274-75).

[35] The *Yellow Dwarf* was a "Weekly Miscellany" founded by John Hunt (1775-1848), which ran for 21 issues, from January to March 1818.

[36] Biblical reference. *I Peter* 2:17.

[37] Biblical reference. *Isaiah* 1:6.

[38] Montesquieu (1689-1755), French political philosopher. His best-known works include the satirical Parisian portrait *Lettres persanes* (1721; *Persian Letters*, 1722), and several studies in political theory. His *De l'esprit des loix* (1748; *The Spirit of the Law*, 1748) is one of the most celebrated treaties in the history of political thought.

[39] See Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Law*, pt. I, chap. 3-7.

[40] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1688), IV.314-15.

[41] Misspelling of *lèse-majesté*.

[42] A similar critique is also present in Hazlitt's article "'On Court-Influence", published in the first issue of *The Yellow Dwarf* (Jan. 3, 1818).

[43] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV.538-39.

[44] *"to tread … to heaven"*: adapted quotations, likely from memory, from Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.iii.46-50: "But, good my brother, | Do not as some ungracious pastors do | Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven | Whiles, a puffed and reckless libertine, | Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads".

[45] William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, V.ii.266. Hazlitt discusses about his habit to quote Shakespeare from memory and the trouble he had recalling this specific quotation in his essay "On Application to Study", originally published in *The New Monthly Magazine*, December 1823, and republished in *The Plain Speaker* (1826) (Hazlitt 1967, 12:55-66): "I was at a loss the other day for the line in Henry V. "*Nice* customs curtesy to great kings." I could not recollect the word *nice*: I tried a number of others, such as *old*, *grave*, &c.—they would none of them do, but seemed all heavy, lumbering, or from the purpose: the word *nice*, on the contrary, appeared to drop into its place, and be ready to assist in paying the reverence required." (Hazlitt 1967, 12:58).

[46] Adapted quotation, possibly from memory, from Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II.ii.270-273: "in form | and moving; how express and admirable in action; how | like an angel in apprehension; how like a god; the | beauty of the world; the paragon of animals."

[47] Alexander Pope, *Epilogue to the Satires* (1738), Dialogue I, ll. 141-48.

[48] Adapted quotation from George Gordon Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24), II.1647-48: "the same luck holds, | They all were heroes, conquerors, and cuckolds."

[49] George III (1738-1820, reigned 1760-1820).

[50] George IV (1762-1830, reigned 1820-30), king of Great Britain and Ireland. He served as prince regent (1811-20) owing to his father's mental illness. In 1795, as Prince of Wales, he married his cousin, Caroline of Brunswick (1768-1821) to secure a successor to the throne and to be released from debt. After the birth of their only child, Charlotte (1796-1817), Caroline was rejected by her husband and excluded from court.

[51] The coronation of George IV (19 July 1821) was one of the most expensive, lavish and extravagant coronation ceremonies in British history, and is fittingly described by Hazlitt as a "theatrical spectacle" (p. 241). The celebrations were spoiled by the return of George's estranged wife, Caroline, to England. She was determined to claim her rights as queen consort, but her attempts to attend the coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey were unsuccessful. She died shortly after, on 7 August 1821.

[52] Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE), Roman statesman, general, and dictator. He had a key role in the transformation of Rome from a republic to an autocratic empire.

[53] Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg (1790-1865), later king of the Belgians (1831-65). In 1816 he married Princess Charlotte (1796-1817) – the only child of the future George IV and Caroline of Brunswick – who died giving birth to a stillborn son in 1817. After Charlotte's death, Leopold decided to stay in England and was granted an annual allowance of £50.000. He received the sum until he became King of Belgium in 1831.

[54] Viscount Robert Stewart Castlereagh (1769-1822), British foreign secretary from 1812 to 1822. He led the Grand Alliance against Napoleon and participated in the Congress of Vienna.

[55] Castlereagh was renowned for his repressive policies. His involvement in the sanguinary suppression of the rebellion of 1798 in Ireland earned him the nickname of "Bloody Castlereagh". Suspected of complicity also in the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, Castlereagh is directly invoked in "The Mask of Anarchy" (1819), where P.B. Shelley's personification of Murder wears "a mask like Castlereagh" (l. 6).

[56] John Dryden, "Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music" (1697), ll. 35-6.

[57] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle IV, ll. 203-04.

[58] William Cowper (1731-1800), English poet and translator of Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey* into English blank verse. His 6000-line poem *The Task* (1785) is a long reflection on different topics – from the blessings of nature to British imperialism – condemning aristocratic immorality and slavery.

[59] William Cowper, *The Task*, III.268-69.

[60] Thor and Woden (Old English for Odin) are two important deities in Norse mythology. Thor is the god of sky and thunder, while Odin (who is considered Thor's father in some traditions) is the high god, worshipped as the deity of creation, wisdom, and war.

[61] Jeremy Taylor (*bap.*1613 - *d.*1667), writer, Anglican clergyman, and theologian. He wrote a series of devotional handbooks, including *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* (1650) and *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651).

[62] El Escorial, monastery-palace built near Madrid by Philip II of Spain (reigned 1556-98). Philip wanted the monastery to be a place where all Spanish sovereigns could be buried.

[63] Athenaeus of Naucratis (flourished 200 CE) was a Greek grammarian and writer.

[64] Ninus, in Greek mythology, king of Assyria in the 3rd century BCE, and the reputed builder of Nineveh. He is mentioned in book 12 of Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae* (c. 200 CE).

[65] Athenaeus of Naucratis, *Deipnosophistae*, bk. 12.

[66] Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651), chap. 1, sect. II.