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COKE OF NORFOLK  
& HIS FRIENDS. VOL. I







*after the Holkham picture by Gainsborough.*





*Thomas William Coke, Earl of Leicester:*

*Born 1754.*

*Died 1842.*



# COKE OF NORFOLK AND HIS FRIENDS

THE LIFE OF THOMAS WILLIAM COKE,  
FIRST EARL OF LEICESTER OF  
HOLKHAM, CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT  
OF HIS ANCESTRY, SURROUNDINGS,  
PUBLIC SERVICES & PRIVATE  
FRIENDSHIPS, & INCLUDING MANY UN-  
PUBLISHED LETTERS FROM NOTED  
MEN OF HIS DAY, ENGLISH & AMERICAN  
BY A. M. W. STIRLING      
WITH 20 PHOTOGRAVURE & 43 OTHER  
ILLUSTRATIONS REPRODUCED FROM  
CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS, PRINTS,  
ETC. TWO VOLUMES. VOLUME ONE

*"I have never received a farthing of the public money—  
my hands are clean"*—T. W. COKE

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IN MEMORY  
OF  
MY MOTHER,  
THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF  
"COKE OF NORFOLK."



## PREFACE

“*THE life, the almost patriarchal life, of a man like Lord Leicester,*” says a writer of an obituary notice in 1842, “*extending as it did over a vast portion of the most interesting and important periods of our history, is so interwoven with national events in which his active mind could not fail to take a conspicuous part, that, whether regarded as the Senator, the friend and companion of those illustrious men who long since preceded him into the world of spirits, the consistent advocate of all that he deemed right and virtuous in high places, or the prince of landlords and farmers, rich and abundant matter is reserved for the pen of his biographer; and these materials I do earnestly hope to see, by suitable hands employed, worthily to honour the name and hallow the memory of Coke of Holkham.*”<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the non-appearance of that expected biography, I feel that a brief explanation is necessary.

It is still a matter of comment, and in a former generation it was one of constant surprise that no life had been published of a man of such world-wide reputation as “Coke of Norfolk.”

Immediately after the death of Lord Leicester, or,

<sup>1</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, July 9th, 1842.

as he was better known to his generation, "Coke of Norfolk," many biographies were set in progress. Francis Blakie, his former steward, in a letter written in 1843, mentions that, to his knowledge, no less than six were then being written, principal among which were a *Social and Political Life* by Mr. R. N. Bacon, and an *Agricultural Life* by Mr. Samuel Taylor; while doubtless many others of which Blakie had not heard were at that time contemplated and attempted.

These, however, were one and all abandoned upon the authoritative *Life* being undertaken by Lady Leicester's brother, Mr. Thomas Keppel, who alone was granted access to the necessary muniments; and who, so the old letters explain, persuaded both Mr. Bacon and Mr. Taylor to give up to him the material which they had collected for their own MSS.

By a curious chain of events, however, the MS. of that authoritative *Life*, which occupied Mr. Keppel many years, was lost before publication. And to this, primarily, may be attributed the fact that the name of Coke of Norfolk, once a household word both in England and America, has sunk into an oblivion which then it would have been thought impossible could ever befall it.

For Coke occupied a unique position in his generation: as a landowner he was accredited with having transformed the agriculture of both hemispheres; as a politician, although his cordial dislike to politics prevented him ever filling any great public office, yet he remained for over half a century a prominent Member of the House of Commons, during which time his contemporaries stated that the force of his example

exercised a peculiar influence upon the political world of his day, and during which, in recognition of his services, he was offered a peerage seven times, under six different Prime Ministers, while—a fact hitherto unrecognised—he was the prime mover in several important political crises.

Unfortunately, with Mr. Keppel's lost biography, is lost, apparently irrevocably, much valuable correspondence of which Coke was known to have been possessed, and thus much also of vital interest respecting Coke himself and the period in which he lived. My task, in consequence, has been rendered far more difficult. The letters from Coke, which are still extant, are business or political letters only, which reveal little more of the intimate feelings and actions of the man than do the bare newspaper reports of his views upon public affairs. He kept no journals; and the correspondence which was preserved by him consists, perforce, of letters addressed *to* him, which express the opinions of his friends rather than his own. Still more, his sons' remembrance of their father is but dim, and all others are now dead who could have aided me by personal recollections.

On the other hand, my knowledge of his life is probably greater than that of any one else now living. As the grandchild of Coke's favourite daughter, who was the inseparable companion of his prime, I have heard all that has survived orally respecting him from an unimpeachable source. For other information and anecdotes I am indebted to notes preserved by Mr. Keppel, and for the account of Coke's early years I am indebted to a fragment of the MS. of

Mr. Bacon, preserved by his granddaughter—both these biographers having received their information *verbatim* from Coke himself, so that the accuracy of their facts can scarcely be called in question. Finally, with regard to the correspondence of Coke's friends preserved in the Holkham muniments, I can only quote Southey's dictum that—“*A man's character can more surely be judged by those letters which his friends addressed to him, than by those he himself penned*”; for the former reveal, often with unconscious faithfulness, the light in which a man was regarded by those who had personal knowledge of his character; and to-day, by their means, Coke of Norfolk can still be re-created for us out of the hearts of those who knew him best.

In view of this, however, it will probably be objected that, from the correspondence and the biographies consulted, I have selected those letters and passages only which are panegyric; but I wish to emphasise the fact that, so far from this being the case, I found the uniformly eulogistic nature of the material with which I had to deal to constitute in itself a great difficulty, and I have been forced in many instances to suppress material I should otherwise have made use of, for fear of wearying those who read the Life of Coke of Norfolk by the reiteration of a theme which never appears to have wearied those who witnessed that life.

With regard to the correspondence inserted in the present volume, save in a very few instances, where, for the sake of the narrative, it has been necessary to quote letters previously made public, all corres-



pondence introduced consists of private holograph letters never before published. With regard to the anecdotes related, I have given those only for which I had direct authority; where another account is in existence and any discrepancy exists between the two versions, I have given the reference to that second authority, while adhering to the version which I, personally, had received. With regard to the political events during the period dealt with, I have touched on these in so far only as the correspondence, speeches, or anecdotes quoted necessitated a brief explanation; and such explanation I have given usually from the standpoint of those whose outlook I wished to depict, rather than from that of a less biassed posterity.

In short, my aim has been, before it was too late, to gather together whatever record remains of a career of exceptional usefulness and of surroundings of great interest; and in so far as this was practicable, to tell the character and the life of Coke of Norfolk by the lips of his contemporaries.

The type of Englishman of his day is no longer to be found among us—the large-hearted, open-handed Whig prince of another generation, who was a feudal lord upon his own estate, who rode with the foremost, drank with impunity what would kill his descendants, spoke with a vehemence which would shock latter-day susceptibilities, believed in God with the same sincerity with which he accepted a political opponent as the prototype of all evil, and fought for the liberty of the subject or the elevation of the masses with a conviction that the welfare of England was directly menaced by the machinations of the “*Vile Tories and their Viler*

*head, Mr. Pitt.*" He has given place to a generation grown more puny alike in its convictions, its virtues, and its vices; while with him has vanished the simplicity of aim and conduct which constituted the charm of that old world, and which found its best expression in the devotion which could subsist between class and class, the veneration of the lower, the genuine affection of the higher.

I can, however, only present Coke of Norfolk to the present generation as he was once presented to the men of his day. On one of the many occasions when his great friend, Lord Albemarle,<sup>1</sup> was called upon at a public meeting to propose Mr. Coke's health, Lord Albemarle rose, and inquired facetiously from those present—"Have I credit enough with the company to *induce* them to fill a bumper to the toast I am about to give?" Being very heartily reassured on this point, he added with mock solemnity—"I am then about to propose to you Mr. Coke, our Member for the County. Of him, gentlemen, *I have not one word to say in recommendation*"; and when he saw the surprised looks upon the faces of the audience, he added emphatically:—

"If a public life devoted to the support of the soundest constitutional principles, if a private life passed in unremitting assiduity to promote the welfare of society and the exercise of every social virtue, be not sufficient to entitle him to your favour, his case is hopeless, for I can command no words in which to speak of him without any recommendation from me; therefore, Gentlemen, I give him up to you, let him speak for himself."

<sup>1</sup> William Charles, fourth Earl of Albemarle.

In conclusion, I wish most cordially to thank all who have aided me by any information, or by the loan of correspondence or pictures which were in their possession ; especially the present Lord Leicester, Mr. Henry Coke, Col. Wenman Coke, the Duke of Bedford, Lord Townshend, Lord Sherborne, Sir William ffolkes, Mr. George Keppel, Mr. Vade-Walpole, Mr. James Hooper, Mr. Walter Rye, Mrs. Steele, the owner of Mr. R. N. Bacon's MS., Mr. Albert Hartshorne, and Mr. F. P. Barnard.

A. M. W. S.



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COKE OF NORFOLK  
AND HIS FRIENDS



# COKE OF NORFOLK AND HIS FRIENDS

## CHAPTER I

### THE STORY OF THE HERITAGE

**I**N reviewing the life of Thomas William Coke, better known to his generation as "Coke of Norfolk," it is well to glance briefly at the story of his heritage, which is of unusual interest, and at the circumstances which served to mould a character of exceptionally strong individuality.

The family of Coe, or Coke, is said to be of very ancient origin; but genealogists are content with carrying back the family records to the year 1206, when Camden assigns its foundation to William Coke of Dodington (Diddlington), who held the lordship of South Burgh, and who is mentioned in a deed of that year. He was the ancestor, by his wife Felice, of one Robert Coke of Sparham, whose son Robert, a barrister of great practice and a Bencher of Lincoln's Inn, in the year 1554, became possessed of the Manor of Burghwood, in Mileham and Tittleshall, by purchase from the Townshend family.

The date of the conveyance by Sir Roger Townshend to Robert Coke was 6 April, *anno* 5 Edward VI ; but there is no doubt that Robert was resident at Mileham four years earlier, either as a tenant or upon land acquired in some other manner ; for there in February, 1550, his illustrious son, Edward, destined to be the great lawgiver of England and America, was born.

In a wood near to Tittleshall are to be seen the foundations of a building surrounded by a square moat which was probably the site of the ancient Manor House ; yet whether this was a ruin or was still habitable at the time of Robert Coke's purchase is not known. A modern farm-house near the road is erroneously pointed out as the birthplace of the great Judge, but it has certainly no claim to such a distinction ; though it is not unlikely that, after his purchase of the land, Robert Coke erected his residence upon or near the site now occupied by this farm. An ancient gateway is mentioned by Blomefield as existing there in his time, but of this no vestige now remains ; only in one of the windows of the present house are to be seen inserted a portion of the Coke coat of arms, which must have been taken from the original dwelling inhabited by Robert Coke.

The great man who was born in this quiet, unfrequented spot came into the world with undue haste by the fireside of his mother's parlour at Mileham. In old age he was always fond of relating this, his first exploit, and used to tell how, from the extraordinary energy which he displayed on that occasion, great expectations were formed of his future career. That these expectations were amply fulfilled is well known

to posterity; but in an old account of Sir Edward's career his principal achievements and sayings are thus quaintly summarised.<sup>1</sup>

After showing how he was descended from Sir Thomas Coke of Huntley (who was himself of ancient lineage, and who in the year 1362, the 36th of Edward III, was "Lord of Dudlington, Foulden, etc."), it states how Edward Coke attended the Grammar School at Norwich at the age of ten, and how afterwards he was—

"Bred in Trinity College, Cambridge, and Cliffords Inn and the Inner Temple, London; and after six years was called to the Bar. In his younger years he was Recorder of the Cities of Norwich and London; then Solicitor-General to Queen Elizabeth; and in 1593, the 35th of her Reign, was Speaker to the House of Commons.

"He was afterwards Attorney-General to that Queen, as also to her successor, James I, and by him was made Lord Chief Justice of both Benches successively, in which he was a just and exemplary Judge.

"He was likewise one of the Privy Council to that King and Ann his Queen; and Chief Justice in Eyre of all her Forests, Chaces, Parks, etc.: and was also Recorder of the City of Coventry, and High Steward of the University of Cambridge: and by King James was Knighted.

"He was a person of admirable Parts, excellent in all learning, and especially in the Knowledge and Practice of the Municipal Laws of this Kingdom: having a deep Judgment, faithful Memory, and active Fancy: and the Jewel of his Mind was put in a fair Case, a beautiful Body, with a comely Countenance: a Case which he did wipe and keep clean: he delighted in good Clothes, being well worn; being wont to say

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the *British Compendium* for the year 1746.

that the outward neatness of our Bodies might be an incentive to the purity of our Souls.

“He was a famous Pleader and a sound Councillor; for none ever applied himself closer to the Common Law, nor ever understood it better; of which he convinced England by his excellent Administration for many years together whilst Attorney-General, and by executing the office of Lord Chief Justice with great wisdom and prudence. Nor did he give less proofs of his Abilities in his excellent Reports and Commentaries on our Law; whereby he hath greatly obliged both his own Age and Posterity.

“For three Things he would give God solemn Thanks: that he never gave his Body to Physic, his Heart to Cruelty, nor his Hand to Corruption.

“In three Things he much applauded his own Success: in his fair fortune of £30,000 by his Wife, in his happy study of the Laws, and in his free coming by all his Offices, *Nec prece nec pretio*. Neither begging nor bribing for Preferment.

“He always declined Circumlocutions, and commended Moderation; saying, If a River swelleth beyond its Banks, it loseth its own Channel.

“If an adverse Party crossed him, he would patiently reply—If another punish me, I will not punish myself.

“He would never privately retract what he had publicly adjudged; professing that he was a Judge in a Court, not in a Chamber.

“He was wont to say That no wise Man should do that in Prosperity, whereof he would repent in Adversity.

“He gave for his Motto—*Prudens qui patiens*, and his Practice was accordingly.

“In his private life he triumphed in his Innocence, that he had done nothing illegally, calling to mind the Motto which he gave in his Rings when made Serjeant, *Lex est tutissima Cassis*, The Law is the safest Helmet.

“And now he had leisure to peruse thirty books, written with his own Hand, pleasing himself most

with a Manual, which he called his *Vade Mecum*, containing the Remarkables of his Life. His most learned and laborious works in the Laws will last, to be admired by his judicious Posterity, to the end of Time.

“He constantly had Prayers in his own House, and relieved the Poor with his constant Alms.

“The Foundation of the Charter House had been ruined before it was raised and crushed by some Courtiers in the Beginning had not his great Care preserved it.<sup>1</sup> The Free School at Thetford was supported by his Assistance and he founded a School at his own Cost at Godwich, in Norfolk. Dr. Whitgift (afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury) was his Tutor, who sent him, when he was the Queen’s Attorney, a New Testament with this Message: He had studied Common Law enough; let him hereafter study the Law of God. He died on 3rd September, 1633, at Stoke Pogis, in the County of Berks, in the 83rd year of his Age, devoutly resigning his last Breath with these Words, Thy Kingdom Come! Thy Will be done!”

We learn besides that Sir Edward was averse from ostentation, was temperate, simple and methodical in his habits, as he was neat in his dress and fastidious respecting the cleanliness of his person. It was his custom to “Measure out his time at regular hours; to retire to rest at nine o’clock, and to rise at three in the morning.”<sup>2</sup> His physique was vigorous; his air and manner were grave and full of dignity.

The one great stain upon his memory during the earlier days of his career, his method of brow-beating

<sup>1</sup> Coke was one of the Governors of the Charter House named by Mr. Sutton, and he sustained the letters patent of the Crown against Lord Bacon and the other counsel who endeavoured to overthrow them on behalf of the heir-at-law of Mr. Sutton.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Coke’s *Detection*, ed. 1696, p. 49.

and insulting the prisoners brought up before him for trial—a method certainly not in accordance with modern ideas either of the dignity of a judge or the impartiality of the law—appears to have been due to an ungovernable excitability and acerbity of temper, which, combined with a coarse bluntness of speech, led him to give violent expression to the belief of the moment. Yet, although he won well-deserved opprobrium when Attorney-General from his manner of conducting the trials of Essex, Raleigh and Southampton, it is said that this excitability left him in later years, and we find that, although a harsh foe, he could also be a generous one; for instance, having on one occasion uttered a slander against Raleigh's religion, and having subsequently become convinced of his own error in this matter, he heartily and in open Court retracted his previous assertion with every appearance of honest satisfaction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *State Trials*, Vol. II, p. 38.

With regard to Raleigh, it appears possible that Sir Edward may have had greater reason to suspect the honesty of the prisoner than was apparent to the general public.

When the Earl of Essex was executed on Tower Hill, 25th February, 1601, for a mad plot which was declared treasonable, a number of his adherents, including Sir Ed. Baynham, were tried the same day and condemned to death. The report was that Sir W. Raleigh subsequently set himself to obtain the pardon of some of the condemned, in consideration of receiving from them large sums of money. On July 29th, Baynham was still in the King's Bench Prison, condemned to death; a few days later he was discharged by a warrant from the Privy Council; he went abroad and lived many years afterwards.

That Raleigh was implicated in his release appears to be proved by the following curious letter from him to Sir E. Coke, which is preserved at Holkham:—

LETTER OF SIR WALTER RALEIGH TO SIR EDWARD COKE  
(*Attorney-General from 10th April, 1594, till 30th June, 1606*).

“Mr. Atorney it would greatly expedite my business for baynam if you would be pleas to write me a few lines to this effect, yt. wheras





SIR EDWARD COKE  
*Lord Chief Justice in the Reign of James I*



But whatever the errors of mood and bearing of which the Lord Chief Justice was guilty, it was not only as the greatest lawyer that England ever produced that he "greatly obliged his own Age and Posterity." It was in his fearless denunciation of abuses, in his unflinching honesty and integrity of purpose that he compels the reverence of all ages. He was no time-server and no respecter of persons. Where he believed in the justice of his opinion, he defied King and Court to his own disadvantage. He is accredited with having been the first Judge who had the insight to see and the moral courage to denounce all torturing of prisoners as illegal and senseless, which alone might endear his name to posterity. But to appreciate his character at its true worth, it is necessary to realise the age in which he lived. The Judges held their offices merely at the King's pleasure; they were considered practically bound to justify the acts of the Crown. The royal favour meant wealth and promotion, its forfeiture ruin and imprisonment, if not actual loss of life. Under such conditions, political morality was well-nigh im-

I entreated you to know whether her majesty might reape any pfit by Baynam's deathe, or wher [whether] baynam weare farther in ay [any] of the treasons then the comon sort of y<sup>e</sup>. L. of Essex servants and followers, you will answer y<sup>t</sup>. you have looked into his estate and have delivered your knowledge. For the land in Essex you shall order it as it shall pleas you.

Your most assured  
loving friend

W. RALEIGH.

Dered House this mday morning [Monday morning].

(Endorsed)

To the right worshipfull

Mr. Atorney generall."

Raleigh elsewhere calls Durham House—Derum House. Queen Elizabeth had commanded the use thereof to Sir Walter Raleigh.

practicable, its pursuit met with the condemnation meted out to the disgrace which it inevitably involved. Yet in those days of servile submission to the kingly prerogative, Coke maintained with a sturdy defiance that no Royal Proclamation can make that an offence which was not an offence before. With unflinching courage he defended the judicial authority against James I. When a test case was propounded by the King, and when all the Judges acquiesced abjectly in the royal will, Coke, resolved to lose the seals rather than compromise his integrity, held his ground, alone and undaunted, in defence of what he considered right, refusing to give other answer than that "*when the case occurred he would do his duty.*" Dismissed, but not disgraced, he upheld the privileges of the House of Commons until he was committed to the Tower for six years. Early in the reign of Charles I he was one of the most conspicuous of Parliamentary leaders. At the age of seventy-five, "an age when the wealthy of his time of life are unusually turned opponents of change, he was leading on the Reformers of his day with all the gallant buoyancy of youth. His love of liberty and even-handed justice shone as bright as it did twenty years previously, when he first ascended the Seat of Judgment. He was still labouring for his country with an energy that never flagged and an enthusiasm not yet exhausted,"<sup>1</sup> and his last act was proposing and framing the famous Petition of Right, though he died at the age of eighty-three, before the great struggle had come to a head.

In brief, Coke not only triumphed in the worldly

<sup>1</sup> Johnson's *Life of Sir Edward Coke*, Vol. II, p. 42.

advantage which he sought, through sheer determination and stability of character, but in the most crucial situations he acted with a keenness of insight far in advance of the age in which he lived, and with a stubbornness of virtue which created an epoch in legal and Parliamentary history.

And, making all due allowance for the difference of time and circumstance, we shall see later how in the independence of his outlook, in his hatred of ostentation, in his sturdy pertinacity of character, in his very axioms of conduct, above all, in his opposition to the exercise of the Royal Prerogative, together with the unflinching integrity and sincerity of purpose for which he commands admiration, we recognise the ruling characteristics of his descendant, Thomas William Coke, who was born into the world just over two centuries later than himself.

Yet the strange trickery of this law of re-creation baffles while it compels attention. For the erratic impulse which will thus obliterate similitude in a near generation to produce it in a remote descendant; which, in succeeding generations, from clay will evolve gold, and again from gold will evolve clay; or which will revive both with a fine disregard of the proportions in which they were existent in the type reverted to—all this we shall see, too, in the varying phases through which the marked individuality of Sir Edward stamped itself upon his posterity.

In his private life, Sir Edward was fated to experience somewhat variable conditions. His first wife was Bridget Paston, a descendant of Judge Paston, who sat on the Bench of Common Pleas with Judge Littleton,

whose renowned commentator Coke became. The daughter and co-heir of John Paston of Huntingfield Hall, Suffolk, and later of Barningham Hall, Norfolk, she brought her husband not only honours and promotion, but a fortune of £30,000, and bore him a family of ten children, seven sons and three daughters, some of whom died in infancy.<sup>1</sup> At Holkham there is a life-sized picture of her, probably painted soon after her marriage, a companion picture to one of her husband in his crimson robes. Her pale blonde hair, strung with pearls, is turned back from her handsome young face; her tightly-laced dress of blue and silver is surmounted by an Elizabethan ruff which leaves revealed a neck of snowy whiteness; while her soft eyes, bright colouring and singularly gentle expression, corroborate the report of her beauty and her amiability which has descended to posterity. Her marriage with Sir Edward was one of mutual affection, and the rough, stern law-giver appears to have been deeply attached to his gentle wife. She, for her part, appears to have been a strict economist and excellent housekeeper. Her house-book for the years 1596-7, kept in her own hand, is still preserved at Holkham, and shows that her husband's table was substantially, but by no means luxuriously, provided.

With Sir Edward's second marriage we need not deal, but it is said to have been a strange contrast to

<sup>1</sup> The *British Encyclopædia* asserts that she died six months after her marriage! The Paston family is now extinct; the last female descendant was Lady Bedingfield, wife of Sir Henry Bedingfield, of Oxburgh, Norfolk.



*Taylor Pinet*

*Bridget Paston, wife of the Lord Chief Justice*





the happiness of his first.<sup>1</sup> His harsh treatment of Frances, one of his two daughters by this marriage, is also a matter of history—how he, with his armed sons, dragged her forcibly from her mother's care, and kept her under lock and key in his house at Stoke Pogis until he had insisted on her ill-fated marriage to Sir John Villiers, brother to the favourite Buckingham.<sup>2</sup> Later, however, the unhappy Frances is said to have been the comfort of her father's declining years, until the great Chief Justice died in 1633, with, we are told, "his love of equity and religion attending him to the last."

His body was then brought back to his birthplace in Norfolk, to be buried in the quiet little church of Tittleshall, where his mother had been interred in the year 1569. There, too, reposed the remains of the

<sup>1</sup> He married secondly Lady Elizabeth Hatton, relict of Sir Christopher Hatton, daughter of Thomas, second Earl of Burleigh, and granddaughter of the great Cecil, a Court beauty. The fact that Bacon was also a rival for her hand made Coke more keen in his suit.

<sup>2</sup> In acting thus, Coke was accused of having gone counter to his own judgment in a case in which he had emulated the wisdom of Solomon. In those days swans were looked upon as a valuable property, and a swan-owner had brought an action against another swan-owner to assert his right to halve the cygnets of a brood. He proved by the swan marks that though one parent belonged to the rival claimant, the other belonged to himself, and suggested a compromise. The case was taken before the Lord Chief Justice. Sir Edward, after deliberation, based his decision on the high moral and domestic character of swans, evidence of which was adduced to his complete satisfaction. "The swan," he pronounced, "is the husband of one wife, and remains so till death. Consequently the children are of undeniable parentage"; and as the two parents in the case under consideration, being the property of different owners, lived apart, he decided that the offspring sprung from the marriage should be divided between their respective homes, the odd cygnet, if there was one, belonging to the residence of the hen swan.

gentle and beloved Bridget, whose effigy, unlike the radiant beauty pictured at Holkham, shows a soberly clad matron, her head shrouded in a coif, and her eight surviving children kneeling at her feet. Near by her tomb there soon arose a monument of her husband, which may be seen to-day as fresh and unblemished as if the hand of the chiseller had only just left it. The name of Coke as a defender of the people's liberties ensured immunity from the depredations of the Roundheads ; and thus his tomb remains to the present one of the few which no mutilation has defaced, and which Time itself seems to have spared.

Beneath a canopy of alabaster, sculptured in marble and supported by a long-tasselled cushion, Coke's effigy lies in judge's robes with his chain of office about his neck. His shapely hands are raised, palm to palm ; on his head is a tight-fitting cap, round his neck the stiff Elizabethan ruff, on his upturned feet are square-toed shoes with large rosettes. That "fair case, a beautiful body with a comely countenance," has been worthily perpetuated for posterity ; his marble face with its Grecian nose and fine regularity of outline still testifies to the classical perfection of his features. Over his head two tablets record his high honours and his great virtues. At the base of the tomb another tablet sets forth the fact that "He crowned a pious life with a pious departure," concluding with those last words which he breathed on earth at the close of his stirring, chequered career : "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done !" to which the sculptor has added—

"Learne, Reader, to live so, that thou may'st so dye."



TOMB OF SIR EDWARD COKE, LORD CHIEF JUSTICE IN THE REIGN OF JAMES 1ST



Throughout his life Sir Edward's great aim had been the acquisition of landed property. Partly through his great professional success, partly through the large fortunes brought him by both his wives, he was enabled to purchase estates all over England, and had large properties in Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Berkshire, and the present neighbourhood of Manchester, while in Norfolk alone he acquired sixty manors. It is said that once James I, who had watched Coke's growing power with great dissatisfaction, became seriously alarmed at the monopoly which he was creating, and informed him angrily that he "had already as much land as a subject ought to possess!" Coke thereupon had professed his willingness to be content if he might add but "one more acre" to his estates. This modest request the Crown could not refuse, and Coke immediately purchased the great estate of Castleacre,<sup>1</sup> which was said to be as large as all the rest of his Norfolk lands put together.

At the death of the Lord Chief Justice, therefore, each of his sons inherited vast estates, and each, in turn, appears to have followed his father's example, and wedded a wife of noble birth, fair looks and princely fortune. It was in this fashion that John, the fourth son of Sir Edward—partly through purchase, partly through marriage with the heiress of the property—became possessed of the estate of Holkham.

There are many theories respecting the origin of the name Holkham, but the most picturesque relates how

<sup>1</sup> Already a ruin in 1647. The Duke of Norfolk disposed of it to Thomas Gresham, who had purchased the lordship of Castleacre town from the Earl of Arundel.

this wild, bleak sea-coast was formerly one of the estates of Annas, under-king of the East-Angles, described by Bede as a "truly religious man," and slain by the pagan king, Penda, A.D. 654. Annas was the father of four daughters, who all inherited the piety of their parent, Sexburga, Ethelburga, Etheldreda, and Withburga. This last and youngest child was sent to be nursed in the village of Holkham, which village, even during her childhood, bore its present name, and is reported to have acquired it from her saintly presence, *Hoeligham—Holy Home*. It is, however, certain that out of compliment to her it was for some years called Withburgstowe, or the place of Withburga; though it afterwards recovered that earlier name, which it still retains.

All the young days of Withburga's life were spent at Holkham, and subsequently so many curious legends were connected with her, that the scene where her childhood had been passed was held peculiarly sacred. As a maiden she founded a Benedictine Nunnery at Dereham, said to have been so poor at its institution that, through the holy prioress's prayers, the nuns were miraculously supported by two milch does which came daily to a certain bridge to be milked, till the bailiff of the town, instigated by the devil, took bow and arrows and slew them. He was promptly smitten with jaundice and died miserably; while, in proof of this miracle, not only does the town bear the name of Deer-ham to this day, but, still to be seen in the churchyard, is the sacred well which, some generations later, sprang from Saint Withburga's grave after her incorruptible body had been stolen from its shrine



TOMB OF BRIDGET PASTON, WIFE OF THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE





by the monks of Ely. Recognising that for three hundred years Dereham had found the royal corpse a substantial source of profit owing to the pilgrims who came from all parts of the world to visit it, the rapacious monks appropriated the precious relic, and interred it near Withburga's three royal sisters in Ely Cathedral, A.D. 947.

The church in the park at Holkham, built in memory of the famous Princess, is still dedicated to Saint Withburga; and, a celebrated sea-mark, it stands east of the village, upon a hill which seems to have served as a watch-tower. Another hill at a little distance was probably a large tumulus, since human bones and pieces of armour have been found in digging there.

In the reign of Henry III, a family called the de Holkhams appears to have had an interest in the parish, though little trace of them remains beyond the bare record of their name. In the reign of Edward II, however, Holkham must have been a port of some consequence, for in 1311 the King sent his writ to this town, among other recognised seaports, to furnish one ship to assist in transporting his army from Dublin to Scotland. Later, Holkham came into the possession of the Boleyns of Blickling. Sir W. Boleyn, second son of Sir Geoffry Boleyn, Lord Mayor of London, died the owner of it in 1505; but subsequently his family sold it, and, with Burgh Hall, it passed into the possession of "the Lady Gresham," widow of Sir Thomas Gresham, member of a noted Norfolk family, since extinct.

This widow, Lady Anne Gresham, is the first mentioned as holding the Manor of Holkham and Burgh

Hall; and is further reported to have possessed two flocks of sheep, one called the *Holkham Burgh* flock, containing 457 sheep, and the other, the *Southouse* flock, containing 460 sheep. During the reign of James I, William Wheatley, of Hill Hall, Norfolk, purchased from her family Holkham Manor and its surrounding property, of which his granddaughter, Merial, eventually became heiress, and which, upon her marriage to John Coke, thus passed into the possession of the latter. There were, however, other lands in the parish of which Merial Wheatley was not the owner, and John Coke, who seems to have inherited his father's passion for acquiring property, set himself to gain possession of these. By slow degrees he succeeded. "Messuages, land tenements, and marshes" were purchased by him, till, in the year 1659, the final transference of property took place, and he became sole lord and owner of the entire parish of Holkham.

Although John Coke did not acquire the Manor of Holkham till 1659, he was living in the parish in 1638, and it is very interesting to note that a year after he got possession of Holkham Manor, in 1660, he reclaimed 360 acres of salt marshes from the sea, thus establishing a precedent which his descendants followed. Beyond this solitary fact, little record of him remains. He seems to have been contented with the renown which was his by inheritance. A few of his papers relating to petty business transactions alone have survived, with a curious old document,<sup>1</sup> exquisitely

<sup>1</sup> In the possession of the present writer.

transcribed in his own handwriting, which states how he covenants to lend to King James the sum of £30; and which, judging by the care bestowed on its preservation, seems to indicate that the loan was never refunded. Of Merial the only record remaining is her effigy on her tomb in the church at Holkham, where she kneels facing her husband, while carved in stone beneath are the numerous sons and daughters who survived her out of a family of fourteen children.

Upon his father's death, the youngest son of John and Merial, also named John, succeeded to the possession of Holkham; but he dying childless, the estates then reverted to Robert, the grandson of Edward's fifth son, Henry of Thorington, who succeeded not only to Holkham, but to the greater part of Sir Edward's property.

Robert married the Lady Ann Osborne, daughter of Thomas, Duke of Leeds, Lord Treasurer of England; but dying at the early age of twenty-nine, he left an only son, Edward, who married Carey, or Cary, daughter of Sir John Newton, of Barr's Court, in Gloucestershire.

Of Carey several portraits exist at Holkham which show her to have been tall, stately and slender, with dark eyes and fair hair; while her high forehead and thoughtful expression are full of intellect and of a strong individuality.

Motteux,<sup>1</sup> who dedicated the second edition of his translation of *Don Quixote* to Edward Coke, speaks of the "charming and virtuous partner of Mr. Coke";

<sup>1</sup> Peter Anthony Motteux (1660-1718), playwright and translator of Rabelais and *Don Quixote*.

while she has been described as a "fair and accomplished woman," with "a true and delicate taste in literature and art."<sup>1</sup> That she collected and appreciated books is shown by the dainty volumes which she added to the Holkham library, pasting in them a little label inscribed—

Cary Coke, wife of Edward Coke of Norfolk, Esquire.

The portrait of her husband, Edward Coke, presents a striking contrast to her own. In his long periwig and quaint attire, he is fat and somewhat bucolic in appearance, also—if portraits can be so far trusted—more addicted to good-living than to youthful energy.

But a sinister fate seems to have overtaken the young couple. On April 13th, 1707, Edward Coke died without having completed his thirtieth year, and within four months his fair young wife, at the early age of twenty-seven, had followed him to the grave.<sup>2</sup> Not only to the heritage of the Cokes, but to that gentle, ill-fated young mother, must be attributed the legacy of brains which descended to one, at least, of their children in such a remarkable degree. Three sons and two daughters survived them, and of these, Thomas, the eldest, achieved celebrity for his fine taste in art and literature, to which a fitting monument exists in the house which he built and the treasures which he accumulated.

<sup>1</sup> *Sandringham*, by Mrs. Herbert Jones, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Carey, born in Pall Mall, June, 1680, died August 1st, 1707. Her grandmother was Lady Mary Carey, daughter of the Earl of Dover and wife of William Heveningham, one of the judges of Charles I. Lady Mary made her granddaughter, Carey Newton (Mrs. Coke), heiress to the estates of the Earl of Dover, to the exclusion of her son, Sir William Heveningham.



*Kneller Pinxt*

EDWARD COKE  
FATHER OF THOMAS COKE, 1ST EARL OF LEICESTER



## CHAPTER II

THOMAS COKE AND THE BUILDING  
OF HOLKHAM

1697-1755

**T**HOMAS COKE, son of Edward and Carey, was destined, all unwittingly, to play an important part in relation to the fortunes of his great-nephew, the subject of this memoir; and in observing how this came to pass, one cannot but feel it is to be regretted that no adequate record has been preserved of a man whose own life was certainly remarkable.

The few facts which are known of Thomas Coke go to prove that he was of a very unusual, if not of an altogether pleasant personality. Indeed, in many of his actions we are forced to recognise that, with much of the genius and the powerful brain of his great ancestor, he inherited in no small measure the less pleasing qualities of the Lord Chief Justice, notably Sir Edward's imperious spirit, acerbity and harshness of temper.

There is one portrait of Thomas Coke as a youth which shows a thin, unprepossessing face of no particular ability, with a mouth which suggests meanness, and an expression which seems to indicate weakness both of body and will. Probably this maligns him,

for in later life he was certainly possessed of an imposing presence and good looks. His portrait at Longford, in the robes of a Knight of the Bath, is that of a man with fine features and a stately carriage; while the weakness of the youth has vanished, and, instead, one sees the signs of a strong intellect and an iron will. But still the face is not altogether attractive. There is a harshness about the mouth, and the eyes are stern and cold.

Born June 17th, 1697, Thomas Coke succeeded to Holkham in the year 1707, and then a boy of ten, with his younger brothers and sisters, all wards in Chancery, he was sent to Barr's Court, in Gloucestershire, to be brought up by his guardian and grandfather, Sir John Newton.

Five years later, when fifteen years of age, he was sent abroad in order to complete his education at the University at Turin and also by travel. With a coach and six, numerous other horses and carriages, and a very large retinue, the principal members of which appear to have been a chaplain, a Gentleman of the Horse, a "Mr. Steward, and a Valet de Chambre," he embarked for the Continent; and during the next six years journeyed through France, Germany, Holland, Flanders, Malta, Sicily and Italy. Whether his great friend, Lord Burlington,<sup>1</sup> was with him the whole of the time there is nothing to show, but during a lengthy sojourn in Italy the two young men were together and, being possessed of congenial tastes, enjoyed the same society and shared the same interests. In those days

<sup>1</sup> Richard, third Earl of Burlington, celebrated as an amateur architect. He built Burlington House.





*Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester*  
*The builder of Holkham*



travellers were scarce, and two youths of wealth and position touring luxuriously from town to town could not fail to attract attention. Thomas Coke became known as a man of great liberality, who was the owner of large possessions in his own country; and, before long, he was recognised familiarly throughout the length and breadth of Italy by the name of the "Cavaliero Coke." At the Court of Cosmo III, then Grand Duke of Tuscany, he and his friend were well received. They prolonged their stay in Rome, Vicenza, Venice, and still longer in Florence; while they soon became on terms of great intimacy with all the most eminent scholars and artists of the day.

Then it was that the unusual ability of Thomas Coke revealed itself. Still a mere lad in years, and belonging to a date when it was no disgrace for men of wealth and position to be illiterate and ill-educated, he showed all the keenness for acquiring knowledge and the eager appreciation of literature which, in those days, were too often relegated to the needy of a lower class.

He devoted himself earnestly to the study of the ancient Greek and Roman authors; and, his friendship with the scholars and bibliographers of the country affording him special opportunities for procuring rare treasures in literature, he soon began to form a collection of valuable MSS. which comprised almost every department of literature, both sacred and profane. His favourite authors appear to have been the Roman historians, and amongst these he gave Livy the preference. He therefore commissioned a celebrated scholar, Antonio Maria Biscioni, Chief Librarian of the Laurentina, to collect any valuable material available connected

with that historian ; and Biscioni devoted three years to the task, which, begun in 1717, was not finished till 1720, after Mr. Coke's return to England. The result is that at Holkham there is a collection of the works of Livy probably unrivalled in any other library ; treasures in manuscript and in print too numerous to mention ; fourteen copies in manuscript of different portions of his works, duplicates of all the manuscripts preserved in the Laurentian Library in Florence and the libraries of Corsini and St. Mark's, together with a splendid manuscript in vellum of which we shall hear later. In 1721 Biscioni sent his collection over in a large folio volume, accompanied by a Latin letter which is sufficient evidence not only of the earnestness with which Thomas Coke prosecuted his studies, but of the liberality with which he rewarded those who worked for him.

That many of the books now at Holkham were collected at an earlier date and during his own residence in Italy, is shown by the fact that the name of Thomas Coke, as a Commoner, is written upon the title-page ; and it was during his tour that an event occurred which subsequently led to a further and valuable addition to his library in the form of a legacy, the story of which and of the testator's connection with Thomas Coke, afterwards Earl of Leicester, is told in the following curious announcement, which appeared in the *Obituary* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for May, 1744 :—

“At the Earl of Leicester's House, Great Russel Street, Bloomsbury Square, Signore Dominico Ferrari, Dr. of Laws and F.R.S. as well as a member of several learned Foreign Academies. He

was a Neapolitan by Birth, and of an antient Family in that City and practised as an Advocate in his Profession with no less success than applause, till by an Accident he became acquainted with a learned Man of Sir Thomas Coke's—now Earl of Leicester—retinue; by whose means, after serious consideration and conviction, he renounced his Practise and the Errors of the Church of Rome, and became a member of that of England; and on his arrival here was appointed Librarian to the Noble Family where he died. *We hear that his body being opened, a large Stone the size of a Turkey's Egg was extracted and that he left a valuable Library to the Earl.* He was a gentleman of uncommon Learning, inoffensive to all, and of a most improving and agreeable Conversation."

Thus, owing to his kindness when but a youth, to a distressed gentleman, did Thomas Coke, later in life, become possessed of a large number of very rare Italian books; and another curious event which happened during his tour in Italy was that he discovered a rare Italian manuscript which through his liberality proved a valuable acquisition to the literature of Italy. This was a history, in seven books, of the specimens of early art discovered in that country, called *De Etruria Regali*, and dedicated to Cosmo II, written by Thomas Dempster, of Muriesk,<sup>1</sup> a Scotchman by birth, who had been driven from his native land a century earlier owing to his being a Roman Catholic. After various vicissitudes, Dempster became Professor at Bologna where he taught for seven years, and where he died in 1625 with his great work still unpublished. It would have lapsed into oblivion, and been lost for ever to Italy, but for the strange chance that an English

<sup>1</sup> Born 1579—ob. 1625.

youth, touring through this foreign city, should happen to see, and be qualified to appreciate, the value of the almost illegible MSS. Thomas Coke, recognising its merits, bought the autograph copy of the great work from Antonio Maria Salvini, and determined not only to give it to the public at his own expense, but to spare no money in producing it in a worthy manner. The scholars of Italy were overjoyed at the promise of such a munificent gift to the country, and awaited the advent of the book with impatience; but it was not till after his return to England and the attainment of his majority, that Thomas Coke was able to fulfil his intention. He then sent the original manuscript back to Italy that a copy might be made of it, and employed Biscioni for the purpose. It was no easy task to perform, owing to the writing of the manuscript being so difficult to decipher; but Biscioni accomplished it in a year, and both the original manuscript and the copy are now in the library at Holkham. The work was finally printed at Florence, with about one hundred fine engravings of ancient art. To it was prefixed a Latin dedication to Cosmo III, written by Thomas Coke, in which he points out the strange coincidence that a book, by a native of Great Britain upon Italian antiquities, should remain to be published, a century afterwards, by another native of the same country, equally devoted to the same pursuits. This dedication is dated "at London I. Kal. Septem. 1725."<sup>1</sup>

But it was not only in matters of literature that Thomas Coke, during his minority, showed a fine

<sup>1</sup> Published 1723-4. Two vols., folio 1.

taste and a cultivated understanding. He was gifted with a consummate appreciation of beauty in colour and outline, and his devotion to classical art was even more remarkably developed than his devotion to classical literature. Very early in his tour he appears to have begun a collection of valuable pictures—a collection which, later in life, left him in possession of genuine works of Raphael, of Titian, of the Caracci, of Guido, of Domenichino and other old masters; of a splendid Van Dyck of the Duc d'Arenberg on horseback; of landscapes of Claude Lorraine so numerous that they cover the walls of an entire room at Holkham; of several of the finest drawings of the same artist executed upon a larger scale—and which, by their skill, almost equal in effect the most celebrated of his pictures,—and of other drawings, amongst which were undoubted works of Michelangelo, Raphael, Fra Bartolommeo and Titian.

To these he added specimens of statuary, the acquisition of which not only required knowledge and perspicuity, but was fraught with considerable danger, owing to the watchfulness of the Government, who tried to prevent any treasures which were of national value being taken out of the country. Thus it was that, in connection with one of his purchases, he got into a serious difficulty. He had secretly bought a beautiful headless figure of Diana for £1500, which on almost indisputable authority is believed to have belonged to Cicero. It is considered to be one of the finest specimens of classical drapery and perhaps the most beautiful representation of the goddess in existence. After its purchase, Cavalier Camillo Rusconi,

an eminent Italian sculptor, added the head and some of the fingers, which are the only parts that are modern. Having secured this statue secretly, Thomas Coke sent it out of Rome by night into safe keeping at Florence; but the Government got wind of this action, the Pope caused him to be arrested and imprisoned, and he was released only at the special solicitation of his friend the Grand Duke Cosmo.

Four very fine antique statues, however, of which he became possessed, were lost, as the vessel in which they were shipped was wrecked on its voyage to England. These statues, it is said, had been intended to decorate the niches in the south tribune of the statue gallery, in a house which he had already determined to build upon his return to England.

It is not known definitely at what date Thomas Coke first conceived the idea of erecting for himself a home of classical design, but there can be little doubt that the idea came to him as the result of his studying the beautiful specimens of Italian architecture, and that it was fostered by the influence of the man with whom he travelled. Lord Burlington was noted for his classical taste in, and practical knowledge of, architecture, and evidently imbued his friend with his own enthusiasm. During part of their tour the young men were accompanied by Mr. Kent, the architect,<sup>1</sup> who, it is specially recorded, was encouraged by their joint patronage to prosecute his studies in Rome. Under such auspices, and while Thomas Coke was

<sup>1</sup> William Kent (1684-1748), painter, landscape gardener and Palladian architect, was a native of Yorkshire, and died at Burlington House.





STATUE OF DIANA, AT HOLKHAM,  
SAID TO HAVE BELONGED TO CICERO.



collecting treasures with which to embellish his future home, slowly and with unrivalled patience, he evolved the design of it.

One can picture the eagerness with which the two young men, both, beyond a doubt, singularly gifted, both exceptionally appreciative of the beauty of their surroundings, must have pursued and developed the first idea of that wonderful building which was to embody all their impressions, all their artistic aspirations. The thought of such a practical outcome of their emotions must have added a zest to all their researches, to their daily enjoyment of the classical beauty in which they both delighted. Lord Burlington, indeed, with his creative faculty, appears to have been not one whit less interested in the construction of that projected house than was its future owner ; while the great idea of the latter was to combine convenience with beauty. With this object in view, Thomas Coke studied the most perfect examples, both of later and of ancient architecture ; he inspected the most commodious and luxurious of the modern palaces and villas of the Italian nobility ; he visited and revisited all the celebrated classical temples and public buildings ; he dwelt upon the architecture of Palladio and the designs of Inigo Jones.<sup>1</sup> Inherently artistic, he steeped his soul in the beauty of his surroundings, and culled thence conclusions, suggestions, and practical knowledge.

But with his designs immature, the time arrived when, in view of his approaching majority, it became

<sup>1</sup> His protégé, Mr. Kent, published in 1727 a book on the *Designs of Inigo Jones*, on which he was a great authority. The plates in this book were from drawings by John Webb (in the possession of Lord Burlington), which were copies of the original designs by Inigo Jones.

necessary for him to return to England. Accompanied by his friend Lord Burlington and by Mr. Kent, he journeyed home once more. From the moment that he set foot on English ground an account of his expenditure was written with punctilious care in "*A JOURNAL kept by Edward Smith, of all ye payments made by him for his Honourable Mastor Thomas Coke Esqre from Tuesday May 13th 1718 being ye day that Mr. Coke Landed at Dover after near six years travails in France, Italy, Sicely, Germany, Malta, Holland and Flanders*"; and from the said Edward Smith (to whom was allotted for the purpose pens, ink and papers to the value of £2. 12s. 10d.) we forthwith learn his master's movements with unerring accuracy.

After the expenses for Mr. Coke and his suite at the custom-house, there follow the expenses of a journey to London with a coach and six, with two Berlins, and men "*Guarding ye Baggage.*" Dinners at "ye Tavern" in London are next entered, dinners "with a chicken" and dinners without, and a final total of "*paid ye Tavern Bill for eating in full.*" Then follow miscellaneous entries of expenses in town, and soon an entry of more significance: "*My Mastor's journey to my Lord Thanet's*<sup>1</sup> £06..06..00. *Ditto to my Lord Thanet's ye second time—*£06..14..00," with an additional "*Item of Meat for Four Doggs at Thanet House—*£00..10..00," apparently indicating that if the "Mastor" was received as a visitor his dogs were not. Nor are we left long in doubt as to the meaning of these visits. On June 17th we are told by E. Smith that his

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, sixth Earl of Thanet.

"*Mastor attained to ye age of twenty-one years, and upon Thursday ye 3rd of July following was marryed to ye Right Honourable ye Lady Margaret Tufton, a Lady of great Beauty, singular Virtue and Goodness, being 18 years of age ye 16th of June, 1718.*" These accounts contain also "*Ye Charges of Mr Coke's Equipping himself for ye said Wedding, and for Liveries, Coaches, Horses, Furniture, Presents to ye said Lady, and Gratuities etc to my Lord Thanet's servants etc.*"

The accounts of "Mr Coke's Wedding Cloaths" which then follow, are described under separate headings down the pages, in large printed letters: "STOCKINGS, SHOES, HATTS, TAYLOR, SEMSTRESS, LACE, SWORD, GLOVES, PERRIWIGS, TRUNKS, etc." Thus we learn that a certain Mr. Lockman received the sum of "£29..08..00 for two Wiggs"; that Mr. Henry Hick's Bill "for Gold and Silver lace and Fringe for Mr Coke's Sutes" was £57. 15s. od., that a Mrs. Mary Gameron was paid a sum of £87 for embroidering two suits; while for "Hatts and feathers" the comparatively small sum of £3. 5. was paid, and gloves were purchased for the modest price of nine shillings the half-dozen. Next is entered "*Item Cloaths and other things for Mr. Robert Coke,*" the younger brother of Thomas, whose periwig (no doubt inferior in beauty to that worn by the bridegroom) cost only £8 and his sword £18. But a certain Mr. Fury was paid the sum of "£01..08..00" for resetting Robert's diamond ring, from another man was purchased for him a "triangular seal," twice "for his pocket" he was given seven guineas; while for "*cleaning and making up his night-gown*" the sum of "£00..07..06" was expended; so

that we may conclude most of his wants were amply provided for !

Next follow entries of "Cloaths for Mr. Steward, the Gentleman of the Horse, and the Valet de Chambre"; "Velvet caps for ye Grooms; Livery, Hatts, Hangers, Boots, Shoes, Gloves, Stockings, and Breeches" for the servants to the sum of "£218.. 11.. 00"; "*A Sett of Harness compleate for six Horses*"—£30; "*Bits and Saddles*" and "*Equipment for ye Postillions*"; to "*Mr. Budders for a Charret compleate*"—£128, and—what would lead one to infer that the "Charret" was not as "compleate" as represented—a bill for "*11½ yards of fine skarlat cloath to line ye said Charret*—£12.. 13.. 00." Also, in view of the higher value of money at that date, it is curious to learn that "*A Rich Red Velvet embroidered Saddle for my Mastor*" cost "£66.. 00.. 00," and for a "*Blue Velvet Saddle* £132.. 03.. 04" was paid, of which the gold lace and fringe cost over £20, the making over £16, and the ornaments over £13, to which had to be added "*two cases of fine Pistols for ye Saddles*" at £22.

Further, Mr. Coke appears to have furnished himself with jewellery as well as clothes for the occasion. For a gold watch he paid £27; for an "*Agget Snuff Box* £17.. 17.. 00." For a "*Trimming Basson*"—i.e. a "*Silver Barber's Basson with ye rest of furniture all compleate in a Shagreen case*"—£49.. 08.. 00." For a diamond ring £350, for diamond shoe-buckles £120, and for pearl tassels £35. While the "*Jewells and other Presents made by Mr. Coke to my Lady Margaret*" amounted to between £3000 and £4000, and included a green velvet side-saddle costing £69, a



*The Lady Margaret Tufton, Baroness Clifford  
Wife of the Earl of Leicester*





watch costing £68, a "*Gold Tweser case*" costing £50, and "*Old Gold for an Endowing Purse*" £108.

And so these two were married, the youth of twenty-one and the girl of eighteen ; and we learn that for the wedding favours Mr. Coke paid over £85 ; for the "*Gratuities to My Lord Thanet's servants*" over £134 ; to "*Musicians and others*" over £56 ; while the poor of the parish were treated with equal liberality. As to my Lady Margaret, her girlish beauty was perpetuated in a picture of rare loveliness, and also in one of later date, where she sits a smiling, dainty dame, with small features, dark hair and bright eyes ; while, richly be-decked with huge pearls, her robe of crimson velvet and silver-grey falls gracefully about her slender figure, and the silver shoe—purposely protruded from beneath her velvet skirt—still testifies, it is said, to her youthful pride in her shapely foot.<sup>1</sup>

After the wedding the bride and groom journeyed to Tunbridge, and the expenses thereof were still carefully entered by the conscientious Mr. Smith ; minor items being "*Paid seven guineas for Golden Toys y<sup>e</sup>. my Mastor bought at Tunbridge,*" "*Paid 5 Guineas y<sup>e</sup>. my Mastor lost at Bassot,*" and the recurring expense of "*6lbs. of powder for My Mastor's Wiggs.*" From Tunbridge, after paying various visits, they travelled to London, and Mr. Smith "*Gave to ye Musick at my Mastor's arrival to town 5 guineas*"—the "*Musick*" consisting of "*Drumors, 6 Trumpetors, Hoitbois, Ringors and ye Parish Musick*" ; and a further mys-

<sup>1</sup> One picture of her was painted in 1719, judging by the following entry : "*Paid to Segnr Ignatus for My Lady Margaret's picture, over and above what he had before the which picture was—£04 . . 04 . . 00.*"

terious donation presented "*To A Drumor 2/6, and to ye Ringors when my Mastor wash'd himself 7/6.*" While in London, Thomas Coke appears good-naturedly to have sent for his young brother and cousin from Gloucestershire, for Mr. Smith records how he paid "for a coach and six horses to fetch Mr. Newton and Mr. Bobby to London"; and how he afterwards had to pay "*Mr. Dont for ye blade and scabbard of his sword broken by Mr. Bobby.*" Constant entries, too, record the charities practised by Thomas Coke, some quaint items of which run as follows:—

	£	s.	d.
For a Gentleman of decay'd Fortune .	01	01	00
For a poor Man to keep him out of Gaol	05	05	00
Prisoners . . . . .	00	02	06
A Man y <sup>t</sup> . bro <sup>t</sup> . home ye Lyon Dogg .	00	01	00
To Mary Harrison running . . . . .	00	02	06
To Andrew -- ditto . . . . .	00	02	06
To ye Portor who lent your Honour A			
shilling . . . . .	00	02	06
To Portor Prince to make him and ye			
Cockors drink . . . . .	00	05	00

Later, Thomas Coke and his bride journeyed down to Longford in Derbyshire, a slow and expensive journey, judging by the board-wages and tavern expenses for their large following of servants, and by entries which include many horses bought on the road and fighting-cocks purchased at the various stopping-places, together with "fooding ye cocks" and providing numerous drinks for "ye Cockers." After the arrival at Longford, however, the accounts assume a more settled character. The expenses of the household, garden, and stables are recorded regularly, the latter including "My Lady's Footmen for Lighting her Ladyship with Flamboys," and "My Mastor's Footmen for Lighting

His Honour with Flamboys." The regular expenses of "Apparill" (or "Apparoll") for his Honour are entered, including annually, a "Tye Long Wigg, and two Short Ridley Bagg Wiggs"; the payment of "My Lady Margaret's Pinn Money" of £400 per annum; and "*Given to Mr. Batcheller for reading prayers for near half a year £10..10,*" and to "*Mr. Springgold for reading prayers at Holkham (Church) £10..10.*" In curious contrast to the stipend of the two chaplains are the heavy expenses of Mr. Coke's hunting and cock-fighting, to which latter sport he was passionately attached. On it he expended heavy sums annually, apart from a separate account which explains itself seriously as "*Such expenses of Cocks as properly belong to your Honour, and therefore are not inserted in ye generall account of Cocks,*" while it seems doubtful whether such entries included the money spent in betting upon the result of the fights. Nor did he tire of his pastime with advancing years, for in 1732 we read in the daily papers how "at the 'Crown,' Swaffham, a cock-fighting match was fought between Lord Lovel of Holkham (formerly Thomas Coke), and John Thurston of Hoxne, Suffolk. There were 46 cocks a side, and the stakes were five guineas a battle, and fifty guineas to the odd battle."

Indeed, the accounts of Edward Smith seem to give a fairly accurate index to his "Mastor's" character. Close to the entries of the money expended on rare treasures of art and literature<sup>1</sup> are the expenses of the

<sup>1</sup> "Item: March 4th, 1719. The statue Diana came over in Ye Supurb Man of War. Fetching her up from Woolwich, etc.

"May, 1719. There arrived from abroad Books, Pictures, Statues, etc., etc."

brutalising sport which he loved ; next to evidences of ostentatious luxury, of sums lavished on rare jewels and articles of virtu—on all the “Golden Toys” of the collector—we read of boyish purchases such as nine guineas for a cockatoo, eleven guineas for a makaw and two small birds—ending with the tragic entry, “*Crying ye Mackaw when lost—5/-.*” Thomas Coke was at once a master-mind and a trifler ; an æsthetic and coarse-fibred ; equally appreciative of all that was exquisite and of all that was brutal in the world around him, passionate, cruel, rough, yet also highly educated, full of that genius which he loved to encourage in others, of polished and courteous manners when he so elected to be, and of a generosity which was profuse.

As a landlord we find that he was liked by his tenants to whom he was lenient and liberal, while socially he was hated by his equals to whom he was arrogant and insolent. In the political world he exhibited capacity ; about the date of his marriage he attached himself to Robert Walpole, then rapidly waxing in power, and, as Walpole rose, so also rose Thomas Coke. For some years the latter was Member for Hexham. In 1725 he was created Knight of the Bath ; in May, 1728, he was raised to the Peerage as Baron Lovel, of Minster Lovel, in the County of Oxford. In 1733 he was made Postmaster-General in conjunction with the Hon. Edward Carteret, when he established a post office at Holkham,<sup>1</sup> and the coaches called there twice a day. Apart from his political career, he became a member of the Society of Dilettante in 1740, and it is

<sup>1</sup> Holkham is still a post office.

evident that he did much to advance literary and artistic taste in England at that period. His return from abroad had been hailed with delight by the English scholars who had heard of his rare collection of books and MSS., and when any of the noted literary men of the day proceeded to beg the loan of these, he lent his most precious volumes with a generosity which seems to show the disinterested lover of literature rather than the mere virtuoso. In consequence, more than one of the works brought out at that date were dedicated to him as the great patron of art and literature. In 1721 Michael Maittaire published an edition of the *Iliad* from an exceptionally fine copy borrowed from Holkham, and inscribed his work with a fulsome dedication to the man who had aided him; while some years later Arnold Drackenborch,<sup>1</sup> the celebrated German commentator, followed his example. Perhaps no better summing up of the character of Thomas Coke can be found than in this

<sup>1</sup> The learned German had been for several years preparing and printing a new edition of the works of Livy. Having heard of the wonderful collection of the manuscripts of that author belonging to Lord Lovel, he begged for the loan of these. In reply, he received seventeen copies of the works of Livy, thirteen of which were in manuscript; these volumes he kept three years, and gave a special description of them at the close of his work. This he, too, inscribed to Lord Lovel in a long and highly panegyric dedication, containing an interesting account of all the principal events of the latter's life, and of his exertions in promoting the progress of literature; and he specially mentions that Lord Lovel had formerly intended to edit the works of Livy himself. But, in responding so generously to Drackenborch's request, Lord Lovel had carefully abstained from mentioning the other valuable MSS. of Livy which he possessed, the collection of Florentine manuscripts made by Biscioni, and there is little doubt that, in thus suppressing the best of his collection, he, all unknown to Drackenborch, had not yet abandoned his original intention, which, owing to the stress of all his other labours, was never carried into execution.

fact—that he was hailed at once as the great patron of the fine arts, and the great patron of cock-fighting in England of his day.

As to my Lady Margaret, she appears to have suited her temper to her fate, and to have realised that, at all events during the lifetime of her imperious lord, she must curb the strong individuality of which, unsuspected by him, she was possessed. Passively she went her way ; she inspected her dairy and her kitchen in the grey hours of dawn while her servants still lay slumbering ; she ruled her household with a rod of iron ; she fed the poor with an extravagant hand ; she admitted her neighbours to her presence on sufferance only, so haughty was she. And all the while the autocrat whom she had married, unaware either of the warmth of heart which made her beloved, or of the strength of will which made her feared, used to make boast of her meek and quiet spirit ; and later, when, by a strange freak of fate, he had to confront a daughter-in-law who defied his will, he would point exultingly to his submissive wife, and ask whether a daughter of the House of Thanet, inheriting in her own right one of the oldest of our English baronies,<sup>1</sup> would not have been more entitled to rebel and give herself airs than the Infanta with whom he now had to deal ?

Meanwhile, whatever his occupations and his pas-

<sup>1</sup> August 15th, 1734, His Majesty was pleased to confirm to Lady Lovel (being one of the co-heirs of Thomas, the Earl of Thanet) and to her heirs, the ancient barony of Clifford, which barony descended to her father, the late Earl of Thanet, as lineal heir to the Lady Anne, his grandmother, daughter and heir of George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland. (See Burke, 1867.)

times, Thomas Coke had never abandoned his original purpose of building a palace for himself and his posterity. He went steadily forward with preparations for his great work. But his plans were not adopted in haste, and although himself a connoisseur and an expert, he determined not to rely solely on his own judgment. For sixteen years after his return from Italy he still studied and developed his designs, consulting all who had obtained a reputation in architecture and art, submitting them to his friend Lord Burlington, and finally placing them in the hands of Messrs. Kent and Brettingham to carry into execution. To the construction of Holkham may be said to have been brought the accumulated experience of the master-minds of all ages, collected and concentrated by the untiring energy of one man.

In one matter, however, Thomas Coke showed a curious taste. It is not known where stood the house in which he lived at this date, when in Norfolk, but there is no doubt that it was in the neighbourhood of Holkham, and it appears equally certain that he determined to erect his new home upon the original site of Hill Hall, the old Manor House of the Wheateleys. Be this as it may, the land about Holkham at this period was a barren, dreary estate, partly open heath with a soil of drifting sand, partly salt marshes, unattractive to the eye as it was unprofitable to the landowner. Situated on the coast of the North Sea, with no land intervening between it and the North Pole, the bleak winds swept over its flat, timberless surface with nothing to check their violence, so that during the cold months of the year it must have been

well-nigh uninhabitable. Yet something stronger than the ordinary love of birthright must have knit the heart of Thomas Coke to this barren possession of his forefathers. When he conceived the idea of building a palace for himself and his posterity, he could not, on any of his vast estates, have chosen for his purpose a site less beautiful ; but, a man of strong purpose and originality, he seems to have desired that all should be of his own creation, the future beauty of the land, as well as the future beauty of the Italian palace which he meditated erecting upon it ; and, of marvellous energy and perseverance, he was undeterred by the magnitude or the apparent impracticability of his attempt to transform the aspect of the bleak, desolate coast.

Perhaps mindful of the example of John Coke, about the year 1722 he reclaimed and embanked four hundred acres of marsh land which had been partially covered by the sea. In 1725-6 he began to enclose and plant ; Holkham Heath was surrounded by a paling, and he planned his future park of about 840 acres. He designed lawns, gardens, water, many plantations of wood, and buildings useful and ornamental. The first work actually erected was the Obelisk, eighty feet high and fashioned on an antique pattern, which was raised in 1729-30 on an eminence facing the site of the future building and upon a spot which was then the centre of the park he had planned. In 1733 preparations for building were going rapidly forward, and heavy expenses are entered by Edward Smith for the "Brick-Killn." Thomas Coke decided to build the house of brick because Vitruvius had stated that buildings of brick were considered by the ancient Romans to be



more firm and durable than those of marble. At first he intended to use Bath stone on account of its fine yellow tint, but, soon after, he made the discovery that bricks fashioned from a brick earth in the neighbouring parish of Burnham Norton and subjected to proper seasoning, acquired much the same colour, while they were more ponderous and far firmer in texture. Just at this crisis a curious event occurred. A packing-case arrived from Rome containing an antique statue which he had purchased, and in it, by accident, a brick was also enclosed. On comparing the Burnham Norton bricks with this yellow brick of the Romans, it was found that both exactly corresponded in colour and in hardness.

Forthwith, the greatest care was taken in their manufacture. Any cutting when they were once seasoned would have caused discoloration of the surface and have increased materially the number of joins in the building; therefore they were moulded in the first instance to all the different sizes and shapes ultimately required. For the execution of a single "rustic," no less than thirty moulds of different forms and magnitude were needed, and these again varied throughout other parts of the building. The labour thus entailed was great, and the same scrupulous care was to be bestowed in the preparation of the mortar with which they were to be cemented. Having been mixed with lime and sand, this was next, in order to render it of sufficient firmness for fine brickwork, to be ground between a pair of large mills fitted to an engine for that purpose; the inner joints of the walls were then to be carefully filled with it, and it was to be poured in a liquid state

upon every course, or every two courses, of the brick-work.

At length, on May 4th, 1734, Edward Smith records the triumphant entry:—

“To Labour—diging Earth out of  
ye Foundation— £03..11..00.”

And so the great work was begun.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the strength of the foundation of the house, that it is on record there are as many bricks below the surface as there are above it; while no part of the principal walls was allowed to rest upon timber, lest, in decaying, it should damage the fabric.

The actual plan of the house was taken with certain modifications from a design by Palladio. It consists of five quadrangles, a large central building and four wings, so that it presents four similar fronts. The state rooms are on the first floor, and are connected by corridors 344 feet in length. Only in the turrets are there any rooms above the first storey. Below, with curious square windows, there is a rustic basement, specially designed in order that the servants' quarters should be immediately under those whom they have to serve. Beneath the basement are the bakehouse, dairy, and other offices, together with the arches and foundations on which the building rests. At intervals, in each frontage, are arched doorways, which are very small, in accordance with the Roman conception that an insignificant entrance enhances the apparent space of an interior.

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that Roscoe, who wrote an account of the building, etc., in the preface to his *Catalogue of the Holkham Library*, gives the dates inaccurately. The entries in the account books are incontrovertible.





SOUTH FRONT OF HOLKHAM, SHOWING



ERIOR OF THE SALOON AND CHAPEL WING



On the south front is a portico with tall Corinthian columns ; which columns are repeated on a lesser scale on either side of some of the principal windows. The casements and the window-sashes were originally of burnished gold, which greatly added to the unique appearance of the house, and, on account of this being specially perishable in the salt sea air, a burnisher was engaged to live on the premises to keep the gilding in a proper state of repair.

Over the doorway of the house, within, the following inscription was placed :—

THIS SEAT, ON AN OPEN, BARREN ESTATE  
 WAS PLANNED, PLANTED, BUILT, DECORATED, AND INHABITED  
 Y<sup>e</sup> MIDDLE OF Y<sup>e</sup> EIGHTEENTH  
 CENTURY  
 BY THOMAS COKE, EARL OF LEICESTER.

One characteristic must surely strike even the most casual observer of the exterior of Holkham. There is no pandering to the picturesque, no conforming to conventional standards of beauty or of fitness. All is solid, plain, impressive, unusual. Holkham stands alone, a law unto itself. There is something defiant in its uncompromising simplicity. Looking at it, one seems to trace there the personality of the man who created it, the spirit of that race of whose genius it is the expression. And although for this very reason it may not appeal to universal taste, yet in its originality, in its handsome, spacious solidity, it is curiously in harmony with the open, barren estate on which it was first erected—with the land where to-day, despite rich fields and magnificent timber, Nature itself is stern

and uncompromising rather than endowed with any conventional prettiness.

But if, externally, all conveys that same impression of rigid simplicity, the contrast of the interior of the house is all the more striking. One steps from the view of that wide sweep of country, and that plain, massive building, into all the delicate beauty and luxury of an Italian palace. The small unpretentious entrance enhances—as it is intended to do—the effect of the hall beyond. This measures thirty-eight feet by thirty-one, and rises to a height of fifty feet in an exquisite dome, decorated after the manner of Inigo Jones. The architecture is of purely classical design, and is taken from the plan of an ancient Basilica or Tribunal of Justice. On either side fluted Ionic columns from those in the so-called Ionic Temple of Fortuna Virilis at Rome, rest on a base of variegated alabaster. A gallery connects the columns, protected by a finely wrought railing and supported by a basement bordered with black marble and inlaid with white alabaster. Bas-reliefs and alto-reliefs by Westmacott, Chantrey and Nollekens adorn the walls; in the niches beyond are classical statues. The actual site of the tribunal, the semicircular space at the upper end of the hall, contains the wide flight of steps leading to the Saloon; on either side of which now stand marble busts of the two great Cokes of modern days—the man who created the beauty of the house, and the man who created the beauty of the land.

But a bare statement of the general plan of the hall can convey no possible conception of its peculiar beauty. Wherever the eye rests, it is struck by the



same perfection of design and delicacy of execution. Each detail is a masterpiece; the whole conveys an impression of lightness, of richness and of grace to which it is difficult to do justice. Its classical beauty of proportion; the exquisite dome with its wonderful decorations; the grace of the columns; the general wealth of colour, of light and of harmony is unparalleled. In its marvellous conception and its masterly workmanship it is one of the most triumphant revivals of classical art.

It is impossible here to give any adequate description of the rest of the house—of the state rooms, the charm of which lies in their loftiness and beauty of proportion, and in the exquisite decoration of the walls and ceiling; of the curious attics upstairs, connected by long, straight corridors; of the labyrinth of passages downstairs, intercepted by the quaint arched doorways, and by staircases leading to the state floor. The fascination of the whole lies in its peculiarity; and the fame of such a curious building created no small stir in England at the date of its erection, so that many noted persons visited it while it was still in process of execution. For although beautiful old country houses abound throughout the land, and although each county can boast its special pride in this respect, and the special treasures for which such dwellings are renowned, Holkham presented then, and still retains, one characteristic which sets it apart from all others—within, as without, Holkham is unique; there is no other house in England like it.

As soon as part of the building became habitable, its owner came to live there; at first, for a week at a

time only, in order to superintend operations ; later, as a permanency. And there he brought the old library of the Lord Chief Justice, and his own rare collection of books, which were carried up to one of the turret rooms then destined for a library, and left for future arrangement, many of them in the packing-cases in which they had arrived from Italy. There, too, he brought the treasures which he had accumulated ; beautiful tapestries with which to cover the walls of the state rooms ; rich Genoa velvet for upholstering ; his pictures—by Titian, Van Dyck, Paul Veronese, Holbein and others ; his statues, which were placed in the niches in the hall and in the statue gallery ; curios, bronzes and costly furniture.

Nearly a century later, in 1828, one Thomas Creevey, writing from Holkham, observed :—

“I came to see the *place*. I dote upon it. . . . I was not sufficiently struck when I have been here before with the furniture of the walls and the three common living rooms, the saloon, drawing and dining-rooms, which is Genoa velvet, and what is more, it has been up ever since the house was built, which is eighty years ago ; and yet it is as fresh as a four-year-old, and as handsome as ever it can be. To be sure the said Earl of Leicester was no bad hand at finishing his work ; never was such a house so built outside and in. The gilded roofs of all the rooms and the doors would of themselves nowadays take a fortune to make ; and his pictures are perfect.”<sup>1</sup>

But all the treasures which Lord Leicester had collected were found insufficient for the adornment of

<sup>1</sup> *A Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the late Thomas Creevey, M.P.*, ed. by the Right Hon. Sir Herbert Maxwell, Vol. II, p. 112.

the hall and the galleries; and the younger Brettingham, who had already bought busts for Lord Orford at Houghton, was commissioned to journey out to Italy and secure the statuary further required for Holkham. This he did, and arriving when Cardinal Albani was making a fresh collection to adorn his villa, Brettingham purchased from him certain treasures which the Cardinal parted with through an obvious error of judgment. One of these was a beautiful Fawn crowned with vine leaves, which had been dug up in the Campagna with the marks of the chisel still visible upon it, and which Brettingham bought, still encrusted with earth as it had been found. A splendid bust of Thucydides was also secured by him; the Silenus, "one of the most remarkable statues which are found in any private collection in England";<sup>1</sup> Poseidon and the Venus Genetrix, two colossal female heads, and a huge head of Aphrodite, "A work of truly sublime beauty which would be an ornament to the richest museum."<sup>2</sup> In all, he purchased eleven statues, eight busts, a relief, and some mosaic slabs, thus executing his commission to the satisfaction of his employer and the credit of himself.

This, however, was not until the year 1755. In all else, Thomas Coke, Lord Leicester, personally superintended the building and the adornment of his home. It is said that no portion of the house was given over into the hands of the workmen till he had critically inspected and approved each detail; and, still to be seen

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, by Adolf Michaelis, pp. 71-2, paragraph 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

at Holkham, is a mass of papers in which he caused to be recorded, with punctilious care, every item respecting the construction of each room. Day by day, week by week, month by month he so planned, co-operated in and directed the great work; for thirty years he watched, while by slow stages there evolved the materialisation of his youthful dream; and, brick by brick, the building grew into the house which was to perpetuate his name to his posterity.

## CHAPTER III

EDWARD COKE AND THE TRAGEDY  
OF HOLKHAM

1719-1759

THE year after the marriage of Thomas Coke there occurs an entry of deep interest in the accounts of Edward Smith. Preparations appear for the advent of a "Little Mastor"; lace and linen to the value of £130 were purchased; "Quilts and Cradles" to the value of £48; a wardrobe is furnished to a certain Nurse Pharoa; and a further sum is allotted "*To my lady by order, to buy things for little Mastor.*" Soon came entries for "*Lodging little Mastor,*" and his three nurses; for the purchase of trifles such as *An anodyne necklace*,<sup>1</sup> and a *correll*; and finally on July 3rd, "*To Mr. Batcheller for cristening little Mastor* £02 . . 02 . . 00," which must have been a valuable addition to the chaplain's salary.

And so Edward Coke, destined to be the only son of his parents who should attain to manhood, the child of promise, the heir to a splendid heritage, was ushered into the world with joy, and set out on life's journey

<sup>1</sup> The anodyne necklace was for many years a popular remedy for children when teething, and was sold for 55s. a necklace, at 78 Long Acre, by Basil Burchell, "*Sole Proprietor of the Anodyne Necklace for children cutting teeth, and of the Famous Sugar Plumbs for Worms.*" Mr. Burchell used the necklace as a sign above his shop.

with as fair a prospect as ever fell to the lot of any man.

There is a picture of him at Holkham as a slender, delicate child, clasping his mother's hand. Few later portraits of him exist. The imprint left by Time on that innocent childish face was not such as his parents can have wished to perpetuate.

That he was possessed of good abilities we have ample evidence; he was, moreover, we are told, "gifted with abundance of wit and humour," some of his friends were "geniuses"<sup>1</sup>—a remarkable trait at the date when he lived—and had he been born in circumstances which enforced that he should toil and strive for his place in the world of men, no doubt he would have left a different record behind him. But genius flags in a bed of roses. The world was too easy for Edward Coke, and his advantage was his undoing. Only once does his name appear in any public capacity; in 1746 he was one of those who presided at the impeachment of the Rebel Lords; all else is a record of shame, of increasing debauchery, extravagance and excess; until death threatened to set a limit to his folly, and the habits of drinking, in which he had become confirmed, seemed likely to bring him to an early grave.

Of all the tragedy which his parents endured meanwhile, there is constant proof. One by one they were fated to lay their other children in an infant's tomb, but the child who survived cost more tears than those who breathed but to die. Few of Lord Leicester's letters exist which do not contain some reference to his son's

<sup>1</sup> See *Lady Louisa Stuart: Selections from her Manuscripts*, ed. by the Hon. James Home, 1899.

health and habits. More than once, upon a promise of amendment, he paid his son's gambling debts, which were enormous. Occasionally, other methods were resorted to, and medical aid was summoned to stem that headlong wreckage of mind and body. Yet one hope of salvation was ever present to his parents. "I like mightily what you have done," Lord Leicester wrote to his agent with regard to arrangements at Holkham, in a letter dated January 3rd, 1744<sup>3</sup>, "and if we could get Lord Coke married to our wish all would go well." In their son's marriage lay his one chance of regeneration. The wife who was to be, would surely transform the sot into a sage; or, if that were indeed impracticable, from the wreckage of Edward Coke's life, phoenix-like, should spring another—a life which should excel in all wherein his own had failed.

So they sought about for a paragon who was to fulfil this mission, and after devoting profound deliberation to the matter, they fixed upon a lady, perhaps the most unsuitable they could have selected.

The Duke of Argyle<sup>1</sup> had a family of daughters,<sup>2</sup> who, being of the useless sex, had been left to grow up wayward, wild, and ignorant. Lady Mary,<sup>3</sup> the youngest, was the most remarkable; her appearance was as unusual as her temperament. Reputed to be possessed of a beauty which was dazzling, it was a beauty of so peculiar a nature that she was nicknamed "The White Cat." Her face was of a deadly pallor, her hair of all but albino fairness, while her dark eyes had the alter-

<sup>1</sup> John, second Duke of Argyle, 1678-1743.

<sup>2</sup> By his second wife, Jane Warburton, maid-of-honour to Queen Anne.

<sup>3</sup> Born February 6th, 1726.

nate sullen glow and fiery blaze of the animal after whom she was named. And her nature was not more normal. Clever, yet silly, quick-tempered, capricious, egoistic, hopelessly wrong-headed and hysterically full of whims and fantasies, throughout her life she lived in a romance of which she was the persecuted heroine, and in which she seemed wholly incapable of separating truth from falsehood, or fact from imagination.

Horace Walpole, who professed to be in love with her, said of her in later years :—

“It is a very good heart, with a head singularly awry ; in short an extraordinary character in this soil of phenomena . . . her virtue is unimpeachable, her friendship violent, her anger deaf to remonstrance. She has cried for 40 people and quarrelled with 400. She might be happy and respected, but will always be miserable from the vanity of her views and her passion for the extraordinary.”

And to this heroine of romance, aged 19, Lord Coke was ordered to pay his addresses. The marriage was conducted on old-fashioned lines and arranged between the parents. After considerable haggling the bargain was struck for £2,500 per annum jointure, and £5,000 pin money ; while Lady Mary, on her part, had £20,000, a fairly large fortune for those days. The Duchess, indeed, demurred slightly “on account of Lord Leicester’s notoriously bad, dissolute, and violent character” ; but of the son, strangely enough, she formed a favourable opinion, and in one letter confirms this by the verdict of Lady Mary’s uncle, Lord Islay :—<sup>1</sup>

“He approves the thing very much and has a good opinion of ye young man. He knows him a good

<sup>1</sup> Archibald, Earl of Islay, who succeeded the Duchess’s husband as third duke.





A. Kneller sculp.

J. W. Audley del.



## *The Lady Mary Coke*

*Youngest daughter of John, second Duke of Argyll, and Greenwich  
and wife of Edward, Viscount Cowley, only son of Thomas, Earl of Leicester*



deal, and thinks of him as I doe ; and approves very much of my conduct with the Father, who he thinks of as I doe, and that I must be very much on my guard with." . . .

And again she writes :—

“Lady Leacester has set her Heart and Sole upon the marryage for her son, and is frightened out of her witts least anything should happen to put a stop to itt.”

But that the negotiations were not always harmonious, Lady Strafford, Lady Mary’s sister, reveals, for she writes :—

“I hear Mama and Lord Leicester have frequent disputes, and I’m afraid his Ill Breeding may make them run high !”

Lady Mary, when the marriage was proposed to her, agreed to it with apparent readiness ; having done so, her rôle as a heroine of romance necessitated that she should be miserable and persecuted. So she wept upstairs and downstairs, languished and wasted away, till her sister, to whom such vagaries were incomprehensible, demanded “why on earth she did not break it off?”—generously offering to do so on her behalf. Lady Mary’s only rejoinder was, “It will be time enough at the altar !” And still, with the airs of a tragedy queen submitting to a hated *mésalliance*, she flouted Lord Coke, who, accustomed to be considered one of the best matches of his day, bitterly resented the lady’s attitude, but quietly bided his time. So he called assiduously upon the Duchess, stroked her pug-dog, drank innumerable cups of tea, and talked sweetly to his sullen bride, until his future mother-in-law wrote

enthusiastically of him that "ye young man has a very good understanding, a great deal of knowledge, and I think a very sweet disposition. That of his play, to be sure, was intirely owing to his Father which he desighn'd to lay quite aside."

Alas! for the misguided Duchess. Lady Mary went to the altar playing the part of a weeping reluctant bride, but apparently forgot to pronounce her refusal to marry the man she professed to loathe, and so passed from imaginary into actual persecution. Still with the airs of a tragedy queen, she prepared to submit to the hated caresses of her husband; but Lord Coke promptly informed her that she had little to fear from his affection, and leaving her upon her wedding day, openly rejoined his boon companions, whom he regaled with a graphic description of the incident, making exceedingly merry over the airs of the deserted lady.

Married life begun under such conditions was not likely to be harmonious. Three months after the wedding the young couple were to accompany the parents to Holkham for the summer. When the Leicester coach-and-six stopped at Lady Mary's door in the morning, she appeared ready clad for the journey, but lo! Lord Coke had not yet returned from the tavern. Inquiries on Lord Leicester's part elicited a disclosure of his son's habits, and his wrath against the latter knew no bounds. In point of fact, he cared not at all who was, or was not in the right; but knowing the precarious state of his son's health, his whole heart was set upon securing heirs to his estate; "He would," says Lady Louisa Stuart, "have protected a devil with this object in view!" and to have his plans

frustrated in the moment of apparent fulfilment was gall and wormwood to his imperious spirit. So he espoused Lady Mary's cause hotly, and treated her with the greatest kindness, whilst his indignation against his son was equally unmeasured. In a long and affectionate letter written by him to his daughter-in-law for the New Year, 1747, nine months after her marriage, he deplores the "brutish behaviour" of Lord Coke, and the "usage" received by her from "this thoughtless Beast," of whom he speaks in terms of unmitigated reprobation, while his comments on Lady Mary's own conduct are equally laudatory:—

"If your husband should not come to his senses," he explains, "but still continue brute enough not to prize as he ought the great Jewel he has in you . . . this verily must be a satisfaction which every Body who have Ill Husbands do not find, that your Behaviour is allowed good, that not a word against that can be said to justify his neglect. . . . I am sure he knows your worth and has often spoke of It in the highest Light to us. In what Light the rest of the family look on you, and how you have endeared yourself to them will be a convincing proof that nothing can be laid to your charge that may occasion this Behaviour, nor indeed do I believe him vile enough to Justify himself that way, which too many Sotts and Brutish Husbands do, trying to excuse themselves by being forced from home by the Behaviour of their Wives. Therefore I think it right, not knowing to what excess of folly and rudeness those vices, if continued in, should bring him to, that you should have something in your hand to show that even his own Father who have [*sic*] watched him with an attentive Eye and all his own Family and Friends blame him and love you."

And, after further expressing at great length his affection for and admiration of her, and assuring her

that, had he not believed Lord Coke's promise of amendment before marriage, he would have broken off the match, he concludes, "I promise you, was it not for *you*, after such Behaviour, I would never see my son more."

Meanwhile, matters went from bad to worse.

"Lord Coke," wrote Horace Walpole, "has demolished himself very fast. You know he was married last spring. He has lost immense sums at play and seldom goes home to his wife till eight in the morning. The world is vehement on her side, and not only her family but his own give him up. At present matters are patched up by the mediation of my brother, but I think can never go on. She married him extremely against her will."

For a time, we are told, Lady Mary consoled herself with enacting the part of an heroic sufferer; but this poor satisfaction could not long endure, since Lord Coke, cowed by his father, saw fit to assume the airs of a penitent and adoring husband—a transformation which Lady Mary found more insupportable than his neglect. Whatever his treatment of her in private—and he appears to have been an arch-hypocrite—in public he called her "My Love! My Life! My Angel!" But when, as the reward of his assurances of devotion and amendment, he expected to be restored to Lady Mary's good graces, he found that, estimating such protestations at their true worth, she refused firmly to receive him again as her husband. Nor did Lord Leicester, when making the same suggestion on behalf of his son, meet with any better success. Forthwith, to Lady Mary's extreme surprise, her father-in-law transferred his championship to her husband, and became as violent in his enmity

against her as he had before been in his friendship. All his natural brutality asserted itself. One day when she was entertaining some friends, into their midst arrived Lord Leicester, raved at her stubbornness, called her insulting names, told her that Lord Coke had done her the greatest honour in marrying her, and behaved like a madman. Lady Mary sent for her mother to defend her, and, as may be imagined, there was a prodigious family row.

Henceforward it was war to the knife. Lord Leicester and his son concerted together how best to break Lady Mary's spirit. Shortly afterwards, when she was staying at Bath for the waters, Lord Coke pleasantly informed her that, well or ill, she should journey down to Holkham, where he "would make her as miserable as he could." Such was his treatment of her that one of his own friends challenged him in consequence, and Lady Betty Campbell records how there had been "a duel between Lord Coke and Mr. Ballendin in Mary-le-Bon Fields, and that they both mist and the seconds parted them." "Lord Coke," she writes later to her sister, Lady Dalkeith, "has behaved in such a manner to Lady Mary that has both surprised and shocked us all. He has told her that he shall leave nothing un-invented to make her as miserable as he can ; and that she shall never see either friend or relation again. She has born it all with great temper. . . . The Duchess desires I wou'd tell you from her that she is now convinced by what she has seen that if Lord Coke had married a woman with the temper of an Angle, she must have been miserable with him."

Lady Mary, however, far from being the "Angle"

of the Duchess's imagination, was both tactless and violent. To Holkham, whether she so willed or no, she was forced to journey ; and there, having alienated her mother-law, who might have alleviated her lot, she was left at the mercy of her father-in-law and her husband. They first treated her with marked rudeness and encouraged the servants to follow their example, so that the latter profanely nicknamed her "Our Virgin Mary." To escape from constant humiliation Lady Mary feigned sickness, and arraying herself in "a night-cap and sick-dress" retired to her turret bedchamber and refused to issue thence, finding what little recreation she could in the rare visits of her friends. Before long her seclusion actually affected her health, but Lord Leicester, furious at her ruse, determined to turn her voluntary into actual imprisonment. One last attempt he appears to have made to bring about a reconciliation between the estranged couple. Sir Harry and Lady Bedingfield, when upon a visit to Holkham, undertook to endeavour to persuade Lady Mary to look more kindly upon her husband ; and in a deposition, which was afterwards produced in court, they described how Lord Coke, with tears in his eyes, swore that he would beg his wife's pardon upon his knees, and how he desired a reconciliation more earnestly than aught else in the world, but how Lady Mary, upon being urged to receive him again, exclaimed : "There may be some things perhaps which one ought to do, but this I cannot do!"—after which she immediately fell into tears and left the room.

Lord Leicester's scant patience was at an end, and we are told that he informed her that "*she was a piece*



*of useless Lumber, fit only to be locked up in the garrat out of the way.*" He actually ascertained how far he could legally "ill-treat a wife who was acting contrary to the laws of God and Man," and in March, 1749, upon receiving Power of Attorney from Lord Coke, who was leaving Holkham, he seized Lady Mary's keys, papers and letters, dismissed her maid and finally removed her from "the New House to the Old One," where he placed her under lock and key, and forbade the servants to allow any one to visit her.

One is forcibly reminded of the treatment which the Lord Chief Justice meted out to his unfortunate daughter; but Lady Mary was made of stronger stuff than the luckless Frances. Though seriously ill, she refused to allow the new maid to approach her, and for six months endured solitary confinement, until she succeeded (it is supposed through the agency of the chaplain or the apothecary) in letting her family know of her plight. The disillusioned Duchess forthwith determined to release her. Accompanied by a solicitor, she drove down to Holkham, and demanded to see her daughter. In this one particular Lady Mary's persecutors overstepped the law; the Duchess, in the presence of witnesses, was refused admission to her daughter. She returned to town, made an affidavit of the fact, and procuring a writ of Habeas Corpus, Lord Coke was enjoined to produce his wife in court on the first day of the November session, when Lady Mary determined to sue for a divorce.

All London was agog with excitement at the approaching trial; but while there was no doubt that

Lady Mary's persecution had been extremely harsh, it is equally evident that, to a person of her temperament, there was a subtle satisfaction in finding herself the public heroine of such romantic misfortune. Brought up to Lord Leicester's house in town, she lived in a garret and clothed herself in rags; though the Leicesters pathetically represented that this was entirely her own will, since she now had her freedom, and her pin money was paid with regularity. When questioned for evidence to be produced in court, she adduced trivialities, and mixed up fancies with fact in a manner truly disconcerting to those who wished to serve her cause. Her nerves, however, had been shattered, and the condition of her health was such that her friends applied to have the trial postponed for three months. This was peremptorily refused by Lord Coke, whose document states that he is impatient to be reconciled to the wife whom he so dearly loves, and that never will he agree to a separation!

Since the great object of himself and his family was to secure an heir to the Holkham property, it is difficult to see why he did not accept the solution presented by a divorce, which would have rid him of a wife who had proved herself so unpleasantly contumacious. There must have been a strong vein of obstinacy in both himself and his father which induced them to combat the matter; though, possibly, in the face of the immense public interest which the affair had roused, to have refused to do so might have involved social ostracism. Of the trial itself Lady Louisa Stuart has left a graphic description. The court was crowded

with a fashionable audience; all the most powerful and reputable friends of the Duchess attended at her request; all the lively, wild, young friends of Lord Coke were present to support their comrade. The Duchess was weeping bitterly, Lady Strafford (Lady Mary's sister) perpetually fainting, and Lord Coke's "young rakes and geniuses" making great sport of the proceedings, while without, an immense mob had assembled to wait the arrival of the persecuted heroine. At length, into their midst she was borne, and as the crowd, frantic to get a glimpse of her, pressed round her in a manner which was alarming, they broke the glass of her sedan chair, whereupon there occurred a dramatic incident. As she stepped forth, feeble, emaciated, and clothed in rags, Lord Coke rushed forward to protect her from the mob, exclaiming tenderly, "My dearest love, take care and do not hurt yourself!"

At the trial which followed, much evidence was adduced on either side; the depositions of Sir Harry and Lady Bedingfield were read, the loving letters of Lord Leicester to his daughter-in-law, etc., and excitement ran high. Finally, however, the case for a divorce collapsed, greatly owing to the inefficiency of Lady Mary's own evidence; and it was agreed that she should reside unmolested at Sudbrook, near Richmond, with her mother, upon condition that she withdrew her suit, lived upon her pin money and never set foot in town.

So after two years of wretched married life, nearly twelve months of which had been spent in imprisonment, Lady Mary attained to a peaceful, if dull,

freedom: "Her perseverance and courage are insurmountable," pronounced Horace Walpole, "as she has shown in her conduct with her husband and his father, in which contest she got the better." Lady Mary was the victor, and the treasured dream of Lord Leicester's life was at an end. No little grandchild, flesh of his flesh, would ever run about the gilded corridors and splendid rooms which he was creating, or prove the ancestor of a posterity which should look with pride on the home he had designed for them. Lord Coke returned to his downward course; and, more harsh and imperious than of old, Lord Leicester retired with his lady to Holkham, where they continued to live in dreary state in a portion of the rambling, unfinished house. "Our time which is spared from *Vertu* is spent on Whist," he wrote; and outside, the labourers dug, the great mills worked, the bricks were hoisted one upon another, and the huge building grew apace; while within, rich decorations beautified it week by week, and month by month. And still Lord Leicester directed and watched the gradual fulfilment of his scheme, all the while pursued by the haunting dread lest even a son of his might never inherit this splendid creation of his brain. And still, with a stubborn courage which refused to be thwarted, he rejected the obvious; the hopes of Lady Mary and her mother, whom he pictured eagerly awaiting his son's death, were to be frustrated: Lord Coke was to be induced to come to Holkham, induced, yet again, "to reform"; doctors, yet again, were to attempt the cure which was beyond all mortal capacity. In June, 1750, ten months after the

scene in court, we find him writing confidently to a friend :—

“As you are so good as to interest yourself in our family welfare, I have the pleasure to assure you Ld. Coke is better y<sup>n</sup> he has been for many years, and by the advice of Doctor Hepburn<sup>1</sup> has used the Cold Bath with great success; his spirits are more equal, and he is able to read and taste what he reads, and seems to be quite easy in his mind as to other affairs, so that Kennell of Bitches who expect his death, will be disappointed, if he will but be prudent enough, and not relapse into his idle courses of drinking.”

But again, alas! even the unparalleled “success of the Cold Bath” was not sufficient to counteract the result of long years of debauchery and excess. Three years later, on August 5th, Mrs. Montagu<sup>2</sup> wrote to her husband from Tunbridge :—

“There is a report that Lord Coke is dying; his wife Lady Mary is here; she is extremely pretty, her air and figure the most pleasing I ever saw. She is not properly a beauty, but she has more *agrémens* than one shall often see. With so many advantages of birth, person and fortune, I do not wonder at her resentment being lively, and that she could ill brook the neglects of her husband.”<sup>3</sup>

That same month, while staying at Greenwich, on August 30th, 1753, Lord Coke ended his unsatisfactory career at the age of thirty-four. “Poor Lord Coke’s death,” commented his aunt, Lady Jane Coke,<sup>4</sup> “though it did not concern me, yet made me moralise, when I

<sup>1</sup> George Hepburn, a doctor in Lynn, who died in 1760, aged ninety. He is described by a contemporary as “a vicious and expensive man.”

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Montagu, “Queen of the Blue Stockings.”

<sup>3</sup> *Elizabeth Montagu*, by E. Climençon (1906). Vol. II, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Wife of Robert Coke of Longford, brother of Lord Leicester.

reflected how different was his character at his first coming into the world to what it was at his leaving it. Lady Mary has now two thousand pounds a year rent charge, and absolute mistress of herself, which at her age is no unpleasant situation."<sup>1</sup>

Thenceforward, although Lord Leicester pursued his work with undiminished energy—although ambition for his posterity gone, the love of the artist for his art remained—there is a new note of dissatisfaction in all his utterances. There is a fretfulness in his complaint to the younger Brettingham that "Your father has built a house more to look at than to live in, for all the chimneys smoke and cannot be cured"; and there is an unutterable sadness in his final verdict as he surveyed the result of his long years of labour and achievement: "It is a melancholy thing to stand alone in one's own country. I look around, not a house to be seen but my own. I am Giant, of Giant Castle, and have ate up all my neighbours—my nearest neighbour is the King of Denmark."

And the final tragedy of his existence is pathetic in its seeming inadequacy to represent the end of such a man. Aloof in the splendid isolation of which he complained, Lord Leicester yet found himself dragged into a petty quarrel with a sullen neighbour. Colonel Townshend,<sup>2</sup> a distinguished soldier, but by all accounts an ill-conditioned, unpopular man, had had an old-standing quarrel with him on the supposition of his

*Letters from Lady Jane Coke to her friend Mrs. Eyre at Derby*, edited by Mrs. Ambrose Rathborne, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> George Townshend, son and heir of Charles, third Viscount Townshend, born 1724 and made a Marquis 1786. He commanded at Quebec after the death of Wolfe.

gamekeeper having killed some foxes. That Colonel Townshend was of a quarrelsome disposition and much disliked is evident. Horace Walpole speaks of him as having a "proud, sullen and contemptuous character, and of seeing everything in an ill-natured and ridiculous light," while, in the former dispute with him, Lord Leicester admits having been worsted over "*my Booby growling about your Partridges.*" But, although foxes may have been at the root of the enmity, the excuse for the second quarrel was the fact that Lord Leicester had spoken disparagingly of the Militia, of which Colonel Townshend was first Colonel. In a fit of drunken anger on January 24th the latter sent a challenge to Lord Leicester, which, as a specimen of the calligraphy and manners of that date, is perhaps without parallel. In it he remarks that "It is naturell to expect ye efforts of a malignant, pensioned, renegade peer to obstruct ye Publick Service, and to blacken ye characters of a sett of Gents who devote their lives from principle solely to ye defence of ye country," and he proceeds to make some very trenchant remarks respecting the traits which distinguish "the Gent from the Tyrent," and how, apart from the ostensible cause of quarrel, "yor private transactions about foxes and such other things have been covered by a kind of very small politeness of which you are so much ye master and which when counteracted by Reall Ill Will is a mere Treachery"; finally subscribing himself, "I am ye friend and follower of reall merit only, with ye utmost contempt for the Right Honourable ye Postmaster Generall," etc.

Now George Townshend was thirty years Lord Leicester's junior, and a professional man-slayer; to

propose a duel, therefore, with a pacific and somewhat infirm civilian of sixty-two was an extravagant suggestion, and in his elaborate answer to the challenge, Lord Leicester shows himself in an unusually favourable light. Although he declines to fight, with some firmness, his letter is full of dignity, well expressed, and exhibits a self-control which presents a remarkable contrast to the illiterate abuse of his adversary, while, in a kind and fatherly manner, he throws gentle ridicule upon the warmth of the younger man :—

“It would be ridiculous and rash,” he concludes, “for an old fellow retired from the world, who cannot even without great fatigue visit his neighbours, to begin duelling with an officer of your rank in his prime . . . you would get no Honour by vanquishing a man older than your Father, and grown quite unwieldy and unfit for such encounters by a long, lazy, and inactive life and entire disuse of sword and file,<sup>1</sup> not having this twenty years wore a sword that could be of any use and for a pistol I never could hit a barn-door with a gun, so it would be very difficult for me to chuse weapons, and I think to turn duellist in my grand climacterisk [*sic*] would be a great proof of indiscreet rashness rather than true courage.”

In his reply, George Townshend shows himself somewhat mollified, and with his second ungracious letter all trace of the correspondence closes. Yet, six weeks later—a sequel which appears to hint more than mere coincidence—the death of Lord Leicester was announced, and he was buried at Tittleshall, where his son already reposed.

Now in neither the Townshend nor the Leicester families does any record exist of the duel having taken

<sup>1</sup> Foil was thus speit in *Bailey's Dictionary*, 1737.



place, and while it would obviously be to the advantage of the family of the aggressor to hush up such an occurrence, no such motive can have existed on the part of the family of the aggrieved. Yet a letter has lately come to light, written by one Norfolk clergyman to another, on May 10th following the date of the challenge, which not only indicates that Lord Leicester's death was the result of the duel with George Townshend, but which, in its very omission of all detail respecting such an event, seems to infer that the facts connected with it were well known in Norfolk at that date.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the contemporary letters of Lady Mary Coke which would have thrown light upon the matter, have, unfortunately, not been preserved. A hint of

<sup>1</sup> May 10th, 1759. Letter (from Edmund Pyle to Samuel Kerrich). "Lord L. is dead since you wrote. I wish with 1000 more that his antagonist were in the shades too (provided his family were no sufferers); for I hold him and his brother [Charles] to be two most dangerous men; as having parts that enable them to do great mischief, and no principles that lead them to do any good. The challenger was (by confession of his friends) drunk when he wrote to Lord L., of whom, notwithstanding what I have here said, I was never an admirer. But in the case now under consideration how can one help being of his side? He spoke contemptuously of the *Militia*, very true, and so do thousands. It has been burlesqued in Publick papers, over and over again—and treated with the highest scorn and satire. Yet because Lord L. was a little severe upon it at his table he is to be challenged, truly, and by whom, why by G. T. a man whose licentious tongue spares not the most sacred characters—King, priest, prophet, minister, general—all have felt the lash of his wit (as he takes it to be) in scurrilous language, in burlesque prints, and in every way that would render them the joke of the very scum of the people. This is the man who denounces death to any one that shall dare to scout a silly project that he thinks fit to espouse—and insists upon being received seriously by the English nation. In troth, my good friend, things, at this rate, are come to a rare pass. Noble or ignoble, old or young, are all to look with awe and reverence on whatever this spark shall think fit to declare for, at the peril of their lives" (*Memoirs of a Royal Chaplain*, edited by Albert Hartshorne, p. 319).

secrecy may lie in the fact that, of all her voluminous correspondence still in existence, one letter only, written in the spring of 1759, appears to have survived; and that letter, written to her sister, Lady Dalkeith, and which, whatever the manner of her father-in-law's death, must surely have contained some reference to it—shows half the sheet cautiously destroyed, presumably by the recipient.

So the matter remains shrouded in mystery. All that is known is that on April 20th, 1759, Lord Leicester lay dead—dead with his work unfinished, his dream unrealised, with the great dread of his latter days fulfilled, in that he left no son to inherit his life-work—dead, unloved, unregretted by the world at large,—dead, it was reported, in a petty squabble with a drunken man.



THOMAS COKE, EARL OF LEICESTER, THE BUILDER OF HOLKHAM  
*Bust by Chantrey after a model by Ronbilla.*



## CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTH AND BOYHOOD OF  
THOMAS WILLIAM COKE

1754-1767

**T**HUS, by a strange freak of fate, had Lord Leicester, throughout his life, diligently accumulated treasures for one whom he had never desired to be his heir, while Lord Coke, by his riotous living, and Lady Mary, by her contumacious conduct, had completed the destiny against which the autocrat of Holkham had striven in vain.

But for the present in the great unfinished building, Lady Leicester was left to face life alone. "I am not surprised," wrote Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "at Lord Leicester leaving his large estate to his lady, notwithstanding the contempt with which he always treated her, and her real inability of managing it!"<sup>1</sup> Ten years earlier Lady Louisa Stuart had spoken of her as "a peaceable, inoffensive woman, long indured to obedience; who, as the father was yet more ill-tempered than the son and addicted to the same vices, had borne submissively for thirty years the trials that exhausted Lady Mary's scantier stock of patience in three

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters and Works of Lady M. Wortley Montagu*, ed. by Lord Wharnccliffe (1893), Vol. II, p. 367.

months.”<sup>1</sup> Now, within six years of each other, and under peculiarly painful circumstances, she had been bereft of both the husband and son who had exercised such a chastening influence upon her life, and was left, a solitary, elderly woman, with small interest save her foibles and her wealth to render existence palatable.

In his will, dated May 25th, 1756, Lord Leicester had left provision for the completion of the house should his death occur before this was accomplished. Two thousand pounds were to be set aside annually out of his estate until the building was finished; and as at the time of his demise the chapel wing was not completed, the work was proceeded with for six years until the structure was erected in accordance with his directions. Subsequently, however, the gilding and decoration of the interior was carried out on a less elaborate and more economical scale than was the case throughout the rest of the building; so that, in this particular alone, the chapel wing did not correspond with the wings finished during his lifetime.

The furnishing of the house was completed by Lady Leicester out of her own income. She stated that she considered this a duty which she owed to her husband's memory; but something, no doubt, she also considered due to her own dignity; for in her solitude one consolation was vouchsafed to her—she had an overweening and all-satisfying sense of her own importance. Perhaps it is not too much to say that this forthwith constituted the great and abiding interest of her life; all her ideas, her fashion of living, almost her code of right and wrong centred round this—to

<sup>1</sup> *Lady Louisa Stuart: Selections from her Manuscripts*, ed. by the Hon. J. Home (1899), p. 69.



EXTERIOR OF ENTRANCE TO HOLKHAM PARK, SHOWING THE ALMSHOUSES BUILT BY MARGARET, LADY LEICESTER





her—sacred theory of the deference which was due to her. Kind-hearted, generous, full of sound good sense and right feeling, she was as imperious at heart as her too tyrannical lord, and her individuality, which had been repressed during his lifetime, after his death had full play. Frail and dainty in appearance, stately and extremely ceremonious in manner, her resolute determination of speech, habit and action was apt to alarm those who were less strong-minded. Her solitude deepened as the years went by, for so few were considered by her fit to admit to her presence ; and, as her horizon contracted, she became more eccentric in her ways, more overwhelmingly punctilious with regard to detail, a greater stickler for etiquette. Austere in her attitude towards her tenants, she raised their rents in defiance of Lord Leicester's past liberality towards them ; but in charity her expenditure was lavish, she devoted large sums alike to the deserving or the undeserving poor, and supported needy vagabonds throughout the county. In 1755 she built and endowed six picturesque almshouses which stood on either side of the principal entrance to the park, and in 1768, at a total cost of £2300, she further endowed these for the maintenance of three men and three women (to be elected by the possessors of Holkham House, out of some parish upon the estate), who were each to have sixpence per day, a chaldron of coal annually, and new clothes once in two years. In 1767 she completely restored and refurnished the church at a cost of £1000.

And while she lived her solitary, ceremonious life, her thoughts must have turned, not without a pang of bitter jealousy, to a child whom she had never seen

—the child who was growing up to inherit all of which her own son should have been possessed.

Far away in Derbyshire was the house where, as a pretty bride of eighteen, in all the bravery of her wedding finery and the dignity of her new estate, my Lady Margaret had first set up housekeeping. A twin property with Holkham, Longford had descended side by side with its fellow estate through successive generations of Cokes since the days of the Lord Chief Justice. Before John Coke settled at Holkham, Clement, the sixth son of the Chief Justice, had established himself at Longford.

The house dates back to Norman times, though the church, which is dedicated to St. Chad, is said, like the church at Holkham, to owe its origin to Saxon history or legend, in which a doe again plays an important part. The story is that St. Ceadda came to live in a solitary place, where he existed only upon the milk of a doe. This doe was hunted by the son of the King of Mercia, and flying back to the cell of the saint for safety, brought there in pursuit the young Prince. This resulted in the conversion of both the Prince and his brother to the Christian faith, which being observed by one of their father's evil counsellors, he accused them to the King of being converts to Christianity, and the King in his wrath slew them both. Saint Ceadda fled for safety to his cell near Lichfield; but the King, struck with remorse, repaired thither by the advice of his Queen, and, being converted, banished idolatrous worship out of his kingdom, and built a church upon the site where his sons had first embraced Christianity.





LONGFORD, THE SEAT



THE HON. HENRY COKE



The church was rebuilt in the fourteenth century, and the registers in it date back to the time of Henry VII.

The house stands close to the church, picturesquely situated at the foot of a gently sloping park. It is only a short distance from the village, but is otherwise in a lonely situation, and in old days, before the advent of railways, it must have been very isolated. It was originally gabled, with buttresses, surmounted by chimney-stacks between the gables. At a later period the gables were destroyed, the upper storey raised and a balustrade was placed along the top. An old castellated tower then formed the centre of the house, containing a banqueting-hall surrounded by a gallery, which had fine old carved panelling and stained-glass windows representing the arms of the de Longfords. The house was likewise encircled by a moat, of which traces were found latterly, and also signs of a former garden. But the original walls and buttresses remain to this day—walls which have seen generations rise and pass away from the Conquest downwards, which have echoed to the voices of those who for centuries now have been mingling with the dust. Over Longford prevails the charm which the house of Holkham lacks—the profound charm of an immense antiquity.

Margaret Markham, the widow and fourth wife of Nicholas de Longford, sold the estate of Longford to Lord Chief Justice Coke, in the tenth year of James I, for the sum of £5000. Later, Clement Coke, to whom his father bequeathed it, married Sara Reddish, heiress of the Reddish estates and sole living representative of the de Longfords. The heirs of Clement thus succeeded to both the heritage and the lineage of the

de Longfords, which date back to the Conquest, and which was written out by Sir Edward Coke in an elaborate pedigree, still preserved at Longford. The authenticity of this as his handiwork is established by the fact that it is endorsed on the reverse side in his handwriting: "*The Cases of Sara Reddiche my son Clement's wife*"; and in this pedigree, with the carelessness of his period, in alternate lines he spells his own and his son's name as *Coke* and *Cooke*.

A monument to Clement Coke in the Temple Church states how "he in the Inner Temple, being a Fellow of the House, Christianly and comfortably in his flourishing age yielded up his soul to the Almighty the three and twentieth of May A.D. 1619."

He was succeeded first by his eldest son Edward, created a baronet in 1641, whose younger son, the third baronet, died in 1727, when the estates passed without the baronetcy to Edward, the second brother of Thomas Coke, of Holkham. The latter also dying childless, Longford then went to the youngest of the three brothers, the "Mastor Bobby" of Edward Smith's Journal of Expenses. But it is difficult to connect that youthful "Bobby," who we cannot doubt got into sore trouble through damaging the sword and scabbard of the redoubtable "Mr. Dont," with the dignified Robert Coke of Longford, Vice-Chamberlain to Queen Caroline, the husband of Lady Jane, sister and co-heir of Philip, the Jacobite Duke of Wharton.<sup>1</sup> Of him and of his wife little trace remains save the

<sup>1</sup> Philip, Duke of Wharton (1698-1731). Espoused the cause of the Old Pretender, and having been convicted of high treason, died wretchedly at a Bernardine convent near Tarragona. Pope's lines upon him are well known.



portrait of Lady Jane, which for many years hung in the long corridor at Longford, curiously painted with six fingers on one hand.

Robert, like his brother Edward, died without an heir; Carey, his elder sister, who had married Sir Marmaduke Wyvill, was also childless; and therefore upon the son of his younger sister, Anne, the estate of Longford next devolved.

Now, Anne Coke, as a pretty girl of sixteen, and a ward in Chancery, had married, in December, 1715, Colonel Philip Roberts, who, in the June of the following year, received his commission as a Major in the 2nd Troop of Horse Guards. He was the "eldest son and heir-apparent of Gabriel Roberts of Soho Square, Westminster," and Amptill, Beds; M.P. for Marlborough in 1713-15-22, and for Chippenham in 1727-34. His father, Governor Gabriel Roberts, had rented the same house in Soho Square since 1712; and as the town house of Sir John Newton, Anne's grandfather and guardian, was also in that square, the two young people must have been neighbours from their earliest childhood. Still more, Philip's mother was Mary, daughter of Sir Francis Wenman, Bt., M.P. for Oxfordshire, whose family must have been acquainted with Anne's brother, Thomas Coke, the owner of Minster Lovel and of other property in that county—to which Philip's grandmother also belonged. Philip himself is said to have been of exceptionally handsome appearance, and two very beautiful portraits of him and of his sister, as children, are at Longford, which prove that, even as a boy, he was possessed of the good looks with which he was afterwards accredited.

Anne alone of all her family had several children—six sons and one daughter. Her eldest son, Wenman, came into possession of Longford on the death of his uncle, Robert Coke, in 1750; whereupon, under the will of Sir Edward Coke, Bt., he assumed the surname and arms of Coke.<sup>1</sup>

Wenman Coke's first wife died six months after the death of her only child, and he married, secondly, Elizabeth, daughter of George Chamberlyne (afterwards Denton), Esq., of Hillesden, Bucks, by whom he had four children, two sons and two daughters. Three years after succeeding to Longford, the death of Lord Coke made it probable that he would succeed also to Holkham. "Your neighbour at Longford," wrote Lady Jane Coke to her friend Mrs. Eyre, of Derby, "is now very likely to succeed to the whole family estate, and if money is happiness, he will have enough, and yet whether his spirits were not so good when he danced with you years ago, I much question."<sup>2</sup>

The matter of the succession, however, was still uncertain, and it was essential that Mr. Wenman Coke should keep well with the imperious owner of Holkham. One of the conditions of doing so appears to have been that he should quarrel with all the rest of Lord Leicester's relations. For this reason, perforce, Lady Mary remained a comparative stranger to him,

<sup>1</sup> Burke and other peerages erroneously state that the estates of his uncle Lord Leicester devolved to Wenman Roberts on the death of the latter (1759), and that he then assumed the name of Coke. Holkham, on the contrary, was left to Lady Leicester for her lifetime, and in 1750 Wenman Roberts assumed the name of Coke, although this was not confirmed by Act of Parliament till 1755 (28 George II).

<sup>2</sup> *Letters from Lady Jane Coke to her friend Mrs. Eyre at Derby*, edited by Mrs. Ambrose Rathborne, 1889, p. 66.



*Anne, wife of Colonel Philip Roberts  
and sister to Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester  
about 1675*



and even Lady Jane was never asked to visit her old home, Longford,—an omission which, while resenting, she condoned. “I am sure if Mr. Coke was left to act for himself, he would always behave right to me, and as he is not, I do not take it ill,” she wrote generously in 1751; though, later in the same year, she added: “Mr. Coke and his whole family have taken their leave of me, and I now neither hear nor see anything of them; this behaviour is by Lord Leicester’s order, who will not have anybody that expects favours from him live in friendship with me. This is the reason given . . . and I wish Mr. Coke may find his new friends as sincere to him as his old ones were. He, at least, thinks it worth a trial.”

Too much, obviously, was at stake for Wenman Coke to risk affronting the autocrat whose heir he hoped to become; but, save for this enforced unfriendliness towards his relations, he appears to have been an amiable man of quiet tastes and studious disposition. He lived much out of the world and disliked society. His habits were those of an ordinary country gentleman; he was interested in agriculture and fond of field sports; but he was a man of cultivated mind and of intellectual pursuits; he loved reading, and spent most of the morning and many hours of each night buried in his books, so that he suffered in health from his sedentary habits.

He seems to have been much respected and beloved by his neighbours and dependents, who found him kind, sincere, and attractive in his manners; while his principles were those of the old Whig school, and were above suspicion. He is specially described as

being "independent-minded, benevolent, and a stout advocate for the Constitution."<sup>1</sup>

It was just four years after he came into possession of Longford, and one year after the death of Lord Coke had left him the probable heir to Holkham, that his eldest son, the subject of this memoir, was born in London, May 6th, 1754. Sixteen days later the child was baptised at the beautiful old church of St. James's, Piccadilly, and received the name of Thomas William.

This son was thus born the heir to Longford, but for the first five years of his life it was not known whether he would succeed to the estate of Holkham. In 1759 the death of Lord Leicester left the momentous question beyond dispute; the Holkham and other estates, after the decease of Margaret, Lady Leicester, were entailed upon Wenman Coke and his heirs for ever.

It is said that the year when little Tom Coke became acknowledged as the future heir to Holkham he was painted by Reynolds as the "Young Hannibal";<sup>2</sup> a handsome round-faced boy of five years old, who looks out of the canvas with large solemn eyes, and clasps a sword in his baby fingers. The picture was probably painted during one of his first visits to town, for his early days were spent between Longford and London; as, in due course, were those of his brother Edward

<sup>1</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, Saturday, April 27th, 1776.

<sup>2</sup> This picture is in the possession of Lieut.-Colonel the Hon. Wenman Coke. It has also been described as the portrait of Master Coxe, but the date upon it (1759)—that momentous year when young Coke became of recognised importance as the future heir to a large estate—coupled with the age and the appearance of the child represented, are strong evidence in favour of its authenticity as the first of the thirty-two portraits which are said to have been painted of T. W. Coke in the course of his life.



WENMAN COKE, THE FATHER OF THOMAS WILLIAM COKE.





and his sisters Margaret and Elizabeth. Wenman Coke represented Derby for many years in Parliament, and came to town every year during the session, when he occupied a house which he rented from a Lady Carpenter, and which stood at the corner of Hanover Square, at what is now the turning into Great George Street. At this period there were no buildings on that side of Oxford Street, while on the present site of Cavendish Square, only a solitary house was standing; so that all the country surrounding Lady Carpenter's house was completely open. One of the earliest recollections of little Tom Coke was being hurried to the window of the house in Hanover Square to see a fox killed by a pack of hounds kept by his godfather, Mr. Archer, in Essex. The whole chase swept into view from the present direction of Oxford Street, and the fox was killed immediately in front of Mr. Wenman Coke's house.<sup>1</sup>

Another event of his early life made a deep impression on him. When he was quite a small child, his grandfather, Philip Roberts, took him upon his knee and said :

“Now remember, Tom, as long as you live, never trust a Tory!” In repeating this story he used to add—“I never have, and, by God, I never will!”

Later, his father, Wenman Coke, echoed this advice. He told his son that, if he lived, he would see mischief,

<sup>1</sup> In 1833 Coke sat to Haydon (see *post*, p. 81) for his portrait and related this circumstance, which Haydon records in his Journal—“Mr. Coke said he remembered a fox killed in Cavendish Square” (*Autobiography and Journals of R. B. Haydon*, ed. by T. Taylor, Vol. II, p. 376). It was not, however, Cavendish, but Hanover Square where he was thus “in at the death.”

as Lord Bute<sup>1</sup> had had the education of the King—that all good men would be excluded from his service. “Let me give you this advice,” he said; “don’t trust a Tory; if you live you will see great mischief from their principles being acted upon. The Tories will always be with you when you don’t want them, and against you when you do: *don’t believe or trust a Tory.*”

Nearly seventy years afterwards, at Lynn, in 1830, Tom repeated to a crowd of his constituents the exact words which his father had spoken to him as a boy. Throughout a long life they had remained fixed upon his memory, and had, no doubt, determined the trend of his whole career.

Another maxim which his father instilled into his mind and to which he was also faithful through life, was to “*Stick to his friends, and to disregard his enemies.*” This was the way, Wenman Coke assured his son, to attach the former and be rid of the latter. This advice was never absent from young Coke’s remembrance; and it may be said to have formed the commanding rule of his life.

The first rudiments of his education were received at the village school at Longford, where he sat side by side with the little village lads who were to become sturdy yeomen on his estate. He was next sent to a

<sup>1</sup> John Stuart, third Earl of Bute, Prime Minister for eleven months. In the household of the Prince of Wales, who in 1760 ascended the throne as George III, Lord Bute acquired great influence over the minds both of the Prince and his mother. He was said to have inoculated the young Prince with the theory that the royal will was to be supreme, and that Ministers were simply to give expression to and carry out the Sovereign’s pleasure.

school at Wandsworth, in Surrey, which was at that date kept by a French refugee of the name of Pampellone, and was considered a school of great celebrity. Only a very limited number of pupils were admitted, and these were all the sons of men of good position. Charles James Fox was there, as a delicate little boy, previous to being sent to Westminster and Eton, but he must have left before young Coke arrived, and the contemporaries of the latter appear to have been the future Lord Egremont and Lord Ilchester, the Duke of Leinster and Lord Fortescue, Lord Braybrooke, Sir T. Faulkland, Lord Townshend, Lord Aylesford and others, many of whom were his friends in later life.

Long years afterwards when passing Wandsworth as quite an old man, Coke was delighted to find it so little altered that he was able to trace all his early haunts and associations, of which he spoke with an almost boyish enthusiasm. From this school, he said, he was recalled and brought to the house in Hanover Square, expressly to catch the measles from his sisters.

At the age of ten he was sent to Eton. Here again he followed closely upon the steps of Charles James Fox, who, a lad of fifteen, left Eton at the beginning of the summer holidays that same year. Fox left behind him the reputation of having been the most good-natured, most careless, and most slovenly boy in the whole school; and so addicted was he to gambling, that certain places were pointed out to young Coke where Fox used at every opportunity to be engaged at pitch-and-toss, or other games of chance. William Windham, a lad of fourteen, who did not leave Eton

till two years later, was famous for his cricket and his fighting ; which latter accomplishment afterwards stood him in good stead, more than once, at county elections. But the difference in age between him and young Coke must have precluded any friendship at this date ; and the only boy whom record indicates as a playmate of Coke's from his earliest years was a Harrow boy, Francis Rawdon, afterwards the famous Lord Hastings,<sup>1</sup> who, Coke's junior by five months only, became one of his greatest, as he was one of his lifelong friends.

One of the events of Coke's boyhood which he always remembered, was going abroad with Lord Moira, Francis Rawdon's father, who took him to a grand review at Prague ; and, insisting on his wearing regimentals, equipped him in a scarlet coat with a yellow collar and plain buttons. The pretty boy, thus picturesquely dressed, attracted attention, and several people observing his buttons, coolly asked him what regiment he belonged to. Being puzzled for an answer and fearing that people looked upon him as a picturesque servant, he asked Lord Moira anxiously what he should say if any more questioned him. "Oh, say," replied Lord Moira casually, "that you belong to the Militia !" Shortly afterwards, several other people came to him and questioned him what regiment he belonged to. On his saying, "To the Militia !" he found, to his dismay, that he was treated with greater contempt than ever.

The ruling passion of young Coke's boyhood was a

<sup>1</sup> Francis Rawdon, son of first Earl of Moira, created Baron Rawdon, 1783 ; succeeded his father as second Earl of Moira, 1793 ; created Marquis of Hastings, 1816. (b. 1754, ob. 1826.)

love of sport. Even when in town he used to get away from the streets—in those days no difficult matter—and pursue his favourite pastime with untiring energy. Haydon<sup>1</sup> mentions how Mr. Coke told him that where Berkeley Square now stands was an excellent place for snipe.<sup>2</sup> But at Longford he always rose before daylight with the same object. He first made his way to the dairy, where he coaxed the dairywoman to skim the cream for him till he had filled his basin. He then adjourned to the bakehouse, and as soon as the oven was drawn he broke off the corner crusts from the loaves, which, steeped in cream, formed his breakfast. Thus fortified, he went off for the day, and was usually at his destination, four or five miles from home, before dawn broke. Directly it was daylight he began his sport, which he continued till darkness fell, contriving, if possible, to leave off near his home. No weather ever deterred him from being out all day. His naturally strong constitution was thus confirmed by the life he led, by his habits of early rising, simple food, long days in the fresh air, and hard exercise. So, too, he developed the passionate love of country life and country amusements which never left him throughout the whole of his career.

Naturally, such an existence was utterly at variance with any love of books or study; and he must have been a curious contrast to his studious, intellectual father. But there is little doubt that it developed in

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Robert Haydon, historical painter, 1786-1846.

<sup>2</sup> *Haydon's Journals and Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 367. Clive committed suicide in his house in Berkeley Square in 1774, so the Square was standing at that date.

young Coke other characteristics which stood him in good stead in after life ; for, besides perfecting the splendid physique for which he was always remarkable, it made him practical, observant and self-reliant, with a mind as clean and healthy, and a brain as actively alert as his body was strong.

At Eton all his leisure was spent in the same manner. His popularity was great, since his gun provided suppers for his schoolmates. The more studious among the boys would offer to do his tasks for him in return for the game with which he provided them. On one occasion he was found with no less than seventy snipe in his room, all killed by himself. On another, he narrowly escaped punishment for killing a pheasant in Windsor Park. The keeper pursued him and his associate ; they escaped by a boat across the river, but were recognised, and his companion was flogged by Dr. Foster for the offence. It is obvious that at this early age he was a most remarkable shot ; and thus it is not surprising that, in later years, in the game-book at Holkham, it is recorded how, in fulfilment of a bet, he killed eighty-two partridges out of eighty-four shots one day *in November*.

During those years of his boyhood he saw little or nothing of the relations whose name he bore. In 1761 Lady Jane Coke died, and is said to have been buried on January 15th of that year at Sunbury, Windsor, where she had resided during the years of her widowhood. Subsequently a legend sprang up round her memory at Longford, and it was rumoured that the house from which she had been excluded during the latter years of her life was haunted by her restless



THOMAS WILLIAM COKE.  
*From a painting at Holkham.*





spirit. After dusk the vision of a pale lady in fluttering white garments was seen to flit along the corridor, where, in those days, her portrait hung; and, so firmly was this legend believed, that, for half a century after her decease, the corridor, when daylight faded, was a place of terror. Often during the days of his boyhood, young Coke heard the story of the strange figure seen there; but one thing appears certain—unless he saw the White Lady when she haunted Longford, he had no other acquaintance with his great-aunt, Lady Jane.

Still more, though often during those years he must have heard of the wonderful house at Holkham which would one day be his, and of the awe-inspiring old lady who lived there in lonely state, as time passed by, he saw neither the one nor the other. Communication between Lady Leicester and the family who were to succeed her at Holkham was little to her taste. She viewed with scarcely disguised animosity her nephew, Mr. Wenman Coke, who, although only eleven years younger than herself, might one day step into the possession of all which had not been intended for him, and it was only owing to an unexpected event that a meeting between the aunt and nephew at last took place.

In 1767 Mr. Coke, without Lady Leicester being apprised of the matter, was asked to stand for the County of Norfolk. Sir Edward Astley<sup>1</sup> and Sir Harbord Harbord<sup>2</sup> posted to Longford on purpose to

<sup>1</sup> Born 1729, died 1802, represented Norfolk for twenty-four years in Parliament.

<sup>2</sup> M.P. for Norwich. Created Baron Suffield of Suffield, August, 1786.

urge him to offer himself for nomination. Such a proposal, though extremely flattering, was received by him with very distinct dismay. He liked his quiet seat for Derby, and had no desire to put himself forward for a contested election in a county with which, at present, he had little connection. It was, however, difficult to refuse, and at length, after much persuasion, he consented to go to Norfolk in order to judge personally of the state of popular feeling there, agreeing to decide accordingly. He therefore posted back with his two friends, and stayed in Norfolk for some weeks, until at length one evening, when a large party was assembled, such pressure was brought to bear upon him, that he reluctantly gave his consent to their wishes.

His first step upon coming to a decision was to wait upon his aunt at Holkham in order to acquaint her with the fact.

The austere lady received Mr. Coke with unbending dignity. As upright and as stately as of yore, with a manner more rigidly severe, she accorded him a frigid attention while he explained the cause of his visit. Obviously she refused to give him any credit for his conduct in the matter. Having listened to all that he had to say, she finally expressed her conclusion: "Sir, I understand you have come to *nose* me in the county!"

Mr. Coke, in short, retired discomfited. He was nominated in conjunction with Sir Edward Astley on the 8th October, 1767. Their opponents were Sir A. Wodehouse and Mr. de Grey. The election took place on the 24th March, 1768. It was finished in one

day, but the poll did not close till nine at night. The declaration of the numbers was postponed till the next day, and the examination of the books occupied from nine in the morning till six in the evening. The numbers were as follows :—

Sir Edward Astley . . . 2977		Sir A. Wodehouse . . . 2680
Thos. De Grey, Esq. . . 2754		Wenman Coke, Esq. . . 2609

Thus, to Mr. Wenman Coke's genuine delight, he found that he had lost his election, and he returned to Longford fully recognising that he had been over-persuaded to stand for Norfolk as much against his own judgment as it was certainly against his own wishes.

Yet another relation of young Coke's remained for many years unknown to him, save only as strange rumours respecting her must have penetrated to his family. This was the young widow, Lady Mary Coke, towards whom, likewise, her austere mother-in-law doubtless cherished no small measure of resentment.

From the moment when, in 1753, at the age of twenty-six, Lady Mary had been released from her dull retirement and uncertain security at Sudbrook, her life had been transformed. No longer in a state of constant humiliation and fear, she found herself a young and wealthy widow, supported by the good opinion of the world who had taken her part in the tragedy of her marriage. Without pretending a sorrow which she could not feel at the death of Lord Coke, she showed all the decorum which good taste inspired; and, the period of her mourning elapsed, her beauty, her wealth, her romantic history, and her extraordinary disposition, soon ren-

dered her a figure in society which it was impossible to ignore. Her warmth of heart enchained her friends, her excitable temper bred imaginary enemies; her extravagances amused both. Her world was a world of fantasy; while she took herself with a seriousness at which that world smiled.

After her mother's death she had a house in Notting Hill, or, as it was called in those days, Nutting Hill, which had a large garden adjoining Lord Holland's park. The view was beautiful, though the position was somewhat solitary, being then two and a half miles from London. There she led a more or less rural life, diversified by visits to town and Court, of which she has left a most curious account in her lengthy journals, written for the benefit of her sister Lady Strafford, to whom they were sent at intervals. And these journals, though full of current gossip, are never malicious. They prove that Lady Mary was kindly of heart, thoughtful to her dependents, liberal to the poor, and that her conduct was above reproach. She appreciated a quiet life, and spent her time between gardening, to which she was passionately attached, and reading many serious books, on which she comments. She was a great advocate for fresh air, and sat out of doors daily, even in the winter. She kept gold-fish, and, when dull, fished for them and had them fried for dinner. She kept cows and poultry, and relates everything connected with them—once, how “Miss Pelham,” her solitary cow, went off “on a frisk” by herself, and got nearly to London before she was discovered in a large field with some other cows whom she had joined for company. On Sunday Lady Mary drove to the

country church of Kensington, and listened critically to the discourse of the "Clergy Man," who usually failed to please her. Occasionally, when the roads were bad, she was forced to drive round by the "Brumton Lanes," and once she relates how, in the Hammersmith Road, the water was so deep that it came into her carriage. Sometimes she took a house in town and indulged in a brief spell of frivolity. At all times she loved her game of Loo, and played constantly with her great friend, Princess Amelia, daughter of George II.

As might be expected, with her temperament and her beauty Lady Mary did not escape romantic episodes in her widowhood. Horace Walpole was her avowed admirer; he wrote verses to her, he loved her, he laughed at her. The Duke of York, brother of George III, her junior by fourteen years, indited compromising letters to her, and, it was hinted, fled from the result. She had, it is said, a mania for royal personages, and for being loved and persecuted by them. "Tho' a great lady," wrote Horace Walpole of her, "she has a rage for great personages and for being one of them herself." And in view of this idiosyncrasy on her part, it is difficult to arrive at a just estimate of the Duke's attitude towards her; many believed that a marriage between her and the Duke had taken place;<sup>1</sup> others derided the suggestion. The Royal Marriage Act, however, had not then been passed, and if, as Lady Mary and many of her friends stated, the marriage cere-

<sup>1</sup> Lady Mary — "as there is every reason to believe, was married to the Duke of York" (*George Selwyn and his Contemporaries*, J. H. Jesse, Vol. I, p. 326).

mony had been performed, she was the Duke's legal wife. Yet the King used to smile when her name was mentioned, and the Princesses inquire facetiously after "our sister Mary"; while the element of comedy was increased by the fact that the Duke of York, on account of his fairness, was known as "the White Prince," in curious similarity to Lady Mary's nickname of "the White Cat." One thing only is certain with regard to this affair, that whatever the humorous aspect which the situation might assume in the eyes of the world, to Lady Mary herself it presented no laughing matter; her affections were involved, and she was genuinely, pathetically unhappy.

Thus it was that in 1767, the year when Mr. Wenman Coke visited Norfolk, Lady Mary was fretting out her life in her solitary house in Notting Hill. That year arrived news of the death of the Duke of York, at the age of twenty-eight, from fever at Monaco, and Lady Mary, despite the maturity of her forty-one years, gave herself up to grief. Visions of her vanished greatness no doubt mingled with her blighted love; morbid and imaginative she dwelt upon her loss, and bitterly resented the attitude of those who, very naturally, did not view it from her own standpoint. There is something intensely dreary in her self-confession of long, lonely days spent sitting out in her garden, even till night fell, upon a bitter evening, haunted perpetually by an imaginary tolling of bells and booming of the cannon which would ultimately greet the arrival of the Duke's body in England. When at last the funeral had taken place she descended into the vault, and for long knelt weeping beside the coffin of

the man who, perhaps, had used her but ill—a ceremony which she repeated whenever a royal funeral gave her opportunity. Obligated to reappear at Court—perforce in colours and bereft of all hope of that position to which she had aspired—she experienced acute anguish; but in society where she could indulge her inclinations, she wore a near approach to widow's weeds.

Thus she lived her life at Notting Hill, diversified occasionally by a journey abroad and a visit to her great friend, the Empress Maria Theresa. Many were the stories of her eccentricities, her fantasies, her adventures which entertained both London and Vienna; she remained, as Horace Walpole said, "Famous for scolding the Living and crying over the Dead." But Walpole, while he mocked, confessed himself susceptible to her charm. "My Heart," he said, "is faithful to Lady Mary." On one occasion, when she was in Paris, he professed himself afraid of going there. "The air of Paris works such miracles, that it is not safe to trust oneself there"; but near Amiens he encountered her. "Half a mile thence I met a coach-and-four with an equipage of French and two *souvants*, and a lady in pea-green and silver, and a smart hat with feathers. . . . My Heart whispered it was Lady Mary Coke." Everywhere she was laughed at, loved, borne with; the victim—according to her own imagination—of persecution, foul plots, sorrows and adventures which befell no other mortal.

But possibly worse, in her own estimation, than all the evils which had yet been her portion, was in store for Lady Mary. The Dukes of Gloucester and Cumber-

land, her actual, or at one time her prospective brothers-in-law, married women less well-born than herself, both of whom were publicly acknowledged as their legal wives.<sup>1</sup> That she personally should have been publicly deserted by the Duke of York, while women, who were no more royal than herself and far lower in rank, should become the recognised wives of the two Princes, was intolerable to her. Unable to bear the torment of these *mésalliances* and the regrets thereby made poignant, Lady Mary betook herself on a prolonged tour abroad; and thus it was that, by an unforeseen chain of events, she first encountered her young cousin, Tom Coke.

<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Gloucester (brother of George III) married, in 1766, the Dowager Countess of Waldegrave, the illegitimate daughter of Sir Edward Walpole (brother of Horace Walpole) by Mary Clement, a milliner's apprentice. The marriage was not made public till June, 1772.

The King's youngest brother, the Duke of Cumberland, married, 1771, Anne, daughter of Lord Irnham (afterwards Earl of Carhampton) and widow of a Derbyshire squire, Andrew Horton, of Catton.

“There appears, indeed, to have been among the Kings, and in the Royal Family of England, an extraordinary predilection for widows. The three uncles of the Prince of Wales (George IV) acted the same part. I know that Lady Mary considered herself united to Edward, Duke of York, who died in 1767 at Monaco, by as legitimate a union as the Duchesses of Gloucester or of Cumberland were united to their respective husbands. She was, indeed, much better born than Miss Walpole or Miss Lutterell, being daughter of John, the celebrated Duke of Argyle, and she possessed extraordinary personal beauty (Wraxall: *Memoirs of My Own Time* (1836), Vol. II, p. 126).



## CHAPTER V

## THE GRAND TOUR

1771-1774

*Ætat 17-20*

**T**WO years after the death of the Duke of York had blighted Lady Mary's life, there took place the first wedding in Mr. Wenman Coke's family. In 1769 his elder daughter, Margaret, married Sir H. Hunloke, Bt. After this, no event of any importance appears to have occurred until young Coke left Eton about the year 1771.

He had returned to Longford, and his father was meditating sending him to one of the Universities, when, to the great surprise of the entire family, one day there arrived a letter from Lady Leicester. This letter has not been preserved, but Mr. Coke always said that he could never forget its exact wording:—

“Sir,—I understand you have left Eton, & probably intend to go to one of those Schools of Vice, the Universities. If, however, you chuse to travel I will give you £500 per annum.”

Was it the thought of her own son's ill-starred life and early death which prompted this sudden interest in another youth who stood on the threshold of existence, and, perhaps, in danger from those very Schools

of Vice which had proved that son's undoing? Or was it mere vanity which dictated her wish that the man whom she was forced to recognise as her heir should be worthy of the position into which Fate had thrust him? Who shall say? On one point, however, Lady Leicester was still resolute; she would never admit Mr. Wenman Coke to be her heir, for she was determined to outlive him, and this determination alone may have influenced her to acknowledge as her successor a representative of the younger generation.

Mr. Wenman Coke left it entirely to his son's option whether he accepted or refused this offer. Possibly he sympathised more fully than he chose to admit with Lady Leicester's horror of a University career. For in those days a vicious system prevailed at the Universities. Students of noble family were exempt from any examination for their degrees; they were not allowed to enter into the competition for honours, neither was their attendance at college lectures enforced. So long, in fact, as they abstained from flagrant misdemeanours, they were free from academical control; and this last stage of their education was too often the first stage of their initiation into vice. For this system created a clique composed of youths of wealth as well as of youths of rank, who despised learning, idled their time, frequented Newmarket, and contracted debts of such magnitude that, in some instances, they were hampered by these throughout their entire after-life. In view, therefore, of the ill-fated career of the last heir to Holkham, Mr. Wenman Coke may well have trembled at the prospect of exposing his son to a similar fate; but without giving expression to any



*Lady Huntcke (Margaret Coke)  
Wife of Sir Henry Huntcke Bart*

*from a portrait in the possession of Sir Walter Huntcke Bart*



such sentiments, or attempting to influence a conclusion which he wished to be unbiassed, he told his son that if, instead of going to the University, he preferred to go the grand tour—then considered an essential part of a gentleman's education—he would add another £200 to the £500 allowance offered by Lady Leicester, the whole representing a far larger sum in those days than it does at the present time. And young Coke—with, it may have been, all his future hanging upon his decision—did not hesitate. He pronounced at once in favour of travelling, and made his acknowledgments by letter to Lady Leicester, acquainting her with his acquiescence in her wishes. Shortly afterwards he received another dispatch from her, evidently satisfied with his decision, and inviting him to pass a month at Holkham before he set out on his travels. With feelings of the greatest excitement he accepted.

A few weeks later, therefore, he bade farewell to his family, and left Longford on what he knew must be an absence of two or three years.

The first stage of his journey promised to be by no means the least interesting. It was late on a beautiful evening in July when he realised that he was approaching Holkham, and was about, for the first time, to see his future home. The outlook, however, was unprepossessing. The country through which he passed was a barren sheep-walk, bleak and ugly.<sup>1</sup> Long spaces of shingle and marsh land stretched down to the flat, treeless coast. The cottages were few, and

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Young, writing four years earlier, 1767-8, says that "all the country from Holkham to Houghton was one wild sheep-walk."

were, as he afterwards learnt, inhabited mostly by smugglers and men of evil reputation. Pasture there was none; the only places in which cultivation of the land had been attempted showed fields of thin, miserable rye.

By and by he turned in at the park gates, and for two miles drove through the plantations in which the young trees planted by Lord Leicester were beginning to make the landscape less bare. But, even here, art had obviously come to the assistance of defective nature; the plantations were formal, and the immature trees served to emphasise the artificiality of their surroundings. As the road swept up the hill, the Obelisk came into view outlined sharply against a clear evening sky; while, below, a long shining arm of the sea cut the broad space of grass land, and stretched away again to the distant salt marshes which were clearly visible. Then, in the light of a beautiful sunset, he saw the house which was one day to be his. It stood in the midst of a wide sweep of turf, the tarnished gilding on the window-sashes and columns gleaming faintly in the ruddy light; the grounds about it appeared to be still in process of formation; there were as yet no flower-beds, no gardens to soften the severity of the massive pile of buildings; bare and somewhat forbidding, it stood out in grand isolation, the lonely centre of all that bleak, lonely land.

As his coach drove up to the front door, the silence which seemed to hold the place in a spell was suddenly broken. The doors were opened, and his reception was most impressive; the servants in their state liveries were all marshalled in the hall to receive him, and he

was conducted ceremoniously to the great ante-room, afterwards named the Landscape Room.

There, in some perturbation, he awaited the arrival of his formidable aunt. Before long, the doors were flung open by two attendants, and there entered a lady, below the medium height, slight in figure and exquisitely dressed. Her small but pretty features betrayed little of the haughty nature and resolute determination of speech, manners and purpose which he had been led to expect; in fact, her whole appearance, combined with the studied richness of her dress, seemed to him to reveal feminine vanity rather than strength of mind. He was soon to be undeceived. She seated herself beside him upon the sofa in silence, and examined his features with great earnestness. No doubt in that moment she was thinking of the dead son to whose birthright the youth before her was to succeed. Next, she addressed him firmly: "Young man, you are now for the first time at Holkham, and it is probable that you will one day be master of this house; but understand, *I will live as long as I can!*" and, so saying, she raised her clenched hands and shook them in his face in token of her determination, with such vehemence that the sofa under them trembled with her agitation.

At nine o'clock a sumptuous supper was prepared, to which young Coke sat down alone, but attended in full state by a large retinue of servants.

Early the next morning, as may be imagined, he hurried out to explore the domain which held for him such a peculiar interest. The keen breath of salt wind which greeted his exit from the house must have come

in sharp contrast to the mild Derbyshire air from which he had journeyed. The house as he saw it upon that July morning was as it stands to-day, save only that to-day the building is encircled by a terrace with gates of finely wrought iron and gilding,<sup>1</sup> while on one side of the main entrance a bronze lion keeps guard, on the other a lioness;<sup>2</sup> all else is as the brain of Thomas Coke conceived it, and as it was completed by the lonely woman who for sixteen years survived him. The park land—then stretching away from the very foot of the walls—nine miles in circumference and three miles across, conveys an impression of space and of solitude impossible to describe. From the building, a wide green vista rises to the Obelisk, and thence cuts through the centre of the park for a distance further than the eye can scan. Seven different approaches lead to the house, the two principal of which, now called respectively Lady Anne's drive and the Golden Gates, stretch away again—the one to the sea and the other inland—an unbroken line of white, even road, bordered on either side by a broad sweep of turf, which, at a space wider than the roadway, is edged by magnificent trees. Along the Fakenham approach from the Golden Gates is a triumphal arch planned by Lord Burlington, whence the road, rising with the hill, approaches the Obelisk, and thence passing the Obelisk wood, branches off to the left, where it skirts the wide expanse of lawn on the south front of the house. On its right stretches the lake—when young Coke gazed upon it a glittering arm of the sea—and then, as now, frequented by wild-fowl from far northern

<sup>1</sup> Put up by the present Earl.

<sup>2</sup> By J. Boehm, the sculptor.



latitudes, who migrate there in thousands. Further, where the lake winds to its close and the park presents the impression of a lonely forest, the presence of these birds and their eerie cries seem strangely in harmony with what appears to be the vast solitude of their surroundings.

No vision can have crossed young Coke's boyish imagination of a future when the space on which he then gazed would be a richly timbered land with eleven hundred acres of fine woodland, and would be, moreover, situated in one of the most fertile counties in England. Very possibly depressed, rather than elated, at the unattractive bareness of his future possession, he returned indoors, and there made further discoveries which were not reassuring. He soon found that everything in the household was regulated with the most scrupulous exactitude; the hours for meals were kept with the most rigid punctuality; the days presented an unbroken round of ceremonious routine, and in the language of Sir Walter Scott, his great-aunt lived—

A life most dull and dignified.

The restraint of such an existence, the terrible punctiliousness with regard to details, and above all, the oppressive ceremony with which he was treated and which Lady Leicester considered his due as heir to the property, soon became very irksome to a boy fresh from school, and above all, to a high-spirited lad of simple tastes, who was devoted to a free outdoor life.

Nor was he allowed to enliven this monotony. On the third evening of his visit, while taking a walk, he met the resident chaplain, whose name was Cole, and

invited him to come in to supper. The next morning, meeting his friend again in front of the house, he was proceeding to enter into conversation, when the old divine earnestly requested that Mr. Coke would not speak to him but would walk off in the opposite direction, as the Countess had taken him severely to task for accepting the invitation on the preceding night. Moreover, when Coke came to the breakfast-table, Lady Leicester desired to know from him what had induced him to take the liberty of asking the chaplain to supper. The young man answered that he had passed three days almost in solitude, and, feeling that a clergyman was a gentleman by education and by profession, he had requested his company with a view to enjoying his conversation. "Sir," said the dame coldly, "if I had considered him fit company for you, I should have invited him myself."

Another chaplain Lady Leicester appears to have had, a Mr. Kinderly, who probably read prayers at the church in the park. Of good Norfolk family, his fortunes had become impoverished, and he had entered the Church, whereupon he had been presented by the Corporation of Norwich with the perpetual curacy of St. Helen's, near North Walsham. Lady Leicester, on hearing of this, further presented him with a chaplaincy at Holkham; and it was forthwith a common sight to see the learned ecclesiastic hastening from Norwich to Holkham, the whole of which journey, a matter of forty miles, he invariably performed on foot, *arriving at Holkham before breakfast!* In order to accomplish this, he was forced to leave his home at one or two o'clock in the morning, and his daughter on one occasion received



THE REV. JOHN KINDERLEY, M.A., MATERNAL GRANDFATHER OF  
SIR JAMES EDWARD SMITH

*From a picture by Gainsborough in the possession of Francis Pierrefont Barnard*



the severest reproof he ever gave her for altering the clock to retard his hour of setting off.<sup>1</sup>

Young Coke, however, attempted to make no more friends; but his first delinquency was soon succeeded by another, for a few mornings later he did not reach the breakfast-room till some minutes after the appointed hour. At Holkham no sound of a gong, however powerful, could penetrate to the distant sleeping-apartments, but the Countess recognised no palliation of the infringement of her rigid punctuality, and demanded in her authoritative manner—"Why was he so late?" "Madam," he replied, "to say the truth, I lost my way and wandered about the passages and rooms, till I found a servant who conducted me here." The severity of the old lady's countenance relaxed, the apology proved an appeal to her pride, and she replied more soothingly, "Indeed, it is not easy to find the way about *this* house!"

She was equally particular with regard to any of her relatives who came to visit her. While young Coke was with her, Lord and Lady De Grey came to pass part of their honeymoon at Holkham, and they were not allowed to escape a severe scolding for a similar breach of etiquette.

About the middle of his visit, Coke received a letter from his father advising him to go to Norwich during the Assizes, in order to make the acquaintance of some of the country gentlemen who were friends of the family. He, accordingly, stated his father's wishes to Lady Leicester, and asked her permission to do this.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoir and Correspondence of Sir James Edward Smith*, by his wife, Lady Smith, Vol. I, p. 6.

She received the request in silence; but the following morning she informed him that she had no objection to his going to the Assizes, provided he went in proper state and in her own carriage.

He expressed his sense of the obligation he was under to her, and orders were forthwith given by her for his proper attendance on the journey. The state equipage was got ready, and in this, drawn by six horses with postillions and outriders, and followed by a large retinue of other servants, young Coke set out to make an almost royal entry into the city. At Bawdeswell, a village half way, the coachman represented to him that it would be necessary to rest the horses for some hours, and on entering the inn there Coke found that the most costly dinner the place could provide had been prepared for him by the Countess's orders, conveyed by a messenger sent on the day before. At this meal, which was a lengthy one, he was attended in full state by the servants who accompanied him.

In about three hours the coachman announced that the horses were able to complete the journey which poor Mr. Kinderly accomplished with far less consideration.

Coke met with a kind reception from his father's friends in Norwich, and made several acquaintances which ripened into lifelong friendships, although he outlived all those who were then his contemporaries.

After the Assizes, he returned to Holkham in the same state in which he had set forth, and the old lady was most particular and minute in her inquiries respecting all that had passed. She was especially anxious to discover with whom he had danced at the

ball at the Assembly. Coke told her with Miss Pratt, "Miss Pratt! Miss Pratt!" echoed the Countess, her ideas of dignity much upset by the name of a commoner, "Who is she? and what could make you condescend to dance with her?" He explained that she was the prettiest girl in the room. "Pretty! Pretty!" contemptuously reiterated the dame. "Sir, you should have led out no one of lower rank than Miss Walpole!"

At length the time arrived when young Coke, with little regret, bade farewell to the monotonous life at Holkham and set forth on his travels, with less ceremony, but no less eager intelligence than had his great-uncle sixty-two years before.<sup>1</sup>

Some months were first spent by him studying at the University at Turin, as his great-uncle had done before him. There he found another Englishman, who, moreover, came from Norfolk, Martin ffolkes Rishton by name, and who was destined to be afterwards closely connected with many of Coke's political campaigns in that county.

Mr. Rishton's history was somewhat peculiar. His grandfather was Martin ffolkes, Esq., of Hillington Hall, near Lynn, who had been named Vice-President of the Royal Society by Newton, and who contested, but failed to win, the Presidentship on the death of the latter. Mr. ffolkes had inherited Hillington from his mother,<sup>2</sup> but having no son, the estate on his death was

<sup>1</sup> Different dates are given with regard to his departure and to the length of his tour abroad. It is, however, certain that he was abroad during the years 1771-1774, and, since he told Mr. Bacon that he first saw Holkham in the month of July, this points to his having started on his tour in the month of August, 1771.

<sup>2</sup> One of the three co-heiresses of Sir William Hovell.

destined to pass to his brother. He had, however, two daughters, co-heiresses to the rest of his property, Dorothy and Lucretia. Now Dorothy, we are told, foolishly ran away with "an indigent person" of the name of Rishton, who "used her ill." Lucretia, on the other hand, married Richard Bettenson, who, by 1773, had succeeded to a baronetcy and a large income. At her father's death, therefore, although he left his daughters £12,000 apiece, the younger, the sensible Lucretia, was made his executrix and heiress to most of his valuables. But Lucretia had no children, so after her death her husband adopted as his heir his nephew and ward, the son of the unhappy Dorothy. Thus it was that, at the beginning of the year 1771, Martin ffolkes Rishton, son of Dorothy and "the indigent person," was sent to travel on the Continent for two years by his uncle and guardian, the rich Mr. Bettenson; and no doubt young Coke in his exile hailed with delight a fellow-countryman and a man from the neighbourhood of his future home, so that the friendship thus started by chance was cemented by circumstance.

From this meeting with Mr. Rishton followed another encounter, of greater interest than Coke can then have recognised. Touring abroad in 1771 were the Burneys, who, on meeting Martin Rishton, must have hailed him as an old acquaintance. For nine years, from 1751 to 1760, Dr. Burney had been organist at St. Margaret's Church, Lynn; and in that town his daughter Fanny had been born. There, too, apart from receiving what was at that date the excellent salary of £100 a year, his duties had permitted him considerable leisure, and he had thus become music-master at most of the great



houses in the neighbourhood, visiting in this capacity the Cokes, Walpoles, Townshends, and Wodehouses, so that it is probable that Martin Rishton's present companion abroad, the future heir to Holkham, came in for no inconsiderable a share of his interest. It is not unlikely that young Coke and the agreeable pedagogue compared their experiences of Holkham and of its austere inmate; or that Dr. Burney retailed with pride to his new acquaintance how, jogging along to his pupils through the quiet Norfolk lanes, his old mare, Peggy, had moved with such a leisurely gait that he had found it possible to study an Italian book by the aid of a dictionary—and now, in this foreign tour, undertaken in order to collect material for his famous *History of Music*, he hoped to feel the benefit of such a course of study. Be that as it may, this chance encounter with the family of the afterwards celebrated writer, Fanny, had an unexpected result upon the future of one of the young men, and set an untimely limit to Martin Rishton's brief attempt to do the grand tour.

Since the days of his residence at Lynn, Dr. Burney had married again,<sup>1</sup> and now travelling abroad with him was his pretty stepdaughter, Maria Allen. The young people, Martin Rishton and Maria Allen, fell in love, and were secretly married at Ypres on May 16th, 1772. The deed had to be confessed—of which confession Fanny Burney gives a lively description in her journal—and Martin Rishton, as rash, but more fortunate than his mother had been before him, returned from his curtailed tour abroad the husband of a charming wife.

<sup>1</sup> His second wife was the daughter of Alderman Allen, of Lynn, the grandson of John Allen, Esq., of Lyng House, Norfolk.

Another Englishman who, curiously, was also a Norfolk man, appears to have visited Turin during Coke's residence there, Thomas Kerrich, who was travelling with a friend, Mr. Daniel Petteward, the owner of a very picturesque country house at Putney, called Fairfax House.<sup>1</sup> Coke made the acquaintance of these two fellow-countrymen, and, as we shall hear, often subsequently encountered Mr. Kerrich at various places during his tour, in which he was fortunate, as he could not have had a better guide to the antiquities which he wished to see. Still in existence is a playing-card,<sup>2</sup> presumably belonging to this date, on which is crudely painted the seven of hearts, while the reverse conveys—

*Mr Coke's Compts to Mr Kerrich  
 & desires the favor of his  
 company at dinner to day*

Travellers, however, were not very plentiful in those days, and, for the greater part of his stay in Turin, Coke was the only Englishman in the place, and was wholly dependent upon foreign society.

Now already at this date he was exceptionally handsome, and as a youth of great personal attraction, besides being the heir to a considerable property, he—

<sup>1</sup> It afterwards stood in the main street of Putney, and was pulled down about fifteen years ago.

<sup>2</sup> At that date informal invitations were often conveyed thus on a playing-card.

like his great-uncle before him—excited unusual interest upon the Continent, where he was soon known as “Le bel Anglais.” The King of Sardinia showed him great attention and welcomed him at Court. Upon the occasion of a Court ball, given previous to the departure of the King’s daughter, the Princess of Savoy, who was about to be married to the Comte d’Artois, his Majesty beckoned to young Coke and assigned to him the honour of dancing with her Royal Highness. Still unaccustomed to foreign life, Coke felt himself under the disagreeable necessity of pleading his ignorance of the cotillion, which was at that time the dance of the Court. The King, however, would not admit his excuses, but good-naturedly assured him that “the ladies would soon instruct him.” And instruct him they did, by twitching him energetically into his place till he found the dance as merry as any in his own country. When the Princess set forth from her father’s capital, Coke gallantly made one of her escort as far as Cambray.

He seemed destined to cross the path of royal brides, for soon another adventure befell him, through which runs the vein of an incipient but a very curious romance. In the spring of 1772, all Europe was excited by the news that a marriage had taken place between the young Pretender, Charles Edward, grandson of James II, and the Princess Louise of Stolberg, daughter of the late Gustavus Adolphus of Stolberg-Gedern, who had fallen in 1757 fighting for the House of Austria. The marriage by proxy took place in Paris, in the month of March, the greatest secrecy being observed for fear of interference on the part of Austria,

since the Princess was a special protégée of the Empress Maria Theresa, whose consent to the alliance had not been asked. As soon as possible afterwards, the actual nuptials were celebrated at Marcata, near Arcona.

Coke cannot have been present at the secret marriage in Paris, but since he used to relate that he had escorted the Princess to Rome subsequently to her wedding, he must have been present at the actual ceremony which took place soon after noon on Good Friday, April 17th, 1772, in the private chapel of the Marafoschi Palace.

Although neither the day nor the hour of the ceremony had been made public, many English who were abroad at that time flocked to witness it, and a large number of the Italian nobility were also present. Charles Edward signed the register as Charles III, King of Great Britain and Ireland; and an inscription was put up in the chapel to record his marriage under that title.

On the two days following the marriage, receptions were given at the palace to all, both English and Italians, who were within available distance. At five o'clock on Easter Sunday, April 19th, the royal pair set out for Rome, accompanied by several of their late guests. They performed the journey with royal pomp, and were greeted by an immense concourse of people on their arrival.

Many festivities were forthwith given in their honour. By their own Court they were treated as King and Queen, but by the Pope and Roman society they were formally accorded the rank of Prince and Princess of Wales. The Princess at this time was twenty years of age,<sup>1</sup> and exceedingly pretty. Bonstetten states that

<sup>1</sup> She was born in 1753.

she had the complexion of an English girl, a dazzlingly fair skin, dark blue eyes, a slightly retroussé nose, and a piquant, fascinating manner. Great as were her personal attractions, however, her mental capacity was greater, and had been carefully fostered in the convent where she had been placed as canoness since the age of six. It is not surprising that Charles Edward, fifty-two years of age, and already degraded in mind and person by a life of excess, did not appeal to the imagination of the high-spirited, gifted girl so strongly as did the handsome young Englishman whose mental and physical charms were in harmony with her own.

At a grand fancy-dress ball at Rome young Coke danced with the Pretender's Queen, and although a staunch Whig in principles, he was too gallant to refuse the white cockade with which she presented him. In token of the impression which his appearance had made upon her, she afterwards gave him a life-sized portrait of himself which was painted by Battoni at her command.

This picture, which is a very striking and beautiful one, is now at Longford. Coke is represented as tall, and of magnificent proportions. The pose of the figure is natural and singularly graceful. His face, which perhaps conveys the impression of a man rather older than he was at this date, is a long oval, and bears a marked resemblance to that of his father, Mr. Wenman Coke; his hair is fair and turned back from a forehead which is high and intellectual; the eyes are remarkably fine and full of expression; the nose is straight and well formed; the mouth possibly less firm and determined than it is depicted in later life, and with lips which are full and mobile. He is wearing the

masquerading dress in which he danced with the Queen, a coat and breeches of pearl-grey satin embroidered in rose colour; over the left shoulder hangs a cloak of rose colour lined with ermine; in his right hand is a Cavalier hat with rose and grey plumes. In the background is a vista of Italian scenery and some classical colonnades, while immediately behind him, and extending across the picture, is a statue of a love-lorn Ariadne.

This statue, at one time supposed to represent Cleopatra, is an antique in the Vatican at Rome. "The reclining Ariadne, then called the Cleopatra," wrote George Eliot with regard to it, "lies in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the draping folding her around with a petal-like ease and tenderness."<sup>1</sup> It was well known that the Princess considered this statue to bear a striking resemblance to herself, and certainly a fanciful likeness may be traced between the face of the Ariadne, as portrayed in the picture, and the face of Louise of Stolberg at the time of her marriage, as represented in a print still extant at the British Museum. Thus it is not improbable that the Princess may have impersonated the subject of the statue at the ball where she danced with young Coke; but the fact of so suggestive a figure being introduced into the picture with marked prominence, by her express command, gave rise to much comment, and, we may imagine, to no little amusement among those who read a subtle meaning into its presence there. Horace Walpole, later, speaking of the "young Mr. Coke," remarked how "the Pretender's Queen has

<sup>1</sup> *Middlemarch*, Vol I, p. 340.



*Anton Mengs*

*Thomas William Coke in fancy dress*

*Painted and presented to him by command of King George III  
of Great Britain the Young Pretender*





permitted him to have her picture,"<sup>1</sup> and there is no doubt that this figure in Battoni's picture was the origin of Walpole's gossip, since the belief was universally accepted that the statue, as represented in the picture, was an actual likeness of the Princess.

There is no evidence that Louise, although she visited England in 1791, ever again met the object of her early romance, but many years afterwards, when Coke's eldest daughter, Lady Andover, was staying in Florence, the Princess, better known as the Countess d'Albani, paid a visit to her, and recurred with much feeling to the recollection she still retained of the young and handsome Mr. Coke.<sup>2</sup>

Young Coke lingered in Rome, entering into all the gaieties and amusements of continental society, and no doubt appreciating the distinction conferred upon him by the avowed admiration of the Pretender's Queen. One of the most interesting events of his visit, however, was his presentation to the Pope, Clement XIV (Ganganelli)<sup>3</sup>, a venerable prelate whose striking face, upright figure and strong personality were familiar to all the dwellers in Rome at that date, where he ruled as the most absolute and the most autocratic potentate in Christendom, and whence he stirred Italy to its depths, in 1773, by "extirpating and abolishing" the

<sup>1</sup> In a letter, August 18th, 1774, to H. S. Conway.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Ronald Gower used to relate that when staying at Aix-les-Bains, he pointed out to Her Majesty, the late Queen Victoria, that a man was actually living whose father had had tender passages with the Pretender's Queen. Her Majesty, he says, would not credit it, until he had explained the circumstances fully.

<sup>3</sup> Clement XIV, born 1705, elected Pope in succession to Clement XIII in 1769, died September 22nd, 1774.

Jesuits, the greatest "concession ever made by a Pope to the spirit of his age."<sup>1</sup> Kerrich, Coke's acquaintance from Turin, who shared the honour of a presentation, records how—

"Ye Pope seems to be an exceedingly good sort of man & particularly civil to ye English; he asked us if we had got good lodgings, & hoped we should meet with no affronts in his territories; if we should, he beg'd we should immediately make our complaint to him, & sometimes adds, (by way of compliment, I suppose)—that he does not expect we shall have much occasion for his assistance, as the English are no Geese & can usually speak for themselves!"

Often afterwards, Coke's thoughts must have reverted to that interview with the wonderful old prelate, whose simple courtesy charmed him, and whose tragic fate he then so little anticipated. The history of that murder—for such there is little doubt it was—may be told here, although it belongs to a later date, and only reached the knowledge of Coke after his return to England. Possibly the most brief, but one of the most interesting acquaintances which Coke made in the course of a long life, Clement XIV has descended to posterity as one "of the best and most calumniated of all the Popes,"<sup>2</sup> a man of ability, of gentleness, and of strength; but of his exceptional power of work, and of certain more intimate details of his life and character, all that is known is preserved in the letter in which Kerrich wrote to announce his death.

"October 1774

"You know, I suppose, by ye papers that we have lost poor Clement 14th, I say 'we' for I believe ye

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica.*

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*

English are ye people ye most sorry for his death. I believe I told you in a former letter how much attention and civility he shew'd to all ye people of our country, & indeed it was so much at some times as to make his own subjects grumble. One of ye last actions of his reign was ye making an Englishman master of his Galleys, a place which I am told will bring him in near 2 thousand a year; it is ye nephew of an English picture merchant he had a great regard for.

“No body seems to doubt but he was poisoned, & it is certain he himself had for many months suspected it would be attempted, & every day took Antidotes, which, too, he had from England, and often 2 or 3 times ye Quantity prescribed him; & would suffer no body to dress his meat but an old Franciscan brother who used to wait upon him when he was a poor man & liv'd in his Convent.

“The Pope lived in his Convent till rather an old man, his name Lorenzo Ganganelli, son of an Apothecary in ye Country. They tell us that one day when he was standing by to see a Procession of ye then Pope Clement 13, he was rather roughly handled by one of ye Swiss Guard, who rudely pushed him aside with his Halbard, and some body said to ye Man, you don't know now, but ye poor Friar you use thus may one day be Pope, which they say struck him so much that it always ran in his head that it was a kind of Prophecy.

“However, he remain'd unknown in his Convent many years after, till it happened that ye Pope and Cardinals, who I believe are rather an indolent sett of men, got into some puzzle about their accompts & found it would be rather a troublesome piece of work to set them right, so one of them said, ‘I know an old Franciscan Father, Ganganelli, a clear-headed, hard-working old fellow, let's set him about them.’ He was accordingly sent for, applied to ye matter in good earnest, and settled their affairs so much to their satisfaction, that ye Pope kept him always afterwards near his Palace, & found him of great service to him

as he grew old, and less & less fit for business his self; & at length made him a Cardinal, but he was still so poor & had so little preferment that he had to live retired, & was not able even to keep a coach, but was forced always to beg a place with one of ye other Cardinals in his, at all Public Ceremonies.

“At ye death of ye Pope they were a long time in agreeing which of them should succeed him, they were divided very much, & one Party would not give up their Friend, nor another their’s,<sup>1</sup> they were tired of ye Contest, & at last cast their eyes on Cardinal Ganganelli, who was nobody’s friend, they look’d on him too as a mere Accomptant, & as his life had been spent in a Convent, thought it not likely he could know much of ye world, so they could rule him & manage affairs as they pleased if he were Pope,— & let it be how it would, he could not, they thought, plague them long, as he was old, & appeared infirm, & I believe, walked with a stick.

“So they agreed that he should be Pope;<sup>2</sup> and behold, he began to walk more upright, and quickly convinced them by his management he was by no means unacquainted with ye world, & so far were they from ruling him, that not a Cardinal of them, they say, during his whole reign, knew any more of what was going forwards in affairs of State than you or I did<sup>3</sup>—he look’d into everything his self, grew very active, & was one of ye most hearty grey-headed old men I ever saw. He used to go every evening to a house he had a mile from Rome to play at Bil<sup>d</sup>eads, which he was very fond of, & I used to see him frequently in ye Summer walking home again as briskly as a much younger man, before his coach, his guard following him on horseback, his Gentlemen attending with their Hats off, etc. ; for he was very exact in keeping up to ye dignity of his

<sup>1</sup> The Conclave lasted three months and three days, and became tumultuous.

<sup>2</sup> He was proclaimed Pontiff on May 19th, 1769.

<sup>3</sup> When his Cardinals murmured at his want of confidence, his reply was—“I sleep sound when my secret is my own.”

character when he appear'd in publick. In his living he was frugal, ordered his dinner every day at about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a crown, which he said he knew would buy as much as he could eat, & he did not like to see more upon ye table.<sup>1</sup> All his expences seems to have been in Pictures and Statues & in taking care of those already in his Palaces—so he grew very rich, though he was every day diminishing his revenue by taking off taxes laid by his Predecessors on ye People ; but has not employed his money as is generally ye case in raising & enriching his family ; he has left them enough to live comfortably, but ye whole Bulk of his Fortune goes to ye Publick, without having reserved even enough to raise him a monument.

“He seems not to have cared whether he were remembered or not. When he was dying, or, at least, past recovery, they begg'd him to consider ye 13 or 14 Gentlemen he intended to make Cardinals who might not perhaps have that honour conferr'd upon them by a succeeding Pope, & besides as he had made but few, he should do so to perpetuate his memory. He answer'd he had enough to do now to run over in his Mind ye actions of his past Reign, & consider how he was to answer for them, without increasing them by making Cardinals. . . .

“We have had a good deal of Ceremony at his funeral, but not all that is usual, for his body putrified almost immediately, and they could not keep it long enough.<sup>2</sup>

“The Cardinals go into Conclave to-day, where they must stay till they can agree on a New Pope ; there are between 50 & 60 of them, each has 3 little

<sup>1</sup> When the head cook of the Vatican came to beg that he might continue in the office of chef, Clement XIV replied—“You shall not lose your appointment, but I will not lose my health to keep your hand in” (*Interesting Letters of Pope Clement XIV*, Vol. I (1777)).

<sup>2</sup> About April, 1774, in the fullness of his health and vigour, Clement XIV was smitten with a mysterious and lingering disease which could only be attributed to a subtle poison ; and the fact that his body turned black immediately after death confirmed the belief that he had thus fallen a victim to the resentment of the Jesuits.

rooms, built on purpose in ye Great apartments of ye Vatican, & they are built this time in Rooms where are pictures, which I am sorry for, as I fear ye dust and dirt of building will do them no good,—for poor Ganganelli had fill'd ye useless empty rooms of ye Palace where they used to be made, with corn, which was to be sold to ye People at ye usual price in case of any scarcity.

“I am afraid you will be tired of this letter, which I perceive I have fill'd with histories of Clement ye 14th ; but he talked familiarly with us, laid his hands upon our heads and bless'd us, & in short was my Pope, & I can't help being sorry for him & full of ye Story of his Death.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Original correspondence of the families of Rogerson, Postlethwayte, Gooch and Kerrich, 1633-1828, in the possession of Albert Hartshorne.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE GRAND TOUR CONTINUED

1773-1774

*Ætat.* 19-20

**I**N Rome Coke met several of his friends from England; and when finally he journeyed on to Naples they appear to have accompanied him, amongst others being his old playmate, Francis Rawdon. They were fortunate while in Naples in being the eye-witnesses of a famous eruption of Mount Vesuvius, said at the time to be one of the greatest eruptions which had ever taken place.<sup>1</sup> The following morning Coke ascended the mountain with his two friends, and a picture of this feat was painted for him by a man of the name of Heygate, and was hung in the chapel wing at Holkham. Coke is represented near the summit of the cone in company with Lord Rawdon; Lord Mountmorres, with a group of spectators, is placed near the base in the foreground. The mountain is still in a state of eruption.

<sup>1</sup> One account states that it was Mount Etna, not Vesuvius. I have been unable to trace that any remarkable eruption is recorded as having taken place about this date from either mountain, save that Fanny Burney, writing in 1772, mentions how "Sir William Hamilton, a very curious man . . . spoke with great pleasure of the *fine eruptions* he had seen, and told us that Mount Etna was now *playing the devil*" (*The Early Diary of Frances Burney*, Vol. I, p. 172).

A peculiar interest is attached to this picture by the presence of Francis Rawdon. He had already devoted himself to the service of his country, and the year following was appointed to a lieutenancy in the 5th Foot, and embarked for America. Three years later he was one of the heroes of Bunker's Hill, where he had two bullet wounds through his cap while fighting in the trenches. He told Coke afterwards how in that, the first battle he was in, he experienced at the commencement a feeling of great terror. Suddenly a soldier by his side was shot dead. He looked at the man lying quiet and senseless at his feet, and exclaimed, "Is death nothing but this?" From that moment he never knew what fear meant.

From Naples Coke went to Herculaneum, where the first excavations and discoveries were then being made. The love of art must have been inherent in him, for his previous education and pursuits had certainly not been calculated to develop it; yet he profited by his surroundings to secure some unique treasures, which, but for his ancestry, it would have been very remarkable that a youth of his age should have had the discrimination to appreciate. Unlike Thomas Coke, however, he had not a large fortune at his disposal; his life in Rome and the recent purchase of his expensive fancy dress had been a great drain on his limited finances, therefore it says much for his prudence and economy that he was able to spare enough from his travelling allowance to buy such invaluable treasures.

One was the bas-relief by Michelangelo, which now adorns the Egyptian Hall at Holkham, and which the best judges have pronounced to be among the finest



works of the master ; another, an antique mosaic, now placed in the library there, which is considered to be one of the most perfect specimens in the world.

A further purchase was a magnificent antique of Minerva. It was very large and set transparent, there being four layers of sardonyx. Chantrey and Westmacott afterwards agreed that it was the finest antique they had ever seen. It was subsequently protected by a gold back and glass, and was often worn by his youngest daughter<sup>1</sup> as a jewel.

Yet another treasure which he acquired was possibly still more curious. He was present when the tomb of Nonius the Senator was opened, and in it was found the famous red opal ring of which Pliny makes special mention. It is said that Antony wanted this ring for Cleopatra, and that Nonius was banished because he refused to give it up. An old account says: "He hugged himself in his banishment and refused to part with his ring." Coke secured it immediately it was taken out of the tomb and before any one else had seen it. He always refused to say what he had given for it, but it was then valued at a sum equivalent to £20,000 of our present money.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, it was afterwards given, with other of her mother's jewellery, to his youngest daughter, when she was too young to realise its value as an antique. She ordered it to be reset with diamonds, in order to wear it as a pendant, and the original setting was lost by the jeweller, who thought it worthless.

<sup>1</sup> Eliza Coke, afterwards Lady Elizabeth Spencer Stanhope.

<sup>2</sup> It is now an heirloom in the family of Sir Walter Spencer Stanhope, K.C.B., of Cannon Hall, Yorkshire.

Thus far the date of young Coke's return to England remained undecided, and was to be dependent upon events in the political world. At that period there seems to have been a universal desire on the part of statesmen to get their sons into Parliament at an early age. Charles James Fox was elected before the age which the law allows,<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Warrman Coke was anxious that at the next General Election his son should stand for the representation of Norfolk. That this had already been determined upon is shown by a letter from Mr. Kerrich, who, writing on October 30th, 1773, to his sister at Burnham, Norfolk, remarks :—

“I hope ye rioting people about ye corn in your part of the world, did you no mischief. I heard of them accidentally by means of young Mr. Coke who I fancy knew it by a letter from Holkham, and told it me as a Norfolk man; by ye bye I should think if Sir Hugh<sup>2</sup> has no other connections which prevent it, he might as well vote for him at ye next election, but perhaps he intends it, I forget which way he voted last time. I have promised him mine, and really think Sir Hugh cannot employ his better.”

While still, therefore, awaiting a summons home, in the autumn of 1773, Coke went to Florence. There also, in November, arrived his eccentric relation Lady Mary, better known now amongst her acquaintances as “Queen Mary.” Driven from home by the *mésalliances* of the Royal Dukes, she had first betaken herself to Vienna, where she had many friends, and where she had hoped, in the light of royal favour and foreign society, to have found balm for her outraged

<sup>1</sup> He sat for Midhurst when only nineteen (1768).

<sup>2</sup> “Sir Hugh” was the *nom de plume* of Mr. Kerrich's brother-in-law

feelings. But still her ill-fortune—or so she deemed it—pursued her. A short time previously Maria Theresa had treated the wife of the Duke of Cumberland with a distinction which was peculiarly offensive to Lady Mary. Lady Mary had expressed her opinion freely thereupon in her letters from England to her friends in Vienna, and on arriving there once more she fancied the Empress estranged and that Viennese society looked coldly upon her. She drew her own conclusion. “No doubt but her Majesty saw all the letters I wrote to Vienna from England, and, as I did not write them for her, I presumed to express my surprise at some of the things she had done.” Forthwith the belief took possession of Lady Mary that every *contretemps* which befell her, in every part of the world, was the direct result of the enmity of the Empress, or of Marie Antoinette at the instigation of her mother. It was no use, Horace Walpole complained, attempting “to convince her that the Empress did not know and the Queen did not care.” It suited Lady Mary to believe that she was the object of plots and of persecution planned by the crowned heads of Europe. Imagining herself flouted at Vienna, she betook herself to Florence. Horace Walpole thereupon wrote to Sir Horace Mann, the British Minister in Florence, to enlist his services for Lady Mary.

“Bating every English person’s madness,” he explained—“for every English person must have their madness—Lady Mary has a thousand virtues and good qualities. She is noble, generous, high-spirited, undauntable, and most friendly, sincere, affectionate, and above every mean action. She loves attention and I wish you to pay it—even for my sake—for I

would do anything to serve her. I have often tried to laugh her out of her weakness, but as she is very serious, she is so in that, and if all the Sovereigns in Europe were to slight her, she would put her trust in the next generation of Princes. Her heart is excellent, and deserves and would become a Crown—and that is the best of all excuses for desiring one.”

But Lady Mary was not at all gracious to Sir Horace Mann, and Walpole had to write again to console the dejected Minister and to urge him to persevere in civility to the lady, in spite of disheartening rebuffs. Meanwhile, Lady Mary had discovered that her young cousin, Mr. Coke, was in Florence, and desired to see him. Unfortunately, no record of that interview has survived; possibly Lady Mary received him in her costume of pea-green and silver, and surprised him by blood-curdling tales of the assassinations and dangers she had so narrowly escaped. One thing we may conclude, she was extremely curious to see the youth who was to succeed to all of which her husband had once been heir; and there is no trace of jealousy in the entry in which she mentions how he made a favourable impression on her. In her Journal of November 30th, 1773, in Florence, she writes:—

“I am much better pleased with the town and country about it than [*sic*] I am with any other part of Italy I have seen. There are a great many English gentlemen here, among others, Mr. Coke. It seems Lady Leicester desired he might be sent abroad and gives him £500 a year. He is a very pretty man and a good deal more fashioned than his sister Lady Hunluck; as he is to have a very great estate, I am glad he is so worthy of it.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lady Mary Coke's Journal, privately printed. Ed. by the Hon. James Home.

Shortly after this, Lady Mary had an open rupture with Horace Walpole. She had made up her mind to return to England, when Lady Barrymore enticed away her favourite valet and factotum, an incident in which Lady Mary at once recognised the work of the Empress Maria Theresa, who, by leaving her unprotected, hoped to murder her upon her journey home. She flew, therefore, at five o'clock in the morning, to Horace Walpole, whom she looked upon as her *cavaliere servente*, and implored his protection, when Horace Walpole committed the egregious crime of laughing at her fancied danger. This Lady Mary never forgave. Although long afterwards she condescended to play cards with him and admitted him to a more distant friendship, she hated him from that day forward and pronounced him "*as false as ever he could be,*" while she remarks in her Journal with supreme seriousness:—

"I have not the same pleasure in meeting him as I used to have, since I knew him to be so False to me. Thank God *I* cou'd not be so to anybody!"

But despite the misfortunes of the persecuted Lady Mary, young Coke found the life in Florence almost as attractive as the life in Rome. Many English were staying there at that time, the society was extremely pleasant, and a great number of balls and masquerades took place, especially during the Carnival festivities in the spring of 1774. Although his own account of his life there is lost, we gather an outline of it from the letters of his travelling friend, Mr. Kerrich, who still journeyed in his track.

“Florence,” pronounced Mr. Kerrich, writing on January 31st, 1774, “is one of the most agreeable places I ever was in, though, to be sure it is not always so gay as at present, in the height of ye Carnival, indeed it is so much, it would begin to grow tiresome if it continued much longer, there are so many diversions & amusements, people all wish to split themselves & scarce know which to go to first.

“There are always a great many English here, who live very sociably and agreeably together, without being much plagued with formality & ceremony, one reason there are so many of them may probably be our having so worthy a man for Minister here as Sir Horace Mann, who seems to be one of ye most benevolent, friendly men I have ever met with.—But I perceive I have not told you what ye amusements consist of, though I have said a great deal of ye number of them. First, ye morning is generally taken up with ye Gallery, which is open gratis, & one may stay there 5 or 6 hours together if one likes it. In ye evening there are I don’t know how many Theatres open, & at one of them there is a Ball in a Room behind, into ye bargain, ye whole for the great price of what they call a Paul, which is not quite sixpence. And there are 3 or 4 others during ye week; ye reason there is so much dancing, I suppose, is because ye people of ye Court are fond of it; ye Great Duke his self often makes one, but in a mask, which as it must be mix’d Company (Everybody being admitted who is mask’d or even that has a Mask or a wax nose stuck in his hat)—I suppose is thought necessary.

“There is besides a more polite assembly, to which none but ye Nobility of ye place & foreigners introduced by their Minister are admitted, the people there unmask, as does ye Great Duke, when he comes. He is a young man, rather slender & seems very lively. . . .”

And to that “polite assembly,” to meet the “Great Duke,” went the irate “Queen Mary,” her cynical

lover Horace Walpole, the depressed Sir Horace Mann, and young Coke, eager for every amusement which the place afforded. But after the Carnival festivities many of the English left Florence, and Coke himself appears to have taken his departure with the intention of embarking for home. However, as Kerrich relates: "Finding ye weather stormy and himself not very well, he changed his plan, and determined to take ye way by land through France, and came by Genoa in his return to Turin, and call'd upon us, so we ran about to see Milan together, though as his disorder turned out an ague he could not accompany us in all our expeditions."

And Kerrich proceeds to relate one of these, which—

"was so very agreeable & had something so new in it that I think it worth giving some account of. It was to the Borromean Islands—they are two very small ones in what they call ye greater Lake, which is about 30 Miles from Milan, & runs up a good way among ye Alps, ye voyage to ye Islands is a short one of 16 or 18 miles, ye country grows higher & more rocky on both sides as you get nearer them; they are very near each other, & belong to two noblemen of ye same family, from which they take their name of Borromean; they seem to have spared no expense to make them elegant, one of them has quite a small theatre where he can amuse himself & his friends during two or three of ye Hottest months of ye summer, which is ye time these gentlemen usually retire to their seats, with plays; the Houses seem calculated to be as cool as possible so that what with ye water & ye cool breezes from ye mountains that surround them, which have always some snow on them, they must at that time of the year be delightful. We

were lucky in having a very fine day, & returned by moonlight to a little town at ye beginning of ye lake where we had taken up our quarters ye Night before, & had stocked our boat with Provisions for the little voyage.”<sup>1</sup>

Again Coke appears to have changed his plans, for in the spring we find him once more in Rome, and, on April 16th, going another expedition with Thomas Kerrich and eight others to Tivoli, under the direction of an English antiquary. Kerrich, when writing to his aunt, gives an account of this expedition also :—

“ I am now answering the letter sent thither to me from Florence which made it come later to my hand than it ought to have done, & my being just setting out with a party to see Tivoli, Frascati (where Cicero’s country house was), and some other places about 20 miles from Rome, prevented my answering it immediately ; I know an account of this expedition, as it proved an agreeable one, will not be tedious. I will begin, therefore, & tell you ; there were about ten of us, who had at least spent many agreeable hours together at Turin last year, & ye English Antiquarian who went to instruct us. The first place we went to, Tivoli, was formerly very flourishing, & famous for ye country seats of Mæcenas, ye patron of Horace and Adrian [*sic*], one of ye most learned & most accomplished of ye Roman Emperors. After having visited most parts of his very extensive Empire and collected various curiosities in his travels, he chose this spot, which is one of ye most delightful I have yet beheld, to spend the remainder of his life in. His Palace was very extensive, on ye whole, they say, taking altogether, near nine miles in circuit ; it had apartments fitted up in ye various

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Kerrich to his maternal aunt Elizabeth Postlethwayt at Burnham, Norfolk. From the MS. collection of Albert Hartshorne, Esq.



tastes of many of ye countreys he had passed through. Very little of all this magnificence now remains, except part of a temple in ye Egyptian taste, & two theatres, one of which they say is ye most perfect now remaining. I wished my sister had been with us to hear ye long account they gave of ye different parts of it, I believe some of our party had quite enough of it; however we went to our lodgings & eat very heartily of ye cold provisions we brought with us; ye place itself (at least in Lent) would afford nothing but Eggs and Pigeons, so we gave commission to a Swiss Servant to provide for us, who took care we should have enough;—6 fowls, 2 Hams, 4 Tongues, a Turkey Pie, & I forget how much wine, were sent off before us on a Mule—observe it was a scheme of 3 days, so we did not find so much too much as you might imagine.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Saloon at Holkham are two fine antique mosaic tables which came from Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli, and which must often have served to remind Coke of his visit there. Shortly after that expedition, he appears to have left Italy on his return by land to England. Kerrich, who in a letter the following July remarks that he, personally, does not expect to return “soon enough for ye election,” adds—“Mr. Coke told me ye last time I saw him, his letters from England seem’d to say there was not any prospect of an Opposition.” Since, therefore, little necessity was anticipated for previous canvassing, and since—so long as there was no immediate prospect of a dissolution—it was not necessary for Coke to hasten homewards, he decided to visit Vienna *en route*, and there appears to have made a long stay.

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Thomas Kerrich to his aunt Elizabeth Postlethwayt at Burnham; dated Rome, April 16th, 1774.

Immediately upon his arrival he was presented to the famous Prime Minister, Prince Reitberg Kaunitz,<sup>1</sup> who was reputed to be the wisest statesman in Europe, and who was the leader of all Viennese society, being by many considered a more important person than the Emperor himself. The Prince, having already been acquainted for many years with Lady Mary Coke, was exceedingly gracious to her young cousin, and made a point of introducing him to the principal officers of State and to all the *élite* of Viennese society. The morning after this general introduction, a very gorgeous footman waited upon young Coke with the mystic greeting—"Les gens de Prince Kaunitz souhaitent Monsieur un heureux arrivé à Vienne!" Coke was informed that this amiable welcome was delivered in expectation of a handsome remuneration of ducats, and, upon receiving this, the resplendent footman departed in a state of satisfaction,—to be followed in rapid succession by the footmen of all the Ministers and all the nobles to whom Coke had been introduced, and who, in return for a repetition of the same formula, awaited a repetition of the same substantial acknowledgment of their civility. In this manner £20 to £30 was soon expended, so that Coke discovered that acquaintance with the *élite* of Vienna was an exceedingly expensive privilege; which discovery was augmented when he began to go out in society and found that, at many of the great houses, shops were opened where visitors were expected to purchase articles in

<sup>1</sup> Prince von Kaunitz (1711-94). In 1753 he was appointed Chancellor, and for almost forty years had the principal direction of Austrian politics.

return for the hospitality which had been shown them, or they were invited to put heavy sums in lottery tickets—an invitation which it was impossible to refuse.

Prince Kaunitz, however, showed him great attention, and it soon became understood that wherever the Prince was invited, there also went Mr. Coke. As the intimacy grew, Coke became a constant guest of the Prince, not only at the public entertainments which the Minister gave on a scale of great magnificence, but in his more private life, and also at his famous country seat at Austerlitz in Moravia, which was the scene of the battle of the three Emperors in 1805. Coke thus mixed familiarly with all the people of note, from Maria Theresa downwards, and often saw the Emperor, who had a covered way built from the ramparts, so that he could reach the town house of Kaunitz unobserved. Daily, both in town and in country, the Prince had covers laid for about twenty guests whom he had invited two days in advance, by means of his courier. Dinner took place at six o'clock, when, although the food provided was sumptuous, the wine was surprisingly scanty in quantity, only two bottles being allowed for about twenty guests, so that one day when an Englishman imprudently took four glasses of wine, he was looked upon as having been guilty of most extraordinary behaviour.

A lady of the name of Carey, a widowed niece of the Prince, presided over his household. She was very agreeable and a delightful conversationalist. The craze for collecting beautiful china was then at its height in Vienna, and the Prince's niece was an enthusiastic collector, having a special admiration for

china of English manufacture. Coke, on discovering this, went to great pains to procure a peculiarly beautiful service from England, which arrived safely, and with which, to her great delight, he presented her. No doubt he must often have been regaled by the vivacious Carey with anecdotes of his cousin, Lady Mary, who had preceded him, but whose imaginary ill-favour at Court did not affect his own popularity. The English at that date were in great request in Vienna, and Coke appears to have ingratiated himself considerably with the fashionable young beauties of the town. Sir Robert Keith, the English Minister there, writing the following year (January 5th, 1775) to Lady Mary Coke, remarks reminiscently: "Your Ladyship's relation, Mr. Coke, made considerable havock amongst the young Beauties during his stay, and I mistake him much if he does not support his Reputation of Conquest in England!"

From Vienna, Coke at length went to Paris, where he again encountered Lady Mary, homeward bound, and where he arrived at an exciting time. On May 10th, Louis XV had died, unregretted, and the ill-fated Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette had ascended the throne amid the acclamations of an adoring people, and amidst auguries perhaps unparalleled in their presage of a happy reign and a new era of prosperity for France. In the bright spring days all Paris was rejoicing; the one thought of the young King seemed to be how to dedicate his life to the welfare of his people, and the beautiful young Queen, appearing at the opera, driving about the sunny streets, and paying with smiles the love which everywhere greeted her,

filled the populace with an enthusiasm bordering on intoxication. Even Lady Mary, according to her nature, was generous to her fancied enemy. "I am persuaded she will be yet more adored as Queen than she was as Madame la Dauphine. She has every quality to make her so, and will put all those in use," she says magnanimously; while of the young King she has only one fear—he is too good to live; she dare not hope that his reign will be prolonged to fulfil the gracious promise of these early days; she is convinced that he will fall an early victim to that scourge of Europe, small-pox, and so blight the prospects of France. "The people are extremely fond of him, and tho' they see him every day, the crowds that always attend is prodigious and the acclamations [*sic*] of joy when they see him are the same." But, again and again, this thought recurs: "He seems in everything to have so much at heart the reforming all kinds of Abuses and to give such flattering hopes of being a blessing to his people, that I fear his reign will not be a long one."<sup>1</sup>

Young Coke, however, could not prolong his stay in the gay city where all seemed sunshine and gladness. An event had occurred which may have caused his own heart to beat with an agreeable suggestion, but which, in any case, set a limit to his wanderings. His younger sister, Elizabeth, had become engaged to his friend, James Dutton, and the wedding was fixed to take place at Longford on July 7th.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Lady Mary Coke*, edited by the Honourable James Home, privately printed.

## CHAPTER VII

## EARLY MANHOOD

1774-1776

*Ætat 20-22*

**J**AMES DUTTON, who was afterwards created Baron Sherborne, was the eldest son of Mr. Lennox Dutton—formerly Naper Dutton, of Sherborne, Gloucestershire; who, it is said, succeeded to the Sherborne property under the following circumstances.

His uncle, Sir John Dutton, was childless, and the choice of an heir lay between Sir John's two nephews, the sons of his two sisters, who were respectively Mrs. Naper, of Loughcrew, in Ireland, and Lady Reade, of Shipton Court. Young Naper and young Reade were constantly with their uncle, and the old man was still undecided to which of them to bequeath his property, when one day he called them to his bedside, and asked them to tell him what books they were then studying at school. The Naper boy at once answered that he was studying the Latin Grammar, but the Reade boy casually replied that he "didn't know, except that it was a Blue Book"—blue being the Tory colour and his uncle a rabid Whig. From that date Sir John announced that he intended to leave his property to the boy who knew what he was studying, and this he

accordingly did. Mrs. Naper's son succeeded to the Dutton property and took the name of Dutton. He had three sons—James, who married Miss Coke, William and Ralph ; and four daughters.

A friendship of many years' standing had existed between the Cokes and the Duttons, who had constantly visited each other. Before his departure abroad young Coke had been struck by the great beauty of Jane, the youngest daughter of Mr. Dutton. Whether this boy and girl attraction had amounted to a definite romance is not known, but it was said that already at that date the Dutton family had the match in view. Not so Mr. Wenman Coke. That his own pretty daughter should marry the heir to Sherborne he had no objection ; but that Mr. Dutton's pretty daughter should marry the heir to Holkham was a different matter. He cherished more ambitious views for his son, and it is probable he was far from desirous that the latter should return in time for the wedding, when it was unavoidable inviting the sisters of the bridegroom to be his guests at Longford.

Young Coke, however, timed his return to reach Longford for the event ; moreover, having left his home an immature youth, he reappeared there manly in appearance, polished in manners and transformed from the schoolboy who had started off on his travels nearly three years before. The change was calculated to impress Miss Dutton, and he, on his part, was destined to discover that his lengthy acquaintance with foreign beauties had not diminished his admiration for the object of his boyish romance.

Jane Dutton, at this time twenty years of age, was

in the height of her beauty. Fair and stately, with a graceful figure, her exquisitely modelled head was set on a full, white throat, her features were delicate, her eyes fine, and her hair, when not hidden by snowy powder, was "yellow as ripe corn."

At Sherborne there is a picture by Zoffany of Mr. and Mrs. Naper Dutton watching their two children, James and Jane, who are seated at a table playing cards. In a duplicate of this picture at Minterne<sup>1</sup> they are represented reading their Bibles; but either picture is very life-like, and the effect conveyed is that of looking into a room where living people are actually sitting.

In the Sherborne picture, James Dutton, in a suit of grey satin, is leaning back to show his cards to his mother, who, dressed in black, with fine lace upon her head, is seated beside the fire, resting a book upon her lap. Mr. Dutton, the father, is seated near his daughter Jane, who, evidently as the beauty of the family, occupies the most prominent position in the picture. Over an underskirt of white satin she is wearing a delicately tinted peach-blossom brocade. Black lace at her neck enhances the whiteness of her skin; her hair is elaborately dressed and studded with pearls; her finely cut features and the beautiful contour of her head are strikingly portrayed, and show, clear as a cameo, against the blue walls of the room beyond.

Talented as she was handsome, witty in speech and winning in manner, with a dignity caught from the great world to which she had been introduced, mellowing the freshness of the country life to which she had been bred, Jane Dutton took young Coke's heart by

<sup>1</sup> The seat of Lord Digby.





THE DUTTON FAMILY GROUP

*From a painting by Zoffany in the possession of Lord Sherborne*



storm. They met in an atmosphere of romance, with the air full of wedding-bells and summer sunshine, while between them lay the link of a past attraction; and it is small wonder that those golden days served to bring about the result which Wenman Coke had feared—the romance was cemented for all time.

“I hear that the young Mr. Coke has returned from abroad in love with the Pretender’s Queen,” wrote the arch-gossip Horace Walpole the following month;<sup>1</sup> but, though the bright eyes of Louise of Stolberg may have flattered young Coke’s vanity, it was not the remembrance of that Royal Ariadne which enchained his fancy. Yet even his present more stable romance seemed threatened with extinction. Mr. Wenman Coke looked coldly upon his son’s infatuation. The cherished days passed all too quickly; the bridegroom and his bride drove away; the Dutton family returned to Gloucestershire, and the old monotony settled down upon quiet Longford.

After his long experience of excitement and change abroad, young Coke found this isolated country existence somewhat depressing. To relieve the dullness, and perhaps to prevent brooding over his father’s opposition to his wishes, he asked permission to attend Newmarket races. His father advised him to keep away; but, finally, seeing that his son was bent upon going, and perhaps hoping that the experience might prove salutary, Wenman Coke yielded, and having bought his son a handsome horse for the price of fifty guineas, made him a further present of fifty guineas to defray the expenses of the journey.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to H. S. Conway, August 18th, 1774.

Thus equipped, young Coke set out. Arrived at Newmarket, he met several of his friends, and was introduced to a Mr. Willoughby Dixie, of Bosworth, a professed gambler and a very eccentric character; indeed, so peculiar was Mr. Dixie, and so unaccountable in his manners, that it was suspected he was not quite right in his head. He was, however, very good company, and that same evening he induced young Coke to go with him to one of those gaming-houses, appropriately designated Gambling Hells. Coke afterwards related how, when he entered the room, the players were all seated round the hazard table, and a heavy sum in gold, amounting to several hundreds, was staked upon the chance. Amongst the party was a man named Hall, a notoriously bad character, who was placing within the circle a sum perhaps equal to the entire stakes of all the players. As Dixie advanced to the table, he yelled out :

“At you all  
And Highwayman Hall !”

meaning that he would stake still higher than any sum yet deposited; and this he did, neither knowing nor caring what was the amount risked, since by a cursory glance at the table it was impossible to compute the sum lying there.

Long before the end of the evening young Coke's fifty guineas had transferred their ownership. His consternation was great; he found himself without the means of paying his bill at the inn, or of travelling home again. The only possible method of extricating himself from the difficulty appeared to be to sell his

horse ; he therefore offered it to one of his friends, who immediately agreed to give him its original cost. With the fifty guineas thus obtained he returned the second evening to the gambling table, hoping to retrieve his luck ; but he played until his purse was again emptied and he was in a worse plight than before. Absolutely bankrupt, he had no course but to borrow the sum he wanted, and to leave Newmarket the next evening in a state of great depression.

It was a humiliating position for a would-be man of the world and prospective bridegroom. When he arrived home, his father inquired how his steed had carried him. "Very well—there," replied the young man meekly. "*There?*" echoed his father. "Did he not bring you back equally well?" "He did not bring me back at all!" replied the culprit, and proceeded to make a clean breast of his adventures. His father's comment on the recital history does not relate ; but Coke concluded his confession with the remark: "I will give you my solemn word of honour, sir, that I will never go to Newmarket races again!"

"It was money well spent," he used to say in after-life. "I kept my word, and have never been near the races from that day."<sup>1</sup>

None the less, the humiliation of his only appearance on the turf always rankled, and to the end of his life, whenever he had occasion to cross over Newmarket Heath, he made a point of drawing down the blinds of his chariot ; and used to advise his son : "Tom, remember when you pass over Newmarket, don't omit to draw down the blinds ; *never look at the place!*"

<sup>1</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, July 9th, 1842.

He does not appear, however, to have borne any ill-will towards Mr. Dixie, with whom he had one or two subsequent adventures which, although they belong to a later date, may as well be related here before quitting the subject of this eccentric being.

Some years later, Coke and James Dutton went to Dishly to purchase some rams from the celebrated breeder, Mr. Bakewell, who lived in Mr. Dixie's neighbourhood. Mr. Dixie, hearing of their intention, proposed to them to pass the rest of the day with him "and take a bed at Bosworth." Accordingly, their business ended, they repaired thither. When they arrived, Dixie was out shooting in the company of his servant, "Mr. John," a species of Caleb, who served him with wonderful versatility in any capacity whatsoever; but on his return, he gave his guests the heartiest welcome and they sat down to such a dinner as "Mr. John" could scrape together at short notice—the most substantial part of it being a dish of bacon and eggs, and a brace of partridges which the said John had just had the good fortune to assist his master in killing.

The evening passed very merrily, the young men being much amused at their host and his hospitality. At length the hour for rest arrived; Mr. Dixie rose, and, snatching up a candle in each hand, announced with much ceremony and palaver that he would show Mr. Coke to his room. Coke would fain have waived the ceremony, but Dixie was not to be deterred; he led the way solemnly upstairs, and paced along a passage till he reached a large, lofty and gloomy apartment in which there was a huge state bed, centuries old, covered with gigantic plumes and ornaments of a

remote date and fashion. "There!" he said dramatically, placing the two lights upon the floor, "There is your bed. King Richard III slept in it the night before the battle of Bosworth Field, *and it has never been lain in since!*"<sup>1</sup> So saying, he vanished; leaving his unfortunate guest not a little dismayed at becoming the successor to Royalty after so long and depressing an interval.

Coke, however, was very tired, and at last, reluctantly, made up his mind to lie down in his clothes on the floor, where he slept soundly until the morning. After breakfast Dixie showed his guests the site of the battle, and on arriving at one part of the field announced with profound conviction that it was the identical spot where King Richard had stood when he exclaimed—

"A horse—a horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

Which exclamation Dixie shouted in such a stentorian voice, and accompanied by such dramatic action, that they thought it well not to dispute the information.

Some years afterwards, when Coke was staying at Godwick Hall, his house at Tittleshall, where he occasionally went during the hunting season, and which had been the original seat of Sir Edward Coke, Mr. Dixie unexpectedly made his appearance. Coke received him cordially, but told him that, not having had any previous information of his visit, the house was unfortunately full, and the best he could do for him was to provide a bed at the farm-house in the neigh-

<sup>1</sup> See Gardiner's *History of Richard III*, revised ed., 1898, p. 232, note 2; also Hutton's *Battle of Bosworth Field* (1813), p. 48, with plate of the bedstead.

bourhood. This was accordingly arranged. Amongst the guests at Godwick Hall, however, was a Mr. Valentine Knightly, who was an intimate friend of Mr. Dixie's, and whom the latter used to call familiarly V. K. Hearing what had happened, Mr. Knightly begged to be allowed to give up his room to Mr. Dixie, and to sleep at the farm in the place of the latter.

This was satisfactorily settled; but by some mischance the fresh arrangement was not made known to Mr. Dixie, and when night came he repaired to the farm. Mr. Knightly had gone to bed and was fast asleep when he was roused by Mr. Dixie's salutation of—"What! V. K. in my bed!" In vain did Mr. Knightly protest, and explain the circumstances. Mr. Dixie stripped off the clothes, took V. K. by the heels, dragged him on to the floor, and running out of the room, returned to the Hall.

Such an insult was not to be borne. Early the next morning Mr. Knightly sought out Mr. Coke, related what had passed, and added that he was about to challenge Mr. Dixie. Coke entreated him at least to postpone this intention until he saw him again, assuring him that not an hour should pass before this was the case. He thereupon left the irate Mr. Knightly and hurried to Mr. Dixie, with whom he remonstrated warmly on his conduct, confirming the statement that Mr. Knightly had relinquished his room in the house solely to oblige Mr. Dixie. He added that Mr. Dixie must apologise in the fullest and most satisfactory manner to Mr. Knightly, or else he, Mr. Coke, should feel it his duty personally to demand



satisfaction for the insult offered to himself, in the person of his friend and guest.

“Apologise to V.K.!” said Mr. Dixie placidly; “oh, I’ll apologise with all my heart!” But Coke, not feeling easy respecting the form which the proposed apology would take, felt it necessary to impress on the culprit very solemnly, that unless the *amende* was made seriously and in terms the most honourable to Mr. Knightly, he should consider it in the light of a fresh and personal affront, and should assuredly call Mr. Dixie out. Dixie, however, proved himself in earnest; he went immediately with Mr. Coke, and made his peace in a way that healed all differences, and thus, fortunately, the matter ended.

The last which we hear of Mr. Dixie is the entry in the Holkham Game Book, dated December 16th, 1797:—

“Mr. Dixie betts Mr. Coke 20 guineas that the Partridge shooting by Act of Parliament does not commence on the 1st of September 1799. If the 1st Sept. is on a Sunday, then the second is understood.”

Shortly after the episode at Newmarket, the dissolution of Parliament, so long anticipated, took place in September, 1774. The country was plunged into the excitement of a General Election, and Mr. Wenman Coke having been again invited to stand for Norfolk, young Coke found himself called upon to stand for Derby.

He consented most unwillingly. In Norfolk his father and Sir Edward Astley were returned without

opposition as Knights of the Shire,<sup>1</sup> and the result of a brisk canvass in Derbyshire had already shown that he himself must inevitably be returned at the head of the poll, when a difficulty arose. An opponent, who, curiously enough, although no relation, bore the same surname as himself, Mr. D. Parker Coke,<sup>2</sup> called upon him, and inquired whether he had yet attained his majority. Young Coke answered frankly that he was still within eight months of doing so. "Then," replied Mr. Parker Coke, "I shall oppose you; and if you are elected, you must understand that your election will be declared void." Coke, thus finding that it was useless to stand, retired from the contest, nothing loath; but being anxious that his party should not suffer, he persuaded Mr. Gisborne, much against the latter's will, to come forward. A severe contest ensued, in which young Coke took an active part; and during some serious riots he was not only badly bruised, but knocked on the head and stunned. Parker Coke, however, to his great delight, was ousted; Mr. Gisborne carried his election by a small majority and remained in Parliament for many years afterwards.

It may be mentioned here that Coke only once represented Derby in Parliament, and that only for a space of about three weeks, as we shall see, in the year 1807.

When Mr. Wenman Coke went to town for the

<sup>1</sup> County members were called Knights of the Shire, because in theory it was originally necessary that they should be Knights, the presumption being that all representatives of the Shire would be minor tenants in chief who were legally bound (by distraint) to take their knighthood. The phrase survived such requirements and conditions.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Parker Coke, afterwards M.P. for Nottingham.

reassembling of Parliament, young Coke accompanied his father, and attended Court. James Dutton and his bride were also in London at that date, and it is not surprising that, with the dual attraction of the latter being at once his sister's husband and the brother of the girl he loved, Coke should have developed a great friendship for his brother-in-law, even though James Dutton was his senior by ten years. Neither is it surprising that Wenman Coke, anxious to discourage the intimacy between his son and the lady of his choice, did not look favourably upon this growing friendship with her brother. One incident, which he must have hoped would have the effect of cooling this intimacy, occurred soon after their arrival in town.

James Dutton suggested to young Coke that, as a useful means of extending his acquaintance and of passing some pleasant evenings, he should become a member of some respectable club, and named that of the Cocoa Tree<sup>1</sup> as likely to answer his purpose. Young Coke fell in readily with the suggestion. He was nominated and elected, whereupon it was announced that a dinner would be given the following week in his honour, as a new member, at which Sir Robert Burdett was to be chairman.

Mr. Wenman Coke, hearing of the circumstance, told his son that he wished to be present at this dinner. Young Coke replied that he feared it was against the rules that any one who was not a member of the club should attend this function; but the old gentleman persisted, saying that the president was well known to him, and that, in any case, Mr. Dutton could easily

<sup>1</sup> In Mr. Keppel's notebook it is called also the "Cow and Tree."

arrange the matter. With some difficulty permission was obtained for him to be present, and he was placed next the chair.

The dinner passed off very pleasantly, but at its conclusion, when the cloth was removed, Mr. Wenman Coke rose and addressed the chairman, Sir Robert Burdett. He begged that his presence might be no restraint, and as their first toast was "THE PRINCE" (the Pretender) he would drink it in the customary manner. He then unbuttoned the knee of his breeches, knelt down upon his bare knee, and, to the astonishment of his son, drank the toast in this posture, and then quitted the room in silence.<sup>1</sup> Young Coke was dumbfounded at the revelation which his father had chosen to convey in such a curious manner, and at what he now recognised to be the dangerous consequences of his own introduction into a society of whose political significance he had been utterly ignorant.<sup>2</sup> Alas! for the remembrance of the Pretender's Queen and the white cockade, he never again entered the Cocoa Tree.

<sup>1</sup> In public, as has often been recorded, the Jacobites were forced to content themselves with responding to the toast of "the King!" by passing their wine-glasses over their finger-bowls or beyond the water-jugs (for which cause it eventually became etiquette whenever Royalty was present, for all who were not royal to dispense with the use of finger-bowls). In private, however, and whenever circumstances permitted such a frank display of loyalty, the health of the Pretender was always drunk by his followers kneeling in the manner described; and it must have been an impressive sight when a large assembly drank it thus upon their knees in solemn and reverential silence.

<sup>2</sup> This noted club was originally the Tory chocolate-house of Queen Anne's reign. It was converted into a club, probably before 1746, when the house was the head-quarters of the Jacobite party in Parliament. In De Foe's *Journey Through England*, p. 168, he remarks: "A Whig will no more go to the Cocoa Tree than a Tory will be seen at the Coffee House at St. James."

But a stronger cause, even, than a discovery of the abhorred Jacobite tendencies in his brother-in-law would have been necessary to sever the friendship of the two young men. If a divergence of opinion did exist politically between them, it must have been more than counteracted by the many tastes which they shared in common, and, more particularly, that of hunting, of which they were both passionately fond. It was probably the winter after his return to England that Coke took Beadwell Hall, Oxon, in conjunction with James Dutton, and there started a pack of his own hounds and kept his kennels. His craze for all outdoor sports had survived his boyhood; keenly alive to every delight, he lived every moment of his life with a heartwhole enjoyment which his splendid health alone made possible; but while he appreciated society and took a harmless pleasure in the popularity which his prospects and his good looks universally ensured him, he was ready to renounce every other pleasure for a day in the covert or a run with his hounds. He was a fine and a fearless rider, and soon became as noted for his seat on horseback as he was for being one of the best shots in England.

While the winter months passed, he still prolonged his sojourn with James Dutton. One cause for this was his growing estrangement from his father. The subject of his projected marriage had become a constant source of friction between them. Mr. Wenman Coke remained obstinately opposed to it; his son as obstinately determined upon it. Mr. Wenman Coke admitted Miss Dutton's attractions—that she was handsome, accomplished and amiable; but he was

resolved that his son should make a better marriage from a worldly point of view, and had long decided in his own mind upon the wife whom he wished him to wed. This was the daughter of a neighbouring baronet,<sup>1</sup> the heiress to an exceedingly large property and to an income of not less than £40,000 a year. The lady's father was equally anxious for the union, and it was believed that the lady herself would have no objection to it. Clever, sensible and otherwise attractive, she was, unfortunately, slightly deformed; and, fully alive to her lack of physical beauty, she had refused many good offers, being determined that her husband should be a simple country gentleman who would be more likely to value her for her real worth.<sup>2</sup> Everything being propitious, therefore, that his son should reject such an addition to his wealth and his estate, seemed to Mr. Wenman Coke to be flying in the face of Providence.

But the suggestion of a deformed wife in the place of the beautiful Jane Dutton, very naturally, did not appeal to young Coke, and he flatly refused to listen to his father's favourite project. Wenman Coke as firmly refused his consent to the marriage with Miss Dutton, and, in consequence, a complete severance took place between father and son, which threatened to be permanent. Events, however, conspired to bring about the fulfilment of young Coke's wishes.

The year 1775 was a momentous one in his life. On February 28th his great-aunt Margaret, Lady Leicester, died at Holkham; and, her determination to outlive

<sup>1</sup> In Mr. Bacon's MS. the name is purposely suppressed.

<sup>2</sup> She eventually married, and died at the birth of her first child.

Mr. Wenman Coke thus frustrated, the latter succeeded to the property of Holkham. On April 13th young Coke was appointed Steward, Coroner, and Bailiff of the Duchy of Lancaster in Norfolk: and on May 6th he attained his majority.

This last fact probably brought matters to a head, and his engagement with Miss Dutton appears to have been announced. "Mr. Coke's marriage with Miss Duton," [*sic*] wrote Lady Mary Coke in her Journal, Friday, June, 1775, "is said to be all agreed. I think he might have done better, but he was certainly to judge of that himself; 'tis thought the lady and her family have had this match in view some years, even before Mr. Coke went abroad."

Still Mr. Wenman Coke remained obdurate; and even Lady Mary, while admitting her cousin's right to choose for himself, did not altogether approve of that choice. On Friday, June 30th, she remarks:—

"Mr. Coke and Miss Duton are much talked of; his father is so displeased that he will not give his consent or anything else. I fear the lady is not very modest, for she took hold of Mr. Coke's hand at Court, when the Queen was very near, which was taken notice of by her Majesty."

Moreover, announced the Journal, Mrs. Dutton had told Lady Townshend that "Jenny and Mr. Coke" had discussed the future ordering of their life together in a manner which greatly shocked Lady Mary. "So much familiarity before marriage," concluded Lady Mary severely, "seems to me as if the Lady has very little delicacy. . . ."

But little recked the young lovers if the whole

world were against their romance, save only in this particular, that if a suitable allowance were not forthcoming from Mr. Wenman Coke, the marriage appeared impracticable. At length friends interposed to effect a reconciliation, arguing that, in view of the would-be-bridegroom's future wealth, to insist that he must needs marry money was surely unreasonable. Sir Harbord Harbord, who was a great friend of young Coke's, had a long correspondence with the irate father, and pleaded his friend's cause with warmth and tact. He it was principally who was instrumental in healing the breach, though Mr.—afterwards Judge—Willes, who was a friend of both families, likewise took part in the dispute and gave great assistance in bringing matters to a happy conclusion.

At length Mr. Wenman Coke made a virtue of necessity and accepted the inevitable. But one fact remains unexplained—Did his capitulation occur prior or subsequent to the marriage? One old paper makes mention of young "*Mr. Coke's wonderful ride to Shireborne,*" but of this no details have survived. Did he ride off like a true knight of romance and secure his bride in the teeth of opposition? In view of the determined characters of both father and son this seems highly probable. All we know is that the wedding took place on Friday, October 5th, 1775, at Sherborne, or, as it was then written, Shireborne; and that two things about it were unusual: first, that owing to the proximity of the parish church to the house, the ceremony was performed there by the Rev. B. J. Twining, the local rector, instead of in the house itself, as was customary at that date; and secondly, that the names inscribed as witnesses are



those of James Dutton and T. Master,<sup>1</sup> by which it would appear that none of Mr. Coke's own family were present.

Under the circumstances, the wedding was presumably a very quiet one; but seldom can a more striking couple have formed the centre of such a ceremony. Both, as we have seen, were remarkable for unusual good looks and personal charm—the bridegroom in this particular had a European reputation—while to a perfect face and figure the bride united fascination of mind and manner. Both were twenty-one years of age; both were deeply in love; and for both on that October day we may safely conclude that the world was fair with a promise of happiness such as falls to the lot of few mortals.

Whatever the state of young Coke's finances at the time of his wedding, he contrived to give his bride many handsome gifts; amongst others on her wedding day he presented her with a very beautiful watch, key and seal of purple enamel encrusted with diamonds.<sup>2</sup> The hands and face of the watch are set in diamonds; on the centre of the back is a diamond urn which still contains the fair hair of that bridegroom of over one hundred and thirty years ago, while the seal bears the words—

*Je ne change qu'en mourant.*

Winter was coming on, and it seems probable that with the approach of the hunting season the young couple went to live at Godwick Hall, Tittleshall, which

<sup>1</sup> T. Master, Esq., of Cirencester, married Mary Dutton, sister of Jane.

<sup>2</sup> Now in the possession of the writer.

has already been referred to. Mrs. Coke, like her husband, was a fine rider and loved to spend long days in the saddle. Soon Coke brought a portion of his pack to Norfolk, and before long succeeded Lord Townshend as Master of the Hounds;<sup>1</sup> but he hunted for a few weeks only till the breed of foxes was increased. Mr. Rolfe of Heacham made some gorse covers on his estate in that parish, and set the first example of rearing them.

But the gaiety of those light-hearted days came to an abrupt termination. Six months after young Coke's wedding, early in April, news came to him of the serious illness of his father. It was some time since Mr. Wenman Coke had given up the house in Hanover Square for one in Grosvenor Square, and it was while there that, on April 10th, 1776, his death occurred. Although he lived to be nearly sixty years of age, he may be said to have fallen a victim to his sedentary habits. His frame and constitution, which were naturally robust, were destroyed by continually sitting to read in a bent position. This produced internal trouble which eventually ended in his decease. At the date of his death he had been in possession of Holkham for eleven months only, and had been resident there for a very short period, owing to his enforced absence in town to attend to his Parliamentary duties; yet during that time he had lowered the rents which Lady Leicester had raised, and had thus endeared himself to the tenants. His death is noted in the *Annual Register* as

<sup>1</sup> It is said that he succeeded Lord Townshend at eighteen (see *Coke of Holkham*, by Walter Rye, reprinted from the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, Third Series, Vol. VI, Part I, 1895); but he cannot have been in Norfolk at that age.

follows:—"Died, Wenman Coke Esqre, Member for Norfolk and Surveyor of the Woods belonging to the Crown in the Duchy of Lancaster." His will was proved by his father, Philip Roberts, his widow Elizabeth, and his son Thomas William.

Young Coke thus found himself called to the more serious business of life ; and, with the possession of his estates, he discovered that the representation of the county was also considered to be part of his inheritance. Sir Harbord Harbord and Sir Edward Astley called upon him immediately in London ; they urged his station in the county, and, above all, the claims which the friends who had supported his father had upon him ; till at length, unwillingly, he yielded.

It is curious to note that the Manifesto which he issued to the public is dated two days after his father's death.

TO THE GENTLEMEN, CLERGY AND FREEHOLDERS  
OF THE COUNTY OF NORFOLK.

GROSVENOR SQUARE, *April 12th, 1776.*

The anxious Ambition which I feel to succeed my worthy father, would scarcely have induced me so early, under such a Calamity, to have solicited this Distinction, which it was his Happiness to have experienced, had it not been well known to me it was his ardent Desire that every Effort might be early exerted for the Attainment of so desirable an Object. You flatteringly held out your Protection to him before he was called to the Succession of his Ancestors, which now devolves to me ; but it would lose greatly of its value, if by the Sense of a General Meeting I should be deemed unworthy of the Honour of representing the County of Norfolk. The Time will not admit of my paying that Respect which is undoubtedly due to every Elector ; but, let me assure you that if my Wishes

prove successful, it shall be my study to justify your Preference, by giving the most unwearied Attention to your particular Interests, and to the Honor, Liberty, and essential Well-being of my country.

I am, with the greatest respect, Gentlemen,  
Your most obedient and most humble Servant,

THOMAS WILLIAM COKE.

N.B.—The day of Nomination being fixed by the Sheriff for Wednesday next the 24th, I beg leave to intreat the favour of my friends' appearance.

On Wednesday 24th, accordingly, a meeting was held at the Shirehouse to consider who was to succeed Mr. Wenman Coke. Young Coke, who came forward with an "amiable composure and engaging address,"<sup>1</sup> created a very favourable impression and was nominated without hesitation. The following day he issued another Manifesto :—

TO THE GENTLEMEN, CLERGY, AND FREEHOLDERS  
OF THE COUNTY OF NORFOLK.

I beg leave to return you my most sincere thanks for the High Honour you have conferred upon me by the unanimity with which I have been nominated a Candidate to supply the Vacancy occasioned by the Death of my late Father; an Honour which receives an additional Value from the undoubted Testimony it affords of your approbation of his Conduct.

Permit me to request the further favour of your Attendance and Support upon the day of Election. Be assured, that if I have the Happiness of being returned your Representative, my unwearied Attention shall be given, not only to the real Interests of this County, but likewise to the Honour, Liberty, and Welfare of the Nation.

I am, with the greatest respect, Gentlemen,  
Your most obedient and humble servant,

THOMAS WILLIAM COKE.

<sup>1</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, Saturday, April 27th, 1776.

At eleven o'clock on Wednesday, May 8th, he entered Norwich at the head of a numerous body of gentlemen, clergy and freeholders, and proceeded to the Shirehouse. He was dressed, as was the custom on such an occasion, in full Court dress, bag-wig, buckles and sword, and the people, who viewed him with curiosity, commented audibly on his handsome appearance. At the Shirehouse many speeches took place, but one alone deserves passing mention, because of the strange train of events which are said to have been its indirect result. We are told that "a gentleman high in office" delivered the following appropriate remarks:—

"Gentlemen,—The melancholy event that calls you together this day, is too well known to you all. You are met to consider of a proper person to represent this great commercial county in Parliament; an object at all times important in itself, but rendered more so by the critical situation of public affairs at this juncture; it is now we want the abilities, the unbiassed firmness of the late Mr. Coke, to protect the interests of the people; it is now we begin to feel the value of the faithful guardian we have lost!

"Your choice this day, I make no doubt, will fall upon some gentleman distinguished by a large property in Norfolk, whose fortunes render him independent, whose inclination is to be so, and whose ambition will lead him to imitate that conduct in Parliament which does honour to the memory of his predecessor, and who may succeed the late Mr. Coke in public virtue as well as public station."

These diplomatic remarks, which pointed so plainly to one particular candidate, were, it is said, written for the "gentleman high in office" by a man named Richard Gardiner, formerly a major in the army, better known by his *nom de plume* of Dick Merry-

fellow. The reputed son of a Norfolk clergyman, though by many believed to be a natural son of Lord Orford, he was a witty writer of electioneering skits, verses and speeches; and so highly was his influence valued, that it is said he was often paid by candidates for his support. No doubt with a view to his future advantage if he could put young Coke under an obligation to him, he exerted all his influence to aid the latter's election, and later we shall see what use he endeavoured to make of his unsolicited energy.

Young Coke, however, was not dependent upon Dick Merryfellow's favour. His position in the county, his attractive appearance and manner, combined with the respect in which his father had been held, made his election a foregone conclusion. He was unanimously chosen by the electors, and returned his thanks to them in "an elegant speech delivered with the most engaging address."

Immediately after the election the chairing took place. The origin of this custom is said to have been the elevation of kings at their inauguration; but in Norfolk it differed from the chairing in other counties. The Member, who stood on a platform in front of the chair, was carried by four-and-twenty strong men who halted at every thirty or forty yards, and, at each halt, tossed their burden three successive times high in the air out of their hold, as far as their united strength could send it, catching the poles again as it descended. To a nervous person the experience was anything but pleasant, especially as the Member thus conspicuously elevated was sometimes a target for brickbats and mud from his less friendly constituents.



THE ELECTIONEERING CHAIR

*In the possession of Mr. George Cubitt, Norwich*





But, fortunately, no untoward event marred young Coke's experience as Knight of the Shire while, borne shoulder-high above the heads of the people, he occupied for the first time the position he was to fill so often during the course of a long life. The chair beside which he then stood is still in existence in Norwich, faded and battered, a curious relic of bygone days. A great unwieldy throne, upholstered in red silk, it is fixed upon a platform supported by two stout poles. The back is overtopped with a gaudy design in gilt carving, emblematic of Plenty, and surmounted by a cap of Liberty; while large gilt Cupids in carved wood, carrying bunches of grapes, uphold the arms on either side. From this unsteady eminence Coke surveyed the scene around him on that memorable day. The market-place was full of stavesmen and spectators, every window showed gaily-dressed women fluttering handkerchiefs with a cockade in the corner which bore his colours, flags were flying and voices cheering, while a cavalcade of his new constituents on horseback had assembled to escort him.

With strangely mingled feelings he must have looked down upon the boisterous crowd beneath. Life stretched before him afresh with great duties and responsibilities. In the last few months he had passed from youth to manhood. He had married, had come into possession of his estates, and had now been chosen a representative of the people. It is not difficult to realise the thoughts which must have swept tumultuously through his brain in that moment. Knowing the temperament of the man, one understands how he must have looked on the future with

awe and with determination—the awe of a nature always diffident about his own capabilities, the determination of a nature always strong for what he considered right. The words of his Manifesto must have been present to his mind: “Be assured, that if I have the happiness of being elected your Representative, my unwearied Attention shall be given, not only to the real interests of this County, but likewise to the Honour, Liberty and Welfare of the Nation.”

How he should fulfil that promise his life was to show.

And so, amidst the cheering, shouting crowd, Coke was borne in triumph through the town. It was thus that, two days after his twenty-second birthday, he entered Parliament. He was the youngest Member when he entered the House; he was the oldest when, after a long and honourable career, he retired. He was elected for thirteen Parliaments, and with the exception of a short break when he judged it best to retire, he represented either Norfolk or Derby for a space of fifty-six years.

## CHAPTER VIII

## EARLY POLITICAL LIFE

1776-1778

*Ætat 22-24*

**W**HEN Sir Edward Astley and Sir Harbord Harbord had waited upon Coke in order to persuade him to stand for the County, they told him that they would desire him to write one letter only to one person, and that was to Lord Orford,<sup>1</sup> the Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk. Coke wrote accordingly, and asked Lord Orford's support. He received the following answer :—

“My dear Sir,

“Holkham and Houghton have ever been united in the strictest bonds of friendship, and I hope will ever continue so.”

The second time, however, when he had occasion to make the same request, the answer was couched in the following terms :—

“I have great regard for you, but I regret to see that you so often clog the wheels of the Government.”

None the less, Lord Orford did not then withdraw his support; but when, on a third occasion, Coke

<sup>1</sup> George, third Earl of Orford, a man of very eccentric mind and habits.

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again applied for it, the answer returned was as follows:—

“Sir,

“I respect you as an Agriculturist, but you must not turn the County of Norfolk into a borough.”

And Lord Orford threw all his weight into the opposite scale.

The attitude of Lord Orford may be considered typical of the manner in which Coke's opponents were disposed to regard him;—at first with complacent indifference, soon with growing alarm, next with a very respectful fear. The fact of his devotion to field sports and his known reluctance to enter the political arena, for a time blinded them to the underlying determination of his character and his invincible earnestness.

There is no doubt that, when he entered Parliament, a political career had little attraction for him. As a means of personal advancement it was as useless as it was unpalatable to him. On the one hand, he was wholly without that ambition which is a craving for gratified vanity. He disliked the fret of party strife, the petty jealousies of contending factions. Country life with its peaceful pursuits had always been more in harmony with his temperament. To follow his hounds in exciting chase through Suffolk, Oxford, or Essex; to tramp with his gun through the keen Norfolk air in a long day's sport; to live in the midst of his tenants; to gather his friends about him and make them taste of a hospitality which was princely—this existence appealed to him far more strongly than the strain of public life and its often unworthy ambitions. On the

other hand, a mere youth in years, he found himself, without personal exertion, already possessed of all which could render existence enjoyable. Recently married to a wife to whom he was deeply attached, the owner of great wealth and of a palatial home, the inheritor of a position which, as a Commoner, was unassailable, he had nothing to gain, and much to lose, by letting himself drift into the vortex of a public career.

Yet he threw himself with characteristic vigour into the work which had been thrust upon him. He had been bred among those to whom party spirit was not merely a pose dictated by convenience—a gentle lever to professional success, but a burning force, a breeder of great loves and greater hatreds, a creed whose negation was a blasphemy; to whom there could be no uprightness, no honesty outside of the faction to which they themselves belonged. And he was of the days of immense concentration, of stubborn conviction, of heartwhole energy; when existence, spent of necessity in a more circumscribed area, battered on its own personality; when those of like persuasion, herding together, waxed stubborn in each other's strength; when individuality was not dissipated in the eternal contact with counter-currents, in the hurry of a life which, while broadening each man's outlook, cripples his assurance. There were giants on the earth in those days; they were the days of great achievements.

So to Coke, with his splendid youth emphasising its boundless capacity for enjoyment, and his boundless means for gratifying that capacity, the claims of duty and of patriotism remained paramount. The principles

which he had imbibed with his earliest boyhood were bred in his bone and had grown with his growth. They were as defined and staunch at this the commencement of his career, as they remained to its close. "When I was first elected," he said half a century later, "I told the freeholders the line of conduct I should pursue. I told them I was a Whig of the old school, a lover of the principles of the Revolution of 1688, and by that line of conduct my course should be governed." To fear God, to help Man, and to hate all Tories, those were the tenets to which he considered himself pledged. There was in his character, we are told, a remarkable simplicity and a complete lack of egotism which was infinitely lovable, as it was, perhaps, infinitely remarkable in his peculiar circumstances. But devoid of all self-assurance as he always remained with regard to his own capabilities, he was already decided in his views and unalterably consistent in his code of action. A passionate love of justice and of fair-play; an unbroken attachment to civil and religious freedom; a hatred of all taint of oppression and coercion, of all intolerance and bigotry—these were the leading characteristics of his nature, alike at this, the outset of his career, as at its close.

Years afterwards, on retiring from Parliament, he described his feelings on his first entry into political life; and they are best given in his own words:—

"When I first offered myself for this county, I did so with great reluctance, for I had no wish to come into Parliament. I was no orator, no politician. I was young, and just returned from abroad, and my own pursuits (if I could appeal to the ladies) were much more congenial to my feelings. But I was

much solicited by Sir Harbord Harbord, Sir E. Astley and Mr. Fellows of Shottisham, who said, and said truly, that I owed it to my father's memory, and to Sir E. Astley, who had just stood a severe contest; and that, if I did not stand, a Tory would come in. *At the mention of a Tory coming in, gentlemen, my blood chilled all over me from head to foot, and I came forward.* Educated as I had been in the belief that a Tory was not a friend to liberty and the Revolution—but a friend to passive obedience and non-resistance—a supporter of bribery and corruption and of all the evils of oligarchy—I could not resist! I had not been in the House of Commons two months when Charles Tompson said to me one day—"If Mr. Coke is inclined for a Peerage, I will mention it."—Soon after this the Duke of Portland wrote to me, and said that the King allowed them to make three Peers, and that I should be the first if I liked. I immediately went to London, to Burlington House, and called on the noble Duke, and told him I was astonished that he should think I would desert Mr. Fox, and that so great was my regard for him (Mr. Fox) so long as I lived I would ever support him."<sup>1</sup>

The bait of a peerage offered thus at the very outset of Coke's parliamentary career, and the complaint in Lord Orford's letter previously quoted, that, as a Member of very brief standing, Coke was already able to "clog the wheels of Government," is sufficiently remarkable, and shows that his was very early recognised as an influence which it was well to conciliate, or to suppress.

But although, as he points out, he was no orator, no polished rhetorician, he speedily acquired the reputation of a man who swayed his hearers by the mere

<sup>1</sup> See *Farmer's Magazine* (1843), p. 3.

force of his immense sincerity. He never spoke on any subject on which his conviction was not absolute. The strength of his personality, his overwhelming integrity, impressed his hearers as a more studied eloquence would have failed to do. Owing to the laxity with which the Parliamentary records and newspaper reports were kept at that date, often only incomplete fragments of current speeches were preserved. Despite this, with regard to Fox's eloquence Lord Erskine remarked that "in the most imperfect relics of his speeches the bones of a giant are discoverable"; and although the same verdict, from the same standpoint, cannot be applied to the often distorted survivals of Coke's utterances, yet of those, too, one feels that they reveal a man of bolder, grander mould than his fellows—not, be it again emphasised, a giant in rhetoric, but a giant in individuality, in honesty of purpose, in the fearless expression of that honesty. "I have nothing to ask from either side of the House," Coke stated; "I speak merely as an honest man representing a great and important county";<sup>1</sup> and in that very simplicity lay his strength.

"Mr. Coke," we are told, "though a very constant attendant on his Parliamentary duties, and a ready speaker, had no ambition to rank high as an orator. His speeches are few, short, and unornamental. He spoke in the style and in the character of a liberal and independent Country gentleman; but whatever he said had the merit of being simple and to the point."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXI, p. 782.

<sup>2</sup> Pamphlet, *Thomas William Coke, Earl of Leicester*, published by Whiting, Beaufort House, Strand, circa 1838.



Thus, at this distance of time, and when interest in the topics discussed has grown cold, there is a life, a force about his remarks which still can impress one with the moral strength of the man, and can enable one to understand the verdict pronounced at the close of his career, how the mere influence of his example for more than half a century had had an extraordinary effect in keeping up the standard of public morality.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, when his indignation was aroused by any acts of injustice, of oppression or corruption, he denounced these with a heartwhole abhorrence which was apt to occasion alarm to timid hearers. "If," says the *Farmer's Magazine* in anxious apology, "in some of his after-dinner addresses he betrayed a want of taste in culling his expressions of contempt, he did it out of the overwhelming conviction of his own mind, and not with a desire to wound!"

There is no doubt that, from his first entrance into public life, carried away by his convictions, his vehemence often gave a handle to his enemies; for, like his ancestor, the Lord Chief Justice, he was no time-server, no respecter of persons. To him the truth was so vital, the cause to which he had pledged himself so sacred, that the more squeamish susceptibilities of an illiberal audience, or the minor considerations of his personal popularity could not weigh in the balance. In reference to this we are told—"It has been charged against his public conduct that it was generally marked by vehemence and intemperance, and those who did not know him imagined that his natural disposition was violent. No mistake was ever

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*

greater. He was, it is true, ardent and honest, and was never disposed to compromise or conceal any fact or any opinion connected with public duty. He rarely appeared or spoke but on the occasions when the abuses he denounced demanded energetic opposition."<sup>1</sup>

In later life he once told a characteristic story of these the early days of his political career. It appears that his friends were anxious to arrange a dinner in Yarmouth on his behalf, and applied to the Mayor of that town for permission to use the town hall for that purpose. The Mayor, a man of conventional views and cautious disposition, took alarm at anything which might, in its development, affect his civic dignity. So he made his acquiescence to depend on what Coke afterwards described as "an insulting and suspicious stipulation"—he would lend the hall, he said, if Mr. Coke would give a solemn promise *not to abuse the Corporation*. Needless to say, the offer was not accepted and the promise not given. Whereupon a man of less timid temperament, the manager of the theatre, came forward and offered the loan of his building for the required purpose; an offer which was at once accepted. But the wrath of the local magnates at what they considered a defiance of their authority knew no bounds. With a system of petty tyranny which it is difficult to credit, they informed the manager that, in future, neither would they attend the theatre themselves, nor allow their wives and daughters to do so.

Coke went to the dinner; but he told the Corpora-

<sup>1</sup> Undated newspaper extract, preserved by the Hon. the Rev. Thomas Keppel, fifth son of William Charles, fourth Earl of Albemarle.

tion very plainly what he thought of their conduct ; and it was twenty-five years before he could again be persuaded to dine in Yarmouth.

“A public man like myself,” he said, when relating the story fifty years afterwards, “is undoubtedly fair game. In early life I went to Yarmouth, but found so much illiberality in the Corporation, that I told them : ‘There is an illiberality in your conduct which I do not like ; I shall never again make my appearance here until you have a Mayor presiding of opposite principles.’”

Twenty-five years later, Mr. Palgrave, a Mayor of this description, reminded Coke of his promise, and called upon him to redeem it. Coke did so, and attended the Mayor’s dinner, but the circumstances of his former visit were fresh in his memory, and he took a subtle satisfaction in giving frank expression to his political views. The Corporation, moreover, had not waxed more liberal with the flight of years and their change of chief. They took alarm very early in the evening, and, in a body, they hurried from the room. “Truth to tell,” said Coke, when relating the incident, “I drove all the Corporation from the room— but perhaps the company was not much the worse for that !”

The story, however, is valuable as an indication of the manner in which his influence was regarded, even in the very early days of his career. A reluctant politician of twenty-two, he had already made himself recognised as a power to be feared. The timid magnates of a provincial town, the wary ministers of a powerful Cabinet alike adopted methods which seemed

to them politic in an attempt to stifle his inconvenient honesty. And both alike failed.

On the other hand, when not roused to resentment by what he considered a just cause, no human being was ever more forgetful of injuries, more peaceful in his tastes and disposition, and more equable in daily life. His contemporaries describe him as of a "delightful temper," and invariably speak of him as unassuming, sincere, and marvellously free from egoism. He had a horror of flattery, and no man saw through it more quickly or treated it with greater contempt. On one occasion, soon after he came into possession of *Holkham*, his health was proposed at a dinner, and the proposer was proceeding to preface his toast by a speech of fulsome compliments, when Coke suddenly disconcerted the flow of his eloquence by murmuring gently—

Lay it on thick,  
Some of it will stick!

Still more, his father's philosophy of loyalty to his friends and indifference to his enemies was never absent from his remembrance; it formed the great and commanding rule of his life, and lay at the root of his unflinching independence of action and opinion.

He was still very young when he attended a public meeting in Norfolk where a man was present who had great influence in the county, and whose friendship was of great importance to him from an electioneering point of view. But there were certain things in this man's conduct of which Coke disapproved, and he unhesitatingly told the man in no measured terms what he thought of him. On leaving the building, a friend

of Coke's remonstrated roundly with him, and told him that he had been most unwise; "You have made an enemy of that man for life," he complained. "And with his conduct, what was he before?" retorted Coke. "I will tell you one thing—my father called me to him when I was a boy, and said, 'Tom, stick to your friends, and disregard your enemies!' I have done so, and will do so to the end of my existence!"

Soon after Coke entered Parliament, Lord Rockingham, the head of the Whig party, invited him to a Ministerial dinner. There he met and was formally introduced to Charles James Fox, and there the foundations of a lifelong attachment were laid. Very rapidly their political relations developed into a warm personal friendship which terminated only with Fox's death in 1806. Fox described Coke as one of "the brightest ornaments of England";<sup>1</sup> while, as a statesman, Coke admired Fox's principles; and as a man revered the qualities which, in spite of Fox's very obvious faults, made him lovable to his contemporaries, and still endears his name to posterity. "When I first went into Parliament," Coke related at his last nomination in 1830, "I attached myself to Fox, and I clung to him through life. I lived in the closest bond of friendship with him. He was a friend of the people, the practiser of every kindness and generosity, the advocate of Civil and Religious liberty."<sup>2</sup>

Although Coke was devoid of, and indeed had a special abhorrence of the particular vices which marred Fox's character, there was in other respects much akin

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Mem. of His Own Time*, by Nathaniel Wraxall (1836), Vol. I, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, August 7th, 1830.

in their natures. Both upheld liberty as the very life of the State and the very breath of existence; both were simple and unostentatious in their tastes, preferring country life and hating the prominence of a public career; both were disinterested, downright and incautious in the vehemence of their sincerity. For Fox's oratory Coke had the most profound admiration. To the end of his life he used to say that none but those who had heard it could ever form any conception of that marvellous fluency. For five hours at a stretch Fox would speak without notes, without preparation of any description, and during all that time not once would he hesitate for a word to convey his exact meaning to his hearers, or pause to sift the arguments which poured from him in one impassioned flow of eloquence. The genius of Fox appealed to Coke only less than the principles it was employed to advocate. "So great is my regard for Fox, so long as I live will I ever support him," Coke vowed in the dawn of his political life, and he was faithful to the principles involved in this resolution till the day of his own death.

His loyalty was very early put to the test. The moment when he entered Parliament was a moment of great national crisis. England's quarrel with America, brought about by the arbitrary and tactless policy of the British Government, had reached a crucial stage. The blockade of Quebec had just been raised. The American Congress was preparing the Declaration of Independence, a circular Manifesto to be sent to the several Colonies, thirteen of whom, on July 4th, abjured all allegiance to the British Crown. And meanwhile, in order to remedy the mischief of past tardiness, the

English Government determined to carry on the struggle with a vigour which should astonish all Europe, and to employ such an army as had never before entered the New World. This, it was considered, would be the most effectual means of silencing clamour and of preventing troublesome and now useless inquiries. For the English, as a nation, are philosophic, and resign themselves to the inevitable with a dogged determination to make the best of a bad job. When once the people were heartily engaged in a war, it was believed that they would no longer cavil over the causes which had led to it; they would be agreed that, whoever was right in the beginning, American insolence deserved chastisement; and, their national and military pride at stake, they would carry the struggle through with eagerness and determination. Still more, the efforts of the minority, battling against general opinion, and apparently directed against the national interest, would every day become more feeble, and deprive them of popularity, which is the soul of opposition.

From the first, Coke, of his very nature, was vehemently opposed to the American war; and he voted in the first minority against it. Not only did he foresee its disastrous consequences and deplore the mistaken policy which had led to it; not only did he recognise that the American States—who, as our allies, were a source of our commercial prosperity—as a people conquered and alienated could prove only an impossible drain upon our resources, a perpetual menace to our tranquillity. Stronger than any motives of selfish policy to him was the question of fair play. Taxation without representation was radically unjust; those who paid

the taxes had a right to appoint those who imposed the taxes ; upon that ground alone he opposed the prosecution of the war. For the Colonies had been goaded into insurrection ; the Declaration of Independence had at first been accepted by twelve out of the thirteen States unwillingly, and only when all hope of compromise was at an end. The Colonists, individually, were men who were attached to the Crown, who did not desire emancipation, who only demanded justice as the pledge of their loyalty. And Coke, recognising the reasonable nature of their demands, believed, even at this critical juncture, that it was not too late for an Administration with insight and tact to cope with the situation.

But the obstinacy of the King, the incompetency of the Ministers, were fatal to a pacific adjustment. George III declared that he would never yield, or give office to any man "who will not first sign a declaration that he will keep the Empire entire, and that no troops shall consequently be withdrawn from America, or independence ever allowed." The war was the King's war ; the Ministers were his tools ; by the bulk of the people, and, unfortunately, by the educated classes, the whole question was woefully misunderstood ; while the friction of rival parties made it impossible to promote a clearer understanding. Coke had early learnt to dread the King's influence in politics, the narrow, unconstitutional policy of George III, which, rightly or wrongly, had been attributed to Bute's pernicious teaching. In allying himself with Fox in opposition to what was known as the King's party, he was aware that he espoused an unpopular, and, as it was believed at the time to be, a losing cause. For to uphold the King's



policy was the way to place and power ; to oppose it was to incur royal and all but universal disfavour ; the dissentients to the war were, by the majority, considered to be the professed enemies of their King and country. —Later, when the truth of their conclusions had been disastrously proved, men recognised, too, the disinterested honesty of their struggle for justice. That small minority who had kept their honour unstained were then seen to be the true upholders of the vaunted British Constitution and of the traditional British love of freedom. But, for the present, misapprehension and calumny dogged their footsteps.

At the opening of the next Session on October 31st, the King, in his speech, declared that it was necessary to prepare for another campaign, as the revolted Colonies had rejected “with circumstances of indignity and insult, the means of conciliation held out to them under the authority of our Commission.” An address of thanks was framed in the usual manner ; but to this an amendment was moved by Lord John Cavendish, deprecating the attitude of the British Government towards the Colonies, and pointing out how greatly their grievances had been misunderstood and misrepresented.

It was with regard to this Amendment that Fox wrote the first letter which is extant from him to Coke, and which, differing in tone from his later correspondence, shows that their acquaintance had not yet ripened into the intimate friendship which afterwards subsisted between them.

“ Dear Sir,

“ I am very happy to acquaint you that everything is settled much to our wishes. Lord John is to

move the amendment much upon the plan of Lord North's, only omitting the Loyalist clause. Lord North will support him and move to insert some words favourable to the Loyalists, to which, if they are moderate, we are not to object. I found Lord N. as reasonable as we could desire. I trust this will give general satisfaction to all our friends, as it has to those in this room who have heard it.

“I am, dear sir,

“Your humble and obt. servant,

“CHARLES JAMES FOX.

“*Sunday night, ST. JAMES' ST.*”

The Amendment concluded with the significant words:—

“We shall look with the utmost shame and horror on any events that shall tend to break the spirit of any large part of the British Nation, to bow them to an abject, unconditional submission to any Power whatsoever . . . for though differing in some circumstances, those principles evidently bear so striking an analogy to those which support the most valuable part of our own Constitution, that it is impossible with any appearance of justice to think of wholly expelling them by the sword in any part of His Majesty's dominions without admitting consequences the most dangerous to the liberties of this kingdom.”

Coke, Fox, Wilkes, Thomas Townshend and Colonel Barré supported the Amendment. Lord North only mildly repelled the charge of hypocrisy which it suggested against that portion of the King's speech which expressed His Majesty's desire to restore to the Americans *law and liberty*. The set against it, however, was too strong, and it was defeated by 242 against 87.

Henceforward opposition to prerogative Government

became the watchword of the Whig party; and Coke, faithful to it, adopted two toasts to which, throughout his life, he always gave prominence on every public occasion.

One was—

“A Ministry which will support what is right,  
And a Parliament which will support nothing wrong.”

The other—

“The respectability of the Crown,  
The durability of the Constitution  
And the prosperity of the people.”<sup>1</sup>

He also adopted as his badge the colours of blue and buff, in consequence of the blue coat and buff waistcoat which Fox had made popular among his followers, and which closely resembled the military uniform worn by the levies commanded by Washington.

Meanwhile he was busily occupied with the affairs of the county which he represented. In 1776 his name

<sup>1</sup> In the *Creevey Papers* mention is made of the Duke of Sussex having quoted a garbled version of the latter toast. The Hon. H. C. Bennet, writing to Creevey from Brooks', 1814, says: "Our dinner last night was good and well managed and a good spice of Whiggism. The Duke of Sussex talked very sad stuff, and his last feat was the following toast, 'Respectability to the Crown, Durability to the Constitution, and *Independence* to the people.' Mr. Keppel, however, states that both the toasts given above were the '*favourite and original toasts*' of Mr. Coke, and the Duke never attended the Holkham Sheep-shearings without giving the latter toast as Coke himself gave it. Lord Albemarle gives another version as 'The Liberty of the Subject' " (*Fifty Years of My Life*, by George Thomas, Earl of Albemarle, 1876, Vol. II, p. 3). It would be interesting to know if Mr. Bennet talked of the Duke's toast as "sad stuff" because it was new to him personally, or because the usual formula was misquoted, as on the famous occasion when the toast was given as 'The Majesty of the People,' or 'Our Sovereign—the People.'—See *The Life and Times of C. J. Fox*, by Earl Russell (1866), Vol. III, p. 168.

was on the list of the Grand Jury of the Norfolk Summer Assizes; while, from time to time, it appears in other public capacities; but an event in January, 1778, first served to bring it into political prominence.

A memorable public meeting was then convened at Norwich. An advertisement for this was first issued, inviting, as it explains—

“All who are disposed at this critical juncture to assist the exertions of the British Empire in support of the Constitutional authority, to defend these kingdoms, if necessary, against any foreign attack.”

This meeting was called at the “Maid’s Head,” the famous old inn in Norwich where Queen Elizabeth stayed, and where the room in which she slept is still used, little changed since she occupied it.

A counter-advertisement promptly appeared summoning the opponents of war to meet at the Swan Inn. It was couched in the following terms:—

“TO THE NOBILITY, CLERGY, FREEHOLDERS, AND  
INHABITANTS OF THE COUNTY OF NORFOLK,  
AND OF THE CITY & COUNTY OF NORWICH.”

“There being reason to apprehend that there is a design of attempting to raise a regiment in Norfolk professedly for the purpose of carrying on hostilities in America, and engaging this County and City of Norwich into giving a sanction to those measures which directly tend to the protracting of this fatal war; lest the resolutions of those who still wish for coercive measures should be deemed the declaratory sense of the inhabitants of Norfolk and Norwich respecting the present unhappy contest—it is wished that a general meeting of the Nobility, Gentry and others may be held at the White Swan in St. Peter’s, Norwich, on Wednesday the 28th of this instant January, precisely at ten o’clock in the forenoon, to consider whether any measure that gives

countenance or support to so burdensome, fruitless and inglorious a war can be consistent with the landed and trading interest of the County and City of Norwich, or is conformable to the wishes and sentiments of the independent part of the inhabitants."

Needless to say, it was this latter meeting which Coke attended; but when the opponents of the war were assembled at the "Swan," it was decided that they should confront the meeting then assembling at the "Maid's Head," and, accordingly, they repaired thither. They found Sir John Wodehouse in the chair, and the business being opened by Lord Townshend, then Master of the Ordnance, who stated that he had called his friends together—

"For the purpose of consulting upon the means of affording such assistance as should best enable the Government, at this critical juncture, to exert itself for the support of the Constitutional Authority of the British Empire; that the unhappy war in which we were engaged with America was unavoidably attended with large expense, had been followed by a destruction of men, and a waste of force, which was much to be lamented, and that our natural enemies, it was much to be apprehended, would avail themselves of our situation, and therefore it was become necessary to be provided with a force that would enable us to resist any attack that might be made upon us at home. For which reason he submitted to the company whether opening a subscription for the purpose of raising levies to fill up those Corps which had been considerably reduced, and might be expected to return from America, would not, as it appeared to him, be the least exceptionable and most beneficial made."

Lord Townshend was seconded by Henry Hobart, brother to Lord Buckinghamshire. But the occasion

was made memorable by the fact that Mr. Windham of Felbrigg arose and made his first public speech. Tall, keen-eyed and athletic as when in his schooldays at Eton Coke had known him as "Fighting Windham," he stood before the excited crowd; and although so often in after-life accredited with being a nervous and a diffident speaker, enthusiasm for his subject now banished all self-consciousness, while in a clear, strong voice he detailed at length the past, and anticipated the future public consequences of the war, protesting against the subscription proposed at the meeting. Coke succeeded him, strongly concurring with all he had said, and uttered a vehement denunciation of the proceedings.

Nevertheless, a large fund (more than £5000) was raised, Sir John Wodehouse and Lords Buckinghamshire and Townshend each subscribing £500. The Whigs never forgot this; eighteen years afterwards, when Colonel Wodehouse was standing for the election of 1806, a huge placard was posted about Norwich bearing the trenchant inquiry—

"WHO SUBSCRIBED FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS TO CUT  
THE AMERICANS' THROATS, AND LOST THAT  
COLONY?"

Coke, however, took more speedy action to bring the meeting into disrepute. He set to work with an energy which astonished and delighted his constituents. By the following month, on February 17th, 1778, he presented a petition from them, in the wording of which it is easy to recognise his influence, if not his actual penmanship. It does not slur over recent happenings; it is dignified, strong and sincere.

After praying for an inquiry into the "true grounds and conduct of this unhappy civil war, and that the best means be found for bringing it to a speedy termination," it points out sarcastically the "*utmost concern and surprise*" with which the petitioners view the "*extraordinary endeavours used in this kingdom to raise men and money for His Majesty's service by free gifts and contributions, not given and granted in a Parliamentary course,*" of which "*unusual and strained efforts* not only is the legality most doubtful, at a time when Parliament is sitting, etc., . . . but is certainly calculated to convey a most dangerous impression to neighbouring countries that the public resources of the kingdom are in an exhausted condition." It points out how the petitioners themselves have been called upon in a "manner equally alarming" to raise men and money for supporting the Constitutional authority of Great Britain; it announces:—

"We hope and trust that the Constitutional authority is safe and well supported in the affections of a loyal and free people; we know of no attack upon or resistance to the operation of the Laws of this country or in this Kingdom—impaired as we may be in Power and reputation abroad—we have, however, peace at home; but in the thirteen once flourishing and obedient Colonies of Great Britain, His Majesty *has no authority or other Government to be supported.* A misrepresentation of our unhappy situation would be a mockery of our distress. An Empire is lost. A great Continent in arms is to be conquered or abandoned."

It concludes by deploring the state to which the country is reduced, and by pointing out that the petitioners entertain grave doubts of the "Wisdom,

Care and Prudence of those who conduct His Majesty's affairs, and by whom a deserving people have been greatly injured, deceived and endangered."

On December 4th of the same year Coke followed up this first attack by bringing forward a motion in the House condemning a Manifesto which had been published by the Commissioners for restoring peace with America. This Manifesto he first moved might be read to the House,<sup>1</sup> and next moved:—

"That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, to express to his Majesty the displeasure of this House at a certain Manifesto and Proclamation, dated the 3rd October, 1778 . . . and to acquaint his Majesty with the sense of this House that the said Commissioners had no authority whatsoever, under the Act of Parliament, in virtue of which they were appointed by his Majesty, to make the said declaration . . . nor can this House be easily brought to believe, that the said Commissioners derived any such authority from his Majesty's instructions."

Whereupon he called upon the King to disavow publicly the matter set forth by the Manifesto, which he pronounced to be inhuman, unchristian, derogatory to the Crown and debasing to the people.

This was a strong measure, since, if approved by the

<sup>1</sup> The Manifesto contained the following threat with regard to the American Alliance with France. "The policy as well as the benevolence of Great Britain have thus far checked the extremes of war, when they tended to distress a people still considered as our fellow subjects, and to desolate a country shortly to become again a source of mutual advantage; but when that country professes the unnatural design, not only of estranging herself from us, but of mortgaging herself and her resources to our enemies, the whole contest is changed, and the question is how far Great Britain may, *by every means in her power, destroy, or render useless*, a connection contrived for her ruin, and for the aggrandizement of France," etc. (*Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XIX, p. 1389.)



House, it practically forced the King to eat his own words and to revoke the sentiments which he had announced to two hemispheres through the mouths of his Commissioners. Coke followed up this daring motion by a brief speech, in which he denounced the policy of the King's Ministers as being "inconsistent with the humanity and generous courage which have always distinguished the British nation."

His speech created considerable sensation. A heated debate followed, during which Lord G. Germaine having asserted that *the King was his own Minister*, Fox cleverly took it up, lamenting that his Majesty was *his own unadvised Minister*.<sup>1</sup> When the House divided, Coke was one of the Tellers. The motion was lost by 123 against 209.

That same day George III, writing to Lord North, pointed out, no doubt with unpleasant anticipation, that there was a "Long Debate expected this day"<sup>2</sup> on Coke's Motion. It is not difficult to imagine the light in which the King already regarded the youngest representative of his people, since Coke's abhorrence of the unconstitutional policy of George III was only equalled by George III's annoyance at Coke's opposition to it. For a man like Coke, who was influenced by none of the considerations which carried weight with the majority of men; whom it was impossible to conciliate as it was impracticable to coerce; whose integrity was above suspicion; who cared nothing for place or patronage,

<sup>1</sup> *Memorials and Correspondence of C. J. Fox*, edited by Lord John Russell, 1853, Vol. I, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> The originals of the correspondence of George III were given to George IV, and are now in the possession of the Crown.

royal favour, or popular approbation ; who was, moreover, wealthy enough to dispense with both, and to sustain, unsupported, the position of first Commoner in the Kingdom—was, indubitably, an awkward antagonist to the undue exercise of the royal prerogative. And to understand the antipathy of the two men, it is only necessary to realise their respective views and characters. George III believed in the “divine right” of Kings ; Coke in the sacred right of the Constitution. George viewed the Ministers as his servants, bound to obey his supreme will ; Coke viewed them as the servants of the State, bound to uphold the liberty of the subject. George was wedded to his own conclusions ; his decision once formed, it became unalterable. Coke said of himself : “For my part, I am governed by experience and I always make haste to discard error when I find it out.”<sup>1</sup> George with all the self-assurance of a narrow nature, Coke with all the diffidence of a strong nature, were opposed upon the very principles which, to each, were vital, unalterable and the very root of his being.

Nor did Coke attempt to conceal his opinion of his Sovereign. “Mr. Coke’s strong Whig politics and decided opposition to the wars with America and France,” we are told, “rendered him peculiarly obnoxious to George III. Mr. Coke, who neither courted the favour nor feared the frowns of a Court, was in the habit of uttering with the most perfect bluntness his opinions respecting his Majesty.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rigby’s *Holkham and its Agriculture*, 1818.

<sup>2</sup> Pamphlet, *Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester*, printed by Whiting, Beaufort House, Strand.

In yet another matter were the King and his first Commoner radically at variance.

Apart from his activity in opposing the American War, Coke, from his first entry into Parliament, exerted himself with regard to economic reform. A description of the House written in 1768 was often aptly quoted at this period :—

That dirty House no mortal yet can clense ;  
 Rub as you please, and polish as you can,  
 Pensions and bribes will iron-mould the man.

The existence of preposterous Pensions was, more especially in the impoverished state of the country, one of the crying evils of the day. They were given to royal and ministerial favourites, and had little bearing upon the services which the recipients had rendered to the State. Not only did the King have recourse to bribery to obtain his ends, and the Ministers by the same means ensure the success of measures which they brought forward in the House, but the actual existence of Members could sometimes be traced to the same system exercised by private individuals. Coke used to relate<sup>1</sup> a characteristic story of how George, Lord Orford, who died in 1791, once paid his gambling debts.

He was accustomed to play high, and had contracted a debt of from £3,000 to £4,000 with Macreath, a waiter at White's Club.<sup>2</sup> On a dissolution of Parliament he asked Macreath if he would like to be in the House. Macreath expressed his astonishment at the question, but at last said he should certainly like it. "Well," said Lord Orford, "if you will strike off what

<sup>1</sup> See *Recollections of Holkham*, 1830. Printed anonymously in 1842. Holkham MSS.

<sup>2</sup> Macreath afterwards became proprietor of Arthur's Club.

I owe you, I will elect you for my borough of Castle Rising," and the bargain was concluded.

Now for many years this borough had only two electors—the parson of the parish and a farmer, who alternately elected each other to the Mayoralty, and who returned two members to Parliament at the bidding of the two patrons, Lord Orford and Lady Suffolk. On this occasion, when the Mayor and his assistants were assembled upon the day of the election, they found to their dismay that Lord Orford had omitted to signify to them *his will and pleasure* as to whom they should elect. In the midst of their distress, however, there arrived a letter from their lord containing only three words—“Elect Macreath—Orford.” Unfortunately his lordship had omitted to state the Christian name of the member-elect; and after some deliberation, it being absolutely necessary to proceed to elect, and deciding that “John” was a common and likely name, they elected *John* Macreath. When the waiter appeared before the Speaker to take his seat, he said that his name was Robert, not John, and the election was therefore declared void. But a second time was the Honourable Robert Macreath, waiter at White’s, returned to represent the people of England in Parliament, *by the free and independent Electors of Castle Rising*; he was knighted and sat in Parliament a considerable time, probably with as much usefulness and honour to his country as many of those men by whom he was surrounded.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Horace Walpole also mentions this story; see *Journal of Lady Mary Coke*, privately printed, Vol. IV, p. 416; and *Walpole Letters*, Vol. VI, pp. 119-152. But Walpole erroneously states that the election caused so much scandal that Bob Macreath voluntarily resigned his seat.

In short, as was remarked in the House nearly half a century later with regard to a petition presented by Coke against this same evil: "It was notorious that Seats in that House were bought and sold like cattle in Smithfield market."<sup>1</sup> Norfolk and Derbyshire papers, however, leave us in no doubt with regard to Coke's attitude towards such practices. He, we are told, "ever showed himself the steadfast friend of freedom and of popular rights"; was ever the "independent, bold, uncompromising enemy of every species of aggression upon the liberty or the property of his countrymen." "Both in and out of Parliament he ever advocated a virtuous system of Government,—he denounced alike the principles and the practice of corruption, whether discoverable in a list of pensions, an enormous Military establishment, in the erection of a palace or the contests of a county court—in a word, his name is to be found in every controversy, and in every division which involved the Rights of the people, *on their side*."<sup>2</sup> "Nor can it be found that any enticements however strong, or from what quarter they emanated, could induce him to give a single vote that tended in the smallest degree to take the money out of the pockets of the people."<sup>3</sup> "At all times he was a strenuous advocate of economy, and raised his voice in Parliament against the extravagance of the Government, from which he anticipated the utmost danger to the country."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. VII, p. 779.

<sup>2</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, July 9th, 1842.

<sup>3</sup> Memoir of Thomas William Coke in *A Narrative of the proceedings, etc., connected with the dinner of T. W. Coke, Esq.*, pub. Norwich, 1833.

<sup>4</sup> *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, July 7th, 1842.

Undoubtedly, he never lost an opportunity of telling Ministers what he thought of their system, and that with a frankness which they must have found disconcerting. "I am determined to oppose corruption whatever form it may assume!" he announced, "and its defence I leave to those who thrive by it. When I look to the situation of the Hon. Gentlemen on the other side of the House, I no longer pay attention to what they say on this subject!"<sup>1</sup> "Such is the abject and degraded condition of their adherents in the House," he said angrily on another occasion, "that if ministers were to hold up a hat in the House and declare it to be a Green Bag, up would come a procession of their placemen, and solemnly vote that it was a Bag and not a Hat!"<sup>2</sup> And he strongly advocated triennial Parliaments, for he said that, when the time approached for Ministers to meet their constituents, their behaviour underwent a considerable revision; at other times he well knew the "profligate manner in which the public money was squandered," and "he would go to the full length of asserting that this was a corrupt House from which no good could be expected!"<sup>3</sup>

For many years both Fox and Coke continued to point out how the tendency of the prevailing system of government was to reduce the entire country to a state of poverty. The contrast between the condition of the masses prior to a long period of Tory administration, with its corruption at home and its wars abroad, compared with the condition of those same classes subse-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XL, p. 493.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at the dinner held on the anniversary of the birthday of Charles James Fox, 1819.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XL, p. 1210.

quent to that period, was a subject which Coke in later years could scarcely bear to contemplate. On his retirement from public life, looking back over a long Parliamentary career, and being then in a position—such as few men could boast—to gauge that result with accuracy, he remarked, “I am afraid there are few present who will recall a period so long past, and I will merely show you the difference between the times they were then and the present times. You will scarcely believe that, when I entered Parliament in the year 1776, this was an *untaxed country*—there was then no poor’s rate ; every man was able to brew his own beer, and every family to bake its own bread. They had all these conveniences in their own homes. . . . But Mr. Fox foretold the dreadful state to which the country would be reduced. . . . That great statesman—for he was the greatest that ever lived—foresaw and foretold this great evil.” One day, so Coke related, during the early days of their acquaintance, Fox remarked to him: “My dear Coke, if you live long enough, you will see this country reduced to a state of dire poverty by the system which the Tories are pursuing”; and thereupon Fox proceeded to delineate with unerring insight both the growth of that system and its result.

How that prediction was fulfilled Coke was fated to observe, year by year, with bitter recognition ; but eagerly, during those first days of his Parliamentary life, he fought the evil which, throughout his career, he never ceased to condemn.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That Coke was exonerated from all participation in the Ministerial loaves and fishes seems to have been apparent even to the somewhat stolid bucolic intelligence, for the verses of Parkinson, who constituted himself a Poet Laureate to the farmers, drovers and publicans of the

In the year of his first election, he presented a Petition for the Abolition of Unjust Pensions. Later he attacked the pension of Colonel Barré. "In a crowded house, Lord Rosebery remarks, "Coke of Norfolk called attention to the pension of Barré. To Barré had been given a pension of £3200 a year, and though this enormous sum would not, after the payment of taxes and fees net, be above £2100, enough remained to be, even in those days, a fair subject for Parliamentary inquiry." <sup>1</sup> In 1780, when Coke had been barely four years in Parliament, we find him writing to Sir Martin folkes and other gentlemen in Norfolk to beg their assistance in promoting a petition to Parliament to reduce public expenditure; while in connection with his letters on this occasion one fact must be remarked. Coke was constantly, both in early and later life, accused of being before everything a party man. At the close of his public career his enemies maintained that for fifty years he had always voted with his party whatever the measure brought forward, and that he illustrated the Whig principle of "The Party everything, the country little or nothing unless seen through Party Eyes." That this accusation was inaccurate is proved

Norwich Cattle Market, and gave voice to their opinions, prove that, on this point at least, Coke did not encounter much misapprehension. In a doggerel entitled, *The Independent Statesman; a respectful tribute to T. W. Coke, Esq.*, Parkinson exclaims with more fervour than poetry—

"Can the Ministers say they e'er found you willing,  
To share from the loaves and the fishes a shilling?  
I only this circumstance slightly just name,  
And ask many Statesmen if they can do the same?  
Was they daily to act as Statesmen like you,  
Our burthens and troubles we soon should subdue!"  
etc., etc.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Pitt*, by the Right Hon. the Earl of Rosebery, 1891, ch. II. p. 35.



by any study of his Parliamentary speeches. Coke certainly was a strong believer in party politics, and never hesitated to call himself a party politician; after he had been for forty years in Parliament he stated that "he had for forty years uniformly maintained those principles which he should continue to maintain till his death—*principles of decided hostility to those on which, for that period, the government of the country had been conducted.*"<sup>1</sup> But the principles were everything, and the party was to be upheld only as the ostensible promoter of those principles. Again and again in the course of his life we find him urging men to fling aside their narrow party prejudices and to think only of their country; when the Tory Government advocated measures he approved, he was ready to vote with them; and his views are seldom more clearly illustrated than in his correspondence with regard to this petition of 1780, while he was still a novice in the political world.

"I need not observe," he emphasises to Sir Martin ffolkes, "that Party has little to do with this business; but that the obtaining a redress of grievances is universally and severely felt must be equally wished by all Parties *except the few Individuals who are preying upon the vitals of their country.*"

This petition, when formulated, prayed the House of Commons "to guard against all unnecessary expenditure, to abolish insecure places and pensions and to resist the increasing influence of the Crown." Against it, however, a strong protest was raised. Coke's opponents declared that it was not the genuine petition of the county of Norfolk, and tried to quash it. Coke

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), Vol. XXXV, p. 782.

held his ground determinedly; he proved that the petition was *bona fide*; it was received and was ordered to be put upon the table of the House; but no result came of it, and his non-success in what he felt to be such an urgent reform greatly disheartened him. "I am not fond of making Motions," he said subsequently; "the ill-success of my Motion for the abolition of an unjustifiable Pension has put me out of conceit with Motions."<sup>1</sup>

Yet his energy does not seem to have abated. Glancing over the next few years, his name appears constantly in the Debates of the period; and his suggestions were terse, practical and dictated by common sense. He had a distinct horror of needless palaver; brief and businesslike himself, he required others to be so. Once we read how, when Chancellor Pitt moved a trifling financial reform, Sir Joseph Mawbey, who was considered the bore of the House, arose, "and was entering upon an ample discussion of the present state of the Nation's finances and negotiations for peace, when he was called to order by Mr. Coke of Norfolk." Coke curtly pointed out to the too loquacious Member "how fond some gentlemen were of debating in that House, and how little the public profited by it. He considered the dignity of the House suffered by it"<sup>2</sup>:—a reflection which, it is to be regretted, is not more often brought under the consideration of Members of a later date. On that occasion, Sir Joseph Mawbey, called to order by the youngest Member of the House, lapsed into discomfited silence,

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 22nd, 1780.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* (1783), December 13th, p. 107.

to the great joy of his colleagues; and the motion was carried without further opposition.

On another occasion we read that, when making some very practical suggestions, Coke met with less success. It was when Alderman Newnham had moved for a repeal of the receipt tax that Coke, in support of a former opinion which held "that no person ought to move the repeal of a tax without having another to propose," suggested three new taxes, which he calculated would represent £530,000 a year to the revenue. One was a tax upon dogs; another was to be put upon a species of property which "had never yet been taxed, and that was pews in churches, upon every one of which, if private property, he proposed a minimum tax of twenty shillings, and upon large pews for corporate bodies twenty pounds, and on every bishop's twenty pounds!" Further, he suggested "that tombstones should be taxed the sum of twenty shillings each, and for burying in churches a licence of ten pounds should be required"; but this last, he explained, "he was far from desiring to see a productive tax, as he considered the custom insanitary and objectionable. He had known a whole parish kept from church a month on account of a person being buried in it who had died from small-pox."

These suggestions were sufficiently unexpected to cause amusement. Sheridan wittily opposed the idea of a tax upon tombstones. "The receipt tax," he allowed, "had been objected to as troublesome and vexatious; that on tombstones was certainly not liable to the same objection, as the people out of whose fortunes it would be levied would know nothing of the

matter, since they must be dead before there could be any call for the tax. But who knows," he added, "that it might not be rendered unpopular by being represented as a receipt tax upon persons who, *after having paid the debt of nature, had the receipt engraved upon their tombs!*"<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to notice that, although not treated seriously at the time, one at least of Coke's suggestions, the tax on dogs, was afterwards adopted by Pitt. Possibly Coke was to be congratulated upon his failure to introduce this measure, for Mr. Dent,<sup>2</sup> who ultimately carried it, was ever afterwards known as "The Dog" or "Dog Dent," and was incessantly the unhappy recipient of large hampers garnished with hares' legs, pheasants' tails, grouse and partridge wings, etc., but filled with *dead dogs*.

Amongst other measures which Coke early brought forward was a strong bill against night poaching; also a characteristic bill for utilising the waste lands and commons of Norfolk, and a bill to regulate the votes of honorary freemen; he attacked the carelessness of the Admiralty in not affording proper protection to trade upon the coast of the kingdom;<sup>3</sup> he was, we learn, the only member who offered active opposition to General Conway's<sup>4</sup> bill for arming the people;<sup>5</sup> and he uttered a strong protest against the ceding of Gibraltar; while upon all agricultural subjects he was particu-

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 4th, 1783.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Dent, Member for Lancaster; of a Westmoreland family and partner in Child's Bank.

<sup>3</sup> February 21st, 1780.

<sup>4</sup> General Conway, Secretary of State, 1765.

<sup>5</sup> June 17th, 1783.

larly active. This is anticipating the march of events, but it suffices to show that at no time was he contented to be a mere spectator of other men's labours. Alert, energetic and keenly in earnest as he appears, it is difficult to realise that his whole inclination was not in the work before him.

Yet whatever reforms occupied his attention at the commencement of his career, the paramount question of the injustice done to the American States was never long absent from his thoughts nor from his speech. He struggled unwearingly to promote a better understanding of the grievances of the American Colonists, and to show that the cause of America was also the cause of England herself. He was far from desiring a separation between England and her Colonies ; yet he quickly realised that if the schism were irrevocable, it was better to agree to the independence of the States and to retain them as willing allies than as conquered enemies. But so long as the English arms were successful, so long men refused to believe that the cause in which they were succeeding was an unjust one. It was not until England had been impoverished by a long and bloody warfare, until Washington had turned the scale of victory against us, that the nation at large began to question whether the policy of George III and his Ministers had not, after all, been as mistaken as it was unjustifiable.

Meanwhile Coke, out of his very loyalty to what he held to be the true principles of the British Constitution, could honour the struggle of those who, he protested, interpreted such principles more accurately than did the obstinate King and his servile Ministers. In later

years he seldom cared to refer to this period of our national history, but once at a Holkham sheep-shearing he told the company a curious fact.

“Every night during the American war,” he said, “did I drink the health of General Washington as the greatest man on earth.”<sup>1</sup>

And this admiration, as Lafayette informed him, Washington throughout his life cordially reciprocated.<sup>2</sup>

Only two more events remain to record with regard to Coke's first Parliament. In this year of 1778, after little more than eighteen months of public life, he was, for the second time, offered a peerage—on this occasion by Lord North—and again he declined it decisively, little dreaming that before six years were over he would, for the third time, reject a like offer, under circumstances yet more remarkable.

In the following year, 1779, we have his own authority for the statement that he first voted with Fox, on March 29th, for Catholic Emancipation; and now, on this occasion, he little imagined that half a century would elapse before, on the actual anniversary of that date, Catholic Emancipation would be carried in the Commons, March 29th, 1829.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Report of the Transactions at the Holkham Sheep-shearing, 1821.* By R. N. Bacon. Printed by Burks and Kinnerbrook, and sold by J. Harding, St. James's Street.

<sup>2</sup> See *post*, Vol. II, p. 377.

<sup>3</sup> Obituary Notice, *Norwich Mercury*, July 9th, 1842. Also Coke's speech at Thetford, July, 1830.

## CHAPTER IX

## DICK MERRYFELLOW

1776-1780

*Ætat* 22-26

**I**N 1780 occurred a dissolution, and Coke again offered himself for the representation of Norfolk. This was the first General Election in which he had taken part since his entry into Parliament. While canvassing, an influence was brought to bear against him which might have seriously affected his success; and the story of his conduct in connection with which furnishes further proof of the quiet determination of character for which he early became known.

When new to the management of his estate, Coke had had a curious and disagreeable experience. Richard Gardiner, *alias* Dick Merryfellow, who had supported him in his first election and who was said to have written the speech on that occasion, already quoted, determined to turn that fact to his own advantage. He was a man whose life had been full of vicissitudes, and at the age of fifty-three he found himself with a wife and family in a state of pecuniary embarrassment. He accordingly wrote to Coke and offered himself as what he termed Auditor-General for the Holkham estates.

Coke was at first unwilling to consent; but Gardiner's

importunities and his own good-nature overruled his better judgment. Partly out of gratitude for the man's services at the time of his first election, for which he felt himself under an obligation, and partly out of a desire to help any one of straitened means, he yielded; and just three and a half months after his accession to his property, on August 1st, 1776, he delivered the appointment under his hand and seal making Richard Gardiner Auditor-General of all his estates in Norfolk at a salary of £600 a year. The office was practically a sinecure; though Coke may have thought that the experience and advice of a man of Gardiner's age and ability might be a help in his newly-acquired duties.

He was soon to find out his mistake. Gardiner, seeing himself in possession of a comfortable salary, and in a post which he believed to be secured to him for life, at once, as an old account says, "assumed the character and dignity of a Dictator-General." Having got his way without difficulty in the first instance, "unfortunately for himself he thought Mr. Coke's youth and inexperience would correspond with Shakespeare's dupe of fortune—

'Who will as tenderly be led by the nose  
As asses are . . . ' "<sup>1</sup>

In short, despite his natural shrewdness, Gardiner hopelessly miscalculated the temperament of the man with whom he had to deal. Coke's amiability at first appears to have blinded friends and foes alike to his real

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Life and Writings (prose and verse) of R--d G--rd--n--r, Esqre, alias Dick Merryfellow. Of serious and facetious memory.* Printed by G. Kearsley, Fleet Street, London, and M. Booth, Norwich, January 1st, 1782.



character ; but, however young and inexperienced, he was not of a nature to submit tamely to being made a dupe by any one. At this period, his Parliamentary duties enforced his absence from Holkham during each session ; yet he soon discovered that the estate was not being managed as he wished. On November 15th he left Holkham for town, and did not return till early the following January, when he hastened back for the audit ; and then an incident occurred which convinced him that Gardiner was not making a proper use of the power with which he had invested him.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst other reports made by Gardiner to Mr. Coke was one to the effect that a certain forester, known to tradition as "Owd Tom," had better be dismissed. He was, so Gardiner stated, a lazy, useless old man, who did not work honestly at his "grub-stubbing" (weeding), and was best got rid of. Coke replied casually that he would decide the matter another day. A few days later there arrived among the foresters a new hand who seemed a hard-working, kindly fellow, and who upon being asked by one of his mates to lend his help with a peculiarly stubborn root, did so with a heartiness and skill which won him golden opinions. He was, accordingly, received by them with rough cordiality and made free of their society ; he worked steadily and uncomplainingly with them, and drank his half-pint of beer or ate his crust of bread and cheese affably

<sup>1</sup> The story of this incident is so universally preserved about the neighbourhood of Ringstead in Norfolk that no doubt can be entertained respecting its authenticity. Tradition indeed assigns it to a date when Coke was a far older man and in the height of his fame ; but as no other instance is on record of the abrupt dismissal of his bailiff or agent, the inference appears conclusive.

with the rest. As he worked amongst them, however, he made special friends with "Owd Tom," reported a sluggard and idler, and who, so far from being what Gardiner had represented him, toiled at his weeding with untiring energy and industry. At the end of two days the new mate disappeared, and the following payday at Holkham "Owd Tom," to his extreme surprise, was presented by the Squire with a handsome rise in wages, which, later, was supplemented with a comfortable pension. Coke, like Haroun al-Raschid, had gone amongst his labourers disguised, rather than do a possible act of injustice to one old man; and the following February he dismissed Gardiner with a gratuity of £200, just six months after the date of his appointment.

Gardiner was dumbfounded. He was a man of prodigious vanity, and the public blow to his self-esteem was intolerable to him. For some reason, feeling convinced that Sir Harbord Harbord had advised Coke to take this step, he wrote to the former accusing him of having prompted his dismissal. Sir Harbord Harbord answered the letter denying that he had influenced Mr. Coke in any way; though he admitted that he did concur with the impropriety of vesting so extraordinary a power in the hands of any man. This letter Gardiner never forgave. He, however, made one last appeal to Coke. On July 3rd, 1777, he wrote: "If you do not mean, Sir, to persevere in your appointment of me as Auditor, *at least for some time*, you have done me the most *irreparable* injury"; and he begged that Coke would, at least, afford him some explanation—"that I may retire in such a manner as to do *honour*

to *yourself* and me, and that you may at least leave me *where you found me.*"

Coke good-naturedly consented to an interview, and Gardiner in that interview accepted the assurance that Sir Harbord had in no way been implicated in his dismissal, finally declaring, upon his honour, that he was satisfied with Coke's assertion to the contrary.

None the less, he promptly published a scurrilous letter of ninety-three pages against Sir Harbord, which he sold for eighteenpence, in which he recapitulated his accusation with full details.

Coke thereupon wrote as follows :—

"Sir,

"HOLKHAM, *August 6th, 1777.*

"It is with very great concern that I find myself obliged to write to you on such a subject ; but after the very inconsiderate step you took at Norwich in regard to my friend, Sir Harbord, subsequent to the explanation we had on this affair at Holkham, with which you seemed so well satisfied, you cannot be surprised that I think it incumbent on me to decline receiving you any more into my house, and demanding back the appointment of Auditor-General, which I desire you will return by the bearer.

"I am, Sir,

"Your most obedient humble servant,

"THOMAS WILLIAM COKE."

Gardiner was incensed. "You must excuse me, Sir, in *not returning* your appointment," he answered, "*though I will never act under it.*" And from that time forward, not only did he look upon Coke as his inveterate foe, to be bespattered with every sort of abuse and calumny, but everybody connected with Holkham

came within the scope of his biting malice. Witty and unscrupulous, his vindictive pen was a power to be feared; for weeks in the public press Coke was subjected to every species of ridicule and vituperation, and no effort was omitted to draw him into an undignified controversy. He was called "Simple Simpkin" or "Squire Shallow," the "Derbyshire block-spitter," the "Prince of Pines" or "Prince Pinery"—on account of his plantations—and many other names, but principally "Young Sir Growl," in contradistinction to his father, who was referred to as the deceased "Old Sir Growl."

From March 21st till May 2nd Coke maintained a total and disappointing silence. Then, finding it absolutely incumbent upon him to contradict the imputation cast upon Sir Harbord, he at last broke silence in the following dignified notice:—

#### TO THE PUBLIC

HAVING waited to see the utmost efforts of Mr. Gardiner's malice and abilities for abuse, at length I think it incumbent upon me to assure the public that all his assertions of Sir Harbord Harbord's having done him disservice with me are absolutely FALSE: and that all the discountenance I shewed him during his continuance in my service and my final dismissal of him from that service arose entirely without *the advice, suggestion, or even the knowledge of Sir Harbord Harbord, or any of the gentlemen to whom it is imputed in his pamphlet.*

That his conduct, whilst in my service, being disapproved by me, I therefore exercised that right, which I apprehend every gentleman has, and dismissed him with a gratuity of £200—which he has not taken the least notice of in this publication. The public bustle he made at Norwich in relation to Sir Harbord Harbord after the assurance I had given that Sir H. H. had never done him *any disservice* with me, I considered as implying his disbelief of my as-

surances, and consequently, as such, an affront to myself, that I thought it necessary to forbid him my house. Some time afterwards, finding he did not think the gratuity adequate to his services, I proposed to refer the point to arbitration, which he at first refused, though I am informed he has since inclined to—but as he now by his CALUMNIES and FALSEHOODS has forfeited every claim to my favor, I shall leave him to try what the law will further give him.

THOMAS WILLIAM COKE.

To this letter Gardiner wrote a furious answer, declaring that Coke did not possess a hundred pounds with which to pay his labourers and the family expenses; but the papers refused to publish it, whereupon he had it printed as a handbill at his own cost, together with a notice accusing Coke of having interfered in a cowardly manner with the liberty of the Press. The printers, however, in justice to Coke, flatly denied that their action in the matter had been in any way influenced by him, and there the subject temporarily dropped, save for two “explanatory pamphlets” issued by the irrepressible Dick Merryfellow, one of which was headed:—

There are, I scarce can think it, but am told,  
 There are, to whom my satire seems too bold :  
 Scarce to Sir H-rb-rd complaisant enough,  
 And something said of “Simpkin” much too rough !

When the election of 1780 came on, however, Dick Merryfellow saw his chance. He set to work with all the energy and wit of which he was capable to prevent Coke’s being re-elected. Every scurrilous story, every disparaging innuendo which he could rake up to influence popular opinion against his enemy was diligently applied to the purpose. His satires were

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brilliant and scathing, his perseverance indefatigable. He hit Coke at every point where it would have been undignified or impossible to retaliate; he attacked his love of hunting, his attempts to preserve his game, and, in a long and stinging poem, urged the freeholders to "Ne'er give a vote to Grawl's tyrannic heir." This effort is perhaps interesting as a specimen of political reprisals in another century, and also as evidence of the passion for sport with which Coke was accredited.

A FRAGMENT OF A POEM

(NEVER BEFORE PRINTED)

*Addressed to the Freeholders of Norfolk previous  
to the County Election*

ON THE MONOPOLY OF THE GAME

BY A FREEHOLDER

Part of it ran as follows:—

How boasts Prince Pinery the game he breeds!  
That game, alas! his ruined tenant feeds:  
Let the poor man but whisper, *he's undone*;  
The keeper's sent to take away his gun;  
Should hares and pheasants spare the corn he grows,  
He must not shoot, not even shoot—at crows.  
The madman's hounds next take their summer-beat,  
And hunt in August through the standing wheat.  
And, O! ye Gods! shall this *bashaw* be sent  
A senator to Britain's Parliament?  
There to preserve our liberties and laws,  
A peerless guardian in his country's cause?  
Let French invasions never fright your ear,  
'Tis our domestic tyrants we must fear.  
And shall we send them to the Commons' door,  
And arm them with fresh power to hurt us more?  
No, countrymen, be firm! this year agree,  
And shew you have the courage TO BE FREE!  
Shew you despise their low septennial arts,—

False promises, false oaths and falser hearts :  
 Shew that you know them well ; and tho' before  
 You have been duped, you will be duped no more :  
 Be honest to yourselves ! fear no man's frown !  
 And as you set them up, so pull them down.

But hark ! what shouts of joy ! the poll is o'er ;  
 And O ! Sir Growl's a senator no more.

To Derby send the Prince of Pines away,  
 His father's friends to ruin or betray ;  
 The wise indeed are cautious to offend,  
 No foe so deadly as an injured friend !  
 Deep in the coal pits plunge the *Tuscan* down  
 To bring up colliers and parade the town ;  
 To Derby send him back, where all agree,  
 No coals or colliers are so black as he.  
 Proud, but yet mean, affecting Leicester's state,  
 Of soul too little ever to be great !  
 Whom not good faith nor gratitude could bind,  
 A hollow heart ! and a deceitful mind !

True greatness springs from high descent alone,  
 Where virtue fails, 'tis lost upon a throne ;  
 Of ancestors a long illustrious race,  
 Where virtue fails, but adds to our disgrace ;  
 The gilded palace noise and nonsense rules,  
 And Holkham House becomes a nest of fools.

No sense of honour nobly spurs him on,  
 His hounds and horses his delight alone :  
 Feeling so little for the worst disgrace,  
 He'd rather lose his *seat*—than lose a *chace* :  
 To shew the ruling passion of his soul,  
 His hounds and huntsmen must attend the *poll*,  
 Th' election lost, he cares not, so the pack,  
 Can find him out a fox in coming back :  
 Freeholders, then, in time observe your cue !  
 And make as light of him as he of you.

etc., etc.

It ends up—

Worth like Sir John's<sup>1</sup> shall merit your applause,  
 And Windham's eloquence protect our laws :  
 To men like these, ye sons of Norfolk look ;  
 And laugh at all such *patriots* as Coke.

*September 9th, 1780.*

To Dick Merryfellow's bitter disappointment, on Wednesday, September 20th, "Sir E. Astley, Bart., of Melton Constable,<sup>2</sup> and T. W. Coke, of Holkham Hall," were attended to the hustings by 2000 freeholders and there chosen without opposition.

Dick died the following year, and Coke was saved further persecution from him, although at an election twenty years afterwards a witty squib was produced, which purported to be written by the "Ghost of Dick Merryfellow."

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Wodehouse, of Kimberley.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Edward Astley, 1729-1802.



## CHAPTER X

## EARLY POLITICAL LIFE CONTINUED

1780-1784

*Ætat 26-30*

**A**S pointed out in the last chapter, anything which serves to throw a light on Coke's temperament has a special interest, and about two months after his return to Parliament in 1780, he addressed the House of Commons in a speech that reveals, perhaps more clearly than any other ever uttered by him, the lack of prejudice which, in contrast to the unswerving nature of his convictions, presents an anomaly in his character.

Although at the age of five, Coke was said to have been inappropriately painted with a sword in his baby fingers, one of his most strongly marked characteristics throughout his life was his intense horror of bloodshed, and his steady opposition to all war not resorted to from dire necessity. Yet, averse as he thus was from war in the abstract, and well known to be one of the most strenuous opponents of the American war, it is curious to find him bringing forward a motion in the Commons on November 27th that the thanks of the House should be accorded to two distinguished Generals who were conducting the hostilities against

America, General Sir Henry Clinton and Lieutenant-General Earl Cornwallis.

In so doing, however, he differentiated plainly between his admiration for the conduct of the Generals, and his disapprobation of the cause in which they were engaged. "The origin of the war," he announced frankly, "he kept entirely out of view in the present question. He did not say that the war with America was not big with calamities to Great Britain; he apprehended even that it would be the ruin of this country financially, but still he saw no medium between unconditional submission to the enemy and the most spirited exertions."

His speech throughout left no doubt respecting his unalterable attitude with regard to the burning question of England's policy towards America—a policy which for ever remained indefensible in his opinion, even though, as he pointed out, America was now the ally of France, confederate of the House of Bourbon, and had proved false to her higher standard. But in the difficult situation into which England had brought herself, spirited exertions were her only resource until such time as she should recognise and accept the conclusion to which matters were rapidly tending. For, in this year of 1780, discontent was becoming universal with regard to the war and to the disastrous expenditure involved. This was powerfully represented by a growing opposition which had Fox, Burke and Dunning for its leaders, and which originated petitions for the reform of abuses together with a change of men and measures. And this spirit of discontent waxed, until in the succeeding year of 1781 it rose to a pitch then deemed formidable. For a time, indeed, public attention

was transferred to the No Popery riots in London, which were partially incited by the formation of a Protestant Association in Scotland, and influenced by the fanaticism of Lord George Gordon. But it revived in fresh vigour, and entered upon a new phase with which Coke was again connected.

Many of the counties, considering that an organised plan of resistance would have more effect than milder and disjointed expressions of opinion, formed Associations with this object in view, and further appointed delegates to meet in convention and give effect to the general resolutions of such constituent societies. They also prepared a petition; but, having ascertained that considerable disapprobation of such a convention existed, even among those most desirous of a redress of grievances, three of the delegates signed in their individual capacities, not in their quality of representatives. The House of Commons regarded the petition with Constitutional jealousy, and, amongst others, Coke expressed his strong disapprobation of an organised plan of resistance, which, in a long speech on April 2nd he pronounced to be "dangerous, unconstitutional, and exceedingly improper," being, moreover, calculated to defeat its own object.<sup>1</sup>

His remarks on this matter are historically valuable, because they reveal, not merely his personal views on the subject, but those of the party with whom he had allied himself, and who, later, were accused of abetting the affiliated societies enrolled during the French Revolution. His speech shows that this was far from being the attitude of a mass of the most pronounced Whigs,

<sup>1</sup> From the unpublished notes of R. N. Bacon.

but that, on the contrary, both Coke and his partisans did not fail to distinguish between the legitimate expression of individual opinion in a public assembly, and an organised conjunction of numbers whose object was to overawe the Government and the Legislature.

An instance, however, of how the object of societies was often misrepresented occurred some years afterwards. Coke was called upon in Parliament to defend the Norwich Union Society, a harmless gathering of Norwich citizens, whose sole object was the furthering of Parliamentary Reform, and who, as they pathetically protested, "never used other weapons but truth and reason." Yet so nervous had the Government become, that this club was represented by them as a terrible secret society affiliated with other societies, that it had secret oaths, bought fire-arms, held midnight orgies in which the Scriptures were ridiculed, and was forming a plot to overthrow the Government!<sup>1</sup>

In 1782, much to George III's annoyance, that Sovereign found himself forced to place the Whigs in authority with Rockingham at their head. Forthwith there arose a repetition of the usual gossip that Coke was about to accept a peerage. On June 8th, Lord Malone wrote to Lord Charlemont: "There is to be a large batch of new Peers made, as soon as they rise, Mr. Crewe, Mr. Coke of Norfolk, Mr. Parker of Devonshire, and many more whose names I have forgot." But on July 1st Rockingham died; and the following day Fox wrote to Coke:—

"GRAFTON ST., *July 2nd, 1782.*

"Sir,—I am sure it is unnecessary for me to point out to you how severe a blow the strength and union

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXXV, p. 790.

of the Whig party have suffered in the death of Lord Rockingham. What consequences this melancholy event may produce, it is difficult to judge ; but it is impossible for those who have at heart to keep together that system which it was the object of his life to promote and support, not to wish you and other considerable persons of the same principles to come to town at this critical juncture ; and to assist in forming some plan for acting together in a body upon the same system and principles upon which we have hitherto acted.

“ I am, with great truth and regard Sir,  
 “ Your obedient and humble servant,  
 “ C. J. Fox.”

The King at once appointed Shelburne as Prime Minister, believing that the latter would be amenable to his will. Fox, supported by Coke, and by most of his adherents, opposed this action of the King, stating that the nomination of First Minister rested with the Cabinet, who recommended Portland for the post. For two days the contest raged ; then Fox resigned.

That same year was a momentous one, in that it witnessed the long-delayed conclusion of the American war. Fighting had practically ceased since the surrender of Cornwallis, October 18th, 1781 ; but still the formal ratification of peace remained in abeyance ; the King still refused to face the inevitable ; and those of his persuasion still clung as tenaciously to the delusion that their cause was not lost. Meanwhile, throughout the country the clamour for the termination of hostilities became imperative. Impoverished, disheartened at the non-success of their arms, horrified at

the large sums which had been expended, at the lives which had been lost in a long and bloody struggle, disabused of their faith in the policy which had led to it, the people were frantic for the recognition of peace on any terms.

On February 22nd, 1782, General Conway moved that an address should be presented to his Majesty to implore him to listen to the advice of his Commons that the war with America might no longer be pursued. The debate on this occasion lasted till two in the morning, and the motion was *lost* by a minority of *one*, (193-194).<sup>1</sup> A second motion, similar in substance, but couched in less definite terms, met with better success. But the crucial question remained indeterminate—whether the King could be forced to acknowledge the independence of the revolted colonies. Unless this were so, unless the independence of the United States were openly ratified by England, it was universally recognised that anything in the nature of a treaty was merely temporising with the question at issue and that a fresh outbreak of hostilities was ultimately inevitable. As Fox pointed out later, when the preliminaries of peace were discussed,<sup>2</sup> to sign a treaty with the Americans on the footing of independence, and to make no mention of independence—“was a difference that he thought of the most dangerous nature to the public;—and what,” he urged, “would the other Powers think if they heard that the independence was not finally recognised, but remained dependent on another treaty, the conclusion of which was at best problematical?”

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXII, pp. 1047-48.

<sup>2</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. XIII, p. 3.

The whole question, therefore, turned on that one issue—Could the King be forced into giving a decisive assent to the wishes of his people? and, primarily, could the House be forced into agreeing to an address which made such a reply imperative? To all previous addresses the King had returned an answer which avoided committing himself to any definite statement. What hope could be derived from his reply to the address on General Conway's second motion: "You may be assured that, in pursuance of your advice, I shall take such measures as shall appear *to me* to be most conducive to the restoration of harmony," etc.?<sup>1</sup> It was requisite that an address should be framed which boldly stated the point at issue, in terms which left no loophole for evasion or procrastination.

The position of affairs being thus, Mr. T. Keppel relates that it was Coke who at length brought forward the motion in the House that the Independence of America should be recognised. All realised then that the crucial moment had at length arrived, the moment which was to determine for all time the relation between the Mother-country and her Colonies. All other discussions had been playing round the real dilemma; and the Tories, aghast at the conclusion which now hung in the balance, refused to divide. All night long the House sat. Robinson, the Whig whipper-in, and the whipper-in on the Tory side, both stationed themselves at the door of the House and allowed no one to go out. The dawn still found them sitting, weary, determined, anxious: each side hopeful, each side fear-

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXII, p. 108. The italics are my own.—Author.

ful of the crisis upon which hung the peace of Europe and the fate of two great nations.

At 8.30 the end came. The House divided. Amid breathless silence the result was announced—177 Noes against 178 Ayes. A ringing cheer went up from the ranks of the Whigs; Conway had been defeated by a minority of one, Coke had succeeded by a majority of one. The result for which Fox had laboured indefatigably during nine long years was at length achieved; the Independence of America was secured.

The Tories were overwhelmed at what they considered the ignominy of such a conclusion, the Whigs triumphant at what they viewed—not only as a long-delayed act of justice—but as the only policy now possible for England to adopt. Yet all—Whigs and Tories, and the country at large—alike experienced an overwhelming relief at the prospect of the peace which was at length assured.

Coke, at the instigation of Fox, at once moved that the address to the King should be taken up by the whole House. By the unanimous voice of his party he was called upon to present it; and to this, supported by General Conway, he consented. As Knight of the Shire he had not only the right to wear his spurs in the House,<sup>1</sup> but a further right to attend Court “in his boots,” i.e. in his country clothes; which latter privilege, however, was seldom, if ever, exercised. But on this occasion Coke availed himself of it, and appeared unceremoniously before the King wearing his ordinary country garb. It was an extremely picturesque dress—top-boots with spurs, light leather

<sup>1</sup> See *Diary and Correspondence of Lord Colchester*, Vol. I, p. 45.



breeches, a long-tailed coat and a broad-brimmed hat; but it caused the greatest horror at Court, and neither the matter nor the manner of the address was palatable to George III.

One can picture that strange scene—the discomfited King, forced to agree to what meant the failure of all his hopes, of all for which he had so long and so obstinately struggled; the excited Members divided in opinion on the momentous event in which they were assisting; and the man who headed them, that youth of twenty-eight, who alone in that great body of men whom he represented showed himself oblivious to the petty details of Court etiquette—to everything, in fact, save the one thing which he felt that he had come in triumph to claim—a belated act of justice to a long-injured people.

Gainsborough afterwards painted Coke in the dress which he wore on this historical occasion.<sup>1</sup> It is a life-sized picture, said to be the last portrait ever painted by that artist, and which now hangs in the Saloon at Holkham. Coke is represented standing beneath a tree with a dog at his feet and in the act of loading his gun. The figure is carelessly graceful, its attitude natural, its surroundings rural; yet it suggests something more than the quiet charm of that rural scene. For into the beautiful, disdainful face in the picture Gainsborough has surely put something of the expression which Coke must have borne when he headed the address which announced to George III the failure of injustice, and the independence, for all time, of the United States.

<sup>1</sup> See Frontispiece, Vol. I.

Years afterwards, when welcoming an American to the Holkham sheep-shearing in 1821,<sup>1</sup> Coke referred to that day.

“Every one,” he said, “knows my respect for the Americans, for their manly and independent assertion of their liberties. I came into Parliament previous to the commencement of the disastrous war which divided the two countries, which, under a mild and wise Government, might have been joined hand in hand, and, thus united, might have bid [*sic*] defiance to the rest of the world. It may not be known, for I have never mentioned it to my friends in that House, that I was the individual who moved to put an end to that war, and it was carried by a majority of one, the numbers being 177 to 178. I was the only Member out of twelve from this county who voted against the war; and I thank God for it; I look back with satisfaction to that conduct, and have followed the same principles ever since. When it was carried, Lord North moved that the debate should stand over till the following day; but Mr. Fox suggested to me to move that the Address be carried up to the Throne. The Debate lasted till seven the next morning, and Lord North, seeing that not a man would stir, at length gave way; and I carried up the Address as an English Country Gentleman, in my leather breeches, boots and spurs. But, would you believe it, the traitor General Arnold, when I presented the Address, stood as near to his Majesty as I am now to the Duke of Sussex—a most lamentable proof of that fatal policy of which we have long seen the evil effects. . . .”

As is well known, General Benedict Arnold was a man of contemptible character, who had first been on

<sup>1</sup> *A Report of the Transactions at the Holkham Sheep-shearing (1821), being the Forty-third Anniversary of that Meeting.* By R. N. Bacon. Printed by Burks and Kinnerbrook, and sold by J. Harding, St. James's Street, London. (Pages 73-4.)



*B. Arnold*



the American side during the war, but who, having been brought before a court-martial and found guilty of certain charges which entailed his being condemned to a public reprimand, afterwards in revenge privately espoused the Royalist side, and betrayed to them any secrets of the party to which he still professed to belong. On his treachery being discovered, he joined the British openly, and was appointed Colonel in the British army, receiving payment of upwards of £6000.<sup>1</sup>

The close proximity to the King of such a man, on such an occasion, was calculated to incense all lovers of straight dealing, irrespective of party feeling; but another fact which specially angered the Whigs was that—owing, it was whispered, to the presentation of the address being singularly unpalatable to the King—public mention of it was subsequently suppressed or minimised in as far as was practicable;—it will be observed that Coke himself, a few years afterwards, spoke of it as a fact which “*may not be known.*” On March 6th, 1782, “Sir Joseph Mawbey claimed the attention of the House to what he called an indecent behaviour in Ministers, who always took care to have inserted in the *Gazette* every address from every little paltry borough that flattered and cringed to them, but the important Address to His Majesty, to put an end to the accursed American war, and his Majesty’s answer to it, had not yet made its appearance; he therefore desired to know the cause of such neglect.” In consequence, Lord Surrey further pointed out that Ministers had never behaved in such an “indecent

<sup>1</sup> For many years General Arnold had a house in Gloucester Place. He died June 14th, 1801, and was buried on June 21st at Brompton.

manner" as when the Address to which Sir Joseph Mawbey referred was presented to the King, "for when the House went up with the address, who should they see close to His Majesty's right hand, but the most determined foe to America, General Arnold."<sup>1</sup>

In his speech for November 5th, however, when the following Session of Parliament was opened, the King was forced publicly to announce his assent to the decision of his Parliament; and the irony of this act must have been heightened by the knowledge that such a crisis had been forced by the balance of one vote. On the 25th of January following (1783), the United States were finally acknowledged free, sovereign and independent, and the preliminaries of peace were signed between Great Britain, France and Spain.

It was not long before Coke again presented an address to the King. Fox, who had never ceased in his endeavour to oust Shelburne from the Ministry, at last bethought himself of a plan which he believed would achieve his object. Early one morning, while Coke was still in bed, Fox came to see him, and entering the room unceremoniously, seated himself upon the edge of the bed and unfolded his great scheme. He proposed, he said, to oust Shelburne by forming a Coalition with Lord North, and the conjunction of their two parties against the Government. Coke was horrified at a suggestion which he unhesitatingly pronounced to be a "most revolting compact"; and he did his utmost to dissuade Fox from pursuing it. A heated argument ensued between them. Fox pointed out, and

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XXII, p. 1109. See also Appendix A.

laid great stress on the fact that Lord North had promised to act upon *his* opinion, not he upon Lord North's—in other words, that North might be said to have gone over to Fox, not Fox to North. Coke told him that this was the one redeeming feature in an otherwise disgraceful alliance—an alliance which would assuredly give rise to much misunderstanding amongst both friends and foes.

Yet, profoundly as Coke regretted what he believed to be an act of mistaken policy on the part of Fox—an act which, as he pointed out, was open to grave misconstruction—his faith in the purity of Fox's motives remained unshaken. He judged Fox out of his own absolute integrity, and believed that, however faulty in judgment the great statesman might be at this juncture, his sincerity and the honesty of his intentions were inviolable. Thus, while he fought Fox's conclusions, he determined to adhere to Fox's cause with unflinching loyalty. For long they argued, each unconvinced by the other's vehement reasoning, each firmly persuaded that the judgment of the other was at fault; but still, each with his faith in the motives of the other absolutely unchanged.<sup>1</sup>

Although Fox achieved his object, and Shelburne resigned on February 24th, yet how correct had been Coke's prognostic with regard to the more far-reaching results of that policy, was doomed to be proved subsequently. That successful diplomacy brought Fox little honour; his integrity was called in question; it was

<sup>1</sup> From the unpublished MS. of R. N. Bacon. It is curious that a wood which Coke planted at Holkham at this date was called and still retains the name of the Coalition Wood.

said that as he had coalesced with Lord North, so he would be willing to betray his party by forming a union with Pitt; and his motives, though undoubtedly pure, were thus looked at askance by some of those who had been his warmest adherents; while, by the general public of his day, as well as by many later readers of history, the true grounds of his alliance with North were never understood.

Meanwhile, although Shelburne had resigned, his Ministry remained in power, and Fox appealed to Coke to consummate the triumph for which the Whigs were impatient. Early in the following March he wrote urgently to Coke to aid him in the formation of a new Ministry.<sup>1</sup> "I depended upon seeing you to-night at Brooks's," he wrote one Sunday evening, "or I should have sent to you to ask you whether you have any objection to moving to-morrow an address similar to that which you moved last year. There are many reasons why you are the properest person to move it, and I know your opinion to be so strong."

The result of this pressing appeal was that, on the 19th of March, Coke gave notice that if an Administration should not be formed on or before the Friday following, he would on that day move an address to his Majesty to discover the reason. "This," says Walpole, "was probably to terrify the King."<sup>2</sup> The notice was supposed to have had the desired effect.

<sup>1</sup> This letter, like most of Fox's communications to Coke, is undated, but it is endorsed in Coke's handwriting, "Re. moving an Address to His Majesty," and there can be little doubt that it was written at this juncture.

<sup>2</sup> Remarks of Walpole, quoted in *Memorials and Correspondence of C. J. Fox*, ed. by Lord John Russell (1853), Vol. II, p. 50. "Coke," adds Walpole, "had the promise of a peerage from Lord Rockingham."



On the 22nd "Mr. Coke made his intended motion, but waived it on the Coalition declaring that they believed his Majesty would soon appoint an Administration."<sup>1</sup> It was universally believed that the King had commanded the Duke of Portland and Lord North to lay an arrangement for a new Administration before him; but still, no definite announcement came of the King having taken action. On Monday 24th, therefore, Coke rose in the House, and demanded to know definitely whether any Administration was formed, or whether any was forming which was to consist of men possessing the confidence of the country?

Mr. Pitt in answer, to the surprise of all present, declared that he was *not* Minister, and knew of no arrangement of Administration whatsoever.

Thus again it devolved upon Coke to force the reluctant action of George III. He delayed no longer. "Public need," he said, "required him to take a step which might seem an infringement on the prerogative of the Crown, but the distracted state of affairs throughout the country was an invincible spur to action." He spoke strongly, pointing out the impossibility of retaining in office "those Members on whose conduct the House had already passed a censure," and he entered into the cause and imperative need of the motion he was about to make, which he termed the "Call of the People by its Representative Body." "Every man," he summed up, "both in and out of Parliament, must admit the necessity of having an Administration, and that *immediately*."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> From the unpublished MS. of R. N. Bacon.

He then moved his address, which respectfully, but somewhat sarcastically, urged his Majesty to "*con-descend to compliance* with the wishes of this House." A heated and most remarkable debate ensued. Fox spoke at great length, and said that the motion had his hearty approbation; the people demanded it and the kingdom required it. Finally, it was agreed to without a division.

The King replied that "it was his earnest desire to do everything in his power to comply with the wishes of his faithful subjects," though on March 26th he remarked pointedly to General Conway: "*It was a strange debate on Monday.*"<sup>1</sup>

But Coke's famous Address had dealt the death-blow to the Shelburne Ministry.<sup>2</sup>

On the 2nd of April following (1783), the Coalition Government was formed, with Portland at its head.

It was on October 8th following that Fox, still anxious lest he should forfeit Coke's support, determined on a special appeal for his assistance:—

"As the meeting of Parliament is now fixed for the 11th of next month," he wrote, "and as the most important business is likely to come on immediately after its meeting, I cannot help troubling you with these few lines to state to you the importance of a numerous attendance on the part of the true friends of the Whig cause. As I flatter myself that I have not done anything to forfeit your good opinion, so I cannot help hoping that you will give me credit when I assure you that it is for the support of the *cause* and not of any particular situation that I am thus earnest in requesting your attendance."

<sup>1</sup> *Memorials and Correspondence of C. J. Fox*, edited by Lord John Russell, Vol. II, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Georgian Era*, by Clarke, 1833, Vol. IV, pp. 50-52.

Coke did not fail to respond to this appeal. He was in his seat when Parliament met on November 11th, and also on the 18th when Fox brought in his great India Bill, which had in view the establishment of some definite control over the power of the trading company, who had become possessed of large provinces in India and who were abusing the authority thus acquired. The Bill, which was to vest the authority then exercised by the company in a body of seven Commissioners, passed triumphantly through the House of Commons; but the King, who, after his defeat with regard to America, was more than ever tenacious of his prerogative, viewed it with suspicion, as a measure calculated to diminish his personal supremacy. He determined that it should not pass the Lords. On December 16th Fox wrote indignantly to Coke:—

“ My dear Sir,

“ Nothing can go against me more than to trouble you at this time upon the subject of attendance in Parliament, *but we are beat in the House of Lords by the direct interference of the Court*, and if some vigorous measures are not immediately taken, the Parliament will be dissolved, and a system of influence be established by acquiescence, of the most dangerous of any yet attempted. I wish you at the same time to let this be known to any members you may happen to see, who have a spark of Whig principles left.

“ I am, dear Sir,

“ Yours ever,

“ C. J. Fox.

“ ST. JAMES' PLACE,

“ 16th Dec., 1783.”

The King's conduct was incompatible with constitutional monarchy, and the uproar in the House of

Commons was great. Motion after motion condemnatory of it was carried by great majorities. On the 18th December the Coalition Ministry were dismissed from office and Pitt accepted the Premiership. The Whigs were forthwith determined on Pitt's resignation, and Pitt was equally determined not to tender it. On February 2nd, 1784, Coke brought forward a motion prefaced by a short but telling speech against the continuance of the Ministers in their office, and Mr. Pitt's refusal to resign, declaring—

“That it is the opinion of this House that the continuance of the present Ministers in their offices is an obstacle to the formation of such an Administration as may enjoy the confidence of this House and tend to put an end to the unfortunate divisions and distractions of the country.”

The debate on this motion was great. The ground on which it was combated by Mr. Dundas and others was that the growing popularity of the new Administration rendered it impossible for the House to adjourn to the foot of the throne and implore the Crown to rescue them from its tyranny! Fox made an eloquent speech in defence of the motion, while Pitt declared that he would not be forced to resign, in a speech which has become historical. “I refuse,” he said, “to march out of my post with a halter round my neck, to change my armour, and meanly beg to be readmitted as a volunteer in the ranks of the enemy.” Some of the Members suggested a Coalition, but finally the House divided on the motion, and it was carried by a majority of nineteen.

In a subsequent debate Coke, alluding to this resolu-

tion, said: "That no man should tell him that the calamities that might flow from the present interregnum were to be ascribed to him, for making that motion: they were to be ascribed to those Ministers who dared to stand up in proud opposition to the whole of the House of Commons."

On the 25th of March, 1784, Parliament was dissolved, and the country was plunged into the excitement of a General Election.

Now Sir Edward Astley, on this occasion, appears to have acted towards Coke in a manner which even his own family strongly condemned. Without acquainting Coke with his intention, he severed all connection with his former colleague, and started a canvass on his own behalf in Norfolk—a fact all the more astonishing in that the expenses of this contest were to be shared by Coke. Coke's opponents in the county also set on foot an early canvass secretly during his absence in town, and further set afloat a triumphant rumour that Astley had gone over to their representative Wodehouse. They hoped by this means, and by making the time between the day of nomination and the day of election unusually brief, to give Coke no opportunity for recovering lost ground.

When, therefore, Coke set to work, it was practically impossible to get through the requisite canvassing. Whilst he drove about the country soliciting the support of his friends, Mrs. Coke exerted herself actively on his behalf. By April 4th she was writing letters from Norwich to many of Coke's influential friends, informing them that the day of nomination was fixed

for April 8th, "when an intention is publicky avowed by Sir J. Wodehouse's friends to disturb the peace of the county by putting him in opposition to the old Members." Her efforts were viewed with great alarm by Coke's opponents, who issued much sound advice to their followers on the subject, amongst others a song, dated the day previous to that of nomination, the refrain of which ran as follows:—

Britons to your country true,  
 Let not beauty vanquish you ;  
 Formed to conquer, formed to please,  
 Gaze no more on charms like these :  
 From the winning graces flee,  
 Hostile now to Liberty !

*April 7th, 1784.*

Yet, so late as April 1st, Mrs. Coke had remained in town in order, as she mentions, to attend Court and pay her respects to his Majesty for conferring a peerage upon her brother James.<sup>1</sup> Before starting for Court, however, she had found time to dispatch a letter to Sir Harbord Harbord from Harley Street, asking him, "for Mr. Coke's satisfaction," to send a few lines to assure her that he, among Mr. Coke's other adherents, would support him on the day of trial ; and, in unforeseen consequence of this letter, a strange misunderstanding arose between Coke and one of his oldest friends.

Sir Harbord Harbord sent a reply to Mrs. Coke authorising her to declare "in any way serviceable to Mr. Coke" that he was resolved to support him and Sir Edward Astley. Three days later, on April 4th,

<sup>1</sup> James Dutton, who had married Elizabeth Coke and was raised to the peerage as Baron Sherborne, of Sherborne, by Pitt, 1784 (Burke and Courthorpe date this creation on May 20th).

writing to Sir Edward, Sir Harbord happened to relate how Wodehouse called upon him subsequently, to canvass him, and how he had told Wodehouse that "*Although I certainly do not think with Mr. Coke on politics, I shall undoubtedly support him in the county, and have told him so.*" Wodehouse, he adds, considerably chagrined, exclaimed coldly: "Do I perfectly understand you that you are engaged to Mr. Coke and Sir E. Astley?" "Undoubtedly so," Sir Harbord states that he replied; and Mr. Wodehouse, he further explains, "did not make a civil bow on leaving!"

For what reason I cannot say, Coke became firmly convinced that, in the ensuing canvass, Sir Harbord played him false, and was actively instrumental in turning the tide of popularity against him. Still more, he believed that it was as a direct reward of this treachery that Sir Harbord was given his peerage in 1786. This, after their long friendship, and after the manner in which he, personally, had acted towards Sir Harbord in regard to the episode with Dick Merryfellow, wounded him deeply; but he never referred to the matter, and it was only by chance that a common acquaintance became aware of the fact long after Sir Harbord's death, and brought about an explanation. Over fifty years afterwards, Sir Harbord's son, Lord Suffield, in order to clear his father's memory, hunted for evidence amongst the latter's papers. The result was the discovery of several letters more or less available for the required purpose, but, above all, of the account of the interview with Wodehouse which his father had written to Astley, and which successfully established Sir Harbord's sincerity towards his old

friend. These were forwarded to Coke, and, after studying them, he expressed himself—to his extreme satisfaction—convinced that his suspicions of half a century had been unfounded.<sup>1</sup>

But the belief that both his friend and his colleague were acting counter to his interests in this election must have been a bitter thought to Coke, while it rendered his acknowledged opponents all the more active in their efforts to oust him. His bill against night-poaching of the previous session was brought up strongly against him, and a ridiculous little story made great use of amongst the Tory wags. A certain poor man had allowed his cow to wander into Holkham Park. Unknown to Coke, his steward summoned the man for trespass and lost the day. The onus of the steward's action naturally fell upon his master, and the incident was raked up at many subsequent elections, when songs, both scathing and scurrilous, attempted to immortalise it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life of First Baron Suffield*, by R. N. Bacon (privately printed).

<sup>2</sup> A favourite one was entitled "The Norfolk Cow-killer," and was sung to the tune of "The Vicar and Moses." It consisted of nine verses in the following strain:—

In story we're told  
That Alcides of old,  
The fam'd bull of Minos laid low ;  
We've a hero as great,  
But of much later date,  
Holkham's Hercules conquer'd a coo !  
Fal de ral, etc.

Warwick's valiant Earl Guy  
Made a mad monster die,  
And fame has recorded the blow ;  
But old Leicester wou'd sneer  
To see this wou'd-be peer  
Vivet armis attack a tame coo !  
Fal de ral, etc. etc.



The great charge which the Tories tried to encourage against Coke at this juncture was that he was working for a peerage. It is difficult to imagine that this idea could ever have obtained credence with regard to a man of his well-known independence of spirit; but there were many who believed it, and it is referred to in the electioneering squibs, while the following doggerel—which also contained verses to Astley and Windham—became very popular:—

Tommy Coke, Tommy Coke,  
 You so fain would have spoke  
 I'd a strong inclination to hear you ;  
 But your countenance told us  
 For a peerage you'd sold us,  
 So not a freeholder could bear you,  
   Tom Coke,  
 So not a freeholder could bear you !

Below this verse is the emphatic footnote—

N.B.—*The Fox stinks worse than ever!*

But while Coke's constituents were encouraged to believe that he would play them false, Pitt, aware of Coke's importance as a political opponent, secretly endeavoured to wean him from his allegiance to Fox; and, failing to do so, took a petty revenge. The following story, told by Lord Albemarle,<sup>1</sup> is recorded also in a private notebook by Mr. Keppel, who, like Lord Albemarle, says that he heard it direct from Coke. Lord Albemarle relates:—

“ In 1784, William Pitt the younger, wishing to draw Coke from his allegiance to his rival Fox, sought to bribe him with the Earldom of Leicester, which had been previously in his family. The offer was indignantly refused.

<sup>1</sup> George, sixth Earl of Albemarle, s. his brother, 1851.

“To spite Coke, the Premier bestowed the title upon his near neighbour George Townshend.<sup>1</sup> Before accepting Pitt’s offer, Mr. Townshend wrote to his father to ask his approval, and received for answer :—

‘Dear Son,

‘I have no objection to your taking any title but that of

‘Your affectionate father,

‘TOWNSHEND.’

“I had this anecdote from Coke himself.”<sup>2</sup>

One point, however, should have been mentioned in connection with the previous offer of this peerage made by Pitt to Coke—a point which is sufficiently obvious, and the omission of which by Lord Albemarle has very naturally cast some doubt on the authenticity of his story. This is, that Pitt’s offer of the peerage to Coke was *not a formal and public offer*. Not only would it have been practically impossible for Pitt to approach a rival of Coke’s political importance *directly* with such a proposal, but Coke’s own evidence, as we shall see later, refutes the suggestion of such an event having taken place. In a letter to Lord Grey in 1830,<sup>3</sup> in which he enumerates the formal offers of a peerage received and refused by him prior to that date, he makes no mention whatsoever of this offer of Pitt’s, of which he had yet informed both Lord Albemarle and Mr. Keppel, separately, that he had been the recipient.

<sup>1</sup> May 18th, 1784. George, second Marquis, b. 1755. Summoned to Parliament 1770 as Baron de Ferrars of Chartley, to which Barony he succeeded (*jure matris*) on September 14th of that year.

<sup>2</sup> *Fifty Years of My Life*, Vol. I, p. 133; see also *Posthumous Memoirs*, Sir. N. W. Wraxall (1836), Vol. I, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> See *post*, Vol. II, p. 419.

But neither does he make mention of a like offer conveyed by Charles Tompson two months after the commencement of his parliamentary career, and of which we have undoubted proof that he had also been a recipient, since he had stated this fact definitely in a public speech. The inference appears conclusive—the one offer, like the other, was a negotiation conducted privately through a third person, in which the earldom of Leicester was held out as a bait to Coke, and was, as he related, indignantly rejected.

A very angry correspondence forthwith ensued between Coke and the Townshends with regard to the proposed appropriation by the latter of a title which had been previously annexed by Coke's great-uncle, and to which he therefore considered that his own family had a prior claim. The De Lisles, the representatives of the Leicester peerage created by Queen Elizabeth, wrote to both combatants to emphasise their own point of view, viz. that they alone had a right to the disputed peerage; but this interference was considered to be irrelevant. There seemed something strangely ominous to the family of Coke in the name of George Townshend; it was a bearer of that name who had challenged—some said, slain—Lord Leicester; it was a bearer of that name who, by a curious coincidence, now engaged in a duel of a different nature with his descendant. The feeling in Norfolk was very strong against the action of the Townshends in this matter, and George Townshend was so much annoyed at the manner in which his decision was regarded, that he wrote to many influential people in the county to exonerate himself from the charge of bad taste or deliberate

ill-will towards Mr. Coke with which he was accredited. He had, he maintained, long thought of taking the title of Leicester in virtue of his descent from Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, in the thirteenth century; in short, his correspondence sufficiently proves that in this matter he was the unconscious tool of Pitt and was innocent of all complicity in, or suspicion of, the Minister's private desire to annoy Coke.<sup>1</sup>

Possibly in consequence of this episode, even more than on account of the Minister's general policy, Coke always said that "he could not call Pitt a great man, for he thought him a little one in all the actions of his life";<sup>2</sup> nor did he hesitate to state emphatically before Pitt in the House: "I am one of those who never reposed any confidence in the Right Honourable Gentleman!"<sup>3</sup> But that Pitt, on the contrary, always entertained a profound respect for Coke's integrity is certain. Some years afterwards he paid a public testimony to it, and that at a moment when such an action on his part could be least expected. It happened that Coke, exasperated by Pitt's policy, and always disposed to frankness rather than caution, had, in the heat of debate, been completely carried away by his feelings. He had made a violent personal attack upon the Minister; and upon resuming his seat and reflecting upon what he had said, he felt convinced that Pitt would, and with some reason, make a severe reply. To his astonishment, however, Pitt rose and said

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that when Coke eventually took the title of Earl of Leicester the Tory newspapers accused him of a breach of good taste towards the Townshends.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at Coke's nomination, August, 1830.

<sup>3</sup> *Par. Debates*, Vol. XXIX, p. 55.

quietly : " I can put up with anything that the Honourable Gentleman may be pleased to say, for he is one of the very few of his party who have never asked a favour of me."<sup>1</sup>

But whatever the power of Pitt's opponents in the election of 1784, the heart of the country was with him. The Dissenters and liberal-minded people were favourably disposed towards him because of his promise to support the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Further, they announced that they would support no one who would not pledge himself to repeal these Acts and to advocate reform. Coke's enemies were fond of asserting that he would oppose all Ministerial measures whether right or wrong.<sup>2</sup> The Dissenters, therefore, decided to send a deputation, headed by two of their leading men, to wait upon him, in order to probe his views with regard to this matter, and to require from him an oath that he would support the cause which they had at heart, whoever the Minister might be who brought it forward.

Now on this question Coke sided with Pitt, but he did not believe in the sincerity of the Minister, and felt convinced that Pitt would never carry the measure—a conviction which subsequent events justified. Coke could, moreover, had he chosen, have reminded the Dissenters that when Sir John Rouse, during the Shelburne Ministry, had moved the repeal of the Test Acts—although the latter was a strong Tory, and although he was known to be acting under the bribe of a peerage from Lord Shelburne—yet he, Coke, while

<sup>1</sup> Recorded in the notebook of the Hon. the Rev. T. Keppel.

<sup>2</sup> See *Georgian Era*, Vol. IV, p. 52.

disapproving of the man, had unhesitatingly voted for the measure. But in view of the absolute consistency of his own parliamentary career, and the manner in which he had always put principle before party, he considered the question of the Dissenters insulting. His only reply to them was that "he was above giving a test," and that if they could not trust him without a test they must turn him out. "Moreover," as he subsequently commented disdainfully, "only Tories give pledges, and why? Because they do not hesitate to break them!"

The Dissenters were extremely chagrined at his frank contempt, and informed him pompously that under such circumstances they could not support him, as they believed in the assurances of Mr. Pitt, who was a most worthy young man. "I did not refer to my past political conduct," Coke said afterwards; "I did not condescend to recall to their minds my political sentiments and actions. Nor would I ever condescend to such a step. God forbid that I should be driven by means so repugnant to every honest man! What was the consequence? I was rejected, and I glory in being one of those who were called 'Fox's Martyrs.' I was sacrificed, and three or four other determined Whigs who would not be bullied into such a measure."<sup>1</sup>

Up to the last the preparations for the election went forward undisturbed. Forty houses were engaged in Norwich for the friends of Sir John Wodehouse, who were to meet at the "Maid's Head" at ten for breakfast, then go to the poll and back to dinner. For the friends of Sir Edward Astley and Mr. Coke fifty-five houses

<sup>1</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, August 26th, 1830.

were engaged ; but final arrangements do not appear to have been made public when Coke, to quote his own words, "made his bow to the county," and retiring from the contest, left the way clear for his antagonist.

In so doing, he attributed the loss of his election, primarily, to the conduct of Sir Edward Astley. In a letter written to Jacob Astley, Esquire, in 1789, he refers to Sir Edward's conduct at the last election as having been "the sole cause of throwing me out of the county," and relates: "I bore all Sir Edward's expences, as well after I retired as before." Some idea of those expenses may be gathered by the receipts still preserved, which show that to innkeepers in Norwich Coke paid £746, for cockades £115, to "Chairmen, Marshallmen, Stavesmen, Riders, Runners, and Assistants £160," etc. ; the total for *one* bill connected with this election representing over £2000. All expenses, however, he appears to have settled promptly by cash ; a feat which his opponent Wodehouse was unable to perform.

Wilson, in his *Biographical Index to the House of Commons*, says : "In the springtime of his popularity, Mr. Coke, notwithstanding his great stake in the country, lost his election for Norfolk." This, however, is inaccurate, for Coke retired voluntarily two days before the poll.

"I retire," he announced, "from a contest which is likely to disturb the peace of the country without producing any advantage to that cause in which I am engaged. The shortness of the interval between the day of nomination and the day of election was thought insufficient to recover the effects of a canvass, which, it now appears, had begun during

my absence in town, was carried on without my knowledge, and owed much of its success to an artifice not the most justifiable—the pretence of a junction between my late worthy colleague and my opponent.”

With much dignity he enumerated the part he had taken in Parliament.

“I took,” he said, “a distinguished part in opposing the American war; I gave my vote most heartily and most successfully for controlling the enormous influence of the Crown; and assisted that truly constitutional measure by which the most abused power of voting was taken away from the undeserving dependents of the Crown.”

And while “Coke the Lord of Norfolk shrank before the storm,”<sup>1</sup> throughout the country the Whigs—Fox’s Martyrs, as they were ironically called—were grievously defeated, and lost 160 seats. Only a few triumphs were scored by the adherents of the Coalition Cabinet: Windham contested Norwich and was returned by a majority of 64 votes, while, for Norfolk, Astley was elected. But for Coke a later triumph was reserved.

Some years afterwards, walking in the streets of Yarmouth, he met the two Dissenters who had been sent to head the deputation in 1784, one of whom, it may be mentioned, bore the appropriate name of Mr. Hurry. They tried to avoid Coke, but he stopped them. “How now!” he said: “what about your young friend, Mr. Pitt? Has he not proved all you thought him?” Mr. Hurry, looking considerably embarrassed, replied that “Mr. Pitt had indeed disappointed them;

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Pitt*, by the Right Hon. the Earl of Rosebery, ch. III, p. 56.



they had thought him a young man who would fulfil his promises; but they had, apparently, made a sad mistake."

"A mistake," rejoined Coke, "which will be made by all who pin their faith on *Pledges*."

## CHAPTER XI

## SOCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL LIFE

**T**HERE followed the only break which occurred in Coke's long parliamentary career. Once he had decided that he was justified in retiring from the contest, it was with a sense of unutterable relief that he turned his back upon the political arena; and although always active in the Whig cause, he did not again enter upon any personal contest for a space of six years.

We must now turn from his life as a statesman to his life as a private individual and a great landowner.

During the eight years which had passed since he came into possession of Holkham his private existence had been happy and comparatively uneventful. One tragedy only appears to have darkened it. To the nimble pen of Lady Mary Coke we are indebted for the information. Sunday, December 1st, 1776, she writes:—

“Did you hear that my cousin Mrs. Coke was brought to bed of a dead son, occasioned by a fright; a mouse got into her nightcap and demolished the heir to Holkham.”<sup>1</sup>

In those days a lady's hair, profusely decorated with pomatum and powder, was worn strained over a big triangular cushion with large curls pendant on either

<sup>1</sup> From the still unprinted Journal of Lady Mary Coke.

side ; the higher this erection, the more fashionable it was considered ; and since the labour required to rear a sufficiently elaborate coiffure was great, an enormous cap—attached to the head by no less than twenty-four large black pins, double and single—was worn at night to envelop and preserve it intact for the next day. It was no unusual event for a mouse, tempted by a prospective meal of pomatum and powder, to attempt to creep into a nightcap ; and, if it once succeeded in entering the vast structure of hair without becoming impaled upon the long pins, it was no easy matter to oust it ; often this could not be accomplished until the whole head-dress had been pulled down. In days when ladies fainted at the mere sight of a mouse, their terror at such an adventure must have been great ; and, in this instance, its result was not only disastrous, but far-reaching. As the years passed by, no other son was born to Coke. Two daughters were born, Jane Elizabeth, afterwards the beautiful Lady Andover, born on December 22nd, 1777 ; and, just over a year later, on January 25th, 1779, Anne Margaret, who afterwards became Lady Anson ; but still no heir replaced the one who had been thus untimely “demolished,”—the destiny of Holkham had been decided by a mouse ! Therefore, when in 1793 a son was born to Coke’s brother, Edward, he was accepted as heir-presumptive to Holkham, and not only was he named Thomas William after his uncle, but, like him, was brought up at Longford, Coke having generously lent that house to his brother for the latter’s lifetime.

Debarred from having a son, the great aim of Mrs. Coke’s life became the education of her two daughters. Herself clever, well read and gifted with a shrewd

insight, she was exceptionally fitted for the task. The few letters from her still in existence are written in a firm, clear hand, full of character and determination, while those published in current biographies are remarkable for their fluency of expression and the literary knowledge which they reveal. In 1785, when Dr. Parr<sup>1</sup> presented her with his "Discourse on Education," she wrote to him with enthusiasm:—

"I have read your Discourse upon Education with the utmost attention, and with that eager desire of information which a parent may be supposed to possess, who has for seven years directed much serious thought to this most important object; for having only daughters, the pleasing task of their instruction becomes my province. . . . What stamps the highest value on your opinions in my mind, is this, that they are not mere assertions, but the result of many years' *extensive experience*, as well as much profound meditation, and diligent researches into the labour of other men. . . . Whereas Rousseau, and several authors I have perused, who have treated this subject, not possessing the superior advantage of experience, only serve to lead astray by plausible theories, which are undoubtedly not practicable."

She further remarks how happy she is in having Parr's authority "in opposition to the fashionable doctrines of scepticism, that religion is the surest foundation on which we can raise moral virtue in either sex"; and she proffers the anxious inquiry—"Pardon the liberty I take in requesting to be informed whether you think Johnson's Dictionary the best standard for the *unlearned* to consult concerning orthography and pronunciation?" In conclusion, she begs that Dr. Parr will come to Holkham in order

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Samuel Parr, LL.D.



*M<sup>rs</sup> Coke (Jane Dutton)*  
*with her two elder daughters; afterwards Lady. Andover*  
*and Lady. Anson*



“to judge how far I have been able to put into practice with respect to my children, a system of education I profess so entirely to approve”; though, she laments, “if they had been sons, it would have been my earnest wish not to confine my approbation of your excellent system to the barren tribute of my poor praise.”

The learned Doctor's verdict has not survived, but doubtless it was all that her heart desired; for her children amply repaid the care which, from the earliest days, she bestowed upon them; though this must be attributed as much to the fact that they inherited her ability, as to her judicious superintendence of their education. And that sound judgment which she brought to bear upon the training of her daughters, stood her likewise in good stead in her social relationships. In the fading legends which still cling round the life at Holkham during those early days of Coke's ownership, his young wife stands out a figure full of dignity and charm. The tales of her which still linger in Norfolk all hint at the admiration she inspired;—how she was a fearless and a matchless rider; how at Court her dancing of the *Minuet de la Cour* was celebrated for its grace; how at the hustings, as we have seen, her influence was feared, since she won all hearts, and changed the fierce antagonism of adverse voters into an enthusiasm equally uproarious; and how she was, withal, a woman of pity and gentleness, charitable to the poor, constant in doing good and gracious to all. “Mrs. Coke,” we are told, “does from good nature and an ardent desire of pleasing what others do from vanity or politeness.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd*, ed. by J. H. Adeane. (1896), p. 255.

Moreover, she threw herself with tireless energy into all schemes and endeavours for the betterment of mankind. Much she accomplished for Norwich. The papers of the day speak of her "constant and spirited endeavours to promote and extend manufactures in the neighbourhood." Amongst other industries, Norwich was at that time striving to start the manufacture of "shawl-dresses," made from a material resembling Paisley or Indian shawls, which was fashioned into costumes. Young Mrs. Coke at once saw that some of the rich and delicate-coloured "shawl-dresses" would make lovely tapestries for walls and couches, so, we read, she gave instructions "to fit up part of her elegant mansion at Holkham with this beautiful article," and thus established an industry for which Norwich afterwards became famous.

Only here and there, however, do isolated events loom out of the oblivion which enshrouds the life at Holkham during those early days. Legends likewise still cling round the memory of the young Squire of that date. His lavish hospitality, the princely state in which he lived and the independence of speech and action for which he soon became noted, form the subject of many tales—always interesting as showing the estimation in which he was held—though often, undoubtedly, apocryphal. Old men in Norwich still relate how, in the days of their boyhood, their fathers told them that Mr. Coke had his horses shod with shoes of gold, and had wheels of solid silver for his chariot, which wheels (it is firmly believed) are still preserved in the hall at Holkham. Another, but far from improbable legend, tells how, knowing that it was in-



admissible for any one save Royalty to drive six horses in town, he drove a coach with five horses and a *donkey as leader* past the King's palace in London, and flicked his whip at George III as he whipped the donkey gaily up to pace. His daring, his individuality, his openness of hand and heart, soon won him golden opinions amongst the tenants who, accustomed to the sober rule of his immediate predecessors, had been prepared to look askance at the reign of their gay successor.

Very quickly was Holkham transformed from what it had been in the days when Lady Leicester lived there in dreary state. It speedily became the pivot round which all the social life of the county revolved. The young couple lived in full enjoyment of local society in Norfolk, to which they greatly contributed, and of society in London when parliamentary duties entailed their journeying to town. At Holkham they kept open house, and before long, men from every part of the world and representing every form of celebrity and every rank in life were made welcome there with unstinting hospitality. Coke soon became known as a delightful host, considerate, unassuming and agreeable; while he made a point of treating every guest, no matter of what rank, with the strictest impartiality. It soon became a favourite saying amongst his friends that "to Coke, prince and peasant are equal."<sup>1</sup> He

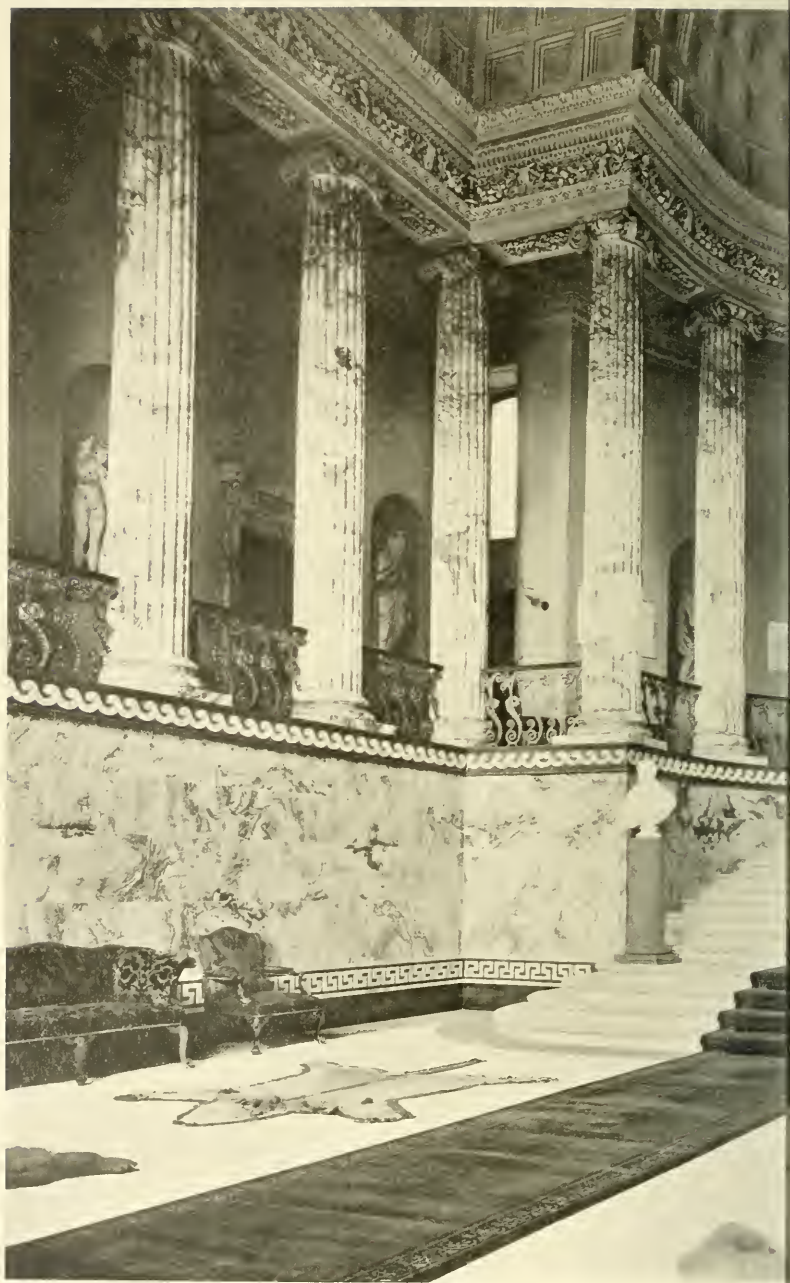
<sup>1</sup> To the last day of his life this was his unchangeable characteristic. "It is certainly a strong trait in the character of the Earl's manners that from the Prince to the Peasant, every visitor on leaving Holkham dwelt on the reception he had received from the Master of the House, and imagined himself the favoured guest. . . . His manners were indeed the finest, for they were based on benignity of heart" (Obituary notice, *Norwich Mercury*, July 9th, 1842).

himself, in later life, always declared that he would as soon meet a party of his yeomen as any men in the world. But from the first he took his own line and refused to court popularity. One of his earliest innovations created much comment. Since old Lady Leicester's time, the poor had attended at Holkham after every public day to receive the broken meat, a custom which had become abused by every vagrant in the neighbourhood. Although Coke continued to keep open house on one day in the week, he promptly put an end to the subsequent promiscuous distribution of food to beggars, despite the violent resentment and unpopularity to which such an action was sure to give rise. In fact, Dick Merryfellow at once made a note of it, and wrote a fresh verse about "Sir Growl"—

His dogs are from his table fed—the poor  
Are driven like slaves from his luxurious door !

One curious custom, however, which probably dated from the days of Lord Leicester, prevailed for many years after Coke came into possession of Holkham. The coaches still continued to call at the house twice a day to deliver and to fetch the mail, and every passenger who journeyed by them was allowed to ask for a glass of ale gratis, at the Hall, from servants who were in attendance daily for the purpose. The amount of ale thus consumed in the course of a year was great, but besides the strangers whom chance brought thus daily to partake of this apparently trifling hospitality, Coke had a constant influx of visitors who desired to see the house privately, or who attended the luncheon upon the public day. Among others, the year after he succeeded





THE HALL



HOLKHAM



his father, Hannah More, driving through Norfolk with friends, wrote to ask permission to see the house and grounds. She did not see Coke personally, but in a letter she mentions her impressions of the place, which have an interest considering the early date at which she wrote:—

“The next place worthy of consideration is Holkham Hall, the residence of the present Mr. Coke, and built by the late Lord Leicester. It is entirely of white brick, and take it for inside and outside, state and commodiousness, beauty and elegance, I have never seen anything comparable to it. The pictures are many and charming; some exquisite Guidos, particularly St. Catherine, and a Cupid, inexpressibly fine. There are some admirable statues, a number of antiques, and some of the finest drapery I ever saw. There is a hall of pink-veined marble of immense size, superior to anything of the kind in this nation: round it is a colonnade of pink and white marble fluted.<sup>1</sup>

When any alterations to the design of the house were proposed to Coke, he replied unhesitatingly: “I shall never venture rashly to interfere with the result of years of thought and study in Italy”; and thus it was due to his good sense that the original harmony and peculiarity of the building were preserved intact. But he early decided to enclose his estate of 43,000 acres with a ring fence, and he began building a wall round his park; though this was not actually finished till September 24th, 1839, when it measured nine miles less twenty yards in length.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Life and Correspondence of Mrs. H. More*, by William Roberts. Third ed. (1835), Vol. I, pp. 102-3.

<sup>2</sup> Part of the wood which formed the original paling placed by Thomas Coke round his park, was used to frame some Hogarth prints, which still hang on the walls at Longford.

It was said that the house had been planned to be safe from fire; and very early Coke had it carefully inspected with a view to discovering if this were indeed the case. As a result it was pronounced fire-proof, and it has therefore never been insured. Although it has been on fire three times since those days, only superficial damage to furniture has ensued.

Soon after Coke came into possession of Holkham he was asked to belong to a club called the "Gregorians," which flourished in Norwich about this date. It was at first instituted for social purposes, but afterwards assumed more of a political character. It had its special ceremonies, signs and insignia, and was, perhaps, the resort of more of the county gentlemen than have ever before or since mixed with the citizens of Norwich. The annual advertisement for the choice of officers for the year 1778 announces Coke as President of the meeting. The chief patron was Sir Edward Astley, and he usually occupied the position of host, for there was no one so celebrated for his qualities as a chairman and a boon companion. On July 19th, 1779, we find that the Gregorians were invited in a body to Holkham by Coke, and there partook of the most sumptuous hospitality.

Many curious anecdotes are told of this club illustrative of the manners of the times and of the habits of drinking. The first time when Coke visited it, at about one o'clock in the morning, toasts swimming in oil were set on the table, and Sir Edward Astley pressed him to eat. Coke inquired the cause of such an unusual refection, and was told that the toast would enable him to begin drinking afresh



as if he had taken no wine from the beginning of the evening.<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion, at about six o'clock in the morning, the party had dwindled to six in number, and these tried to discover some striking way in which to end the revels of the night. All around the room was placed a row of strongly-fixed iron cloak pins, and upon these they hung their chairs, mounted into them, and then rang the bell. The waiter arriving in answer to the summons was astounded to find the company apparently transfixed to the wall, where they sat absolutely silent and immovable, like statues. But the poor fellow's terror at this unexpected sight was too much for one of the revellers. Sir Peter Amyot, who was a very heavy man, was racked with such fearful paroxysms of suppressed laughter that the pins which supported him gave way, and he broke the spell by falling to the ground with a resounding crash. The terrified waiter fled from the room, and the company descending from their seats with difficulty, assisted their stout companion to regain his feet amid peals of uproarious laughter.

At intervals in the papers of this date there appear notices of entertainments promoted by Mr. and Mrs. Coke, which often took the form of private theatricals. In 1779, on the anniversary of their wedding day, October 5th, there is an advertisement of a play—"The Clandestine Marriage and the Padlock"<sup>2</sup>—a significant title considering the event which it was presumably destined to celebrate. This play was "bespoke" by them at the theatre, Walsingham, a neighbouring village,

<sup>1</sup> Drinking oil will prevent the fumes of wine rising to the brain.

<sup>2</sup> Written by Colman the elder and Garrick, about 1766.

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to be performed by a company of comedians styling themselves the "Leicester Company."

Another fashionable amusement, which had not fallen into disfavour in Norfolk since the days of Lord Leicester, was cock-fighting, but in this, however, there is no evidence that Coke took part. Yet it is curious to note that, at that date, the tenants at Holkham had to give two fighting-cocks with their rent—a payment which in modern times is changed to turkeys.

A sport, however, in which Coke certainly indulged, and which found great favour locally, was bull-baiting. In Beer Street, Norwich, there was a place for this amusement, of which Coke and his neighbour Lord Albemarle<sup>1</sup> became patrons. George, Lord Albemarle, relates how their bull was never known to have been "pinned," and how, one day, a farmer who had seen a number of dogs tossed in succession, called out, "Lawk! it's like batting at cricket!"<sup>2</sup>

It is all the more curious to find Coke the patron of such a sport because, both in early and in later life, he was noted for being a singularly humane man, who was opposed to cruelty in any recognised form. But at that date it was considered as unreasonable to object to bull-baiting as it is still to object to fox-hunting. Windham, writing to Captain Lukin in 1801, expresses this opinion: "I should rejoice in your bull-baiting," he says, "if I could rejoice in anything. I defy a person to attack bull-baiting and to defend hunting"—a point of view which modern huntsmen may find less

<sup>1</sup> William Charles, fourth Earl of Albemarle (1772-1849).

<sup>2</sup> *Fifty Years of my Life*. By George Thomas, sixth Earl of Albemarle, Vol. 1, p. 324.

palatable than easy to disprove. It was not till 1835 that this amusement was made illegal in England.

As we have seen, Coke early became M.F.H. He soon engaged a huntsman named William Jones, who became a celebrated character in Norfolk, and was considered the best man of his class in the kingdom. The pack was reputed to be so skilfully managed, so judiciously hunted and so well ridden up to. Before long, Coke's hunting country extended through a great part of Norfolk, and he had kennels in Suffolk, Cambridge, and Essex. He was said to hunt the entire country from Holkham to Epping Forest; for when he found that his parliamentary duties precluded the possibility of his enjoying the sport in those districts, he built a kennel near Mark Hall, in Essex, the seat of his friend Montague Burgoyne, and he hunted the whole country round Epping, where he could run down from town about four times a week. On one occasion he killed a fox with his own hounds in Russell or Bedford Square.<sup>1</sup>

Epping Place may be said to have been the centre of his operations; and there was in those days a celebrated Irish giant, O'Brien or O'Bryne, who came to live there solely for the sake of joining Mr. Coke's hounds whenever he allowed himself any recreation.

<sup>1</sup> In a letter from the late Lord Digby to Mr. Henry Coke, January 7th, 1883, this statement was confirmed. Lord Digby says: "My grandfather (Thomas William Coke) killed a fox with his own hounds either in Bedford or Russell Square. Old Jones the huntsman, who died at Holkham when you were a child, was my informant. I asked my grandfather if it was correct; he said, 'Yes, he had kennels at Epping Forest, and hunted the Roodings of Essex, which he said was the best hunting ground in England.'"—*Tracks of a Rolling Stone*. By the Hon. Henry Coke (1905), p. 331.

O'Brien was eight feet high in 1780, and apparently went on growing, for in 1782 he measured two inches more, and after his death in 1783 he was found to measure eight feet four inches, yet no other members of his family were unusually tall. He was crazy about hunting, and became so attached to Jones, Mr. Coke's huntsman, that he paid the latter a visit at Holkham, and was there solemnly introduced by Jones to Mr. Coke and his guests.

O'Brien's end was curious. With extreme simplicity he invested all his property in a single bank-note of £700, which, needless to say, he lost; and grief at his loss, combined with excessive drinking, brought about his death. John Hunter, the celebrated surgeon, was extremely anxious to secure his skeleton; and learning that the giant was dying, he set his men to watch the house in order to be sure of getting the body. O'Brien hearing of this, and having a horror of being dissected, left orders that his corpse should be watched night and day until a lead coffin could be made, in which it was to be conveyed to the Downs and sunk in twenty fathoms of water. O'Brien died, and his body started for the Nore, escorted by a walking wake of thirty Irishmen who drank deeply at the hostelries *en route*. Howison, Hunter's man, who watched closely, informed the surgeon when he might catch this bodyguard off duty at the public-house, and Hunter went thither to bribe them. He offered fifty guineas to one of the men to allow the body to be kidnapped, and the man consented on his own account, but said he must first consult with his companions, who, perceiving Hunter's eagerness, raised their price, first to £100, and finally

to £500 before they would agree. Hunter borrowed the money to pay them, and the coffin consequently went on its way filled with stones, while the body of the dead giant journeyed back to London in a spring cart, until John Hunter's own carriage met it, after dark, and drove it to his house in Earl's Court. There, for fear of detection, he did not dare to dissect it; but separating the flesh from the bones by boiling and cutting, quickly skeletonised it. Hence, in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons may be seen, to-day, the skeleton—brown from boiling—of the giant whose greatest joy when living was a gallop with Mr. Coke's hounds and the friendship of Mr. Coke's huntsman.

Jones, it may be here mentioned, lived to the age of ninety, having spent all his life in the service of Mr. Coke, who delighted in cheering the last days of his old and respected servant by paying him constant visits, and living over with him the memorable hunts of former days. Jones, in fact, survived until 1827, when Coke's two eldest baby-sons were taken by their father to see him. The old man's one grief was—as he expressed it—“that the young ladies had not been the young gentlemen,” meaning that the daughters of Mr. Coke's first marriage had not been the sons of his second, in order that he, Jones, might have had the pleasure of training them to follow the hunt.

Jones's mind was clear to the last, and he died surrounded by three generations of his family, who revered him as a father and a patriarch. Coke always described him, not only as the best of huntsmen and the first of sportsmen, but also as one of Nature's

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gentlemen, who won the respect of the field wherever  
he went by the perfect courtesy of his manners.

Coke's passion for field sports, which had served as a telling argument for prophesying his failure as a politician, further furnished reason for anticipating his incapacity as a landlord. His tenants, however willing to be cajoled by his "elegant and engaging address" of which we are constantly informed, remained dubious regarding the wisdom of a youth whose first aim had been to increase the breed of foxes. Dick Merryfellow but gave voice to a prevalent opinion when he pronounced Coke's "hounds and horses" to be "his delight alone." In a song sung by Coke's friends at the big hunting breakfasts at Holkham, he is described as :

Attentive and civil till Reynard is found,  
Then hears nor sees ought but the head leading hound.<sup>1</sup>

The young Squire appeared, even to those who knew him best, too full of that *joie de vivre* for which he was conspicuous, to curtail his pleasures, or to take his duties as a landowner seriously. Moreover, if his Norfolk estates were poor, he had property in other parts of England, he had money in plenty to gratify every whim, and beyond an amiable desire that those under him should be justly dealt by, little, it was felt, could be anticipated from the rule of a light-hearted youth, whose whole soul appeared to be absorbed in a sport which found small favour with the farmers upon his estate.

But another passion as powerful as that of sport, of

<sup>1</sup> *A song of Mr. Coke's Hunt*, by the Rev. Dixon Hoste.

which, indeed, it formed part, operated to counteract what it appeared calculated only to develop. Coke's love of the country has before been dwelt upon; it formed one of the strongest characteristics of his nature, surpassed, perhaps, only by that love of plain-speaking and honest dealing which had forced him against his inclination to stand his ground in current politics. The fresh, clear Norfolk air held an elixir for him which dwellers in the south can scarcely appreciate; it stimulated every sense, it whipped brain and soul into a keener life; it meant health, it meant happiness. Windham, from his wooded hill-top at Felbrigg, complained that London asphyxiated him, and pleaded earnestly in Parliament for open spaces and parks to form "the lungs of London." Coke, from his bleaker and wind-swept home upon the coast, suffered mentally as well as physically when forced to forego the clean, free life which exhilarated brain and body.

"For myself," he said in one of his speeches to his constituents at Holkham, "I should not be worthy of your confidence did I not speak my sentiments in a bold, manly and independent manner. I should not wish to be your representative, nor do I desire to be so one day longer than my conduct deserves your approbation. I love the country, and I love liberty, and am always impatient to get home! I suffer I know not what, cooped within the pestiferous walls of that House which should be purified by virtue and patriotism. Here I breathe salubrious air, but there I am stifled by corruption. So glad am I to get home, that in three days I am as well as ever, and I could wish that each day was as long as two!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Report of the Transactions at the Holkham Sheep-shearing* (1821), by R. N. Bacon, p. 75.

And this very passion for the freedom and purity of the country obviously predisposed him to an interest in every phase of rural life; so that, in his early boyish delight in country pursuits lay, unsuspected, the root of his future renown. While his exuberant health made him a sportsman, and duty made him a politician, it was inclination that made him a farmer. Politics for ever remained outside his natural bent—the toll he paid to circumstance—but from rural sport to rural toil was an almost inevitable sequence to one of his disposition. When as an old man he retired from the political arena, he explained: “Though I have stood forward for the situation which I have occupied, I may state that it is a duty I never liked.” Again and again in his political speeches he points out how “the peaceful pursuit of agriculture has always been much more my happiness than the turbulence of politics.” It is as an agriculturist rather than as a politician that Coke must be remembered; yet even so, and with all his tastes ripe for such a development, it was chance which actually decided his career, and caused him to turn his indomitable energy and perseverance in this direction.

A large part of the Holkham estate, it will be remembered, was originally salt marshes on the coast of the North Sea. In 1660 John Coke, son of the Lord Chief Justice, had reclaimed 360 acres from the sea, and in 1722 Thomas Coke, afterwards Lord Leicester, had reclaimed 400 acres and had struggled to improve the barren sweep of country. Yet when Coke came into the property, the whole district round Holkham was little better than a rabbit-warren, varied by long tracts of shingle and drifting sand, on which vegetation,



other than weeds, was impossible. Soon after Coke's marriage, when Mrs. Coke remarked that she was going down to Norfolk, the witty old Lady Townshend<sup>1</sup> made a comment which was ever afterwards quoted as a most perfect description of the county:—"Then, my dear," she said, "all you will see will be one blade of grass, and two rabbits fighting for that!" And such, we may imagine, must have been Mrs. Coke's first impression of her future home. Beautiful as was the interior of Holkham, externally, we have seen, its surroundings were exceptionally unattractive. The park, as yet sparsely timbered, exhibited plantations which were still immature, the lake near the house ebbed and flowed daily with the tides from the salt marshes, and the country beyond lay exposed in its native bleakness—a country which, here and there scantily cultivated, could boast farming only of the most primitive type.

Indeed, throughout the county of Norfolk the agriculture was of the poorest description. Between Holkham and Lynn not a single ear of wheat was to be seen, and it was believed that not one would grow. All the wheat consumed in the county was imported from abroad. And, meanwhile, everything that ignorance could do was done to impoverish further an already miserable soil. The course of cropping where the land would produce anything was three white crops in succession, and then broadcast turnips. No manure was

<sup>1</sup> Etheldreda (Audrey), wife of Charles, Viscount Townshend, from whom she was separated, and mother of George, first Marquis Townshend, who challenged Lord Leicester. She was celebrated for her wit and beauty, and Walpole calls her "The beautiful Statira." She died in 1788.

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ever purchased. The sheep were a wretched breed, and, owing to the absence of fodder, no milch cows were kept on any of the farms.

Yet such, as Coke found the land, it had been for successive generations; and nothing seemed more incredible than that its condition could be permanently improved, and nothing, as Lord Spencer points out,<sup>1</sup> "more improbable than that Coke—then a youth of 21 [*sic*]  
—fond of and excelling in field sports, and with princely wealth, should have applied himself to the detailed management of a farm. . . . Yet it was," he adds, "to the obstinacy of a farmer of the old school that not only Holkham, but all England and another Hemisphere is indebted for the great Agricultural School established by Coke."

One of the first discoveries made by Coke on succeeding to his property, was that the leases in the parish of Holkham, granted by old Lord Leicester, were about to expire. Five leases had subsequently been granted. In the leases previous to the ones then current, these farms had been let for eighteenpence an acre; in the current leases this had been raised to three-and-sixpence. Coke sent for the tenants, Mr. Brett and Mr. Tann, and offered to renew their leases at the moderate rental of five shillings. Both refused, and Mr. Brett, who, as Lord Spencer remarks, ought to have his name recorded for the good which he unintentionally did his country, jeered at the suggestion, and pointed out that the land was not worth the eighteenpence an acre which had been originally paid for it. This was sufficient for a

<sup>1</sup> Article by third Earl Spencer in *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, Vol. III (1842), Part I. Pub. J. Murray, Albemarle Street.

man of Coke's temperament ; he immediately decided to farm the land himself.

When one remembers that his hands were newly filled with his parliamentary duties and with the cares of a large estate ; when one realises that he was absolutely ignorant of the subject of practical farming, as he was, indeed, of all the work which he had recently undertaken, the energy of this youth of twenty-two was certainly remarkable. Nor is it surprising to learn that many years afterwards, when he was an old man, he said that throughout his life he had never known what it was to find time hang heavily on his hands ; he had never found the day half long enough for all that he had to do.

In order, however, in a brief survey of his agricultural work, to gain any idea of what he attempted and what he achieved, it is necessary to treat the subject as a whole, rather than to insert events in their proper sequence in his life. We will therefore glance rapidly on through the years, and view, first his labours, and then the result of those labours.

Coke's agricultural life is always considered to date from 1778, when the lease of Mr. Brett's farm fell in ; but before that date he was already at work. He at once set about remedying his ignorance. He began to collect around him practical men who could aid him—at first, for the most part, humble and perhaps prejudiced advisers ; but no means of information did he despise. It struck him what enormous benefits might be derived from an annual visit to one district of a company of men scientific, practical and theoretical,

all interested in agriculture. But for the present he contented himself with assembling together a party of farmers from the immediate neighbourhood, who, upon a day fixed, were to meet and discuss agricultural matters, to inspect his own farm and method of farming, to criticise what they saw, and to condemn or approve unhesitatingly as they thought fit. By this means he saw that he could not only gain, but also judiciously impart knowledge, and pave the way for local progress by raising an interest in the questions discussed.

Next, he studied the agriculture in other counties, and lost no opportunity of observing the results of different methods of farming and different treatment of live stock. In Cheshire he visited several farms; also farms in the north and south. And what struck him most was the extraordinary waste of rich pasture in the more fertile counties. Where the country was poor, ignorance impoverished it; where it was naturally fertile, stupidity failed to profit by it. He said afterwards that in Yorkshire he saw wide and beautiful fields, thick with luxuriant grass, yet, in passing a score of these, he discovered *only a solitary donkey grazing*. In Shropshire he drove many miles through the county, but saw only two sheep; one was upon the road journeying to Mr. Roscoe in Lancashire, and the other was a ram chained in a corner of a field for fear it should do mischief!

As an immediate result of his investigations, he adopted an improved course of cropping on his own land. Instead of growing three white crops in succession, he grew two only and kept the land in pasture

for two years' interval. This change slowly but surely brought about a marked alteration in the impoverished soil. He also caused deep pits to be dug in order to bring to the surface the rich marl which lay buried far beneath the thick layer of sharp flint and drifting sand. By such means clover and other grasses began to flourish, and it became no longer impossible to feed live stock upon the land.

At Dishley, as has been already mentioned, there lived a well-known breeder named Robert Bakewell,<sup>1</sup> of whom it was wittily remarked that "his animals were too dear for any one to buy and too fat for any one to eat!" Almost immediately upon coming into his estate, Coke had asked this man to come and spend a week at Holkham. Bakewell did so, and Coke was very struck by his remark that the Norfolk sheep were the worst in the whole of Great Britain. He questioned Bakewell about the cattle, and the answer was: "Mr. Coke, give me your hand, and I will guide it!" Bakewell thereupon took Coke's hand in his own, and passing it over the cattle, taught him how to judge the formation of a beast's flesh, its inclination in feeding and whether it possessed the proper qualities for fattening. At this time on the 3,000 acres which formed the Holkham estate, there were no cattle, and only eight hundred sheep, which were fed with difficulty. But directly it became practicable, Coke, who was a great believer in the Norfolk proverb that "Muck is the Mother of Money," increased the number of beasts upon the farms, realising that they would do more to improve the value of the land than any other means he could employ.

<sup>1</sup> He died in 1795.

He did not at first trouble about the cattle. Remembering what Bakewell had said, he turned his attention to the old race of Norfolk sheep (possibly decadent descendants of the flocks of "the Lady Gresham"), "whose backs," he said, "were as narrow as rabbits!" and he "did his best to extirpate those sheep, *the most worthless that could be kept!*"<sup>1</sup> He had, he explained, no prejudice for any particular breed, it was his intention to try *every* breed. But for a long time he believed that Merinos would flourish in Norfolk. "It was found," he pointed out, after various experiments, "that the Leicester sheep first beat the Norfolks, while the Southdowns next beat the Leicesters, and he questioned whether the Merinos would not beat the Southdowns. But he was by no means particularly anxious to recommend these sheep, for, as Mr. Bakewell used to say: "If they will not speak for themselves, nothing that can be said for them will do it!"<sup>2</sup> There was, however, from the first a prejudice against them which he tried in vain to combat. This had been increased by a ridiculous cause.

The King himself had tried to rear Merinos and had failed. It appears that a flock of forty score of these sheep had been sent to the Royal Shrubs Hill Farm to be wintered. About a fortnight before the annual auction at Kew the remains of that flock returned, in number not six score, and those such poor emaciated creatures that the prejudice already existing against their breed was publicly confirmed. The King's shepherd was asked before several gentlemen what had occasioned this great mortality amongst the previously

<sup>1</sup> The *Bury and Norwich Post*, June 29th, 1808.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*

fine flock, and he said he "could not tell." Next he was asked to explain what had become of the skins of the animals, which were valuable on account of their wool, and again he "could not tell." He was particularly pressed to declare what had been done with the fine skins of the lambs, which, it was reasonably concluded, must have been born into the flock; but always he "could not tell."

Subsequently some inquiring mind discovered that the skins of the King's sheep were given to one shepherd and the skins of the lambs to another as perquisites. This sufficiently explained the great mortality amongst the unfortunate Merinos!

But although this calumny against them was satisfactorily exploded, the prejudice against them remained, and this in spite of certain undeniable merits possessed by them which were, from time to time, demonstrated at the Sheep-shearings. One year, for instance, there were exhibited "various beautiful specimens of ladies' Merino dresses, scarfs, shawls, stockings, coatings, cassimeres and stocking knit," which were manufactured from Merinos on the Holkham estate. A pair of the worsted stockings were of so delicate a fabric, we are told, that two could be passed at the same time through a lady's ring; and a manufacturer at once ordered a dozen pairs at the price of £18 per dozen.<sup>1</sup> Still more, Mr. Tollett, an agricultural friend of Mr. Coke's, who always attended the Sheep-shearing, proved at the same time the unique individuality possessed by these sheep in the remarkable fact that a Merino ram which he owned, and which was horn-

<sup>1</sup> The *Bury and Norwich Post*, Wednesday, June 29th, 1808.

less, produced annually plentiful offspring, one half of which invariably were hornless and the other half had horns!—Nothing served to make the Merinos either appreciated or prosperous in Norfolk,<sup>1</sup> and Coke, recognising this, substituted for them the Southdowns, which he brought to a wonderful state of perfection, until on the same area where eight hundred sheep had been kept with difficulty, he had a flourishing flock of two thousand five hundred.

Meanwhile, during his hunting expeditions in the neighbourhood of Blofield, he noticed that, throughout that district, not a single sheep was visible. He was convinced that their introduction there would be perfectly practicable and a great advantage to both the farmers and the land; but he knew that he had to contend with a rooted belief to the contrary. Accordingly he took his own method of dealing with it. One morning he rode over to a rich farmer in the neighbourhood and invited him to ride to Kipton Ash Fair. The man, much flattered and suspecting no ulterior design, accepted the invitation, and they went together. Arrived at their destination, Coke observed some sheep which would answer the required purpose, and suddenly proposed to his companion that, as the animals were so fine, the latter should buy them and stock his farm. The man was horrified at the suggestion, and asked Mr. Coke indignantly what on earth he should do with the beasts if he did buy them, as it was impossible to keep them on his farm. “Impossible,” suggested

<sup>1</sup> Napoleon shortly afterwards made similar exertions to introduce the breed of Merino sheep into France. (*From the unpublished Journals of John Spencer-Stanhope, Esq., of Cannon Hall.*)



Coke, "is a word which is greatly abused. Until you have tried, how can you know what is 'impossible'?" The man still objected strongly; whereupon Coke urged him further. "I will make you a fair offer," he said; "as your buying them will be at my suggestion, if they die, I will refund your outlay; if they live, your profit is your own." The farmer, thus overruled by Mr. Coke's determination, very reluctantly bought a hundred sheep. The next year, uninvited, he rode over to Holkham and begged Mr. Coke, as a favour, to ride with him to Kipton Ash Fair. Coke agreed, and, arrived there, the farmer at his own risk bought four hundred sheep for his farm on which he had thought it impossible to rear one hundred. Needless to say, his neighbours followed his example, and soon, in the district where it was imagined that not a single sheep could thrive, there was not a farm to be seen without flourishing flocks.

One inveterate enemy, indeed, Coke thereby gained. A Norfolk lady, Mrs. Bodham, of the most vehement Tory principles, and who in later years obstinately said that she intended to outlive Mr. Coke—(an aim which, to her immense satisfaction, she ultimately accomplished by attaining to the age of ninety-four)—always, to the last day of her life, railed against him on account of his "Whiggish Sheep," by the introduction of which into the county, she said, he had completely ruined the flavour of Norfolk mutton!

After importing fresh sheep, moreover, Coke soon introduced a breed of shorthorned cattle into Norfolk, which latter he discarded for the North Devon breed, when he found these to be superior. In this decision

he was influenced by the opinion of Francis, Duke of Bedford,<sup>1</sup> the agriculturist, who was one of his greatest friends. One morning, as he was riding down the park at Holkham, Coke encountered a drove of thirty Devon oxen solemnly marching towards the house. Much surprised at such an unusual sight, he inquired whence these unexpected visitors had arrived, and was told they had travelled from Woburn, a present to Mr. Coke from the Duke of Bedford, who wished him to try the special breed of Devons which he personally approved.

Coke at once started a trial between the fattening of two Devons against one shorthorned beast; and discovered that the two former cost the same as the one latter. When killed, the two weighed 140 stone, while the shorthorned beast weighed 110 stone only, and it had eaten more food than the two Devons. In short, Devons would flourish in pasture where Durhams would starve; and Shorthorns, though satisfactory for the butcher, were unprofitable for the breeder.

After he had made this discovery, he saw some Shorthorns belonging to a tenant of his, and informed the man that he would find them great consumers. The man announced, however, that he was supremely satisfied with his stock. Upon his next visit, Coke asked him if he was still satisfied with the Shorthorns? The man carefully ignored the question. At last, unable to contain himself any longer, he burst out, "Mr. Coke, you were right! Them darned beasts have eat up all my turnips; and gi' them a chance, they'd eat all the turnips in the parish, and all the turnips in England itself!"

<sup>1</sup> Francis, fifth Duke of Bedford (1765-1802).

Not contented, however, with recommending the Devon breed amongst his farmers in the country, Coke called upon a butcher in London, a Mr. Handcock, who then supplied the principal families, and asked him if he killed any Devon beasts. The man replied, "Certainly not! They are not good enough for *my* clients, who will only have the best Scots!" "Try the Devons," urged Mr. Coke, "and let me know the result!" The result was that, for a considerable time, the butcher bought whatever Mr. Coke sent to market, in all more than a hundred beasts, and that both he and his clients were supremely satisfied with the change.

Coke, who often used cattle for ploughing, found that the Devons were also the best for this work. That he was peculiar in thus using oxen is shown by a remark which he made in the House in 1805, that "in Norfolk, where farming was carried to a great degree of nicety, he believed there was no such thing known as the use of oxen in husbandry."<sup>1</sup> When he used horses he never employed more than two, though throughout the country it was customary to employ from three to five, and then to find that the land was not ploughed very deep nor was the work thoroughly neat and efficient. The secret was that, although always ready to test new inventions, where Coke found the old methods best, he stuck to them with equal determination; and in spite of all that others less able to judge could say to the contrary, he kept to the old-fashioned Nor-

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, 1805, Vol. III, p. 883.

"In 1784 Coke worked twelve oxen in harness for carting, and found them a very considerable saving in comparison with horses; but by 1800 he had been forced to give up using them partly from the difficulty of shoeing, but principally from the prejudice of his men against them" (*Autobiography of Arthur Young*, p. 481).

folk plough which places the horses nearer their work, and thus saves the waste of force occasioned by four or five horses pulling from a point six or seven inches below the surface of the earth.

In the *Agricultural Annals* of 1784, it is related how "the great Coke of Norfolk" visiting a friend near North Leach, in Gloucestershire, was utterly astonished to see "six horses at a length turning a single furrow with a clumsy plough," and making hard work of it. He could not rest till he had made his friend a present of a Norfolk plough and a pair of Norfolk cart-horses, and had sent the ploughman over to start these. This plough made excellent headway, and the two horses were not tired with work, well performed, which, with the other plough, it had fatigued six horses to do badly.

Some years later, in 1801, Coke, while staying at Woburn, was enlarging upon the merits of the Norfolk plough, when Sir John Sebright, M.P. for Herts, who was an obstinate and eccentric man, shook his head and announced gruffly: "Coke, I'll stake you a wager of two hundred guineas that a Norfolk plough and two horses cannot plough an acre of heavy Hertford land in ten hours." Coke promptly accepted the challenge, but pointed out that, since Sir John would certainly lose his wager, he would be wise to offer lower stakes. Conditions were then drawn up by the Duke of Bedford, and the document ran as follows:—

"Sir John Sebright offers to bet 50 guineas that Mr. Coke will not plough an acre of land in one day in a husband-like manner with the wheel-plough commonly used in Norfolk, with two horses; an acre of which Sir John Sebright will plough in the same time with a Hertfordshire plough and four horses; the land to be fixed upon by Sir J. Sebright,

near Beechwood in the month of October. One person to be named by each of them, and the calling in a third if they do not agree.

“Accepted by (*Signed*) THOMAS WILLIAM COKE.”

Sir John, as may be imagined, took particular care that the land chosen should be the very worst he could find. Coke sent a responsible farmer to inspect the field beforehand and the report which I subjoin, unexpurgated, was far from reassuring:—

“Honor’d Sir,—According to your desire I taken the first opportunity to go with your Man to Sir John Seabright’s were he seen the land that is to (be) plough’d; it is very stoney and what is worse the chosen Spot is rising Ground where the Horses will be obliged to go up and down the Hill. William says he cannot positively say whether he can plough it or not, from the innumerable Quantity of Flints there is above ground. The Day is fixed for next Friday when I will Aid and Assist as much as lays in my power. William is now at plough in the Park where his Plough performs the work better and with more ease than the Bedfordshire Plows do with four horses. I understand of Sir John Seabright there will be a large Concourse of People attend on the Day appointed. I am informed the Bets in the Neighbourhood of Beechwood are offer’d fifty guineas to Ten in favour of the Norfolk Plow, and that the Herfordshire Man may be beat is the sincere wish of

“Your Most Obet. Humble Servant,

“JOHN CLAYTON JUNR.

“SPEEDWELL FARM, *September 28th 1801.*”

The contest was privately fixed for October 2nd; but although the fact was not known in Hertfordshire until the previous day, a large crowd of agriculturists and farmers came from great distances to witness the trial, and made a sporting event of the strange incident. It

is said that many strangers bet ten to one against Mr. Coke's plough when it started with his horses and men, but the task was accomplished in the time agreed upon, and the only question to be decided was whether it had been performed in a husband-like manner. "A Hertfordshire gentleman," wrote a friend to Mr. Dixon in Norfolk, "told me that it was an extraordinary performance."—"If in your mind there remains any doubt," wrote Coke to Sir John, on October 7th, "let it be referred to the Duke of Bedford, under whose roof, and in whose presence the bett was made." But the Duke could only assure Coke that, after minute inspection of the work by a competent farmer, no doubt could exist that he had won his bet. "All agree," he pronounced, "that it was the hardest day's work done by man or horse."

So Sir John paid his fifty guineas with a good grace; "I should be wanting in Justice to your Ploughman," he wrote to Coke, "did I not state to you that his skill and exertions astonished every person present." And Coke, thanking him for his "polite" letter of information respecting the performance of the Norfolk plough, remarks: "Had I entertained a doubt of its success I should not have done justice to the skill and ability of the Ploughman, whose exertions, I can easily assume, must have astonished men less conversant in the Norfolk science of Agriculture."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Two years later, on June 17th, 1803, Coke challenged all England with a Norfolk plough and a pair of horses to plough an acre, or half an acre, of any soil for fifty guineas, to be tried on light land at Holkham and on strong clay at Woburn.

Sir J. Sinclair said he would accept the bet if it was extended to Scotland, which was accordingly agreed, but the result is not recorded.

## CHAPTER XII'

## AGRICULTURAL LABOURS CONTINUED

**M**EN were destined, however, rapidly to become conversant with the "Norfolk science of Agriculture"; for, as Coke wrote to his farmers: "Everything connected with Agriculture must necessarily be a subject of the first importance to the public at large. From this source the labourer is employed and the manufacturer fed; from this source, also, the landlord receives his rent, the tenant his support, and all classes of society their comforts." Similarly, a great contemporary—or, perhaps, more correctly, precursor of Coke's—Voltaire,<sup>1</sup> had already remarked how "the best thing we have to do on earth is to cultivate it"; and how "to have cultivated a field and made twenty trees grow, is a good which will never be lost";—which latter fact was also early recognised by Coke.

Almost immediately in his experiments he turned his attention to timbering his estate, and thus transforming the bleak, bare coast. He decided to plant fifty acres every year till he had environed three thousand acres of land which was to compose the park and demesne. He planted four hundred acres of different kinds of plants, two-thirds of which he intended to be thinned

<sup>1</sup> Voltaire died in 1778.

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and cut down for underwood, leaving only oak, Spanish chestnut and beech as timber.<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Coke is doing wonders in planting and improvement," we are told in 1791.<sup>2</sup> Many years afterwards he had what was probably a unique experience in the life of any man. In 1832 he and his family embarked on board a ship at Wells built of wood grown from acorns which he himself had planted.

He also, like his ancestors, devoted his thought to reclaiming land from the sea. Laboriously, and at enormous cost, he reclaimed seven hundred acres which had previously been covered by the ocean, and began to prepare them for cultivation. Within two years, corn was growing upon soil which had been shingle swept by daily tides.

Yet so late as 1808 we find him complaining that no meadows were in so disgraceful a state as those in Norfolk, and, in order to encourage irrigation, offering £50 to the person who should convert the greatest number of acres (not less than ten) into water meadows by the following year.<sup>3</sup>

One result of his personally reclaiming the salt marshes was that the lake at Holkham ceased to be an arm of the sea. This left it twenty acres in extent, and over a mile long. Not till sixty years afterwards was it cleaned out for the first time since it had been part of the ocean, and the mud which was then removed was found to contain many marine substances. This was used as

<sup>1</sup> *Agricultural Survey of Norfolk* (1796), by Nathaniel Kent, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd*, edited by J. H. Adeane (1896), p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> *The Bury and Norwich Post*, June 29th, 1808.



manure and proved most beneficial, four cart-loads being applied to one acre of land, and causing that land, though poor and sandy, to produce fourteen coombs of wheat to the acre.

In the repairing and strengthening of the sea-breaches and the irrigation of this land Coke employed the well-known "Strata" Smith. This geologist, William—better known as "Strata"—Smith,<sup>1</sup> was the son of poor parents, and had risen by his own abilities. Coke first met him at the house of a friend, and being struck by his improvements in irrigation and draining, decided to employ him, and afterwards helped him by introducing him to friends, and particularly to Francis, Duke of Bedford, who made great use of him upon the Woburn estate. Smith gained celebrity as the author of the first Map of the Strata of England and Wales, and afterwards wrote a well-known book on "Water Meadows," which he dedicated to Coke.<sup>2</sup> In his *Memoirs*<sup>3</sup> there is a description of his first journey to Holkham. He rode on horseback from Bath with nothing but a one-sheet map to guide him. Being afraid that he would not remember the road on his return, he took characteristic measures to recall it. He relates: "I alighted from my horse, from time to

<sup>1</sup> William Smith (1769-1839), the Father of English Geology.

<sup>2</sup> *Observations on Water Meadows*, published in 1806, dedicated to "Thomas William Coke, Esq., M.P. for the County of Norfolk." The dedication, after referring to improvements in various parts of Norfolk, proceeds: "Indeed, the recital of these good practices is nothing but a faint echo of what the community is indebted to you; but those only who live in the County of Norfolk can form any idea of the great good that is there going on, and the ultimate advantages of your invaluable improvements would to many appear like a romance, especially if put down in numbers, which is the only way of ascertaining their real worth."

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of William Smith*, by J. R. Philips, F.R.S., 1844.

time, sketched a section of the ascents and descents of the road, marked the stone quarries, outcrops of the rocks and other strata thereon, and could not refrain from loading my pockets with identifying fossils." One imagines that he must have been somewhat exhausted by the end of his journey !

Coke had all the aptitude of a clever man for discovering talent in others, and for recognising the men who were best qualified to help him in his endeavours. It was thus that he quickly recognised Gardiner's incapacity and unworthiness. It was thus that, later in life, he secured the services of an invaluable assistant, Francis Blakie, of whom we shall hear in due course. But whatever information he collected from others, he never considered it conclusive until he had personally tested its value, at whatever cost to himself. And in all the work which he undertook he did not look for any immediate profits ; indeed, the enormous outlay which his labours entailed must have prohibited any expectation of this. During the first few years of his experiments he spent over £100,000 in the erection and repairing of farm-houses and outbuildings alone. Between 1776 and 1842 he is said to have spent no less than £536,992 on improvements, which did not include any of the large sums spent on his house and domain, home-farm buildings and his expensive Marsh-farm of 459 acres.<sup>1</sup> His object was a disinterested one—at whatever loss and exertion to himself to bring about a permanent improvement in the condition of the

<sup>1</sup> See Walter Rye, *Coke of Holkham*, p. 11 ; from the *Journal of the R.A.S.E.*, 3rd series, Vol. VI, part 1, 1895 ; also *Journal R.A.S.E.*, Vol. XXIII, p. 370.

soil and in the knowledge of agriculture. And though gain came to him, it must have seemed at first improbable that his mere outlay could ever be recouped.

One thing, however, he always maintained was that the interests of landlord and tenant were identical. "A good understanding between landlord and tenant" was always quoted as the root of the Holkham prosperity. In order to encourage his farmers to exert themselves he let out his farms on long leases at a very moderate rental, and burdened by very few restrictions. This, he saw, was, in the end, an advantage to both landlord and tenant. It made it worth while for the tenant to invest capital in his farm and to interest himself in its improvement, while it eventually benefited the landlord by enriching his estate. But in granting these long leases it was necessary to take into consideration the fact that, under a bad tenant, the land would have greater opportunity for deterioration; therefore, when a certain tenant named Overman, who had been the first to further the new agricultural schemes, at length took a farm on the Holkham estate, Coke allowed him, as an experiment, to draw up the covenants of his lease himself. Overman inserted a clause making the improved course of cropping *compulsory*; and Coke forthwith made this lease the model on which all others, with any necessary modifications, were framed; so that the land was thus efficiently protected from the possible results of a long course of bad farming.

In one particular, especially, Coke was unalterably consistent. Effort and industry in his tenants were met by him with unstinting liberality as a landlord.

When a farmer by wit or work had increased the value of his holding, Coke did not, as the value rose, immediately raise the rent. Such a course he considered calculated to discourage effort. In a neighbouring estate, where the landlord was old, the heir refused to renew the leases, thinking the farms might be worth a higher rent in the future. In consequence, all improvements on that estate ceased. But when a tenant who had taken a Holkham farm actually doubled the value of his holding, Coke twice renewed the man's long lease on the original terms, and the improvements increased.

In the year 1818, one tenant reclaimed two pieces of meadow pasture from a complete bog at the expense of ten pounds an acre. When Blakie saw this he was so struck with it that he exclaimed: "Upon my word, young man, you have a stout heart!" A few days afterwards the tenant found a note upon his table, in Coke's well-known handwriting, as follows:—

"I approve the improvements effected by you as reported to me by Mr. Blakie, and in consequence *feel it my duty* to grant you a new lease from Michaelmas 1818 for 21 years."

This lease was to remain at the annual rental agreed upon when the land was partially bog. The farm was subsequently so improved that a second lease of twenty-one years was granted.

A naïve letter to Coke from the wife of one of his tenants, written at this date, refers to a similar transaction:—

"COKE FOR EVER! and so Mrs. Dowsing always has said, and ever will say. This is not the first time on which Mr. Coke has treated Mr. Dows-

ing in the handsomest manner possible.—A thousand, thousand thanks.—Mrs. Dowsing likewise desires to express her best acknowledgments to Mr. Coke. This lady is a staunch friend and well-wisher to Mr. Coke, as well as Mr. D.”

Whenever a tenant had been proved to be a valuable farmer, in renewing his lease Coke gave him the bonus of an excellent house. “Gentlemen’s houses for farmers” these gifts were described,<sup>1</sup> and his political opponents made it one of the complaints against him that he built palaces for farm-houses. He, however, built his home-farm, yard and buildings as a model to his tenants of what such buildings should be; and more than once he said to a tenant: “If you will keep an extra yard of bullocks, I will build you a yard and shed free of expense.”

Besides all his other expenditure, he spent large sums in improving the dwellings of his cottagers. He designed special buildings for the comfort of the aged or infirm, whose cottages he planned all on one floor that they might not have the fatigue of going up and down stairs. Indeed, the permanent happiness of his tenants seems to have been his first consideration. “It has been objected against me,” he said at one of the Sheep-shearings, “that my tenants live too much like gentlemen, driving their own curricules, perhaps, and drinking their port every day. I am proud to have such a tenantry, and heartily wish that instead of

<sup>1</sup> “The Stately Mansions, as they would be termed in most other counties, which the farmers occupy were equally admired by strangers with the degree of intelligence and spirit of improvement, which their hospitable occupiers possess” (*The London Chronicle*; Account of the Sheep-shearing, July 3-5, 1804).

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drinking their port they could afford to drink their  
claret and champagne every day!" . . . "Such,"  
adds the enthusiastic recorder of the speech, "is the  
spirit, such is the liberality and such are the feelings  
of Mr. Coke!"<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that Coke always put good solid  
comfort in daily life far before all outward and more  
striking signs of prosperity. "We can all be clothed  
with imperial cloth of British growth," he said at one  
of the Sheep-shearings; "but I had rather that an  
Englishman's back should go without a superfine coat  
than that he should want plenty of wholesome mutton  
inside him!" A cheery song called "Barley Mung,"  
which was sung throughout Norfolk, celebrated his  
indifference to the considerations of appearance as well  
as of rank:—

Coke little recks of low, or high,  
Coats fine, or jackets barely worn;  
The Landlord of Holkham ne'er looks down  
On the humble grower of Barley-corn!

Arthur Young,<sup>2</sup> the agriculturist, declares, indeed,  
that Coke was something of a martinet towards his  
tenants. On Sundays, he says, Mr. Coke insisted on  
all his labourers attending church, and afterwards sent  
them to work in the fields, declaring that honest labour  
was preferable to drunken idleness—their only other  
method of spending the Sabbath.<sup>3</sup> This sounds ex-  
tremely like a fable circulated by his political oppon-

<sup>1</sup> Undated newspaper extract kept by the Hon. the Rev. Thomas  
Keppel. Holkham MS.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of the Board of Agriculture.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Young calculated that if the half-day Sunday work were the  
custom all over England, it would be worth £600,000 per annum to the  
Kingdom (*Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. II, p. 379).

ents with the object of damaging his popularity among the working classes; but, be that as it may, it is certain that no tenant ever left him, except owing to extreme old age, and that no man who had once known Coke as a landlord would ever consent to live under any other.<sup>1</sup>

“Though long leases and clauses of management were innovations,” we are told, “Holkham farms commanded the pick of the English tenants.”<sup>2</sup> Even William Cobbett,<sup>3</sup> the hater of landlords, who had previously made a fierce and public attack upon Coke on account of his great wealth—an attack which roused a chorus of indignation from current periodicals—even Cobbett acknowledged the benefit which Coke’s tenantry derived from his paternal rule. “Every one,” confessed Cobbett in 1818, after a visit to the Holkham estate, “made use of the expressions towards him which affectionate children use towards their parents.”<sup>4</sup>

As the condition of the land surrounding the estate improved, Coke must have often compared it mentally with the bleak and barren heath which he had seen upon his first arrival at Holkham; and must have contrasted, too, the prosperous farmers in their comfort-

<sup>1</sup> “I have never seen an instance of any tenant leaving him, unless grown too far in years to be able to continue” (Nathaniel Kent, *Agricultural Survey of Norfolk* (1796), p. 123).

<sup>2</sup> *Social England*, ed. H. D. Traill (1893-7). Vol. VI, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> William Cobbett (1762-1835), son of a small farmer and grandson of a day-labourer. Socialist and demagogue. M.P. for Oldham, 1832. Originator of Hansard’s Debates (1806).

<sup>4</sup> *Social England*, Vol. VI, p. 80. It is perhaps a trivial circumstance, but it helps to show the light in which Coke was regarded, that, throughout Norfolk, crockery was popular in the cottages which bore his likeness upon it, and the inscription—“*The Norfolk Patriot. Greatly beloved.*”

able dwellings with a recollection of the ill-conditioned smugglers who had then occupied the cottages upon the coast.<sup>1</sup> One point, however, he was determined all should recognise, and that was the sharp distinction between his sentiments as a politician and as an agriculturist. Strongly as he felt upon the subject of upholding the principles of the Whig party—principles on which he believed the welfare and liberty of England to depend—he wished it to be clearly understood that, whatever benefits he bestowed upon his tenants, he laid no claim to their political allegiance; each man was free to follow the dictates of his own conscience, and no one should be coerced.

“When any man who holds a farm under me gives me his support, I consider it a compliment; when he votes against me, I naturally feel hurt; but I give each man credit for his opinions, and I wish him to vote according to his conscience. I have on my estate some who have been very active partisans against me, but I have never removed them from their farms on that account.”—Once Lord Exeter, finding that some tenants upon his estate had voted against him, gave them notice to quit, and Coke did not spare the expression of his opinion upon that occasion.—“Is it to be endured,” he exclaimed in a public speech soon after, “that any man should extend his authority to such a despotic

<sup>1</sup> “Not many years ago, the site on which Mr. Coke’s stables now stand was occupied by a few mean, straggling cottages, inhabited by miserable beings who, unable to obtain a maintenance from the inadequate produce of the agricultural labour of the neighbourhood, derived a not less precarious subsistence from smuggling and the predatory habits connected with it.” See *Holkham and its Agriculture* (1818), by Dr. Rigby.



extent as to tell a free-born Englishman, 'If you don't go to the lengths I do, I shall remove you from your occupation'! I would scorn to turn a man out of his farm or his dwelling because he voted against me! It is horrid, it is revolting to every good feeling that a man should say, 'You and your wife and your children shall be turned out into the road destitute because you exercised your franchise against my will.' If this is the conduct of the aristocracy, they must expect the result of it—hatred and aggression. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

As a result, Coke always said that in the whole course of his life, wherever he went, he never met with anything but perfect civility from all denominations of people.<sup>2</sup> It was his pride to mix with the yeomanry. "He knew they were a proud and independent body of men—men who were willing to be led, but would never be driven; and he trusted to God they never would!"

To emphasise this attitude—as in his political life he had adopted certain toasts to show his principles, so in his capacity of landlord he adopted a motto which became the keynote of existence upon the Holkham estate. This maxim, "LIVE AND LET LIVE," was his first toast at all gatherings of tenantry on the estate; it was the maxim on which he moulded his life. His sole aim, he stated, was to give everybody a fair chance, to combat prejudice, to encourage effort, to increase practical knowledge. Towards the scoffers he showed an infinite patience: "To those who are hard of belief," he said, "I can only say—Come and see—you will be

<sup>1</sup> *Norwich Chronicle*, October, 1830.

<sup>2</sup> One must, however, recognise an exception in the conduct of some of the rioters subsequently referred to.

heartily welcome." When praised for his generosity, he always parried all compliment by answering simply that he considered himself a temporary steward of the ample fortune which Providence had bestowed upon him ; that he was bound to use it, not for himself, but, to the best advantage, for others.

And, meanwhile, in all his efforts, he laboured most earnestly with the children of the tenants. His first idea was to educate the younger generation to a greater intelligence and love of enterprise than was possible with their fathers. He instituted special classes for their instruction in the knowledge of all matters connected with practical farming. He himself taught them by taking them about his farms ; questioning them on what they saw, and explaining what they did not understand ; while he made a careful note of those who showed greatest aptitude, and to them devoted most pains. But chiefly he encouraged all alike to exert their own powers of observation. What they merely learnt, he commended ; what they discovered for themselves, he rewarded.

Thus during the months of May and June when the grass was in bloom, he not only gave the children simple botanical lessons, but employed them to scour the country in search of the best stock of seed. This apparently unimportant action gradually consummated the transformation for which he was labouring in the pasture-lands. The want of deep drainage had formerly been severely felt, and the wet pastures had favoured the growth of the rankest and coarsest vegetation. Yet, although this had been altered, when the land wanted seeding, the farmers continued to throw on the ground

an indiscriminate collection of seeds which often contained as much rank weed or coarse grass as nutritious herbage. Coke was the first practical farmer who appreciated the value of distinguishing between the various kinds of seed,<sup>1</sup> and, even as meadows and pasture, the light lands of Norfolk at length beat the grass-lands of other counties, despite the natural superiority of the latter. So clearly was this fact recognised, that the Norfolk fairs became crowded with half-bred Galloway Scots, Highlanders, Lowland Scots and Skye cattle, as well as beasts from less remote districts, which were sent to the eastern counties to be fattened for the London markets.

Another improvement which he brought about deserves mention, for though not developed by him personally, it was directly due to his promoting agricultural progress, and was handsomely rewarded by him. A tenant of his at Warham, Mr. Blomfield, who farmed on the Holkham system seventy acres very near the sea, discovered the plan of what he termed "inoculating" the land. This first occurred to him from noticing the pieces of flag along the hedgerows being well beaten with a spade. The country was absolutely without old pasture, and the attempt to "lay down" land, as it was called, was very expensive. Blomfield tried placing two pieces of grass-turf of flag about three and a half inches square at certain distances, leaving an interval between them uncovered equal to that which was covered. This turf was well rammed down in the winter months, and in the spring some grass seeds were sown on the uncovered spots. Before

<sup>1</sup> See *Social England*, ed. H. D. Traill (1893-7), Vol. VI, p. 80.

the end of the summer the flag had extended itself, and, uniting the whole, appeared to be, and was actually equivalent to old pasture of fifty years. Thirty acres of wretched soil near Mr. Blomfield's house, which were practically valueless before this system was adopted, soon became rich land; and Coke, delighted at this discovery, at once prepared a large piece of land in view of the house at Holkham to be improved in this manner.<sup>1</sup>

Many volumes might be filled with an account of Coke's methods and his ceaseless experiments; but I fear these technicalities would have little interest for the general reader. "The life-story of 'Coke of Norfolk,' we are told, "is too much made up of agricultural technicalities to be generally attractive, but to the Norfolk farmer it reads like a romance—an agricultural romance."<sup>2</sup> Lord Spencer, however, sums up Coke's system briefly:

Improved rotations of crops.

The application of marl and clay.

The judicious use of artificial organic manures.

The adoption of a more profitable description of live stock.

Exciting the general use of the drill.

Concluding that the interest of the landlord and tenant were too closely united ever to be dissociated.

Granting leases of a liberal nature and extent, burdened by few restricting covenants; his theory

<sup>1</sup> The real reason of its great success on a soil not adapted to good turf is that some of the rich mellow soil on which the turf has been flourishing goes with the roots and imparts new vigour to the unsuitable soil. The cost was about thirty-five to forty shillings per acre.

<sup>2</sup> *Highways and Byways in East Anglia*, by Joseph Rennel, pp. 233-4.

being that these, while they cripple the exertions of a good farmer, but seldom improve the bigoted and indolent.

To this must be added the magnificent rewards which he gave as an encouragement to industry and enterprise, whenever he came across them, together with the splendid annual prizes at the Sheep-shearings; and thus we glean a faint outline of the system he pursued. At the Sheep-shearing in the year 1808, for instance, we read that he gave ten silver tankards value ten guineas each, a bowl value twenty guineas, liberal prizes in money to all the farmers and shepherds who had reared fine sheep and lambs, and still more ample prizes in money or plate to competitors who exhibited successful new implements to aid any form of industry.

Yet in spite of his generosity and in spite of his unrivalled perseverance, he had, in carrying out his schemes, to contend with incredible opposition. All that prejudice and ignorance could do to thwart him was done. The old race of Norfolk farmers were stolid and obstinate. Seldom moving many miles from the place where they were born, they were wedded to old methods and to what their fathers had taught before them. In the first instance, no doubt, Coke's youth told against him. That one who was a mere lad in the eyes of most of them should presume to meddle with old-time saws and knowledge that had descended to them from generations of forbears, was an insult to their most cherished traditions. Coke's experiments were ridiculed, his motives misunderstood, his liberality met with disheartening ingratitude—even so late

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as 1804, with open riot and violence. His less aggressive opponents scoffed at the notion that his "rabbit and rye lands" were capable of better cultivation, and declared that the thin drift soil must be ploughed by "rabbits yoked to a pocket-knife." "It is difficult," Coke admitted patiently, "to teach anything to adult ignorance. I had to contend with prejudice, an ignorant impatience of change, and a rooted attachment to old methods."<sup>1</sup>

Even when he had proved that wheat would grow, no one followed his example. It was nine years before any one attempted to imitate him, and then at last Mr. Overman having made the experiment, others slowly, very slowly, followed his example. It is curious that nothing spreads more leisurely than any innovation in the agricultural world. Perhaps the brains of tillers of the soil are naturally unprogressive and conservative; for whereas in a manufacturing centre any improvement in machinery is usually adopted directly its advantage is proved, in an agricultural district any change is regarded with suspicion, and a discovery, even when admitted to be advantageous, is too often allowed to lapse into oblivion rather than be adopted. For sixteen years Coke used the drill before any one could be induced to do so;<sup>2</sup> even when the farmers at last began to recognise the advantage of the quicker method, he estimated that its use spread only at the rate of a mile a year. "When I introduced the drill,"

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rigby's *Holkham and its Agriculture* (1818).

<sup>2</sup> The farmers persisted in the old method of sowing the grain broadcast, i.e. casting it upon the land; or else in dibbing, i.e. laboriously making holes with a dibbing-iron into which the grain was dropped, while another man followed with a rake and covered the holes over.

he said afterwards, "it was a long time before I could get a disciple." It used to be said: "Oh, it's very beautiful—and it's very well for *Mr. Coke!*" but that it might be equally "well" for Mr. Coke's tenants was carefully ignored. By and by, however, he discovered that a quaint term for a good crop of barley had come into use upon the estate. His farmers called it *hat-barley*, for the reason that if a man throws his hat into a crop, the hat rests on the surface if the crop is good, but falls to the ground if it is bad. "*All, sir,*" pronounced his tenants at length, "is 'hat-barley' since the drill came!"<sup>1</sup>

In short, where a weaker man would have given up the struggle, Coke succeeded because he was not of a nature to be daunted. The more opposition he encountered, the more determined he was to succeed. He used to tell many amusing stories of the want of grit with which he had to contend. One day a well-to-do tenant came to hire a farm on the Holkham estate which he had heard was to let. The farm proved to be close to the park, and on seeing this, and how the place abounded with game, the intending tenant refused it decisively. Blakie went to Coke and told him that the man had seen the farm and had declined it, considering it impossible to grow crops profitably upon it. "Oh," said Coke, "don't let him go without first coming to speak to me." The man, consequently, was brought to Coke and repeated his unalterable decision not to hire the farm. "Pray," said Coke quietly, "did you happen to see my crops adjoining the farm, just inside

<sup>1</sup> *General View of the Agriculture of Norfolk*, by the Secretary of the Board of Agriculture (1804), p. 251.

the park palings?" "Why, yes, sir," was the reply, "they are first-class." "And what then is the matter with the *paling*?" asked Coke; "isn't it possible to grow as good crops one side of the paling as the other?" "I don't know, sir," was the dubious answer; and the man took his departure. Two days later he again put in an appearance at Holkham and asked to see the Squire. On being brought into Coke's presence, he announced solemnly: "Sir, I have been unable to sleep the last two nights for thinking of what you said about growing as good crops outside the park pales as inside, and I have been looking at the farm again, and if you please, I will take it at the rent you ask." The bargain was immediately concluded, the tenant proved satisfactory, and the crops subsequently grown outside the park pales corresponded with those grown inside!

It was partly Coke's patience which prevailed against the inherent stubbornness of the natures with which he had to contend, partly that he took an infinitude of pains to enter into their objections and prejudices, and to learn what justifiable grounds existed for the opinions to which they held so tenaciously. But principally his was the influence of a strong nature imbued with strong convictions. That profound honesty which constituted his power in the political world stood him in good stead with his Norfolk farmers. He often said that he never ventured to give an opinion on any subject till after three years' trial; until then, he looked upon his experiments as a mere amusement. None the less, so unused was he to failure, so ill schooled to bear even its suggestion, that when any part of his experimental



farming was unsuccessful, he would, while riding about his estate, turn his head resolutely away from the obnoxious sight—much in the same manner as he refused ever again to look upon the scene of his first failure at Newmarket. But, once successful, once convinced of the utility of any particular practice or invention, his sheer determination that this should be adopted swept opposition and ignorance before it.

One curious instance of the difficulties which he had to encounter was the deep-rooted prejudice which then existed in Norfolk against potatoes. He tried to introduce this vegetable amongst the villagers at Holkham, but great was their indignation. For five years he could not induce them to look upon it as an article of food, or to consent to cultivate it. He even offered them land rent free on which to plant it, but they refused firmly and with outspoken disgust. At length, upon his own farm, he introduced the Ox Noble, a very large species, and this, apparently from its size, found a little favour in their eyes, for a few farmers admitted, as a great concession, that, perhaps, “’t wouldn’t poison tha’ pigs.” He persevered, however, and, in time, he would have had as great a difficulty in persuading his tenants not to eat potatoes as he had at first in inducing them to risk swallowing such a suspicious article of diet. After his success he allowed the poor to plant potatoes among his young trees for two or three years, which kept his land clean, and saved hoeing.

An interesting contemporary account of the attitude of both Mr. and Mrs. Coke towards strangers who approached them in the spirit of inquiry is given by

two celebrated farmers, J. Boys, of Betschanger, in Kent, and J. Ellman, of Glynde, in Sussex, who visited Holkham in July, 1792, and which shows that Mrs. Coke, who, as we have seen, from the first days of her married life, was specially interested in promoting industry in Norfolk, not only entered into her husband's schemes, but must have been qualified to aid him in furthering them.

It appears that these two men were to have met Arthur Young at Holkham for a tour of inspection; but upon their arrival, to their "great mortification," they found that Mr. Young had been prevented from coming and had written instead to introduce them to their unknown host. At that moment, they were informed, Mr. Coke was riding with the ladies about his farms, so they set off, by request, to find him; and their first dismay soon gave place to an immense satisfaction. "We meet here," Boys related complacently, "with a reception far superior to that which arises from mere politeness, and which we plainly perceive will detain us longer than we had intended!"

From their arrival till dinner-time, and from dinner-time till the evening, Mr. Coke devoted his attention to them. He showed them his crops with many stout oxen at work, his bulls and other splendid beasts, some of which they measured, his dairy of fifty cows, his two hundred score sheep, his ewes,—"the finest we ever beheld." "Mr. Coke's farm," Boys says, "consists of three thousand acres within a fence, farmed in a very capital style, to describe which would require a pen and abilities far beyond what we possess—in short, it appeared altogether a perfect paradise"; and in his

lengthy account he gives little homely touches which bring the scene before one's eyes—how, near the sea, the yearling heifers were feeding upon very rich salt-marsh, “in grass up to their eyes”; how he found “the rams so uncommonly fat that it would be vain for them to attempt to waddle away from us,” and how, on his return, in the beautiful July evening, he found “a fine group on the lawn of valets, footmen, grooms, cooks, women and labourers to the amount of sixty persons, all busy getting hay into cocks,” a merry, busy scene in which, in a private letter, he admits that he and his friend could not resist joining. “The house,” he concludes, “is a palace of the first-rate!”—though his professional admiration breaks out more enthusiastically when, in the same breath, he describes the slaughter-house, a “very extensive and elegant building!”

The next day was audit day, and Coke with many tiring hours before him, yet met the two men by appointment before breakfast at his stables, and at seven o'clock they mounted their horses and rode away to the marsh lands along the coast to study the grazing, etc., on their way back inspecting the brick manufactory, “where are made by far the best bricks we ever saw.” After breakfast Coke was obliged to attend to receive his rents, whereupon Mrs. Coke ordered horses, and herself offered to accompany them to view the farms, the dwellings on which again called forth their admiration: “Nothing can exceed the convenient arrangement of these buildings for the farmer; nor the wonderful liberality of this gentleman in thus spending a princely income in making his tenants comfortable and happy.”

For thirty miles Mrs. Coke rode with them before the early dinner, pointing out the improvements, and entering into the technicalities of agriculture with an enthusiasm and a minute knowledge of each subject which surprised and delighted them. Little can she have thought that that simple act of good nature would be recorded for future generations; but Boys' account of it has survived for over a century. "It is impossible to describe," he relates with a quaint simplicity, "either the pleasure we enjoyed in this morning ride or the agreeable surprise in meeting with such an amiable lady in high life, so well acquainted with agriculture, and so condescending as to attend two farmers out of Kent and Sussex a whole morning to show them some Norfolk farms. What improvements," he adds, "would be made in this country, if one half of the gentry of landed property understood and delighted in agriculture like this worthy family!"<sup>1</sup>—And so, after "taking dinner with the ladies and company above," while Mr. Coke entertained his tenants in the audit room below, the two men rode away from Holkham much edified by all they had seen, and singing the praises of "the hospitable mansion and its worthy inhabitants."

With regard to some of Coke's favourite theories and minor experiments, it may be interesting to mention that he was a great advocate for early sowing the wheat very thick in rows, and early cutting, even when the ear and stem are green and the grain not hard. He said he got two shillings a quarter for it more than wheat cut in a more

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XIX of the *Annals of Agriculture* (1793), p. 118.

mature state. He was equally early in cutting oats and peas, saying that he should lose more by the falling of the ripe seed at the bottoms than he should gain by waiting till the rest were ripe.

He also greatly improved the cultivation of turnips, and furthered the cultivation of mangel-wurzel; but against this latter, for a long time, he was much prejudiced. Mangel-wurzel when first introduced into Norfolk had been given to cattle at too early a stage, had been found to be prejudicial, and was consequently abandoned. Sir Mordaunt Martin, of Burnham Upton, however begged Coke to resume its cultivation, and we are told that although Mr. Coke "had always laughed at mangel-wurzel, and cannot bear the taste of beetroot, he will nevertheless sow some of it on his estate next year."<sup>1</sup> The result of this decision was that experience soon taught him the proper method of using mangel-wurzel; it was again cultivated throughout the country, and came into great favour.

He moreover made a special study of the use of particular birds in relation to the destruction of particular grubs. Once, when there was a plague of black canker—a larva which feeds upon turnips—he turned four hundred ducks into a large field, and found that in five days they had cleared the whole field from all trace of the larva.<sup>2</sup>

An entry written by him in an old notebook records the following :—

“ The mode adopted in some parts of Fifeshire for protecting new sown fields from crows, wood-pigeons, and other destructive vermin, is the following : In a

<sup>1</sup> *Norfolk Tour*, 1829, p. 32.    <sup>2</sup> *Annals of Agriculture*, Vol. II, p. 376.

large field which has been newly sown, place a number of *stamps*, say a dozen (used for killing rats, etc.), cover them lightly with earth, and avoid by all means anything like methodical arrangement of the stamps. A few crows taken by such means will serve as so many beacons to protect the field. The noise they make is incredible. By this simple operation many pounds sterling will, in the long run, be saved to the agriculturist. And, besides, it is believed that in a short time the crows would be as much afraid of a new-sown field as of the gun. They would therefore confine themselves to the end for which Providence designed them; viz. the destroying of grubs.

“In Dupplin, in the county of Perth, it is said that no less than eleven or twelve thousand nests and about twenty-seven thousand crows were destroyed one spring by Messrs. Stirton. It was done by contract for the sum of £25. The above simple contrivance would have avoided this wholesale slaughter, and the loss of birds which are of use to the farmer in the destroying of pernicious grubs.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A few other entries jotted down by Mr. Keppel in 1837 as *Notes on Farming from Conversations with Lord Leicester*, also have an interest:—

“Wheat should not be sown deep, say about three inches, for the sooner it shows itself the better, and hence the true and old saying :

If you sow in slop  
You will have a crop.”

“Lord Leicester pays his ploughmen one shilling and sixpence an acre; they plough about one and a half acres per day, and are allowed five hours each to do it in, of course using only one pair at a time. The wheat is drilled eleven inches wide, but if the land be good, at twelve.”

“When harvest is over, begin ploughing for wheat. The sooner this is done in the month of September, the better; wheat being found to be more productive when sown on an old layer. Plough as fleet as you can, two and a half inches deep. If you can afford to manure for wheat, let this be done just previous to ploughing; not as many farmers do—viz. mucking their land weeks beforehand, by which means the heat of the sun absorbs much of the moisture and consequently deprives the manure of much of its goodness.”

“Wheat ought not to tiller. Lord Leicester has for many years been

In conclusion, Coke was an original member of the Board of Agriculture, and is named in the charter granted by George III on August 23rd, 1793.<sup>1</sup> On March 12th, 1806, the Board voted a Gold Medal to him for his extensive system of irrigation, and "for the very successful mode by which a tract of unprofitable, boggy and gravelly soil in Norfolk was converted into sound and excellent water meadows."

At the present date, however, an impression appears to prevail that Coke's labours were confined to the mere enriching of soil and pasture and the improvement of live stock; also that, permanently excluded from Parliament, he was at leisure to devote all his energies to this betterment of his estate and advancement of agriculture.<sup>2</sup> That this was very far from being the case we have seen; not only, throughout his life, did his political duties receive a large proportion of his time and energy, but his agricultural labours knew no limit. Still more, other forms of industry and enterprise received his support and encouragement. He instituted Thetford Wool Fair, the first institution of the kind

in the habit of drilling four bushels an acre; here is no tillering, consequently no mildew, which is generally the attendant on a thin plant; and a thin plant only can tiller."

"Lord Leicester's tenants are not allowed to sow oats for the last four years of the lease, and generally among good agriculturists the tenants are not allowed to sell hay, straw, or turnips, in order that the land may not be impoverished by the want of stock, and, thereby, the want of manure."

<sup>1</sup> In the earliest list of Members he is described as being "of Hanover Square."

<sup>2</sup> "Excluded by his politics from Court and Parliament, he devoted all his energies to farming" (*Social England*, ed. H. D. Traill, Vol. VI, p. 78). It is curious that such an error should exist respecting a man who was for over half a century an active member in the House.

ever introduced into England, and he is said to have done as much for the trade in wool as he did for the trade in corn. He encouraged a Hemp and Flax Industry; and, as we have also seen, he had a brick manufactory on his estate which turned out excellent red and white bricks. In short, the area of his experiments comprised every branch of agriculture and every branch of local industry, while it is practically impossible to convey any adequate conception of his secondary labours in imparting and promoting the knowledge that he arduously obtained.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RESULT OF THE LABOURS IN ENGLAND

**W**E may now briefly compare these early labours of Coke's with their practical result, brought about during his own lifetime.

Not until 1778, two years after Coke had first collected the farmers together to discuss matters agricultural, did this local gathering assume a more definite character. This came about, apparently, without special effort on his part. First, his farmers brought with them their own relations and friends. These, in turn, brought others from a yet greater distance. Next, agriculturists from more remote parts of the kingdom wrote to ask if they might attend. Swiftly and steadily grew the fame of "Coke's Clippings" as they were called locally; till scientists of note turned their attention to them, and men of celebrity from other countries came to England in order to be present at them; till, year by year, they assumed greater proportions, so that, as we shall see later, they became representative of every nationality, British and foreign; of every phase of intellect, scientific and simple; of every rank, from crowned heads to petty farmers. It was Lafayette's greatest regret that he had never witnessed a Holkham Sheep-shearing; in 1818 the Emperor of Russia sent a special

message to say how he wished he could be present;<sup>1</sup> among the most famous names on the page of contemporary American history are men who journeyed from the other hemisphere expressly to take part in so unique a gathering. And meanwhile the rule which had characterised the meetings in their early simplicity was never departed from; all united thus in a common interest, met on common grounds; the suggestions of the simplest farmer were treated with the same respect as the conclusions of the most noted scientist; the same pains were taken in explaining to the former as to the latter the intricacies of a new system, or the merits of a new implement; the same courtesy and hospitality were experienced by the most, as by the least distinguished guest.

And, year after year, another rule was never departed from. Politics were carefully excluded from these meetings. Any attempt to introduce a party spirit into the toasts or speeches was at once silenced by Coke. Still, in his political character, he was a friend and a leader of Whigs, still in his agricultural capacity he sank politics and opened his doors to men of brain and merit irrespective of their views. "Live and let live" was a maxim which, in his eyes, embraced all humanity. The first time this rule was infringed was the last. Never until 1821 were politics tolerated at a Holkham Sheep-shearing; and then it was subsequently recognised to have been an evil omen, for that Sheep-shearing proved to be the final one.

Thus the "Clippings," which were always dated from 1778, extended over a period of forty-three years, until

<sup>1</sup> Sent by Dr. Hamel, a Russian physician.

that ominous year of 1821 ; and, during that time, it is said that not a single year passed without some discovery being made, either of avoidance or adoption, and some practical benefit accruing to the human race.

One of the most interesting accounts of these meetings and of Mr. Coke's system of agriculture appeared in 1816 in a little book written by Dr. Rigby, called *Holkham and its Agriculture*, which met with an astonishing reception.

For fifty-nine years in Norwich lived Dr. Rigby, its author, first studying, and then practising medicine. He obtained a European reputation by his writings on medical subjects ; to which he afterwards added a local reputation by becoming the father of twelve children, four of whom, three boys and one girl, were born at a birth, when he was seventy and his wife forty years of age. So struck were the Corporation of Norwich by his patriotic efforts on this occasion, that they presented him with a piece of plate, valued at twenty-five guineas, to celebrate the event. Dr. Rigby's maternal grandfather, Dr. J. Taylor, the Hebraist, had likewise been noted in his day, and all the descendants of that successful divine were so gifted with brains that Sydney Smith<sup>1</sup> said of them that they reversed the old proverb that "It takes nine tailors to make a man." Amongst other celebrities, Dr. Taylor was an ancestor of Harriet Martineau.

Dr. Rigby was abroad at the outbreak of the French Revolution, and witnessed the storming of the Bastille, when he had some exciting experiences and only escaped from Paris at the risk of his life to continue his tour

<sup>1</sup> Also attributed to the Duke of Sussex.

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abroad.<sup>1</sup> After his return to his peaceful existence in  
Norwich, he became greatly interested in all that he  
heard of young Mr. Coke's experiments in agriculture ;  
and he was specially struck by the misrepresentation  
with which, at this date, those efforts were met.

In days when the grossest calumnies were spread  
broadcast by the members of opposing factions, and  
were treated only with dignified indifference by their  
victims, it must have been not a little confusing to sift  
truth from falsehood. One of the ignorant accusations  
against Mr. Coke was that he was enriching himself  
at the expense of the small farmers ; another, that the  
annual Sheep-shearings were a clever contrivance on  
his part to gain a temporary popularity and increase his  
influence at elections ; a third, that they were political  
meetings in disguise, which he had instituted thus,  
in order to blind people to their real significance. The  
injustice of these charges is sufficiently apparent—time  
conclusively disproved them—but Dr. Rigby, naturally  
of a scientific and a critical turn of mind, was no doubt  
perplexed what to believe, and became anxious to prove  
the nature and extent of Coke's efforts.

In 1787 he must have heard that Coke had begun to  
grow wheat where it had been believed that none would  
grow.<sup>2</sup> In 1792-3 he probably read J. Boys' account of  
his visit to Holkham—Boys, who had noticed with the  
quick eye of the farmer the advantages of the Holkham  
agriculture, and who, at that date, fourteen years after  
Coke had started farming, spoke with enthusiasm of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rigby's *Letters from France, etc., in 1789*, edited by his daughter  
Lady Eastlake. Longmans (1880).

<sup>2</sup> *Coke of Holkham*, by Walter Rye, p. 5 (1895).

“immense fields of barley, very great crops and perfectly clean, on land naturally poor.”<sup>1</sup> In 1796 he must have heard that Coke, who was the greatest planter of sainfoin in the district, cut 365 loads of excellent hay, rather exceeding a ton to a load, from 104 acres; this from a plant four years old, upon land not worth more than twelve shillings an acre for any other purpose.<sup>2</sup> Yet it does not appear to have been till 1807, thirty years after Coke had started farming, that Dr. Rigby finally succeeded in paying his long-deferred visit to Holkham.

He then relates many interesting details; how, at that time, Mr. Coke's establishment consisted of sixty persons, nearly all of whom were recruited from his own villagers; how his postillions, smart, good-looking lads, were the sons of his own labourers—in fact, whenever Mr. Coke saw a lad of any promise he always endeavoured to find him some post in his employment, in which, if steady and intelligent, the boy could better his position; how, on all the Holkham estates, there was no one in a state of poverty, no one out of employment, so happily was work provided for all; and how, in the village, people appeared to idolise Mr. Coke, and had learnt to look up to him with a veneration which knew no bounds.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Rigby could only express amazement

<sup>1</sup> *Farmer's Magazine*, 1793, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Agricultural Survey of Norfolk*, Nathaniel Kent (1796), p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> “In his neighbourhood (it is not saying too much) *he was idolised*. . . . His constant motto—that which influenced his acts, and which he was constantly impressing on his tenantry—was ‘Live and let live.’ He had one source of pride—he gloried in his tenantry, and they, in return, loved, revered, and looked up to him as a father. The darling object of his life was to render them independent—the subject he derived most pleasure from talking upon was their intelligence, their skill in agriculture, *their confidence in him*” (*Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, July 7th, 1842).

at what he saw ; “the splendid hospitality of Mr. Coke, and the admirable system of agriculture by which his extensive estate has been converted from a comparatively barren soil to the most rich and exuberant domain in this part of the kingdom, fill me with enthusiasm on the subject.”

Again he writes :—

“At the latter end of August, 1816, I was gratified by a visit to Holkham. Everyone who visits Mr. Coke is struck with the beauty of the Holkham scenery, the magnificence of his mansion, his princely establishment and his liberal hospitality. They impressed me forcibly. . . .”

He goes on to relate how he rode with Mr. Coke for several hours, on two successive mornings, and his astonishment at the exuberance of the crops, at the richness of the soil and at its extraordinary freedom from weeds.<sup>1</sup> It had been a very wet season, and else-

<sup>1</sup> “It is a certain and most striking fact, and that which appears most wonderful to all farmers who for the first time view the Holkham Agriculture, that scarcely a weed of *any kind* is to be seen in the crops ; fields of from 20 to 40 acres lying on a slope and all in one view, present neither cornflower, cockle, nor poppy ! Upon our faculties, when, a few years ago, we witnessed these scenes, that had something of the effect of magic. In other places where culture is thought to be well performed, where crops are good, and weeds neither very noxious nor very numerous, yet some wild oats, darnel, hareweed, or charlock, etc. etc., will be seen. . . . It is not our intention here to compare systems, but to relate efforts. Visitors from a distance are apt to say—‘We could not do so, we could not afford the expense.’ Others observe—‘It is all very well under such a landlord as Mr. Coke !’ Some assert that they could not get hands to do it ; others gravely hint, ‘Only think of the manure !’ . . . All these objections are so many eulogies upon the system pursued at Holkham, and on the character of Mr. Coke, who is unquestionably the greatest patron of Agriculture that the world has ever seen ; and the good of the landlords and of the tenantry and of the kingdom at large will be promoted in proportion as his example spreads and the influence of his system prevails” (*Farmer’s Magazine*, July 20th, 1818).

where weeds were plentiful ; but on the Holkham estate, where they had once formed the chief vegetation, they were so successfully eliminated that he actually pauses to describe how, in the many miles which they must have traversed, he saw one plant of charlock—*Sinapis arvensis*. They were riding over Mr. Blomfield's farm of seventy acres at the time, and with them was a German youth who was living with Mr. Blomfield to learn farming. Dr. Rigby, perhaps casually, perhaps of malice prepense, pointed out to the German the solitary specimen of unwelcome vegetation in all those acres of well-kept land. The result of his remark filled him with amusement. The youth, apparently overwhelmed at what he considered the personal disgrace involved by the existence of this single weed, dismounted hurriedly, ran to the spot, plucked up the offending plant fiercely by the roots and tore it to fragments, all the while speechless with annoyance !

What surprised Dr. Rigby most, however, was the richness of the wheat and barley. Mr. Coke, he says, estimated the wheat from ten to twelve coombs an acre, and said nearly twenty coombs per acre of barley had grown upon it, *which is at least double the crop in the county of Norfolk, and nearly treble that of many counties in England.*<sup>1</sup>

So impressed was he with all he saw that he forthwith wrote his book *Holkham and its Agriculture*, which, on its publication in 1816, caused an unparalleled sensation. In 1818 there appeared a third and enlarged edition, revised after he had had the "pleasure and

<sup>1</sup> A doubt having been cast on this assertion, it was afterwards proved by experiment. (See Dr. Rigby's *Holkham and its Agriculture*.)

advantage of accompanying Mr. Coke over his farms the day before the Sheep-shearing on July 5th of that year." This was translated into three different languages, and had an extensive sale in Germany, France, Italy and America.<sup>1</sup> In it he described his visits to Holkham and to the Sheep-shearing; he defended Mr. Coke indignantly from the misrepresentations of his enemies, and dwelt in terms of admiration on all Mr. Coke had accomplished.

In 1776, he says, when Coke entered upon the possession of the estate, the annual rental derived therefrom was £2200. By 1816 the rental from the annual fall of timber and underwood alone was £2700, and, despite Coke's moderate rents, the annual income from the estate was £20,000.

"Mr. Coke," he says, "gives 21 years' leases, and he has already seen the termination of such leases on most of his farms, and, though he continues the same encouraging system of long leases and moderate rents, his present relatively moderate rents . . . have admitted the total increase of his Norfolk rents to the enormous sum of twenty thousand pounds; an increase of the value of landed property, a creation of wealth probably unexampled, except in the vicinity of large towns, or in populous manufacturing districts."

And, after dwelling upon the complete transformation in his surroundings which Coke had effected, he sums up, in the curious, sententious language of his day, how the condition of the estate—

"Has a character even surpassing the highest natural beauty—it has a moral character which leaves

<sup>1</sup> Such universal interest did it arouse, that similar publications appear to have followed. In 1820 Molard published in France a work entitled *Système d'Agriculture suivi par M. Coke*.



a more lasting and a more satisfactory impression on the benevolent mind. . . . It exhibits man under his best features, and in his happiest state ; it is the field of human industry, and it shows its rich reward ;—talent and invention—science and experiment—the principles of mechanics—the discoveries of chemistry, and the investigations of Natural History are here all applied to the promotion of the first and most important of human arts. . . . Society at large—the proprietor of the soil—the farmer who occupies and cultivates it, and the labourer and artisan who work upon it, all share in these benefits—all partake of the general good. I am indeed unable to express the high moral satisfaction I experience in witnessing the enviable state of the labouring classes in Mr. Coke's parish. . . .”

He was greatly struck, not only by the neatness and comfort of their well-built cottages, but by the fact of these being unusually well furnished, “for I observed in almost all of them articles not very common in a poor man's cottage, but of which when able to procure them, the poor man is very laudably proud” ; the manner in which the tables at meal times were “not sparingly covered,” and the careful cultivation of the gardens annexed to each cottage also came in for a share of his attention. Yet another peculiarity of the village impressed him : “There is but one thing which could not be found, which has ever been reckoned desirable to enjoyment, namely an alehouse ; there had formerly been two, but they had long since been converted to other purposes.” In fact, when Coke came into his estate there had been not only two alehouses in the village, but a poor-house, supported out of the rates, had been built for the parishes of Holkham, Warham and Dereham, *which was always fully occu-*

*pied*. Later, both these alehouses had vanished for lack of customers, and, twenty-five years after the erection of the workhouse, a deputation waited upon Coke to inform him that it was a senseless burden to keep it up, as now it was *always empty*, and it had better be converted to some other use. Coke told them to consider well what they were about, and to look forward to times when they might not be so prosperous. They only replied that by the spirit of independence which their comfort inspired, and the certainty of labour, they were convinced they need dread no reverse, for the whole district now was industrious and moral. The workhouse was therefore pulled down, and the rates lowered.<sup>1</sup>

Again one is reminded of the verdict of Voltaire respecting the highest philosophy of life. "True philosophy," he says, "makes the earth fertile, and the people happier; the true philosopher cultivates the land, increases the number of ploughs and so of the inhabitants; occupies the poor man and thus enriches him, does not grumble at necessary taxes and puts the labourer in a condition to pay them promptly." And in sympathy with the great French philosopher, Dr. Rigby, on his return home, wrote to Coke (July 20th, 1818):—

"I have to thank you for many, very many things, and now that I am a little sobered from the delightful intoxication into which I was thrown at Holkham, I may attempt it. . . . I feel, however, that I must first do it as a *man*; I must thank you for the extensive good you have rendered to the Human Race; you have indeed been a Benefactor to your Fellow

<sup>1</sup> *Holkham and its Agriculture*, third edition (1818), p. 79.

Creatures, of the very first class ; you have improved and extended the most useful and important of human Arts :—By exciting a more general Attention to this Subject, and by inducing so many more Individuals practically to engage in Agriculture, you have enlarged the Boundary of human Enjoyment ; and you have proved how much this is capable of exercising and improving the best powers of our Understanding.”

In the same strain of stilted but heart-felt admiration, he dwelt at great length on his recent impressions at Holkham, referring also to those of his friend who had accompanied him, James Perry<sup>1</sup> of the *Morning Chronicle*, whose verdict on the occasion he likewise records in his book :—

“In Mr. Coke,” Perry pronounced, “I see a true Patriot ; and of all the exhibitions I have ever witnessed this is the proudest ; compared to it what are the boasted triumphs of a conqueror ? As a man, as an Agriculturist, and as a Patriot, Mr. Coke has merited the esteem and gratitude of his countrymen, for he has inspired, not only his immediate neighbourhood, but the kingdom at large with a spirit of emulation and improvement, and he has his reward in the love of his tenants, the affection of his neighbours, and the gratitude of all Mankind.”<sup>2</sup>

But one might multiply indefinitely quotations from Coke’s contemporaries in evidence of what he achieved in the space of, comparatively, a few years ; the Duke of Sussex, for one, was never weary of pointing out in his speeches how Coke “had made a garden of a

<sup>1</sup> “An excellent and constitutional writer, well known in America as well as in Europe” (*Holkham and its Agriculture* (1818), p. 43).

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

wilderness," and how he had "planted sufficient trees to put the entire British Navy in a state of defence."<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Bedford,<sup>2</sup> after travelling abroad for some time, paid Coke a compliment which the latter said he valued more than any he had received: "In all Europe," the Duke said, "I found nothing like England; and in all England nothing like Holkham." In 1833, Major Case said that he and his family had been tenants of Coke's for sixty-three years, and his grandfather had died worth £150,000, which they owed to Mr. Coke. Lord Lynedoch<sup>3</sup> writing yet later, in 1837, quotes:—

"I had yesterday an opportunity of seeing many of the farmers on our little agricultural drive, and you can form no idea in what raptures they one and all expressed themselves of Mr. Coke—his agricultural knowledge, his readiness to impart what his long experience had taught him; and his general kindness of manner were extolled one more than another;—pray tell him this; he will not dislike to hear this, though coming from a prejudiced corner."

But perhaps Coke's own modest reference to what he had accomplished, uttered at the Sheep-shearing in 1818, the year Dr. Rigby was present, is sufficiently conclusive.

"He could state," he said, "from actual enumeration that three times the number of inhabitants were maintained on the same space of ground as before. In all his parish there was not a single individual, of any age, that did not find full employment—and they even wanted hands. He had per-

<sup>1</sup> Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex (1773-1843), sixth son of George III. (See speech at the Holkham Sheep-shearing, 1821).

<sup>2</sup> John, sixth Duke of Bedford.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Graham, Baron Lynedoch, a celebrated general (1748-1843).

severed steadily in the system which he saw was productive of prosperity and happiness; he had fought with prejudice and had many times conquered it; he had accomplished by perseverance what experience had recommended, and he had the happiness to say that his meeting annually increased and improvements annually extended.”<sup>1</sup>

Later, we shall be better able to weigh the value of such a statement of prosperity at the particular date when it was uttered—a date of unparalleled distress throughout the length and breadth of England; but for the present, a simple comparison of facts is more convincing:—

1776.

Rental derived from the  
Holkham estate, £2200.

No wheat grown from  
Holkham to Lynn, and  
farmers convinced that none  
would grow. Upwards of  
10,000 qrs. of wheat im-  
ported annually to Wells,  
quantities averaging that  
amount to other parts along  
the coast, Blankney, Burn-  
ham and Brancaster, etc.

Holkham an open heath,  
bleak and barren.

1818, and onwards.

Money derived from an-  
nual fall of timber and  
underwood alone, £2700.  
Rent Roll (with moderate  
rents) over £20,000.

Norfolk, one of the rich-  
est wheat-growing coun-  
ties in England; called the  
“Granary of England,”  
exporting wheat abroad in  
larger quantities than any  
other district. 11,000 qrs.  
per annum exported from  
the port of Wells alone.

Holkham a site of splen-  
did timber, rich pasture-  
lands and luxuriant crops.  
Wheat growing on soil  
which two years previously  
had been covered by daily  
tides.

<sup>1</sup> *Farmer's Journal*, July 20th, 1818.

1776.

Population of Holkham under 200, a poor-house, built for it and the neighbouring parishes, supported out of the rates, always fully occupied.

A few farmers assembled to discuss agricultural subjects.

Apathy and stupidity characterised the Norfolk farmers, agricultural experiments met with ingratitude, calumny and opposition.

1818, and onwards.

Population 1100. Not one pauper upon the estate. The poor-house razed to the ground.

An annual international gathering held at Holkham to discuss agricultural subjects, which was attended by most of the noted men in England and by agriculturists, scientists, etc. from every part of Europe and America. In 1817, 2000 persons were present at the dinners given on this occasion. In 1821, 7000 were present.

Arthur Young wrote in 1818: "Mr. Coke resides in the midst of the best husbandry in Norfolk"; while, fourteen years before this date, in 1804, already Coke's farmers, in token of their appreciation of his efforts in the cause of Agriculture, had voluntarily presented him with a piece of plate three feet high which had cost them 700 guineas.

And the above—that Coke had transformed the attitude of his farmers and the condition of his estate, that the population of Holkham was enriched and multiplied, that agriculture was permanently improved, that England, Europe and another hemisphere were bene-

fited—all was primarily due to the decision of a youth of twenty-two, to his subsequent energy and perseverance, combined with a liberality which did not pause to count costs, nor mete out gifts by the gratitude these evoked.

Still more, by Coke's untiring energy and the great interest he took in farming, he turned the attention of others in the same direction. A stimulus of the utmost importance was given to agriculture throughout England. It was due to him that persons of intellect, education and capital became interested in the pursuit, and began to view it no longer as a mere occupation for the lower classes, but as a science of the first importance. "Improvements," Coke himself wrote in 1809, "are everywhere taking place in agriculture. . . . Men of the most enlightened minds, the most virtuous characters and the most elevated stations in society, do not now disdain to attend to those pursuits, to promote them by their labours, and to extend them by their influence. . . . A spirit of inquiry has gone forth that cannot ultimately fail to enlarge the boundaries of useful knowledge." It must be borne in mind that Coke was the precursor of the efforts of his great friend Francis, Duke of Bedford, his old schoolfellow, Lord Egremont, Sir John Sinclair<sup>1</sup> and others, whose labours also influenced their generation. He was, besides, one of the first persistently to uphold agricultural interests in the Commons, although he complained bitterly that "*never had he known a Minister willing to promote agricultural improvements,*" and instanced Burke, who

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Sinclair, Bart., of Dunbeath, Co. Caithness, author of *The Code of Agriculture* and other agricultural works.

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had decried all agricultural experiments as "perilous."<sup>1</sup>  
Yet, principally through Coke's agency, vast tracts of  
uncultivated land at length became cultivated; be-  
tween 1804 and 1821 no less than 153 enclosures took  
place in Norfolk alone; while between the years 1790  
and 1810 he was directly instrumental in bringing  
into tillage not less than two millions of acres of waste  
land.<sup>2</sup>

Yet another result was attributed to him, and which,  
commented on by his contemporaries, was considered  
by them to deserve special record on the page of history.  
Before Coke had thus transformed the aspect of agri-  
culture throughout the country, England, unable to  
feed her people, was dependent for sustenance on foreign  
supplies. Had this state of affairs continued, it was  
averred, she would, at a crisis in her history, have been  
at the mercy of Bonaparte's decrees. Coke, by the  
timely impetus which he gave to agriculture, raised the  
whole standard of cultivation throughout the kingdom,  
so that, before Bonaparte became all-powerful, England  
became self-supporting. But for this fact, it was confi-  
dently asserted by those who lived at that date, but for  
the energy and determination of the man who was the  
first to give and the most indefatigable in sustaining that  
impetus, England's very existence as an independent  
Power would have been at stake. "Let those who have  
so wantonly decried Mr. Coke's exertions to draw large  
capitals, together with men of enterprise and skill,  
towards agricultural pursuits, steadily contemplate this

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 1811, Vol. XIX, p. 688.

<sup>2</sup> Sketch of *Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester*, printed by Whiting,  
Beaufort House, Strand, p. 43; also *Norwich Mercury*, July 9th, 1842.



fact and yield him the praise he so eminently deserves from his countrymen."<sup>1</sup>

One of Coke's contemporaries said that he had saved his country with a ploughshare where a sword would have failed.<sup>2</sup> One may add that, whereas national poverty and individual misery follow the use of the sword, national riches and individual happiness followed the wake of the plough under the guidance of Coke of Norfolk.

"Year after year," remarked the Duke of Sussex at the last of the Clippings, "what must be his pride and satisfaction in seeing so many enjoy the benefits whom his great mind and Christian conduct have made happy. This is to deserve that great reward which is promised to the faithful steward upon earth, where it is said, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'—Blessed is the man who can do such work, and blessed are the people who receive his bounties. So long as this mansion shall last, as long as these blooming fields retain their verdure, so long shall his fame continue; nay, till Time shall be no more."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sketch, *Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester*, printed by Whiting, Beaufort Street, Strand, p. 48. Many of the speeches of the day contain reference to this fact (see *Norwich Mercury*, May 6th, 1840), and most of the obituary notices of the Earl of Leicester in the daily papers, *Norwich Mercury*, July 9th, 1842; *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, July 7th, 1842, etc. etc.

<sup>2</sup> Speech at the Earl of Leicester's birthday dinner (*Norwich Mercury*, May, 1832).

<sup>3</sup> Speech of the Duke of Sussex at the Holkham Sheep-shearing, 1821 (see *A Report of the Transactions at the Holkham Sheep-shearing, 1821*, by R. M. Bacon, p. 101).

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE RESULT OF THE LABOURS IN AMERICA

**H**AVING viewed the effect of Coke's labours upon the minds and fortunes of his own countrymen, it is interesting to glance briefly at the result produced thereby upon the minds of men in another hemisphere.

Owing to the prominent part which he was known to have taken with regard to the question of American independence, Coke's name had been held in respect in America ; but the novelty of his position as a practical and scientific farmer soon excited considerable curiosity there, and added fresh glamour to the original sentiment entertained towards him. Men who had before revered him as a politician began to inquire into and to desire to emulate his methods as a farmer ; the advice which they sought, they found him ready and anxious to impart ; and the impetus which agriculture had received in England soon communicated itself to the New World, so that, in this peaceful pursuit, a fresh *rapprochement* began to take place between the hitherto antagonistic sister countries.

The result of this sentiment upon Coke, as a private individual, was certainly curious. Both causes—political and agricultural—operated to keep up a constant and increasing flow of communication between Holkham and the United States. This, it must be

emphasised, was extremely remarkable at a date when Americans were still looked at askance as the recent foes of England and were received with scanty cordiality in this country. Coke was the first Englishman to open his doors to the first Minister sent by the United States at the conclusion of hostilities ; and this fact was always gratefully remembered in the other hemisphere. From the date of American independence, few Americans came over to England without proposing a visit to Coke ; these, in turn, sent letters of introduction to their friends, who unhesitatingly claimed his hospitality, many of them being men who journeyed over to Europe for the express purpose of seeing the Englishman who in their eyes occupied a unique position ; and, still preserved at Holkham, are a number of letters from Americans who in their day were men of mark—letters which reiterate the same story—thanks for and surprise at the hospitality which had been shown to the writers and their friends—gratitude for favours received and anticipation of favours to come.

It is impossible to do more than glance very cursorily at a few names of those who were thus strangely brought into contact with the far distant life at Holkham during the period dating from the Emancipation until Coke's death ; but one thing must be borne in mind with regard to this correspondence—that the majority of the writers, in the first instance, were strangers to Coke, who knew his name and his hospitality only by repute, but who none the less desired to pay some tribute to the former, and unhesitatingly laid claim to the latter.

One of the most noted men in American history is

Andrew Jackson, born in 1767. "No figure in American history," we are told, "with the possible exception of Abraham Lincoln, stands out with more marks of originality than that of Andrew Jackson."<sup>1</sup> Jackson never visited Holkham, and never saw Coke; yet he knew him so well by repute, that, when President, he wrote to Coke as to an old friend. His first letter, written from Washington, was to beg hospitality for an agriculturist, Mr. Bradford, who wished to visit Holkham, and Jackson expresses a faint apology for his request:—

"Without the honour of a personal acquaintance, or of previous correspondence," he writes, "I have taken the liberty of introducing a highly esteemed countryman to your favourable notice. If contributions like this are frequently levied upon your kindness and hospitality, you must attribute them to the true cause—to the high regard which in this country is entertained for your Character, Sentiments, and pursuits. Your name has reached us under those circumstances which have rendered it dear to your own countrymen and revered in other countries."

He proceeds to explain Mr. Bradford's love of farming, and concludes his letter a little enviously.

"Having during life devoted much of my attention to this pursuit, and being most anxious to exchange for it the cares of office, I enter into the feelings of Mr. Bradford; and believing he could nowhere find a more perfect model than at Holkham, I beg to recommend him to your own kind attention."

<sup>1</sup> *History of the United States*, by Charles Litten, p. 253. Before Andrew Jackson was thirty-two, he had been country storekeeper, lawyer, district attorney, judge, Congressman and Senator. He was also a celebrated General; he was Governor of Florida in 1821; he was President of the United States for two terms, 1829-36. "The reign of Jackson," as this latter period is sometimes called, marks an epoch not only in the political history of the country, but also in material, intellectual and social progress.

Rufus King, the second Minister sent to England by the United States after the adoption of the Constitution, also wrote as a stranger to Coke, to make the same request for a compatriot. Afterwards, during his sojourn in England, he became intimate at Holkham. His son was the late Charles King, President of Columbia College in New York from 1849 to 1864; and his granddaughter, curiously enough, became Madame Waddington, wife of the French Minister in London in the reign of Queen Victoria, whose amusing account of her experiences while in England appeared in her published correspondence.

Another correspondent of Coke's who eventually became a visitor at Holkham—as indeed each member of his family appears to have done—was Richard Caton. Born in England, he became a merchant in Baltimore, and himself a tall, handsome man, of fine presence and dignified carriage, he married a celebrated American beauty, Miss Carroll,<sup>1</sup> who was greatly admired by Washington. Caton's first letter to Coke, apparently before the latter was personally known to him, is a request that hospitality may be shown to a whole party of his friends who were visiting Europe; and he excuses the boldness of this demand in much the same terms as those used by Jackson and Rufus King: "I must tell you," he explains, "that your name imposes upon me a task which, to any other person than yourself, I would avoid. Our American travellers all keep in view a hope of seeing you and Holkham: and you must therefore endure all the pains and penalties which you un-

<sup>1</sup> Her father was the noted Charles Carroll of Carrollton.

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avoidably incur by your general hospitality and magnificence.”

Of the daughters of Richard Caton, all celebrated for their beauty and fascination, Mary, the most noted beauty, was the first to visit Holkham. When she came to London with her first husband, Mr. Patterson,<sup>1</sup> and her two unmarried sisters, the three fair Americans created quite a sensation, and were universally admired from the King downwards. A letter of introduction to Coke ensured to Mr. and Mrs. Patterson a welcome from him, and they appear to have been entertained by him right royally, for her father wrote afterwards with effusive gratitude to discover if he could do anything to repay the obligation he was under to her unknown host.

“Although I have not had the honour of being personally known to you, your mind and character have been sufficiently manifested to me by my daughter and Mr. Patterson, to remove any hesitation I might feel in writing to you. A sense of your kindness and attention to my family would furnish me with a motive for so doing, did none other offer; and when I tell you how much I partake of their sentiments and regard for your unlimited hospitality and goodness, I shall repeat only what they have a hundred times expressed to you. Strangers as they were, such kindness was the more grateful, as it was neither expected nor due; and if I may speak for them, I should say that you have implanted in them a sentiment and feeling of respect and affection towards you, which can never be forgotten, and will be remembered often and often with an ardent and a grateful recollection.”

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Patterson's beautiful sister, Elizabeth, was the first wife of Jerome Bonaparte, King of Westphalia and Marshal of France.

He proceeds to beg that he may make some return, if possible, for this hospitality :—

“Can I in any shape, is there any means by which I can be the instrument to convey to you a small evidence of their regard, and my gratitude? In politics I can, if they be acceptable, offer you the fugitive pieces of the day. Would our American publications be desirable? I fear our literary reputation in Europe is less estimated than it deserves to be. If in Geology or Natural History you indulge a taste, I can meet you on more equal terms and perhaps afford you some rude specimens that would improve your Cabinet.<sup>1</sup> In the way of Agriculture I can offer little, for we have little that would be acceptable. . . . I shall be happy to forward to you anything which our country affords, and something we may have which may be found useful to you, could we but know what it is.”

He concludes his letter with a prophetic utterance respecting the future of his country :—

“Our country is indeed a wondrous spectacle of human association, possessing means and variety without limit. It may be said, in truth, that we have emerged from first principles, and are fast developing into a Nation of numbers, plenty, power, energy, and policy with a rapidity that the world never witnessed, and that will one day make us feared and hated by all nations; for I do not think that forbearance is a characteristic that will mark our conduct. I write now as one looking into futurity and designating a period when the greater part of the present generation will be at rest; and I should not venture to utter the sentiment, did I not feel that it would be received as it is given, with a liberality detached from local feeling.”

Mr. Patterson, Mr. Caton's son-in-law, was deeply interested in agriculture, and was a clever and agree-

<sup>1</sup> Caton was a well-known geologist.

able man; but he occasioned some amusement at Holkham by the extreme frankness of his remarks. It was the custom after dinner for every one to repair to the chapel for family prayers. On the first evening of his sojourn at Holkham, when Mr. Patterson was invited to attend, he replied with gravity, "I thank you—I thank you; but I pray, devoutly and sincerely, *once a week!*" In those days, however, while the servants occupied the chapel for worship, and their superiors were present in a private room overlooking the sacred edifice like a gallery, it was yet considered necessary for certain footmen of the establishment to be in attendance in that upper apartment during evening prayers in order to assist to their feet those gentlemen who were too drunk to rise from their knees. Mr. Patterson, therefore, may have concluded that to worship with a clear head on Sunday morning was more edifying.

During her visit to England the beautiful Mary Patterson was as greatly admired by the "Iron Duke" as her mother had been by Washington. Later, her husband died, and constant mention is made of her as a young and lovely widow by Coke's correspondents, which prove that she made painful havoc among the susceptible hearts in the other hemisphere. On returning to England, she married in 1825 the brother of her early admirer the "Iron Duke,"<sup>1</sup> and as Lady Wellesley her portrait was painted by Lawrence and is now in Baltimore. Of her sisters, one became Lady Stafford, and another Duchess of Leeds—"a singular

<sup>1</sup> Richard, second Earl of Mornington (1760-1842), created Baron Wellesley of Wellesley in the Peerage of Great Britain 1797, and Marquis Wellesley in the Peerage of Ireland 1799.



instance," remarks a contemporary, "of three sisters, foreigners, and of a nation hitherto little known in our aristocratical circles, allying themselves to such distinguished families in England."<sup>1</sup> But, however brilliant their subsequent fortunes, the three sisters appear never to have forgotten the man who was one of their first friends on arriving as "foreigners" in a strange land; and at last their father, following the example of his daughters, visited the English home of which he had heard so much. "I take so much interest in everything that relates to you and yours, more especially since my residence at Holkham," he wrote to Coke towards the end of his life, "that I can never lose the grateful recollections, nor think of them but with pleasure and gratitude."

As Coke's influence upon agriculture spread far and wide through that distant world, pamphlets respecting his system of farming, some of them written by his own tenants,<sup>2</sup> penetrated and were read with interest in remote parts of America. One of his correspondents mentions that "accounts of the Holkham Sheep-shearing are extensively circulated by the public journals in the United States:—

"After my return from England last autumn," writes John Farish, of the Montreal Agricultural Society, "I astonished them all with the detail of the wonderful experiments and agricultural operations of which I was an eye-witness at your last sheep-shearing. I also distributed among them a few copies of Dr. Rigby's pamphlet, which was perused with

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of T. Raikes* (1856), Vol. II, p. 384.

<sup>2</sup> Blakie in a letter mentions this fact, and also that he personally had been asked and had consented to write a pamphlet containing a description of Coke's system of agriculture for America.

avidity and delight. . . . I know full well how much satisfaction you derive from an extension of that theoretical and practical knowledge which centres at Holkham, and which, like the genial and beneficial warmth of the sun, diffuses its radiation for the profit and advantage of both hemispheres."

The Montreal Agricultural Society soon after elected Coke as an honorary member; and some years later James Lowell, father of the ambassador, wrote to beg the same honour for the Massachusetts Agricultural Society—"impressed," he says, "with a just sense of the services you have rendered to Agriculture both by your example and opinions, and not insensible of the early, steady, firm and inflexible regard you have shown to this country in the darkest times."

Thus, when American agriculturists began to make pilgrimages to Holkham more frequently even than did American patriots, Andrew Oliver, the Lieutenant-Governor of Massachusetts, appears to have journeyed thither in the former capacity. "Mr. Oliver," writes a common acquaintance, General D'Evere, "often exclaims that his visit to you alone was worth his voyage across the Atlantic. . . . Mr. Oliver has enlarged and improved his system of farming since his return, no doubt to imitate your great example, so that he is now considered *the Coke of Maryland*."

General D'Evere himself, who had been induced to perform the journey to Europe partly with a view to making Coke's acquaintance, had then brought with him a simple introduction to his host, which stated him to be "the gallant and distinguished defender of South American Independence, who has a heart as warm and

generous as your own." He appears to have been an intimate friend of Mr. Caton and of Mr. Oliver, for later he writes :—

"I have been to the United States on a visit to our friends Mr. Caton and Mr. Oliver, when you and Holkham formed the pleasing subject of our conversation. Mr. Oliver often exclaims respecting his visit to you ; and His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex made so favourable an impression upon him as a Prince of the Blood, that he no longer feels any Republican hostility to Princes !"

General D'Evere did not hesitate, in his turn, to send a friend of his own to Holkham, pleading as his excuse to Coke "that hospitality to our countrymen for which you have gained so deserved a reputation."

What seemed to impress Coke's American visitors most was the—to them—extraordinary contrast between the splendour of his surroundings and the simplicity of his individual tastes. A man who in his daily life was at once both prince and farmer ; a patriot and the friend of kings ; luxurious, yet hardy ; proudly independent, yet absolutely unassuming in his attitude towards all men—was a distinct anomaly in their experience ; and they found a never-failing romance in the feudal life of such a man, living in the midst of a free tenantry, who voluntarily accepted his will as law. To this day, Americans cherish that same element of romance with regard to institutions which, to an Englishman, have all the prosaic character of familiarity ; and at that date this sentiment was perhaps even stronger with regard to the world that they had renounced, and the existence they had discarded. The interest attached to their correspondence lies solely in its curious revelation of

the estimation in which they regarded Coke; while to-day, still preserved in the New York Public Library, are two apparently unimportant letters from him, evidently once deposited there as treasures.<sup>1</sup>

But amongst the miscellaneous correspondence addressed to him by writers whose identity it is now impossible to trace, there are others of a different character; letters from unknown correspondents petitioning for advice in matters of perplexity, for encouragement in times of failure; letters expressing thankfulness for the sympathy the writers had experienced and the generosity they had met with—for the practical help and valuable gifts which they had received. There are letters which refer to distressed families whom Coke had aided, and to struggling farmers to whom he had given the benefit of his experience, or to whom he had sent out presents of machines or cattle as an encouragement to perseverance,—men, not one of whom can have been known to him across the intervening miles of sea and land. Even the guests who had received his hospitality appear afterwards to have appealed for his aid for their impecunious friends: “Mr. Oliver and I often talk of you,” again explains

<sup>1</sup> The first, addressed to “Lichfield,” but the date of which is lost, shows that, like the Lord Chief Justice, Coke “never gave up his Body to Physic”; he speaks with horror of medicine, and warns his correspondent, who has been ill, to avoid taking it, of which avoidance Coke explains that he, personally, had proved the benefit. The other letter, without date or legible address, shows that he was, nevertheless, ready to welcome the progress of medical science, for it states that it was his “ardent wish to diffuse the benefit of vaccination as generally as possible. I shall certainly,” he adds, “support any Petition that may be laid before Parliament for that purpose. I beg that you will express my sentiments to the Managers of this beneficial institution, and assure them that I will do all in my power to promote their views.”

Mr. Caton in one letter ; “ he has, I believe, written to you some time back, relating to a person who was known to you, and who has left a family in much distress. (The person is dead, I understand, under circumstances much to be lamented.)” One thing this variety of correspondence serves to prove is, that none who sought the sympathy and the aid of Coke did so in vain.

But there were times when his rôle of benefactor was reversed, and, as in the case of Richard Caton, his correspondents were not contented to be passive recipients of benefits. Presents found their way back to him, though occasionally of a quaint character—offerings of rare seeds for plants and grasses ; portraits of the writers ; once, a parcel of beautifully woven shawls ; once, a chest of sweet-smelling cedar-wood, procured specially from Canton ; once, entrusted to the care of Richard Rush<sup>1</sup> by a “ gentleman of New York,” a couple of cases of “ American pure beef,” intended by the giver, as Rush explains, to represent to Coke “ a tribute of the high respect in which he holds your publick character and your services in the cause of Agriculture.”—Unfortunately, the weather being warm, this “ tribute ” arrived in a condition which necessitated its hasty consignment by Rush to the depths of the ocean ! Another curious gift was a portion of a fleece of the brightest golden colour, said to be the only fleece of this hue which had ever been beheld by European eyes. Supposed to come originally from Thibet, it was found in a captured ship which had been carrying a rich cargo from Tartary to the Emperor of China ; but,

<sup>1</sup> American Minister at the Court of St. James’.

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valuable as was the cargo, this fleece was estimated to  
be the most priceless thing on board.

Sometimes the offerings took the form of prints  
relating to American history. General D'Evere when  
he came over to England was the bearer of one of these  
tokens from a sometime guest at Holkham.

“To one of the most early and constant friends of  
America,” says the letter which accompanied it,  
“who is also a lover and a munificent patron of the  
fine arts, an American engraving of an American  
picture, which commemorates the birth of the  
American nation, will, I hope, be acceptable. . . .  
It will serve as a testimony of my grateful recollec-  
tions of Holkham—its elegant and cordial hospitality,  
and the gratification I received from the society and  
kindness of its distinguished owner.”

But what must have been a greater tax on Coke's  
good-nature—more even than the effusive gratitude of  
his unknown correspondents, or than the constant  
influx of pilgrims to Holkham, his admirers in that  
other hemisphere sent over artists expressly to take his  
portrait. “I am sending over Mr. West, a relation of  
Sir [*sic*] Benjamin West,”<sup>1</sup> writes one persuasively,  
“who is said to have taken the best likeness of Lord  
Byron ever done of his Lordship!”—“The many proofs  
you have given of your friendship towards our country  
and countrymen will ever prove a lively remembrance of  
your name with us,” pleads another; “to have the like-  
ness of him to whom we are so much indebted would  
add a lasting satisfaction to the thousands that will  
behold it!” And while the request which was con-  
tained in these letters was often repeated during Coke's

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin West, President of the Royal Academy.

life, the romantic admiration which prompted it does not appear to have proved ephemeral, as one might have expected. As the years went by, Coke's correspondents continued to show a curiosity as keen in his unique personality, an interest as lively in his success as an agriculturist, a gratitude as enthusiastic for his aid during the struggle for independence. Stevenson, the American Minister,<sup>1</sup> gave proof of this when he came to England in 1836. His first visit was to Holkham, and he claimed for himself the honour of having paid Coke the highest compliment which one man ever paid another.

"I," he said, "the representative of fourteen millions of freemen, thought it my first duty on my arrival in England to pay my respects, and to offer the grateful acknowledgments of those fourteen millions of countrymen to the man who so early had acted so noble a part in vindication of America."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Stevenson, born 1784, died 1857 in North Carolina. Minister at the Court of London, 1836-41.

<sup>2</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, July 9th, 1842.

## CHAPTER XV

## SOCIAL LIFE RESUMED

1783-1789

*Ætat* 29-35

**H**AVING now glanced briefly at Coke's early work, both in the capacity of politician and of agriculturist, we must once more resume the thread of events in due order. In doing so, however, it is perhaps essential to lay stress on one fact.

In his dual capacity of politician and farmer, the noted men who crossed Coke's path at every period of his life were many and varied. Statesmen, agriculturists, artists, literati, great generals and naval heroes—English and foreign—one by one they appear upon the stage; and while it is impossible to do more than refer to a very limited number of those who were, at one time or another, thus connected with his career, and while mention of these can be made only in the order in which their correspondence happens to have been preserved, or in which their lives became interwoven with the events of Coke's own life, it must be borne in mind that the names occurring thus most often in these pages do not of necessity represent those whose lives actually bore the closest relation to Coke's own. Of his deepest and most intimate friendships,



indeed, in many instances, no trace remains beyond the bare knowledge of their existence; and friends of whom mention will be made here most constantly and most in detail, are therefore, obviously, those of whom—very often by a mere chance—the correspondence was kept, and most record thus preserved.

It was in 1783, the year before his temporary absence from Parliament, that an incident occurred to which, although apparently trivial at the time, Coke used afterwards to advert with great interest. About three miles from Holkham lies the village of Burnham Thorpe, whose rector for many years was the Rev. Edmund Nelson. The parish of Burnham, in fact, adjoins that of Holkham, and a road to it runs through Holkham Park. Mr. Nelson, from this near neighbourhood, was well known to Mr. and Mrs. Coke, although neither his politics nor his social status in Norfolk were calculated to promote great intimacy. His fourth son Horatio, who was a little over four years younger than Coke, had gone to sea as a boy of twelve, in 1770, nearly six years before Coke came into possession of the estate. From time to time, however, young Nelson had reappeared for short intervals at his old home, and during these visits his chief amusement was to join Mr. Coke's hounds when out coursing. Fragile and delicate in health, there were occasions when he found even this healthy exercise more than his strength could stand, and was forced to abandon it for the less energetic amusement of bird's-nesting. "It was not my intention to have gone to the coursing meeting," he wrote to his brother on one occasion; "for, to say the truth, I have rarely escaped a wet

jacket and a violent cold. Besides, to me, even the ride to the Smee is longer than any pleasure I find in the sport can compensate for.”<sup>1</sup> Partly owing to the fact that he shunned violent exercise, partly owing to his carelessness in carrying his gun ready-cocked, and in shooting at random, it does not appear that he was ever asked to join the Holkham shooters, and he remained a poor shot, so that only once in his life did he succeed in killing a partridge.

Shortly after the recognised close of the American War, in June, 1783, young Nelson returned home from a two years' cruise; and, one morning, when Coke was seated in his study writing, he was told that Captain Nelson wished to see him, in order to make his declaration for half-pay as a Commander. Nelson, at that time, had just been presented to the King, and was known to Coke only as a creditable young man of very average ability; no premonition crossed Coke's mind that, in the spare, fragile youth of five-and-twenty, who, a moment later, entered his study, he was welcoming a man whom posterity would acclaim as one of England's greatest heroes. And could any onlooker, knowing that future, have witnessed this interview, it might have seemed incredible that, of the two men before him, any word, any action of the apparently unimportant visitor would be treasured by posterity, while the memory of his host would be all but consigned to oblivion. For at that date, while Coke, although only four years young Nelson's senior, was already acknowledged by his generation as a man of mark and the benefactor of his species, Nelson was

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Nelson*, by A. T. Mahan (1897), Vol I, p. 90.

still unknown to fame; and thus confronted, the two young men must have presented a curious contrast, in which physically, as well as socially, and, apparently, mentally, Nelson was at a disadvantage. Undersized and insignificant in appearance, weak in health, nervous in temperament and poor in circumstances, he could boast as yet little achieved in the present, and less prospect for the future, save what lay unguessed in his own keen brain and indomitable pluck.

Yet, little over twenty years later, the chair in which he then sat was looked upon by Coke as one of the most prized possessions amongst all the treasures of Holkham, and a humble turret bedroom which he had occupied as Coke's guest was adorned with his portrait and proudly known as "Nelson's room."

Nelson's own politics appear to have been comprised in the dictum, "To hate all Frenchmen as you would hate the Devil," but his father, as an avowed Tory and follower of Pitt, on no occasion ever bestirred himself to promote the cause of his great Whig neighbour at Holkham. Yet Coke could boast certain Tory friends in Norfolk. Henry Styleman of Snettisham, although a staunch Tory, was one of his great friends; and Coke used often to visit him, on which occasions Mr. Styleman, with great delicacy of feeling, used to turn with its face to the wall a picture of William Pitt which hung in his dining-room! Another Norfolk neighbour, William Windham, the statesman, on the contrary, affords an instance, as we shall see later, in which a political difference with Coke seriously affected an otherwise unwavering friendship.

From his early days Coke evinced a strong attach-

ment for Windham, and the first public speech of the latter in 1788—that bold protest against the war with America, uttered at a meeting called together for the very purpose of furthering hostilities—had served to cement this attachment. Windham, on his part, felt for Coke perhaps as sincere an affection as he ever exhibited for any one. Lord Holland, indeed, believed Windham to be absolutely self-absorbed, and points out how Windham's *Diary* reveals “*the total absence of all affection, and, with the exception of Dr. Johnson, of all admiration or deference for others,*” and thus destroys “*anything like interest for the man.*”<sup>1</sup> But the prosaic record of a man's daily actions is not always the best criterion by which to judge his affections; and had Lord Holland seen the warm and constant affection of Windham's letters to Coke, he would probably have modified that view of his character, and have discovered that Windham was capable of sincere friendship, strong appreciation, and also of exerting himself on behalf of those he really loved.

Felbrigg, the Windham property, beautifully situated on the hills above Cromer, was about twenty-five miles by road from Holkham; and often, in response to a summons from Coke to join some unexpected guests at Holkham, or to share in the pleasure of a sudden visit from Fox, Windham passed along the intervening miles on horseback, meditating, as his *Diary* relates,<sup>2</sup> upon some abstruse problem which he had elected to solve *en route*.

<sup>1</sup> *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party, 1807-1821*, by Henry Richard Vassall-Fox, third Baron Holland, edited by the Earl of Ilchester, 1904, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary of Rt. Hon. William Windham (1784-1810)*, ed. by Mrs. Henry Baring, 1866.

His first mention of a visit to Holkham, and of his impression of the house, occurs in August, 1784, when he states how he "left Felbrigg, and went in the phaeton from thence to Holkham," and how, the next morning, they all rode about on horseback. "The place finer than I expected," he says; "nothing more just in my opinion than Coke's ideas of laying it out."

Later he writes more fully, in January, 1786:—

"Set out for Holkham. Drive not unpleasant; feeling of great satisfaction on my arrival, which was not rendered less by the circumstance of arriving in the midst of the audit. During the whole of my stay here I enjoyed myself very much; in this enjoyment the house itself had no small share. Of all the modes of existence that vary from day to day, none is to me more pleasing than habitation in a large house. Besides the pleasure it affords from the contemplation of elegance and magnificence, the objects it presents, and the images it gives birth to, there is no other situation in which the enjoyment of company is united to such complete retirement. A cell in a convent is not a place of greater retirement than a remote apartment in such a house as Holkham.

"Accordingly, during my stay there, I have read more than I have done in the same number of days in other places to which I have retired to read. The easy transition from company to study gained to employment many hours which, by coming in portions too small to admit of any reduction, must in other situations have been thrown aside as useless. The pond at the back of the house was frozen for two days so as to bear, and the ice was so clear and the weather so pleasant, that all the pleasure which solitary skating can give, existed in perfection.

"21st. Rode after breakfast, and on one of Hoste's<sup>1</sup> horses to Rainham.<sup>2</sup> Before I set out, went for the first time into the library at the top, which I

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Dixon Hoste.

<sup>2</sup> House of the Marquis of Townshend.

had heard of when I was last here, and forgot again. The room and the collection answered fully to my expectation, and gave a pleasing impression of the use that might be made of it and the comfort enjoyed by any literary chaplain belonging the family."

The "library at the top" was the large airy turret room in which Thomas Coke had first deposited his literary treasures. With big windows commanding a fine view over the park and lake, it was bright and pleasant; while, approached only by a long silent corridor, its isolation was complete. At the time when Windham wrote, the dilapidated but priceless MSS. and rare tomes collected by Thomas Coke were stored there; some, with ancient bindings incapable of holding their leaves together, were lying neglected on the shelves without any attempt at order or classification; others, in great boxes, lay still unpacked, as they had arrived from Italy, or as Drakenborch and other scholars had replaced them. There, too, in open wooden bookcases along the walls were the well-worn volumes which had once formed the library of the Chief Justice, together with books which had been the property of Sir Christopher Hatton, his wife's first husband—a number of which to this day remain in the passage outside the former library.

To Windham, who eventually owed his death to his appreciation for books, such a discovery must have been momentous. A library so far removed from the ordinary living-rooms of the house was, it may be presumed, visited only by the scholarly or the curious; and his remark that on his previous visits to Holkham he had "heard of it," and "forgot it again," is signifi-

cant, while an entry many years later in his *Diary* records how, in one of the books which he was reading there, he came across a paper, undisturbed, which he had left in it two years previously. Having once found his way there, many delightful hours were passed by him in a solitude which he loved ; and to-day, looking round the now deserted room, one can still picture the brilliant, witty statesman revelling in its complete isolation, or pausing in his search amongst the treasures with which he was surrounded to look out on the peaceful view over the sunny park.

His visits to Holkham at this date were pretty frequent ; for despite his professed love of solitude, he was excellent company and a delightful conversationalist, so that his society was always welcome. Like Coke, he was a friend of Fox and Burke and mentions being asked to meet them at Holkham, and to dine with them and Coke in town. Sheridan, Burke and Fox at this date were constant guests at Holkham, but unfortunately, no correspondence from the two former has been preserved.

On the other hand, the letters from Fox which survive, although treasured with an affectionate care, are those only of the most terse and practical description. At a time when unimportant writers labelled their voluminous compositions with the day of the month, the day of the week, and, often, the very hour at which these were written, Fox, to his intimate friends, more usually dashed off his brief, matter-of-fact notes with no date, and little avoidable palaver. Besides his urgent appeals for help in any political crisis, his letters to Coke consist of equally short and yet more eager directions with regard to sporting arrangements.

“My dear Coke,” he writes in a typical letter from St. Ann’s hill, “I intend to be at Swaffham Tuesday night, and if you do not think it too early in the year for Houghton, and you go out Partridge-shooting Wednesday, I should be obliged to you if you would tell me where I can find you, as my dogs will probably have had enough of it. I think I could easily be at Creek soon after ten, or even Holkham by eleven. If you could lend me a horse, it would be better, but I can manage to have my own with me. I do not hear that there’s any chance of the Meeting of Parliament being put off. I received two brace of partridges and one of pheasants from you.

“Yours ever,  
“C. J. Fox.”

And again :—

“Dear Coke, Lord Robert<sup>1</sup> and I mean to be at Banham Thursday, at about eleven, where, if you will send a keeper to meet us, I shall be obliged to you, and you could send me a horse for myself. It would be very convenient to me, as I think of sending my own strait [*sic*] to Holkham to save him a little. If you have no horse fit for me, I shall still be glad if you send one, and I might, in that case, ride one of Lord Robert’s and send his servant upon that you send.

“Yours ever,  
“C. J. Fox.”

It was no easy matter to provide a horse equal to Fox’s weight, and his letters usually show great anxiety on this point. He was always ready, however, for a jest against himself on account of his great size. Once, at Holkham, when they were teasing him for having grown so fat, Coke happened to remark that he wondered which weighed most, Fox or the fat *chef* in the

<sup>1</sup> Lord Robert Spencer, third son of the third Duke of Marlborough, a great friend of Fox.



kitchen. The idea was taken up, wagers were staked upon the result, and the party, surrounding Fox, hustled him off to the kitchen, where they weighed him and the stout cook one against the other. But history is silent upon the result.

Coke, in later years, used to tell many amusing anecdotes about Fox. One night at Brooks's, when Coke was present, Fox, in allusion to something that had been said, made a very disparaging remark about Government powder. Adam,<sup>1</sup> who heard it, considered it a personal reflection, and sent Fox a challenge. At the time appointed Fox went out and took his station, standing full face to his adversary. Fitzgerald pointed out to him that he ought to stand sideways. "What does it matter?" protested Fox; "I am as thick one way as the other!" The signal to 'Fire!' was given. Adam fired, but Fox did not. His seconds, greatly excited, told him that he *must* fire. "I'll be damned if I do!" said Fox; "*I* have no quarrel!" Whereupon the two adversaries advanced to shake hands. "Adam," said Fox complacently, "you'd have killed me if it hadn't been for the badness of Government powder!" The ball had hit him in the groin and had fallen into his breeches. Needless to say, after this Adam and Fox were devoted friends.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Adam, 1751-1839, Attorney-General to the Prince of Wales.

<sup>2</sup> This was the famous Fox and Adam duel which took place in 1779. A different version of the story is given by Earl Russell in his *Life and Times of C. J. Fox* (1866), Vol. I, p. 219. Another, in *Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox*, Vol. I, pp. 302-3. But Haydon confirms the above version related by Coke (see Haydon's *Journals and Correspondence*, edited and compiled by T. Taylor, 1853, Vol. II, p. 376).

The Westminster Play of that year was *Phormio*, and the epilogue

Fox, in common with his generation, had a profound admiration for his beautiful champion, the Duchess of Devonshire. On one occasion he turned to her at dinner and demanded abruptly, "Do you know what you are like?"

The Duchess, anticipating a compliment, smilingly shook her head.

"You," pronounced Fox, glancing at the fruit upon his plate, "are like a bunch of grapes."

Somewhat mystified, the Duchess confessed that she could not discover the connection of ideas, and begged that Fox would explain his meaning.

"*Vous plaisez jusqu'à l'ivresse!*" responded Fox.

Soon after Fox came into power, Coke dined with him. During dinner Fox talked most frankly before the servants, so that, when they were gone, one of his friends said to him, "Fox, how can you go on like that when the servants are in the room?" "And why the devil," said Fox, "should they not know as much as myself?"<sup>1</sup>

The sympathy between Fox and Coke as politicians was even surpassed by their sympathy as sportsmen. Coke used to say that Fox, like himself, was as fond of shooting as any schoolboy; so eager, indeed, was Fox that he would constantly put the shot into the gun before the powder. A certain amicable rivalry existed between him and Coke with regard to their prowess

was spoken in the character of a Government Powder Contractor. It ended—

"Quin cum privatis certetur ubique duellis  
Nemo perit—pugnat pulvere quisque meâ,"

which was received with shouts of laughter by Westminster Whigs and Tories.

<sup>1</sup> Haydon, *Journals and Correspondence* (1853), Vol. II, p. 377.

with the gun. It was at the instigation of Fox that, in 1797, Coke, in fulfilment of a wager, shot at Warham, in a mile circumference, forty brace of partridges in eight hours in ninety-three shots, each bird being killed singly, and with the old muzzle-loaders. The day before, at the same spot, he had killed twenty-two and a half brace in three hours. In consequence of a like bet that he would kill thirty brace of partridges between sunrise and sunset with a single barrel, in 1788, he killed eighty-eight birds on the manor of Wighton, and only missed four shots during the entire day. Daniel, in his *Rural Sports*,<sup>1</sup> remarks how, on another occasion, "Mr. Coke killed in five days 726 partridges; surely the number of discharges must deafen the operator, putting the destruction out of the question; and Mr. Coke is so capital a marksman that as he inflicts death whenever he pulls the trigger, he should in mercy forbear such terrible examples of his skill." It must be borne in mind that his gun was a flint-and-steel, and that it was therefore necessary for him to fire two and a half times further ahead of a bird flying rapidly across the shooter than if a percussion gun had been used, i.e. the wielder of the flint-and-lock gun must aim five yards ahead of a partridge, where the wielder of a percussion would aim two yards ahead of the same quarry.

Fox, with his uncontrollable impetuosity, could never come within measurable distance of Coke's success as a sportsman, but this fact in no wise diminished his ardour. Occasionally, however, other impulses were known to interfere with his ruling passion. One hot September morning he set out from Holkham fully

<sup>1</sup> *Rural Sports*, by the Rev. W. B. Daniel (1813), Vol. IV.

anticipating a good day's sport at Egmere, Coke's best partridge beat. As was usual with sportsmen in those days, he started at daylight. Just as the family were sitting down to breakfast, Fox was seen staggering home. "Not ill, Charles?" inquired his host anxiously. "No," was the meek reply, "only tipsy!" Being thirsty he had asked a tenant of Egmere for a bowl of milk, and was too easily persuaded to add thereto a certain, or rather uncertain quantity of rum. As a consequence, he passed the rest of the day in bed instead of in the turnip field.<sup>1</sup>

Another time a party of Holkham shooters who had started out at daybreak were driven home by a heavy rain. Fox, however, who was reluctant to abandon all hope of his day's sport, was left behind, sheltering under some fir trees in company with a labourer who had been ploughing near. All day long it rained incessantly, but Fox did not reappear. Dinner-time arrived and the ladies were all waiting, assembled in the Saloon, when into their midst arrived Fox, dripping wet. "Where have you been, Charles?" inquired his host. "Why, talking to that man all day," replied Fox; "there's hardly a man I can't get something useful out of if he only talks!" It appears that the labourer had been giving him a history of the system of turnip husbandry, just then come into vogue, and so absorbed was the statesman in the company of the ploughman, that he found it impossible to tear himself away.<sup>2</sup>

Fox's visits to Holkham were often followed by a

<sup>1</sup> *Fifty Years of My Life*, by George Thomas, Earl of Albemarle, (1876), Vol. I, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 244; also Haydon's *Correspondence and Journals*, Vol. II, p. 377.

sojourn at Quidenham,<sup>1</sup> and vice versa ; indeed, the intimacy between the two houses constantly led to an interchange of guests. Bob Jeffs, Lord Keppel's gamekeeper, who was a great friend of Fox's, was a notorious story-teller, and used to vie with Baron Munchausen in the marvellous tales he related. Fox was in the habit of stopping on the road as soon as he came to Lord Keppel's manor, and beginning his day's sport with Bob, who was on the look-out for him. Upon one of these occasions, however, he lost his watch. In the month of February, after the break up of a long frost and deep snow, Bob found the watch, he told Mr. Coke, hanging on a fence, *and going correctly!*<sup>2</sup>

Lord Albemarle points out how, in an establishment like Holkham, gamekeepers are persons of importance ; and the celebrated Bob Jeffs of Quidenham found a rival in old Joe Hibbert at Holkham, who had been a prize-fighter in the days of his youth. On one occasion Sir John Shelley, who was celebrated for his neat sparring, challenged Hibbert to a set-to with the gloves, and some of the young men staying in the house mischievously promised Joe a good tip if he would administer a judicious punishment to Sir John. Joe put on the gloves, but drew them off again ; turning round upon his backers he exclaimed, "Not for twice the money would I strike a gentleman !"

Another curious character was J. Hawkesworth, who was gamekeeper at Holkham for many years, and finally died at the age of seventy in 1804. He became very eccentric as he grew older, and never associated

<sup>1</sup> The seat of Lord Albemarle.

<sup>2</sup> From the Hon. the Rev. T. Keppel's notebook.

with or spoke to any persons unless he was first addressed. He was very miserly, and, it was said, had accumulated a large fortune which he hid from fear of invasion, his death being actually due to his having deprived himself of sufficient nourishment. Coke always furnished him with proper liveries, but he would not wear them, and at the time of his death the suits he had hoarded were supposed to be worth more than £100. His dress was of the most miserable description, and he always wore an old painted hat patched over with pieces of cloth. He was known throughout the neighbourhood by the name of the "*Walking Obelisk.*"

The battues at Holkham began on the first Wednesday in November and continued twice a week for the rest of the season. The amount of game killed in three months was probably not more than it is now the fashion to slaughter in so many days, but the flint-and-steel guns always found plenty of work, and everybody enjoyed his day's sport, returning home contented and hungry after long hours of vigorous exercise. The non-battue days were passed either in the turnip fields among the partridges, or in the salt marshes in pursuit of snipe and wild-fowl.

Coke, besides being a keen sportsman, was an equally keen game-preserve, and very determined that his neighbour's rights as well as his own should be respected. At Flitcham a trout stream separated his property from that of Sir Martin ffolkes, of Hillington. A story runs that Coke's brother Edward, when shooting at Flitcham, was so anxious to prevent the pheasants from going over to Hillington that he waded up mid-stream. Sir Martin ffolkes saw him

thus employed, and cordially invited him to come on to the Hillington side of the stream out of the wet. When Coke heard what had occurred he was extremely angry, and swore that it should never happen again. He thereupon gave the Flitcham shooting to Sir Martin as a free gift. "Undoubtedly," he wrote, "as long as the manor of Flitcham is an object worthy your attention, no power whatever will be given by me for others to interfere with your amusement"; and he sent an injunction to his tenants that they should not suffer anybody to shoot there without "Sir Martin's leave first obtained." The shooting remained in the possession of Sir Martin's family, without rent, until 1860.

For three months during the shooting season Holkham was filled from end to end, and the old game-books present an interesting record of the guests whose sojourn was the most frequent and most prolonged; amongst whom, at this date, the names of Fox and Sheridan rank foremost. When friends who came from any distance had to post across country during long, wearisome days, they often extended their visit for some weeks. It was no unusual thing for a party of from fifty to eighty guests and their servants to be quartered on their host for an indefinite period; and Royalty often stayed for a length of time which, in these days of lavish display, would mean ruin to their entertainers. In later years the Duke of Sussex<sup>1</sup> often spent a couple of months at Holkham during the winter. The Duke of Gloucester<sup>2</sup> came twice a year,

<sup>1</sup> Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, son of George III.

<sup>2</sup> William Frederick, Duke of Gloucester, nephew of George III, m. Princess Mary, daughter of George III.

but for a shorter period ; and an annual though less lengthy guest was George, Prince of Wales, afterwards George IV. "George the Fourth, when Prince of Wales," says a writer in the *Monthly Magazine*,<sup>1</sup> "was exceedingly fond of Mr. Coke, and paid frequent visits to Holkham. His Royal Highness was accustomed to live in the greatest familiarity with him, and usually saluted him with the graceful salutation of 'My brother Whig!'—His Royal Highness," the writer concludes sarcastically, "was then a subject ; Mr. Coke continues one, *and is still a Whig!*"

In the days of his intimacy at Holkham, the Prince of Wales was believed to be a very warm adherent of the Whig cause ; and in him the Whigs placed their hopes for the future. An event, however, occurred in 1787 which, although it had no direct bearing on party politics, first rudely shook the faith of both Fox and Coke in the Prince's honour and integrity.

Part of this story, which is well known, need only be very briefly recapitulated. In the summer of 1784, the Prince had fallen desperately in love with Mrs. Fitzherbert, a lady whose character was irreproachable and whose beauty was generally admired. She was an earnest Roman Catholic, and unlikely to change her religion from any worldly motives. The Prince, who was like a spoilt child when thwarted, used to call on Coke as well as on Fox and Mrs. Armistead,<sup>2</sup> to discuss his unhappy romance ; and, as Fox related, would testify to the vehemence of his passion by violent paroxysms of sobbing, by striking his forehead, tear-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *The Georgian Era* by Clarke (1833), Vol. IV, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Blane, whom he married in 1795.



ing his hair, falling into hysterics, and swearing that he would abandon everything and fly to America with the object of his affection.

Both Fox and Coke, in whom he constantly confided, gave him sound advice upon the subject, which, however, was unavailing. After one of his talks with Fox he stabbed himself, inflicting a real wound. Thereupon Mrs. Fitzherbert was informed that her acquiescence was necessary to save the Prince's life. She repaired, unwillingly, to Carlton House, where the Prince put a ring on her finger; but she still remained obdurate in her refusal to marry him, and left that same day for Holland. For a year she remained abroad. At the end of that time, in December 1785, she returned to England, and it being rumoured that she had consented to the marriage, Fox wrote urgently to the Prince on December 10th, 1785, pointing out the political danger of such an event. The Prince, in reply, the next day, assured him that there were no grounds whatever for such a supposition. "Make yourself easy, my dear friend," he wrote; "believe me, the world will now soon be convinced that there not only is not, but never was, any ground for these reports which of late have been so malevolently circulated!"

The duplicity of this statement is the more striking since in it the Prince deliberately implies a denial of the rumoured marriage, while, by referring to it only under the vague term of "these reports" which have been "circulated," he avoids exposing himself to the utterance of a lie which could afterwards be proved against him. Yet at the very time when he wrote thus, he was devising every possible plan to accomplish his

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secret marriage, and it took place immediately afterwards, on December 21st.

In the spring of 1787 there arose the question of paying his debts, which amounted to £160,000. The King refused to discharge them, and the Prince appealed to Parliament to do so. The issue at once turned upon the question whether a marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert had or had not taken place. By an Act of Parliament, marriage with a Roman Catholic invalidated all claims to the throne; while by a second statute, the Royal Marriage Act, any marriage contracted without the Royal Consent was null. By pleading the second the Prince could avoid the action of the first, although, by doing this, he was virtually evading the law and literally taking away the character of his wife. This he did not scruple to do in order to achieve his object. He had placed in Fox's possession—or so Fox believed—the authority to declare that the marriage had not taken place; and Fox, trusting in the Prince's honour, denied it absolutely in the House on April 30th, at the same time stating that he had direct authority for so doing.

The result of a solemn assurance, given on the honour of a statesman whose veracity was held to be above suspicion, was that £161,000 were voted for the payment of the Prince's debts, and £20,000 for the completion of Carlton House. It is said that the very same day Orlando Bridgman<sup>1</sup> came up to Fox at Brooks's and said, "I see by the papers, Mr. Fox, you have denied the fact of the marriage of the Prince with Mrs. Fitzherbert. You have been misinformed. I was present at the marriage."

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Lord Bradford.

Now this statement, though very generally received, is undoubtedly apocryphal. Not only is there ample proof that Orlando Bridgman never was present at the marriage, but Fox, still obviously unaware that he had been duped, continued to correspond affectionately with the Prince so late as May 10th following. It has, in explanation of this latter fact, been suggested that Fox had received no further authority for denying the marriage than that afforded by the Prince's evasive assertion in his letter of December 11th, written previously to the wedding having taken place; yet that, actuated by reasons of expediency, the diplomatic statesman, conveniently closing his eyes to the shifty character of the Prince and to the probability of a marriage having occurred subsequently to that date, used the letter as his "direct authority" for proclaiming as true what he saw to be advantageous.<sup>1</sup> But Fox, whatever his failings, was no hypocrite, and evidence is plentiful that the man with whom he had to deal was one. Had the Prince not been the author of Fox's lie on this occasion, whatever His Royal Highness's attitude in public to secure payment of his debts, in private, and with so great a friend as Fox then was, he would surely not have made himself an accessory to that lie, by the affectionate and approving letters which he wrote to Fox immediately after its utterance "*on direct authority.*" Still more, Fox's own conduct affords striking proof of personal honesty, for having remained friendly with the Prince until May 10th, what possible cause can be assigned for his subsequent

<sup>1</sup> *Mrs. Fitzherbert and George IV*, by W. H. Wilkins (1904), Vol. I, p. 202.

open rupture with His Royal Highness were it not that, by some means, the Prince's duplicity had at length been disclosed to him?

But after all the discussion which the matter has evoked, it is the more interesting to find that Fox's own statement to Coke apparently puts the question of his integrity beyond all doubt. Coke was his great friend, with whom it is incredible that he should have acted a double part, yet in the summer of 1788 he went to Coke in a state of profound indignation, and related that he had discovered himself to have been duped by the Prince. Not only, as he pointed out, had he to bear the onus of that lie which the public failed to accept, and to which it was now said that both himself and the entire Whig party were privy, but he saw himself unable to withdraw the erroneous statement which he had made, since the matter then undergoing discussion had been decided in consequence of that statement; and now publicly to proclaim the Prince's duplicity would involve complications for the country which, at all costs, must be avoided.

Coke shared his disgust, and the epithets applied to the Prince during that conversation might have been salutary hearing for His Royal Highness. But Coke was not bound by the considerations which enforced silence upon Fox. A short time afterwards the Prince wrote complacently to propose his annual visit to Holkham, and Coke's reply was brief and characteristic:

“Holkham is open *to Strangers* on Tuesdays.”<sup>1</sup>

This would have been conclusive for most people; but

<sup>1</sup> Related by Coke's third son, the Hon. Henry Coke.

the Prince never allowed his pride to interfere with his convenience. He saw himself cut by two of the most powerful representatives of the party he had espoused, and while he recognised that it was to his disadvantage to quarrel with so prominent and popular a man as Coke, he understood that his best hope of reconciliation with Fox likewise lay in retaining the friendship of Fox's great ally. Accordingly, the sequel to the story is somewhat extraordinary.

The following autumn Fox was afraid that he would not be able to come to Holkham as usual, on account of the indisposition of Mrs. Armistead. Coke wrote to urge him to do so, and on October 4th, Fox wrote: "I received this morning your obliging letter. Mrs. Armistead is quite recovered, and I think it next to impossible that anything should prevent my being at Holkham on the 19th or 20th at latest of this month."

Shortly after his arrival at Holkham, however, a recurrence of Mrs. Armistead's illness gave him cause for anxiety, and he left sooner than he had intended. The very day of this unexpected departure, Coke received the intelligence of a still more unexpected arrival. A royal outrider appeared, who announced that the Prince of Wales was posting to Holkham, and would reach there that same evening.

The law of hospitality, even towards an unbidden guest, could not be infringed. Coke felt that he had no choice but to receive his unwelcome visitor, who followed hard upon the heels of his messenger, and reached Holkham at seven that night. The Prince carefully ignored the marked absence of cordiality on the part of his host, and appeared in excellent spirits

and extremely friendly. Towards eight, the company assembled for dinner, which had been delayed till that unusual hour on account of His Royal Highness's arrival. When at length dessert was on the table, the Prince arose, and begged leave to give a bumper toast. He solemnly announced: "The health of the best man in England—Mr. Fox!"

The toast, while it created some silent amusement, met with a hearty response. Others were proposed, and much wine was drunk. It was near one o'clock before the company showed signs of dispersing; and, just before leaving the dining-room, the Prince rose again, and again gave a bumper toast—"The health of the best man in England—Mr. Fox!" At nine o'clock the next morning he left Holkham on his return to London.

What further took place between Coke and the Prince in that hastily patched-up reconciliation is not known. Coke, in relating the story to Lord John Russell, who mentions it in his *Life of Fox*,<sup>1</sup> merely said that the palpable object of the Prince's visit was to find Fox at Holkham and effect a reconciliation with him. He did not mention that, in travelling all the way to Holkham in order to drink Fox's health, the Prince had determined also to force a reconciliation with his host. Fox, on his part, refused to speak to the Prince again for more than a year; and, disgusted at the manner in which he had been treated, and out of heart at the position in which he found himself, he started on a prolonged tour abroad.

<sup>1</sup> See *Life and Times of Charles James Fox*, by Earl Russell, 1859-66, Vol. II, p. 187.

Although for political rather than personal reasons he subsequently acted with the Prince, he never again believed in him ; while Coke, although for a time he admitted the Prince to his acquaintance, never again admitted him to his former trust and confidence.

The following year, however, the Prince once more proposed a visit to Holkham, but which was unexpectedly prevented. On November 5th occurred the centenary of the landing of William of Orange at Torbay ; and Norfolk determined to celebrate the occasion with due rejoicing. In Norwich great preparations were made for the event, while at Holkham the great Whig festival promised to be on a more elaborate scale. Hearing of this, the Prince of Wales sent a special message, couched in the form of a request that he might be present ; which suggestion was received with civility ; and, forthwith, upon the list of expected guests was entered : “The Prince of Wales from Carlton House with six attendants.”

But the day before the fête, when the Prince had journeyed as far as Newmarket on his way to Holkham, he was overtaken by an express messenger informing him that the King’s mental condition was such as to necessitate his immediate presence at Windsor. Very reluctantly, therefore, he turned his horses’ heads about ; and in days when nothing was sacred from the wit of wags, many were the jests upon the fact that *Newmarket* had proved the unexpected goal of the Prince’s journey.

On the 6th, Fanny Burney relates how, at Windsor, “Suddenly arrived the Prince of Wales. . . . He had just quitted Brightenhelmstone ” ; but Fanny Burney was no doubt purposely misinformed ; the Prince had

returned from his interrupted journey to his father's *bête noir* at Holkham, and came at the call of his friends, not knowing whether the King's illness boded a Crown or a Regency for himself. Queen Charlotte, recognising with bitter jealousy the power which he anticipated, received him with distant coldness, which Fanny Burney observed, but failed to understand. "Something passing within," she remarks, "seemed to render this meeting awfully distant on both sides."<sup>1</sup>

But the Holkham fête took place none the less merrily despite the Prince's absence. For weeks beforehand it had formed the one topic of conversation throughout the county. It was, in fact, a great political entertainment, yet every care was taken to avoid giving it a party character; cards were to be sent to every gentleman and beneficed clergyman in Norfolk and all were to be bidden irrespective of their professed political views. But in giving such a colossal entertainment, Mr. and Mrs. Coke were naturally very anxious that no offence should be occasioned by the unintentional omission of any who had a right to expect an invitation. Some competent person, therefore, in each Norfolk town was deputed by them to prepare a careful list of all residents who were entitled to notice; and these lists were supplemented by much unsolicited correspondence which poured in from all quarters, supplying further names and offering suggestions. A well-wisher, who prefers to be anonymous, calmly proposes that those who cannot be invited to the house should have a public invitation to the fireworks in the park; several mention names of

<sup>1</sup> *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, 1842-6, Vol. IV, p. 285.



old or infirm persons who, although unable to be present, would yet be "highly gratified at your notice"; while an excited correspondent announces in great agitation that "Archdeacon Warburton and family, hitherto your warm partisans, are greatly incensed at not being invited!"

As was inevitable in such an undertaking, omissions were made and offence was given. While partisans were offended at being accidentally forgotten, opponents appeared unreasonably offended at being invited; and a certain proportion of both were indignant at fancying that invitations received late were an afterthought. The lists from each town are still preserved at Holkham, and also the answers of the invited, strung together upon string in alphabetical order, together with a book in which they are again carefully recorded. Down one column are entered their names, down another their answers—whether "Yes" or "No"; down a third, the nature of these answers; and under this last heading we are presented with an amusing variety. "*Civil with a reason*" or "*Sensible with a reason*" are evidently much appreciated; but many are pronounced—"Civil, but no reason," or simply "*No reason.*" "*Friendly*" and "*Very friendly*" jostle "*Rather angry.*" Against three "*Noes*" are written respectively, "*Sensible—Age—Distance—Ill-health.*" Lord Rosebery, we learn, was "*Coolly civil*"; Windham, "*An amicable and decisive friend.*" One alone was "*Insolent*"; while against the "No" entered opposite the unfortunate "Archdeacon Warburton and family" is put the sad memorandum, "*Very angry at the lateness of the card.*" Some of the invited apparently declined humbly be-

cause, though gratified at the invitation, they did not consider their social position warranted their acceptance of it. The Reverend Edmund Nelson declined without explanation, and no comment being annexed, it appears that his reason was recognised to be political. Still strung upon the list of answers is the somewhat brusque refusal of young Captain Nelson, who had just returned to Burnham Thorpe from Bath with his recently-married wife, of whom the letter—written by her, presumably at his dictation—omits all mention:—

“Captain Nelson’s compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Coke, and is sorry it is not in his power to accept their invitation for November 5th.

“BURNHAM, *October 31st, 1788.*”

As many guests as could be accommodated in the house were invited to spend the night there, and every corner of Holkham was to be inhabited. “At the ball last night,” writes a grateful friend on October 11th, “you were so kind as to hint that it might be possible for my wife and myself to creep into a garret on the approaching glorious 5th of November”; and on this occasion, at least, Coke determined to gratify what he always described as his greatest satisfaction: he would see Holkham “filled from end to end.” Of his immediate friends, Fox, as has been mentioned, was abroad, ostensibly travelling for his health through Switzerland and Italy; but Windham, the “amicable and decisive friend,” had just returned from a tour through France, and his answer is preserved:—

*The Rt. Honourable William Windham to Thomas*

“My dear Sir, *William Coke.*

“As my return to England has been in time to receive your invitation, there can be no doubt of the

Captain Nelsons Compliments  
to Mr. and Mrs. Coke And is sorry  
It is not in his power to accept their  
Invitation for Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>

Burham Oct. 31<sup>st</sup> 1788

Facsimile of Mrs. Horatio Nelson's answer to the invitation from  
Mr. and Mrs. T. W. Coke



answer to be given to it. I shall not fail to have the pleasure of paying my respects to you. A festival to celebrate the Revolution is a proper reception for a person just come from France, and there is no spot where I can feel that it can be celebrated with more propriety than the one now proposed.

“The only part of your invitation which I shall not accept is the bed. I beg that that may be kept for some of those who may stand more in need of it, and probably be unreasonable enough to feel impatient at not having it. This is one of the few occasions on which I must insist upon not having a bed at Holkham. Pray make my best respects to Mrs. Coke, and believe me,

“With greatest truth,

“Yours most sincerely,

“WILLIAM WINDHAM.

“HILL ST., *October 18th, 1788.*”

“I am afraid that Fox, who has now got beyond the Newmarket Meeting, will hardly be back in time for an occasion when his presence, I think, would neither be unsuitable or unwelcome.”

Meanwhile, a clever Italian, named Martenelli, had been at Holkham ever since October 23rd preparing the fireworks and decorations. “He says,” a friend explains to Mrs. Coke, “that it is absolutely necessary he should be there so long beforehand, as he dare not venture to send any of his works ready-charged, and he must assist in erecting scaffolding, etc. . . . the poor fellow really appears extremely anxious to give satisfaction!” Another letter observes how, in view of the anticipated presence of the Prince, “I have just pointed out to Martenelli the Prince of Wales’ crest and motto *Ich dien*, and have desired him to try what he can do with the *Ostrich*.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Coke crest.

As the day approached, contributions of provisions began to pour in. Sir Martin and Lady ffolkes, of Hillington Hall, wrote on November 1st, that—"Had they not received a hint, they would not have presumed to send to Holkham a Hare, 10 Brace of Pheasants and two couple of Guinea Fowls which they hope may be acceptable"; while Mr. Dixon Hoste, from Godwick, on November 2nd, sends "8 Brace of Hares and 25 Brace of Partridges," and hopes further "to send a large parcell of Snipes."

The momentous day dawned bright and sunny. In Norwich, from early morning, flags were flying, bands playing and bells ringing throughout the town. The proceedings began with a thanksgiving service in the cathedral; after which there was a public dinner to the local dignitaries, and the city prisoners were also fed. At seven in the evening a gigantic bonfire was lit in the market-place, and the residents sang or danced or paraded round it to the strains of inspiriting music, while the rest of the city was brightly illuminated.

At Holkham, as the beautiful autumn day faded into a clear, still night, only a faint breeze blew from the sea. While daylight died, the colonnades along the house and the pillars of the portico began to glow with wreaths of many-coloured fire, and next, above the pediment, in honour of the absent guest, there blazed a gigantic design of the Prince of Wales' feathers in the Whig colours of blue and buff. This threw its light far down the drive, where, by eight o'clock, the guests began to arrive. Soon the block of vehicles became so great that, in spite of every precaution, it is related "some accidents and overthrows took place from





THE SALON





AT HOLKHAM



the immense number of carriages of those who witnessed the elegance, magnificence and hospitality of this glorious festival." Within the house the scene each moment became more attractive. Martenelli had achieved his utmost. How illuminations were so cunningly contrived before the days of electric light I cannot say ; but by some clever machinery he had connected the illuminations within and without the house so that all were set in motion with but little effort. When the light illumined the exterior of the house, the Egyptian Hall became ablaze with lamps, sparkling in the ceiling, circling the niches of the statues, and swinging from colonnade to colonnade, interwoven with heavy festoons of flowers. As the guests entered the hall, their names were written down, and they were conducted up the steps to the Saloon, at the door of which Mr. and Mrs. Coke received them standing under a transparency on which glittered the words—LIBERTY AND OUR CAUSE. The glow from this bathed both host and hostess in a flood of light ; and each Whig chronicler remarked how it helped to emphasise the grace and stateliness which, at the age of thirty-four, still made Mrs. Coke conspicuous as the most beautiful woman amidst all those who thronged up the steps to greet her.

Despite every effort to make the party non-political, few Tories had accepted the invitation, and among the dresses of the guests blue and buff predominated, out of compliment to their host and the Cause. Thus, while men as well as women, with their powdered hair and gay clothing, added to the picturesqueness of the scene, among the former blue coats were conspicuous, while the older ladies were resplendent in orange bro-

cares and the younger ones in white, with bright orange silk twisted amongst their powdered locks.

At nine o'clock dancing began in the Statue Gallery. The ball was opened by Miss Jane Coke, now a pretty little girl of eleven, with the same fine features and bright eyes as her mother. In the absence of the Prince she danced with Lord Petre; and as, in a short-waisted dress which fell to her heels, she solemnly trod the first measures of the minuet which opened the ball, other bands simultaneously struck up in other rooms out of ear-shot; some also playing minuets, some country dances, and some the figures of a cotillion, so that the guests might have ample choice with regard to which dances they preferred. In other rooms, too, cards were provided and music of a more serious order.

An hour later, however, dancing and cards were alike forgotten, and every one crowded to the windows of the house. At ten o'clock the grounds and lake were illumined, and, for two hours, a wonderful exhibition of fireworks was superintended by the Italian. In the fine clear night over five thousand people, not invited to the festivities within the house, had assembled on the lawn, and the crowd in the park was even greater. For these, booths had been erected filled with ample refreshments, while "in the background, beyond the fireworks, appeared like a great carbuncle an immense bonfire, which was set round with lesser jewels, but not of inferior value in the eyes of the exulting populace, viz. forty barrels of beer!"

At two o'clock the supper was served indoors. Here, again, the clever Italian artist had surpassed himself,

for we are told that "when the company first entered the supper-room, those who had trod on enchanted ground in chrystal [*sic*] palaces in the Eastern stories of fairies and Genii, seemed to find the most luxurious flights of Arabian magnificence realised!" And his masterpiece caused special admiration, for—"By a curious piece of machinery the crest and garter were interwoven in dazzling lights among the wreaths and festoons of flowers which adorned the table and turned this room into fairyland."<sup>1</sup>

And there were other aids to enchantment, for all down the table a bottle of Burgundy and a bottle of champagne alternately were placed in front of each guest, to be replaced when emptied. The guests who supped in the dining-room were served with plate, those in the other rooms with almost equally precious china. Supper ended, all assembled to sing the afterwards famous song, the "Trumpet of Liberty," written for the occasion by Dr. Samuel Taylor, of Norwich, and which had been sung for the first time that same day by the townsfolk at their banquet. Next followed the toasts, which we are told were received with "shouts of conviviality and good humour." Under the circumstances, the health of "The King," to the surprise of those present, was omitted—an omission of which few can have known and few even guessed the full significance. But the Duke of Bedford gave the "Health of the Prince of Wales," and Mrs. Coke added—"With sincere regrets for his absence *and the cause of his absence* which prevents him here celebrating the glorious Revolution."

<sup>1</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, November, 1788.

At that very time a far different scene was being enacted at Windsor, where during dinner that evening the King's indisposition and "delirium" had at last declared itself in an attack of raving madness. Through the long hours of the awful night which followed, confined in a dressing-room adjoining the Queen's apartment, George III was a prey to the horrors of lunacy; and the agonised Queen, sitting up with her attendants, listened in terror to his ravings, while, by a curious freak of fate, throughout the kingdom his subjects were holding high revel in joyous celebration of the "glorious event" which had placed him upon the throne.

Little recking, however, that strange element of irony in their rejoicing, the guests at Holkham, their toasts concluded, resumed dancing merrily; and though some of the more craven-hearted left so early as 4 a.m., the majority kept it up with spirit till six o'clock in the grey dawn, when they departed—Windham to ride back five-and-twenty miles through the fresh morning air to Felbrigg, and many to be driven a yet more weary distance before they had a chance of resting their tired limbs.

"I," wrote one of the guests afterwards to a friend, "was at Mr. Coke's magnificent fête at Holkham on Nov. 5th. Descriptions of it you have seen in the newspapers, without doubt; it suffices therefore to tell you that they were not at all exaggerated; the entertainment being magnificence itself, and the splendid Mansion having quite the air of an enchanted castle when illuminated for the reception of the company."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Memoir and Correspondence of Sir James Edward Smith*, ed. by his wife, Lady Smith, Vol. I, p. 351.

“It will be a great satisfaction to you to know,” Windham informed Coke reassuringly, a few days later, “that for once, at least, people seem to judge right, and there is no dissenting voice about the elegance, splendour, grand conception and perfect execution of your ball at Holkham. I flatter myself, too, that as little offence has been given as it is possible to expect in so general an attempt to please. Such instances as have, or may come to my knowledge, I shall let you know, that where an opportunity offers, endeavours may be used to set them right.” And good-naturedly enumerating at great length all the people inadvertently omitted, he mentions that a “Mr. Twiss, who lives at Catton, and married Mrs. Siddons’ sister, feels a little dissatisfied at not having received an invitation, both by his situation and his attachment to our party. He is a wearer of the Blue and Buff. I will take upon myself to explain this, but perhaps you may furnish me with some circumstances that may account for the omission.”

None the less, there were the usual scathing comments in the newspapers of opposite politics. Mr. Coke was asked what was “the Cause” which the transparency had advocated, and which he apparently wished to carry on unknown to the country at large. He was asked why the King’s health was not proposed—and whether such an omission would recommend him to his friend, the King’s son. And witticisms were plentiful respecting the absence of Fox and “Bet Armstead.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the old letters the name is spelt respectively, Armistead and Armitstead, but in the *Morning Advertiser* and several daily papers she is referred to as above.

## CHAPTER XVI

DR. SAMUEL PARR

**B**UT the absence of one notable guest appears to have escaped public comment. Dr. Samuel Parr, whom Mrs. Coke had consulted so anxiously respecting the education of her daughters, is entered upon the List of Guests invited for November 5th with "NO" opposite to his name, and the "Nature" of his answer explained by the jest—" *Par Pari.*"

Shortly before the party, Coke penned an answer to Dr. Parr's letter of refusal:—

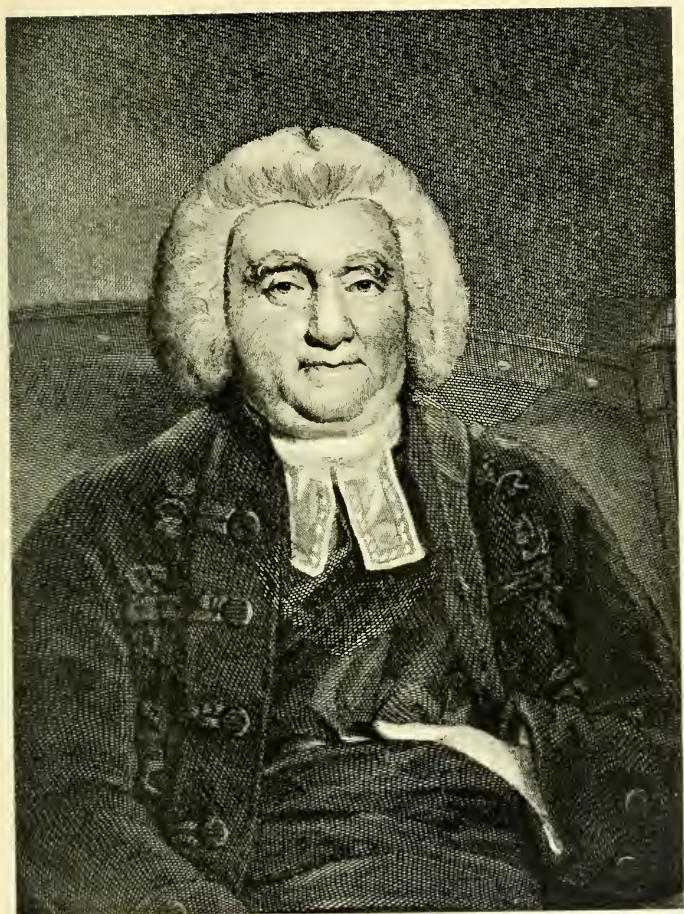
"Dear Sir,

"HOLKHAM, *October, 1788.*

"Though my time is much engaged at present, I cannot reconcile to my feelings the delay, even of a few days, in answering your most flattering letter, or to express Mrs. Coke's and my concern that the illustrious author of the preface to Bellendenus should not be able to attend our secular commemoration of an event which preserved to us our religious and civil liberty. As a friend to my country I must lament that your talents should be buried in the obscure corner where you now reside; not but what you must be sensible your writings are far better calculated to secure fame than to obtain preferment.

"The approbation of such men as yourself I shall ever esteem as the highest gratification I can obtain from being in Parliament, and affords me ample consolation in my private station. I enclose you a small





*John James Halls, Pinx., 1813.*

*W. Skelton, Sculp.*

REVD. SAMUEL PARR, LL.D.



bill for the distressed family you mention ; and remain, dear Sir, with sincere regard and esteem,

“ Your obliged and faithful Friend,

“ THOMAS WILLIAM COKE.”

In the previous year, 1787, Dr. Parr had brought out a new edition of the three books *De Statu* of William Bellenden, a learned Scot, Master of Requests to James I. To this Parr had prefixed a preface of his own, setting forth his political sentiments, which excited great approbation among the Whig party.

But it was not due only to political affinity that Coke thus professed an admiration for Dr. Parr ; and in view of the close connection of the learned Doctor with Coke throughout a long life—either as a tireless correspondent, an insatiable suppliant, or a loquacious admirer—we must pause to glance briefly at the causes which could forge a link between two men, apparently of such diametrically opposite temperaments.

Acknowledged to be one of the profoundest Greek scholars of his age, Dr. Parr had experienced a somewhat chequered career. Assistant Master at Harrow School, 1767 to 1771, he had, upon the death of Dr. Sumner, tried and failed to obtain the headmastership there. On this occasion he was the innocent cause of a wild riot among the boys who had desired his success, several of whom were, in consequence, expelled from the school, among others being Lord Wellesley, brother of the Duke of Wellington. Subsequently, Parr had a school of his own for five years, then became headmaster of Colchester Grammar School, next of Norwich Grammar School in 1778.

To this residence in Norfolk was primarily owing his acquaintance with Coke, who had previously had a slight knowledge of Parr's uncle, Robert Parr, a learned divine, said to be second only to his great nephew in solemnity of manner and pompous phraseology. This same Robert Parr, who occasionally visited a son living in Norwich, and who then impressed all with whom he came in contact by his overwhelming dignity, nevertheless appears, once in his life, to have been guilty of a lapse into frivolity. Dr. Parr recounts privately in a letter to Coke :—

“Dr. Chapman [of Eton] was a most incorrigible Tory, a blundering Bigot, and a crafty worldling ; but I must say his learning was even prodigious, and among the naughty wits of Eton there was a merry story, that Chapman and my uncle Robert Parr began to read the Fathers, one at one end, and the other at the other, *and that they met exactly in the middle!*

From Norwich, in 1786, Parr removed to the Vicarage of Hatton near Warwick, and there, much to the indignation of himself and of his Whig admirers, he passed the remainder of his life without preferment. To the Whigs, Parr was thus a hero and a martyr ; since by his vehement adherence to their principles he had put himself out of favour with the Court party, and debarred himself from worldly advantage. “I wish that I had the happiness to address this letter to a Palace,” wrote the Duke of Sussex to him on more than one occasion ; and the Duke but echoed the sentiments of the entire Whig party. Whether in his school in Norwich, or in his little parsonage at Hatton,

Parr was looked upon as a man to whose genius a misguided country had refused his legitimate reward.

But no one entertained a greater opinion of the sacrifice thus consummated than did Parr himself. The loss of the bishopric which he so clearly recognised to have been his due, never ceased to rankle in his own mind even more than it did in the minds of his friends. He had an opinion of his own merits which nothing could daunt. The first time he saw Fox in the House, he exclaimed: "Had I followed any other profession, I might have been sitting by the side of that illustrious statesman. I should have had all his powers of argument, all Erskine's eloquence, and all Hargrave's law!"<sup>1</sup> When inveighing in a letter to Coke against "the professional neglect and persecution to which I have been doomed by Courtiers, Ministers and my Episcopal brethren," he closes his diatribe with the self-sufficient conclusion: "But I possess that which they cannot give in the resources of my MIND." And once only is he apparently anxious lest his pretensions are unsupported by any adequate achievement, when he professes to explain to Coke the various causes of this delay in the completion of much which he was minded to accomplish.

"The truth is my Mind is in constant action, and that one subject thrusts out another from my memory. The difficulty of getting scribes, the quarrels with the Printers and their Journeymen, the quantity of outlandish Jargon, the shortness of the Days, the weakness of my Eyes, the want of skill in correcting the Press, and other causes," etc. etc.,

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register*, 1830, p. 482.

constitute the explanation of his failure to astonish an expectant world.

Nevertheless Parr, on account of his profound learning, remained the friend and correspondent of most of the noted men of his day, who persistently expected great things from him and accepted his opinion upon the affairs of nations without a smile at the pompous egoism with which these were delivered. His humorous, obstinate face, set round by a dirty bob-wig, his self-opiniated speech, his eccentricities of speech and habit were familiar to all his contemporaries. So, too, were his kindness of heart, his ready wit, and the laugh which, once provoked, would break with irresistible heartiness into the very midst of his rounded periods and bombastic utterances—those, it is said, who had once heard Parr's laugh, never forgot it. Moreover, as William Taylor of Norwich expressed it, "There is a lovingness of heart about Parr, a susceptibility of the affections, which would endear him even without his Greek!" "Have you," once wrote Roscoe to Coke, "seen our old friend Dr. Parr's comical letters to our other friend Dr. Butler? They are in his highest style of eccentricity. *The strength of his head and the goodness of his heart shine through the whole!*" For Parr was warm-hearted, generous and noble-minded. He did good for the pure love of doing good. Throughout his life he was always on the side of the down-trodden and unfortunate; the enemy to oppression in any form; the vehement hater of tyrants; the fiery upholder of civil and religious liberty. Such qualifications sufficiently explain how he retained the lifelong friendship and admiration of a man like Coke—a man

who, of his very nature, was apt to overrate the merits of others as he was ready to underrate his own.

Parr's correspondence with Coke, which has been preserved at Holkham, and some of which was published after his death, would, in itself, fill a bulky and amusing volume ; it forms a fairly consecutive comment on political events for many years, and is interesting as an echo—often exaggerated—of the sentiments of the Whigs upon current events. Still more, it enacts the part of a Greek Chorus with regard to Coke's own life and sentiments, for Dr. Parr had a habit of reiterating or applauding the views of the person to whom he was writing, so that he thus supplies a clue to Coke's own opinions on many questions upon which we should otherwise be at a loss to trace them. That the worthy Doctor's letters are not without a strong flavour of adulation is undeniable, and the astonishing self-approbation which pours from his pages in a torrent of verbosity strikes one as all the more remarkable when contrasted with the unassuming character of a man of genius like Fox, or of a man of vast achievement like Coke ; yet in Parr's very originality lies the stamp of his sincerity, in his exaggerated affections, hatreds and self-admiration he is profoundly, almost naively honest ; and if he can be accused of ingratiating himself with Coke, from whom he received ceaseless benefits, so, too, he must be accredited with being, himself, the benefactor of many who had no claim upon him.

For, self-doomed to poverty during the greater part of his days, Parr was ever ready to contribute to those who were in like penurious circumstances, and did so with a liberality out of all proportion to his means. In-

numerable instances of this occur in his letters to Coke, one of which may be mentioned as typical of the rest.

It appears that Coke had lent the Doctor a valuable book, and some time afterwards received a letter from him in great distress—the book had disappeared.

“I have to tell you a dismal tale,” wrote the Doctor. “In a closet near my breakfast-room six or eight shelves are reserved for the reception of books which I borrow, and so it is, from the convenience of the place, and my diligence, that I never had a book missing before.”

Now Parr had been warned that a young Oxonian, to whom he admits he had been “not only a benefactor but a protector,” had been seen in his absence, to invade this private closet where he kept his priceless books and papers; he reproved the young man, and thought so little of the occurrence that, the following autumn, he gave the youth employment for five weeks sorting numerous precious letters—an onerous task, for Parr had over 800 letters which he destined to go into his biography.

“One morning,” Parr relates, “when he had just left my house to go to Banbury where he resides, I stepped into his room and saw a large bundle, which rather surprised me, as on that very morning his trunk had, by his own order, been put into the waggon. I examined the bundle and found many of my own private letters and three or four books. I summoned him immediately. In the presence of a friend I obtained his confession to several stolen books and letters. I obtained from him a further acknowledgment that by his mother’s advice he had burnt some of my letters at his own house in Banbury, and I obtained also a solemn declaration that he had taken no more.”



Subsequently, it was discovered that the pilfering had been more extensive than had been suspected. Coke's book had been taken, "and of the injury done me in my books and my engravings, which lay in his bed-chamber, in my MSS. and in my letters I can form no calculation," Parr adds sadly. Finally, as the Doctor's indignation overmasters him, we learn how this youth who had treated him so scurvily was one who, with his mother and sister, had been destitute, and upon whom Parr had taken pity, how Parr had obtained for him many subscriptions, procured for him an advantageous scholarship at Pembroke College, Oxford, given him books—once presenting him with a library to aid his studies, at a cost of £15, how he had guaranteed to the young Oxonian an annual sum of £30 till he should have taken his degree, and, as if this were not enough, "from time to time I gave him money," so that, "on the very morning that he was leaving me I put into his hands £15."

And this category of benefits bestowed by a poor man upon a youth who had no claim upon him, and who robbed him while accepting his charity, is closed by Parr with the unassuming comment: "It happens to me as it has so often happened to yourself, that ingratitude and treachery are the requitals of kindness"; and his conclusion upon mentioning that his protégé had since proved yet more worthless than had at first appeared, is equally characteristic: "He has lately been ordained, and as he has no principle nor good feeling, he will make a truly loyal and orthodox Churchman; but he is an INGRATE, and he is a LIAR, and he is a THIEF."

But, despite his liberality, for many years Parr's poverty was great; the whole of his emolument from the Church, indeed, up to an advanced age was £93 on account of his living and £17 on account of his prebend, so that in 1795 his friends, to whom his straitened circumstances were always a source of deep regret, got up a private subscription for his benefit. To this Coke contributed handsomely, and the result of the sum thus collected was to provide the Doctor with an annuity of £300 for life. Later, in 1807, Coke tried to secure him another addition to his income. In those days the standard of duty required from a clergyman was far more elastic than is the case at present. All that was considered necessary was that, in the parish of any living held by him, he should ensure a decent and regular performance of Divine Service, personally or by deputy; and hence it was a common occurrence for the holder of a living to be a non-resident. Coke, aware of this, obtained from his mother, in whose gift was the living of Buckenham, representing £300 a year, permission to offer this to Dr. Parr.

The Doctor wrote back enthusiastically, describing the wonderful effect which the good news had had on the spirits of Mrs. Parr, and how he, personally, should "jump for joy" if he found that, by resigning one of his present livings, he could accept that of Buckenham. But Parr was never called upon to perform the gymnastic feat which it is difficult to associate with his usual department. He applied to the Bishop of London for leave to accept Mr. Coke's offer, and relates as follows:

"When Mr. Coke offered me the living of Buckenham, in the diocese of London, I gave Dr. Prettyman

to understand that I should perhaps resign one of my livings and retain the other. He told me that if I took Buckenham *I must reside*. The living was given to Mr. Crowe,<sup>1</sup> *who never did reside*, and at whose non-residence the Bishop connived. His rigor with me arose from his dislike to my supposed religious and my avowed political tenets."

This episode, however, brought one great consolation to Dr. Parr, in that it enabled him to designate Coke his Patron. Henceforward, his letters to the latter usually begin, "*My long-trying friend, and honoured Patron, Mr. Coke.*" Even his wrath against his despoilers afforded him a subtle satisfaction. Writing to Coke respecting Mr. Leigh, of Stoneleigh, "who although an hereditary Tory, never mentions Mr. Coke but in terms of respect and kindness," he adds complacently: "He is one of the few Tories who do not wish to see me imprisoned in Newgate, pilloried at Charing Cross, hanged in front of Newgate and doomed to everlasting torments in the flames of Hell!" And he draws the contrast with his own attitude: "Under my roof Whiggism is established, but Toryism is tolerated, and upon the principles of Whiggism itself we must tolerate largely!"—a happy self-deception which the unwavering fierceness of his invectives to Coke against Tory politicians goes far to disprove.

But the poverty which was thus Parr's portion during the greater part of his life, never lessened his readiness to share his little with those whose need seemed to him greater than his own. And that liberality which he never failed himself to exercise in the days of his

<sup>1</sup> A Norfolk man, and a great connoisseur in art.

greatest straits, he as unfailingly expected to be exercised by his friends. John Johnstone, who published his life in 1828,<sup>1</sup> emphasises how “Parr, ever ready himself to comply with demands from others, never hesitated to beg for objects he deemed deserving”; and almost every letter from him to Coke contains some request for aid to come, or some expression of gratitude for past aid, for himself, for his church, or for his friends; and testifies to the ceaseless liberality which Coke showed him—a liberality which, to Coke’s obvious despair, Parr announces “shall be properly recorded in my parochial books for the credit of the donor, the instruction of my parishioners and their posterity.”

The Rev. J. Horseman, Vicar of Royston, a relation of Parr’s and the poetaster of current events, one day enclosed to Coke the following epigram against Dr. Parr, together with his answer to it. Both, no doubt, present a faithful portrait of Dr. Parr as he appeared to his foes and to his friends:—

RECEIPT FOR COMPOUNDING A POLITICAL RADICAL  
DOCTOR OF DIVINITY, A.S.S., ETC. ETC.

To half of Bushby’s skill in mood and tense,  
Add Bentley’s pedantry, without his sense;  
From Warburton take all the spleen you find,  
But leave his genius and his wit behind;  
Squeeze Churchill’s rancour from the verse it flows in,  
And knead it well with Johnson’s turgid prosing;  
Add all the piety of St. Voltaire,  
Mix the gross compound—fiat Dr. Parr!

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Dr. Samuel Parr, with Memoirs of his Life and Writings, and a Selection from his Correspondence*, by John Johnstone, M.D., in eight volumes.

To which Horseman replied as follows :—

To more than Bushby's skill in mood and tense,  
 Add Bentley's learning and his sterling sense ;  
 From Warburton take all the wit you find,  
 But leave his grossness and his whims behind ;  
 Mix Churchill's vigour as in verse it flows,  
 And knead it well with Johnson's manly prose ;  
 Sprinkle the whole with pepper from Voltaire,  
 Strain off the scum—and fiat Dr. Parr !

William Coke, Coke's nephew and heir-presumptive, was sent as a private pupil to Dr. Parr's—a doubtful happiness, for the Doctor was an old-fashioned disciplinarian, and believed in flogging for all offences, and even for the absence of offence. One exception to this practice alone he made: never to punish a stunted capacity, nor try to extort from a mediocre intelligence more than it was capable of yielding. A divine, who was distinguished in later life, used to relate how, for some time after he entered Parr's seminary, he was happily classed as a "Mediocre," and enjoyed the comparative amnesty accorded to that grade. One unlucky evening, however, the head assistant, after school hours, acquainted Parr with the momentous discovery that "From some recent observations, he had been led to conclude that . . . was a lad of genius." "Say you so?" roared out Parr; "then let the flogging begin to-morrow morning!"

William Coke, however, was not of a nature to be afraid even of the awe-inspiring Doctor and his pompous Johnsonian speech; and many are the anecdotes, as we shall see later, of the manner in which he dared the redoubtable Doctor's wrath, and the tricks he performed to the Doctor's discomfort and to the admiration of his fellow-pupils.

But the correspondence of Dr. Parr with Coke has as its primary subject neither the delinquencies of his scholars nor the affairs of Europe, though these were closely criticised and summarily dealt with by the indefatigable Doctor. A matter before which all else palled usually occupied Parr's attention when writing to Holkham. The event of his life—the annual incident of paramount importance—was his birthday party, given on January 26th. For this festivity he issued invitations three months beforehand, and many distinguished men from far and near were gathered at his little parsonage at Hatton upon the auspicious day. For weeks beforehand, too, the toasts to be given on this occasion—usually about eighteen in number—occupied his most serious consideration. The first, perforce, was always: “Many Happy Returns of the Day” to himself; the second comprised a list of his friends, in which Mr. Coke's name occupied a most prominent—if not the first—place. Other toasts varied according to the tide of public events or the mood of the host; but four favourite ones remained:—

“The Cause of the Birch; and the Learned Masters of Eton, Winchester, Shrewsbury and Harrow.”

“May Servility be Banished from our Universities, and Intolerance from our Church.”

“A Patriot King, and an Uncorrupt Parliament.”

“May the Lion of Old England never Crouch to Russian Bears and French Baboons.”

And to this festivity, in his rôle of an upholder of tolerance, Parr even condescended to invite certain favoured Tories. “My visitors,” he explains to Coke on one occasion, “will be Whigs, with a little side-

garnish of Tories ; and these Tories will not contaminate our feast because they will have good manners, good nature and good morals, such as *justify* me in summoning them to my feast !”

On the great day, “ the Master,” we are told, “ was in his glory,” dressed in his best apparel, his fullest wig, his velvet coat and an impressive scarf ; “ the feast was sumptuous, and the wines various ” ; while to the success of this entertainment Coke annually contributed a present of food, and annually the Doctor wrote—anxiously before the reception of the gift, enthusiastically after it—so that his correspondence hinges round this, to him, all-important event of each year.

One peculiarity of that correspondence, however, was conspicuous. From the haste with which he endeavoured to inscribe his too prolific thoughts, the Doctor’s writing was all but impossible to decipher, and this was rendered more hopeless still by the fact that he was subject to erysipelas in his hands, and could often scarcely hold his pen. When this became literally impracticable, he was forced to employ as his amanuensis Mrs. Parr, his daughters or his pupils ; occasionally, in fact, employing two or three such assistants at once, since he could with perfect facility dictate no less than three letters at the same time.

But he does not seem to have recognised the relief which this change of calligraphy caused to the recipients of his correspondence. “ I am sorry,” he writes naively to Coke on one occasion, “ that you could not read my letters through ; I hope that which *my daughter* wrote was legible ? ”

Of Coke’s letters in reply few are extant ; and these,

brief and practical, form a remarkable contrast to the Doctor's sententious utterances. Johnstone, Parr's biographer, remarks how Coke's correspondence to Parr begins with the publication of Parr's *Sermon on Education*, and ended only in January, 1825, with the last annual present of game from Holkham for the Doctor's birthday party. Johnstone quotes few of the letters from Coke, and contents himself with observing with regard to the writer :—

“The consistency maintained in politics by this chief of the country gentlemen of England, his elevated and independent spirit, his love of civil and religious liberty, his devotedness to the old English Constitution, his domestic virtues, his magnificent hospitality and his liberality, are all illustrated in his correspondence; but I hope to obtain from Dr. Parr's letters to Mr. Coke words and expressions which will enable me to portray his character.”<sup>1</sup>

Not content with paying every tribute to Coke himself, however, Parr taught his scholars to do likewise. On one of those occasions when circumstances forced him to dictate—but not curtail—his lengthy correspondence, he remarks: “My Scribe, who although an Oxonian, is yet a Whig (and such he ought to be with the aid of my instruction and the discipline of my scourge) has often joined me in drinking your health, and never fails to propose it as a splendid toast under his own roof!”

It was once suggested to Dr. Parr that Mr. Coke ought to be raised to the peerage. “*Raised* to the peerage!” echoed the Doctor indignantly, “Sir, Coke of Norfolk is a far greater title than any that monarchy can bestow!”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Dr. Samuel Parr*, by J. Johnstone, Vol. I, p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> *Norfolk Tour*, Vol. 11, p. 593.



## CHAPTER XVII

## POLITICAL EVENTS

1788-1792

*Ætat* 34-38

**A**NOTHER friend of Coke's, of whom we find constant mention in connection with the Holkham fête of 1788, was his old Turin acquaintance, Martin folkes Rishton.

Settled now in the neighbourhood of Lynn with his pretty wife, formerly Maria Allen, he was deputed by Coke to prepare the list of guests to be invited to the fête from that town—a task which he performed with care and insight. Mr. Rishton, indeed, on all occasions never failed to take a keen interest in Coke's local well-being, and, being seven years Coke's senior, constituted himself a species of mentor towards his friend, dispatching to Holkham long letters of advice, admiration and adulation, intermixed with considerable dry humour. Fanny Burney, speaking of Mr. and Mrs. Rishton, observes: "There is a remarkable similarity in their humours, for he is as whimsical and odd as herself. There is a kind of generous impetuosity in his disposition which often lures him beyond the bounds which his cooler judgment would approve."<sup>1</sup> And as in the case of Dr. Parr certain characteristics

<sup>1</sup> *The Early Diary of Frances Burney*, Vol. I, p. 172.

explain the root of Coke's liking, so in this very "generous impetuosity" of Mr. Rishton we find something akin to Coke's own temperament, and seem to read the keynote of his constant friendship towards his former fellow-student.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Rishton, on her part, developed an enthusiastic admiration for Mrs. Coke, and when Fanny Burney used to rave about her "dear Mrs. Thrale," Maria Rishton used to retort with a boast about her "delightful Mrs. Coke." Yet meetings between the half-sisters were not frequent, and consequently, although Fanny Burney occasionally visited Mrs. Rishton at Lynn, for many years no introduction seems to have been effected between the lively little writer and the woman of whom her dear Maria never ceased to make mention. Once Mrs. Coke wrote to entreat Fanny, whom she knew only as the author of *Cecilia* and *Evelina*, to choose her a governess "whom she will take from *her* unseen," but the first acquaintance between the two women who had heard so much of each other did not take place until the year 1792, when, on November 27th, Fanny, on a visit to Aylsham, writes: "I have been also, at last, introduced to Mrs. Coke, and I think her one of the sweetest women, on a short acquaintance I have ever met with."

<sup>1</sup> A portrait of Mr. Rishton by Barber was hung by Coke in the ante-room to the manuscript library; and in the *Stranger's Guide to Holkham* (1817) we are told: "The lively intelligence expressed in the countenance of this picture, renders it very interesting. Mr. Rishton is one of Mr. Coke's earliest and most valued friends, and a gentleman no less distinguished for the urbanity of his manners than for his shining talents and general information." A portrait of Mr. Coke was painted by Barber, for Mr. Rishton, and is reproduced in Vol. II.

Soon after the Holkham fête Mr. Rishton was again actively employed on Coke's behalf. Following upon the rejoicings of November 5th came the universal anxiety occasioned by the public knowledge of the King's illness. Great excitement also prevailed at the prospect of a Whig Ministry coming into office. At Bologna, in November, Fox received an urgent summons to return for the meeting of Parliament on the 20th of that month, rendered necessary by the state of the King's health. While journeying back to London a false report of the King's death reached him, and he travelled at such speed that he arrived in town nine days after leaving Bologna, so that, having gone abroad in a state of bad health, he nearly killed himself by his rapid return.

Parliament, convened for November 20th, was prorogued till December 4th, and a variety of rumours penetrated to Norfolk from town. In the event of a General Election it was understood that Coke would again come forward for Parliament. Throughout the county every preparation was made by his partisans to resist any effort of the Tories to oppose the power of the Prince of Wales, champion of the Whigs.

“We all agree,” a local correspondent<sup>1</sup> had written to Coke on November 12th, “that the present position of affairs with regard to the King's health does not ought to relax our attention to the business we have undertaken. For if the King dies (tho' it will certainly lessen your difficulties) yet some struggle will be made to obtain a powerful Tory opposition in Parliament; and if, as it is feared, the King is insane, it is not impossible that the present *daring* influence

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Repton, of Oxmead.

may contend for a Regency in opposition to the Prince ;—we therefore suppose you will join us in thinking that no time should be lost in preparing for a canvass which may be suddenly called for.”

The letter concludes with the piquant information :—

“Mr. Gurney told me this morning that, to his certain knowledge, Sir J. Wodehouse *borrowed* all the money, ab<sup>t</sup> 9 thousand pound, which his Election cost him ; if this circumstance is New to you, as it was to me, I hope you will excuse the liberty I take in mentioning it.”

Lists were forthwith prepared stating the districts and persons to be canvassed ; and Windham and Mr. Rishton, concerting together, were active on Coke's behalf. After his experience of 1784, Coke determined to stand alone in the event of a contested election, and he wrote privately to Mr. Astley to tell him how a conjunction with Sir Edward “would endanger my re-election, which I flatter myself by standing unconnected I shall obtain.” “From my heart I wish for peace,” he wrote to another friend, “and shall endeavour all I can to promote it. I hate trouble, and have a thousand ways of laying out my money to my satisfaction [other] than in a contested Election, but the sense of the county whenever the time comes I am determined to try from the confidence I entertain of success.”

Coke's partisans, however, viewed with considerable alarm that he preserved his independent attitude, and, despising the means usually adopted to conciliate electors, relied solely on his past integrity of conduct and upon the fact that he need spare no expense in achieving his object. The advice which his different

friends showered upon him at this juncture throws an amusing sidelight upon his character.

Mr. Rishton wrote to urge him to court popularity, pointing out :—

“Men in your elevated situation do not and cannot dive into the dirt of Electioneering manœuvres, or understand the measures to be pursued like ordinary men, who are more conversant in the drudgery of Common Life, and are more accustomed to hear and understand the opinions of men in lower stations.”

Windham wrote :—

“Let me take the liberty of suggesting to you a piece of caution, the want of which people pretend to say was of great prejudice to you at the last Election—I mean the making any declarations of your determination not to be deterred by expence. It is all very well that people should suppose it, but the declaring it, while it is not necessary to make it believed, *has something the air of a menace*, which those who are not to profit by it will be disposed to resist. I would wish the thing to be supposed—We would wish it to be in part true (tho’ perhaps not so much as it is), but I would not wish it to be declared either by yourself or those immediately about you. You will excuse, I know, my giving you these hints.”

Sir Martin ffolkes wrote, diffidently, to point out that it would be in Coke’s interest to attend the Thetford Assizes, which apparently he had not done for six or seven years. To the latter Coke’s answer is extant :

“I perfectly agree with you,” he replied frankly, “that if I had paid more attention, and not relied too much on the purity of my political conduct, all the expence which is like to ensue and the trouble I am now under, the necessity of putting myself, too, to regain my situation as a Member for the County would probably have been avoided. The success

and flattering support I have experienced from gentlemen of a decidedly different opinion in political questions, who are not the less urgent in their good wishes than those who entertain the same sentiments I do, inclines me to believe that my own election is very secure, and that the peace of the county may be preserved by a proper understanding, as far as I am able to form an opinion; an object of the greatest importance to me, who have no inclination to throw away my money or put myself to more trouble than is absolutely necessary; and much to be wished for the county at large. The Assizes I will certainly attend. . . . From the Assizes I will go to Hadleigh, where the hounds are to give me the meeting; they will stay there about a fortnight before they return to Melford; which of the two is the finest country I can't say, never having been to Melford, but Jones assures me that I may expect to see very good sport."

With the approach of winter Coke usually went to Suffolk for hunting, and annually gave a celebrated hunting breakfast at Castle Hedingham. "A new toast to be drunk every day after dinner at the Fox-hunters' Club in Suffolk," Mr. Rishton now informed him, "is—' *Good Friends in Norfolk and good Foxes in Suffolk!*'" but though, for a time, the Norfolk friends had claimed Coke's attention, the foxes were destined not to be abandoned. To Melford Coke went, and apparently found satisfactory sport, for we find him writing from there again the following winter. The anticipated Dissolution was indefinitely deferred. On December 13th, 1788, a heated debate on the Regency question took place, and the bill was brought into Parliament the following February 3rd, but a fortnight afterwards, the recovery of George III from his illness put a temporary end to the dissensions thereby

involved, and to the immediate prospect of a Whig Ministry.

Coke used to relate the following story connected with this period. With the recovery of the King's reason, Queen Charlotte showed herself in a peculiarly unamiable light towards her sons. During the King's illness the struggle for supremacy between her and the Prince of Wales had roused bitter animosity on both sides, and the Duke of York, siding with his brother, came in for a full share of the Queen's displeasure. Although the King was still weak in mind and body, and all agitation should have been carefully avoided, the Queen never ceased endeavouring to sow the seeds of discord between him and his sons, by relating stories of their misconduct during the struggle for the Regency. Moreover, all those who quarrelled with the Prince she openly befriended.

Colonel Lennox, afterwards Duke of Richmond, whose mother held a place in the royal household, constituted himself the Queen's champion, and went about publicly abusing the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York. The royal brothers were indignant at his impertinence; a quarrel was picked upon some trifling pretext, and Lennox sent a challenge to the Duke of York, which the latter accepted. It was arranged that the duel should be fought on Wimbledon Common; but when the time came, although Lennox fired and grazed the Duke's ear, the Duke haughtily declined to return the shot, and the combat came to an ignominious end. The Prince of Wales, furious at the whole affair, went down to Windsor afterwards, determined to tell the King what had occurred, and which

he considered had been instigated by the Queen. The King, who was devoted to the Duke of York, became greatly agitated on hearing of the danger to which his favourite son had been exposed, but the Queen pronounced coldly that "It was all the Duke's own fault." The Prince told Coke afterwards how, that same evening, when his mother espied Colonel Lennox in one of the Court circles, she made a point of going up to him before everybody, in the most marked manner offered him her hand on first addressing him, and was singularly gracious to the man who, that very day, had nearly shot her son.<sup>1</sup>

In July of the year 1789, the news reached Norwich of the fall of the Bastille. The grievances of the French peasantry, and the boldness with which they had taken the law into their own hands, roused the sympathies and stirred the enthusiasm of all lovers of freedom. The greatest excitement prevailed, and during the public rejoicings which ensued, even the most sedate amongst the Norwich residents became demoralised. "Don't I remember," afterwards remarked the daughter of one of those citizens to the descendant of another, "your glorious grandmother dancing round the Tree of Liberty at Norwich with Dr. Parr!"<sup>2</sup>

In the following October Windham formed one of a party at Holkham which included Fox and James Dutton. "There were others," he relates, "whom I had not known of before; Captain Roberts, a relation of Coke's, who had served a great deal in America, and

<sup>1</sup> Related by Coke also to Richard Rush, 1819. (See *Residence at the Court of London*, by Richard Rush (1833), p. 188.)

<sup>2</sup> *Three Generations of Englishwomen*, by Janet Ross (1888), Vol. I, p. 8.



afterwards Rishton, etc." The next month he again visited Holkham, and on November 30th he states how he was aroused at Felbrigg, at five o'clock in the morning, by a messenger from Norwich, who informed him of Coke's intention to canvass that town the next day.<sup>1</sup> But still the Dissolution was postponed, and while awaiting the delayed summons to Parliament, Coke became occupied with a work apart from politics or agriculture.

For some time past Dungeness lighthouse had been in a deplorable condition. It was impossible to get the Government to act in the matter. Coke therefore purchased Dungeness, and also Harwich lighthouse, from the Government on lease, and, both thus becoming his private property for a term of years, he promptly rebuilt Dungeness at his own expense, so that from having been the worst upon the coast it became the best. In 1790 he reopened this fresh lighthouse, and an inscription was placed upon it recording the event. The new erection was built of wood covered over with sheet-iron; and, probably for this reason, was eventually destroyed by lightning; but, before that day, we shall again have occasion to refer to it, and to the unforeseen chain of events connected with Coke's action in this matter.

On June 12th, 1790, the long-delayed Dissolution at last took place, and on June 28th Coke again entered Parliament, in company with his former rival Wodehouse. As on his first entry he had found the House agitated by the fierce emotions and the hopeless divergence of opinion called forth by the American

<sup>1</sup> *Windham's Diary*, ed. by the Hon. Mrs. Baring, p. 109.

struggle for independence, so now those same emotions were renewed—if not surpassed—by another struggle which, in its infancy, seemed even more justifiable and more imperative than the first.

The eyes of all Europe were now directed towards France, where the masses, starved, down-trodden and enslaved, had finally asserted themselves in a desperate effort to better their condition. It was impossible not to realise their justification in the present, as it was all but impossible to foresee the unjustifiable lawlessness and brutality to which they would give rein in the future. Burke alone, the prophet of ill-omen as he was considered by the adherents of Fox, denounced the rise, and predicted the progress of the Revolution; and his utterances gave birth to a diversity of opinion among the Whigs which threatened to separate their forces and to create an open schism.

Before this took place, there occurred, on April 17th, 1790, in Windham's *Diary* the following amicable entry:—

“Went at six to dine with Coke. I sat next to Burke, with Fox next to him, and had a tolerable share of conversation, the principal subjects of which were Bruce; the conduct of the Judges on the Impeachment; Dunning; farming; architecture and painting.”<sup>1</sup>

A peaceable conversation, apparently, which cautiously avoided the burning topic of the day. But in the October following, Burke published the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, which brought fuel to the smouldering flame. Thirty thousand copies were sold,

<sup>1</sup> *Windham's Diary*, p. 197.

and there is no doubt that it was received with sympathy by the majority of Englishmen, whose opinions were divided, not only upon the subject of the French Revolution itself, but on the increasing prospect of a war between England and France.

In order to understand the light in which Coke viewed this question, it is necessary to realise the position of England at this date. After long smarting from the effects of a disastrous campaign—a campaign from which she had emerged crippled in wealth, in prestige, and with an irreparable loss of valuable lives, England was just entering upon a fresh era of prosperity. Her wounds were healing, her prospects were fair. Her self-respect was becoming reinstated, she was regaining her ascendancy among the nations of the world, her resources were increasing, and there was every hope that her renewed riches would enable her to pay off some of her national encumbrances. “In fine,” as one of Coke’s correspondents remarked, “the pinnacle of our greatness seemed placed on a base which nothing but our own folly could undermine.”

And all this slowly acquired advantage was to be risked, and England’s prosperity irretrievably wrecked in the mad endeavour to exert an arbitrary interference with the affairs of a nation by whom our safety was not at present endangered, since France, absorbed in internal strife, was not in a position to originate acts of aggression towards her neighbours.

Still more, it was held, such an unprovoked attempt to crush—not control—France’s struggle for freedom came peculiarly ill from England, the professed friend of liberty. France had broken her bonds asunder, and,

mad with the licentiousness of newly acquired freedom, was given over to a period of delirium which interference could only goad, not check. While the object of her struggle called forth Coke's warmest sympathies, no one viewed with greater abhorrence the lawless means by which she strove to attain that object. But any attempt at coercion on the part of England, he was convinced, could only serve to prolong the horrors of the Revolution, while retarding the issue of which those horrors were the birth-throes. It should have been England's policy to stand on guard, not to assail. "Our power made us the arbiters of nations, and even France herself might have been restrained in her madness and half her enormities prevented, had we been wise." England's policy of interference appeared to him to be that of a man who, seeing two dogs fighting, rushes in and belabours them indiscriminately with a whip, thus increasing their blind fury; and since all war not resorted to from dire necessity he held to be iniquitous, his natural antipathy to bloodshed was, if possible, intensified at this crisis. "I have always hated war," he said as an old man; "rivers of blood were never congenial to my feelings!"<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, this question of impending hostilities with France affected every other measure which could be brought before Parliament. It involved opposition to reform, extravagant subsidies, enormous loans. It produced a further chasm in the Whig party, already divided in opinion with regard to the nature and the issue of the Revolution itself. Pitt, accredited by the Whigs with manœuvring for war, at present preserved

<sup>1</sup> Speech, August 7th, 1830.

an attitude of neutrality ; but in 1791, as events tended more and more towards hostilities, the rupture between the Whigs became more emphasised, and the conviction that Pitt was secretly determined upon war gained ground.

“I shall at all times,” wrote Dr. Parr to Coke, “look upon such a coalition as this between Mr. Pitt and our friends with a jealous mind, nor have I the smallest doubt that some day or other *he* will turn it to account against those who are not only repeating his avowed language, but forwarding his *unseen* purpose.”

Windham, infatuated by the influence of Burke, was fast drifting away from his former politics and former friends. On January 17th, 1791, he wrote again in his diary :—

“Dined with Coke ; present, Fox, Burke, Duke of Portland, Lord Fitzwilliam, Grey, Fawkner, Mr. Anson, Lord North, Lord Tichfield, Lord Petre.”<sup>1</sup>

And this entry has a special interest, for it was probably the last occasion when Windham, Fox, Burke and Coke all dined together as friends. Although Windham continued to visit at Holkham until 1792, in the political world he openly severed himself from his former party ; and on May 6th following occurred the famous breach between Fox and Burke on the subject of the Revolution, when Burke, like Windham, was ranked with the Ministerialists.

Thenceforward all friendship between Burke and Coke appears to have ceased ; but on three occasions was a futile attempt made to renew the friendly relations

<sup>1</sup> *Windham's Diary*, p. 219.

between Burke and Fox. The first attempt was undertaken by Burke himself, whether voluntarily or employed against his inclination is not recorded, but in a manner which Fox, of all men, was not likely to accept.

Burke wrote to Fox saying that he hoped their "political differences would not extinguish their mutual friendship," and, to this overture, Fox replied amicably that he was leaving St. Ann's the next day, in order to pay a visit to the Duke of Norfolk, and he wished that Burke would come to see him there.

Burke accordingly went to the Duke's, accompanied by Powis, and after a friendly conversation on the crisis, he suddenly offered Fox the Secretaryship for Foreign Affairs—"with such emoluments as he should prescribe." The other appointments which he said he proposed were: Sheridan as Under-Secretary, with £2000 per annum; for Grey, either the War or Paymaster Office; and for Bedford "Ireland, with the whole Patronage thereof."

Fox smiled at this information, and pointed out that he could not understand how such a proposal could be made, as his new friends must know that he was pledged to give "all his opposition to the system which had so long prevailed."

Powis thereupon attempted to cajole him. Fox, he said, must not consider himself as belonging to himself; his great abilities belonged to the public who, at this awful season, had a right to their utmost exertions. Fox quietly remarked that he was afraid he should keep some very worthy gentlemen waiting for their dinner at St. Ann's if he did not start for home immediately; and he promptly wished the pair "Good morning."

He told this story to Coke, who happened to relate it when dining at Lord Suffolk's in 1796. Lord Charlemont, commenting on it afterwards to a correspondent who had repeated it to him, says:—

“The conversation between Fox and Burke is certainly curious and not unlikely to have happened exactly as it was related to you. That overtures have been made I have little doubt, though the choice of Burke as a negotiator seems most whimsical and not a very wise one; yet there is no reason why the fact should not be precisely true, and there can be no better authority than Mr. Coke of Norfolk.”<sup>1</sup>

Not long afterwards, a common friend, Lord Petre, determined to afford the former allies an opportunity of reconciliation, and to this end he prepared a contrivance by which he hoped to turn their difference of opinion into a jest. He invited both statesmen to dinner, and upon entering the dining-room they perceived, in the centre of the table, a wonderful piece of confectionery fashioned in a model of the Bastille. As soon as dessert was put upon the table Lord Petre turned to Burke.

“Come, Burke,” he said, “attack that Bastille!” Burke gravely declined. “Well, Fox,” pursued his lordship, “do you do it.” “That I will, by God!” cried Fox heartily, and instantly dashing at the elaborate confectionery he demolished it with all the hilarity of a boy.<sup>2</sup>

One last attempt was made by Fox to heal the

<sup>1</sup> Historical Manuscripts Commission, Vol II, p. 179; (Charlemont to Halliday), Thirteenth Report, Part VIII, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoir, Journal and Correspondence of T. Moore*, edited by Lord John Russell, M.P., Vol. V, p. 281. *Credat judæus*, comments Tom Moore, somewhat absurdly, with regard to this story. As Coke was present at the dinner, and Tom Moore was not, the authority of the former appears the more reliable.

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breach. When Burke was dying Fox went to see him, but Burke refused the interview. On Fox's return Coke was lamenting Burke's obstinacy.

"Oh," replied Fox philosophically, "never mind, Tom; I always find every Irishman has got a piece of potato in his head!"<sup>1</sup>

Yet Fox was perfectly ready to acknowledge when Burke's judgment had been more accurate than his own. Speaking once of Burke's book which he had opposed so violently, Fox said cheerfully—

"Well, Burke is right—but Burke is often right, only he is right too soon!"<sup>2</sup>

In 1792 the great severance between the leading Whigs reached its culminating point. In the spring of that year was established the Society of "Friends of the People," for the express purpose of advancing Parliamentary Reform, but which was accredited with revolutionary tendencies. Its list included twenty-eight Members of Parliament, and such names as Lord John Russell, Grey, Sheridan and Erskine; but both Fox and Coke, from different motives, refused to belong to it. For this Fox was greatly blamed by his party; he was accused of apathy towards Reform, and, indeed, at this date he was secretly unconvinced respecting the advisability of that measure. But Coke, who from the first was its ardent advocate, caused yet greater surprise to his friends by his firm refusal to join a society formed in harmony with his well-known opinions. His motive, however, is not far to seek.

<sup>1</sup> *Haydon's Journals and Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 373.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, edited by her niece, 1842, Vol. V, p. 316.



Since anything in the nature of a bond or pledge was obnoxious to him, to join such a society was to bind himself to principles with regard to which, if his loyalty could not survive *without a pledge*, it degenerated into mere cowardice. He regarded with silent contempt all whose integrity required thus cementing.

Meanwhile, amidst the anxiety with regard to affairs on the Continent, the state of political feeling at home was calculated to cause alarm. The revolutionary spirit which was running riot in France proved infectious, and the disaffected amongst the lower orders in England appeared disposed to adopt violent measures in dealing with their grievances. In 1791 Paine<sup>1</sup> had published the first part of *The Rights of Man*, which assisted in rousing the feeling of all classes to a dangerous pitch of excitement, and which filled the Government with alarm at the progress of opinions calculated, they feared, to undermine all law and order. These feelings were further intensified by a Royal Proclamation issued on May 21st, 1792, warning the people against seditious writings, assemblies, etc., and representing in strong colours the dangers to which the nation was exposed.

It is possible to create evils by suggestion; and in laying stress on dangers which were as yet potential, the Government was no doubt giving them a solidity in the minds of the people which they might otherwise never have possessed. Coke was convinced that such a measure at such a juncture was both impolitic and tactless on the part of Pitt, and that Parliament

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Paine, a Norfolk man, Deist and Radical (1737-1809), son of an ex-Quaker stay-maker.

should have rested on its own strength without making any appeal to the people. "And there was a time," supplemented Doctor Parr sadly, "when Mr. Windham more than almost any other man was distinguished by this solid and dignified way of thinking!" But now Windham, in his new rôle as the ally of the Minister, strongly advocated the policy of the alarmists.

Soon afterwards, an address was moved in Parliament to thank the King for the Proclamation, and this occasion may be regarded as the exact point at which the new division of parties sprang prominently into view, for it was supported by many of the leading Whigs. The Duke of Portland, Lord Fitzwilliam, Windham, and Lords John and William Russell, brothers of the Duke of Bedford, openly avowed themselves adherents of Pitt's policy; while among those who remained faithful to Fox were Grey, Sheridan, Erskine, Samuel Whitbread, and "with them," writes Lord John Russell, "sat Mr. Coke and Mr. Lambton,<sup>1</sup> two of the richest of the county gentlemen."<sup>2</sup>

The advocates of Pitt's policy in Norwich, therefore, held a meeting approving the address. This was supported by Windham the Apostate, Mr. Buxton and Charles Townshend. None but those who were in favour of the Proclamation attended the meeting, with the exception of Coke, who characteristically opposed it unsupported, although, naturally, with no hope of success against such overwhelming odds.

"I attended the meeting," he wrote to Dr. Parr, "not with any hope of opposing an Address on the

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Lord Durham.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Times of C. J. Fox*, by Lord John Russell (1859-66), Vol. II, p. 321.

Proclamation, but thereby to express my disapprobation of a measure which I deem calculated to spread a general alarm without any reasonable cause for fear, and to rouse our friends; in which objects our artful Minister has, I fear, succeeded but too well.

“Windham spoke well, I only wish it had been in a better cause; but I must confess, I do not feel myself impressed with those terrors of impending evil with which he said his mind was filled, and I went so far as to whisper to him that I thought a time would come when he would find the storm would burst from another quarter, and that he would feel himself under the necessity of holding different language, for that the executive power appeared to me to be gaining strength daily, which afforded just offence to us of the Commons, tho’ I so far agreed with him that this was not the moment to attempt Reform. As none but Addressers attended the meeting, but myself, I was the only individual present who did not sign the Address.”

“*Bustle* there is!” responded Dr. Parr, “but I can assure our friend Mr. Windham that, even in this land of Toryism where I live, no man seems to have any real fears.” He implored Coke to exert his influence to turn Windham from such evil ways, since already in London bets were afloat for and against the Apostate’s prospects at the next Norwich election.

Perhaps in consequence of this suggestion, two days after the meeting at Norwich, on July 3rd, Coke rode over to Felbrigg, doubtless to reason warmly with the Apostate upon his attitude of antagonism towards his former political party. Curiously enough, Windham in his diary explains that this was the first time during his own residence at Felbrigg that his friend Coke had ever been inside the house. Coke stayed to dine, but, possibly in consequence of himself and his host failing

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to agree, refused to stay the night and rode back again  
twenty-five miles to Holkham.

Fox, however, still endeavoured to treat the situation philosophically. "It is lucky," he pronounced to Coke, "for both Burke and Windham that they take the royal side on the subject of the French Revolution, for they would certainly have been hanged on any other!"<sup>1</sup>

Still the question of a war with France hung in abeyance; but events drew rapidly to the conclusion which the adherents of Fox deplored. Parliament was summoned to an Autumnal Session, and, in the Commons, Fox's following diminished from about 160 to 50, while in the Lords he had but ten or twelve adherents left. Next, the unsettled state of affairs, the seditious conduct of the revolutionary societies in England, and the increasing tendency to riot, made Pitt decide to call out the militia on December 1st. His legal excuse for this measure was alleged insurrection amongst the lower orders; but it was suspected that he had made up his mind, not only for repression in England, but for war abroad.

Coke remained at Holkham, having good sport in the coverts, especially with woodcock, presents of which he constantly sent to Fox. Meanwhile his friends kept him informed of the course of events; and two letters which he received at this date show the light in which current affairs were regarded by members of opposing factions.

The first is from Roger Wilbraham, M.P. and F.R.S.,<sup>2</sup> who was a lifelong friend of Coke's. He had a house

<sup>1</sup> Moore's *Life of Sheridan*, Vol. II, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Son of Roger Wilbraham, of Nantwich, by his second wife, Mary, daughter of Thomas Hunt, of Mollington, and great-nephew of Henry, third Earl of Radnor.



ROGAR WILBRAHAM, M.P.



at Twickenham, surrounded by a garden which became celebrated for its beautiful flowers. He was a great scholar and a great gardener, a politician, an agriculturist and, withal, a philosopher. He was Coke's consultant in the purchase of many valuable MSS. ; and a clump of trees in the park at Holkham is still named after him.

*Roger Wilbraham to Thomas William Coke.*

“Dear Coke,                   “LONDON, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1792.

“I see no occasion for your coming to Town, but will learn more before I close up my letter. The mischief is done and I fear is a very great one. I do not know that the D. of P. has behaved in a manner at all culpable. In a conversation I had with him he highly blamed the Ministry for spreading what he thought a groundless alarm by calling out the Militia ; among the fifty minority were Lord E. Bentinck, young Lord George Cavendish, two Lord Russels, H. Howard, Lord Milton, etc. ; so that, at least, Mr. Fox was in appearance supported by the principal Whig aristocracy of this country. We have probably by our conduct irritated these mad and victorious Quixotes of a Liberty, the principles of which they do not practise ; and may involve this country in a war which possibly might have been avoided. They have at present an established Government, why not acknowledge it? it must be done sooner or later, and the acknowledging of it might be very advantageous to this country.

“Adieu, my dear Coke, remember me with great kindness and respect to the ladies, and believe me most sincerely yours.

“R. W.

“If anything occurs worth communicating, I shall give you another line.

“3 o'clock.

“I have just now been talking to Fox ; he does

not see any immediate necessity for your leaving Holkham—we shall probably divide no more before the Holy Days, and certainly not on Fox's motion of this day to acknowledge the Republic of France. I asked him if he should be down in Norfolk about Xmas; he feared not, from the probable shortness of the recess; but on my telling him that an acquaintance told me he had heard from Mr. Pitt that Parliament would probably adjourn on Xmas Eve, and that he did not see any reason why they should not adjourn to near the Birthday, he replied, 'In that case I may very probably go down.'

Six days later, Coke's other correspondent wrote gloomily—

*Extract from a letter from William Windham  
to T. W. Coke.*

“ Dear Coke,

“ You will have seen in general by the papers the progress of our proceedings, and they are certainly not such as to have given you much satisfaction. My hope was to have found that the opinions of our friends, when they came to be explained, approached near enough to each other to have admitted of some course of proceeding, or of some declaration in which we might all have agreed; but after the best determination that I can foresee of our respective sentiments, that hope, I confess, is reduced almost to nothing.

“ The fact is that Fox's mind and affections are so given to this French Revolution; he is so little inclined to see any ill in it, and so much disposed to hope good; he views with so little apprehension the chance of effects which it may produce here, and has such a dread that by decrying the French, we are to injure the English Constitution, that I do not see in the actual state of things what community there can be of conduct between him and those who think of these things as almost all the rest of his friends do. We



must wait till circumstances shall become so critical as to leave no room for dissent among those who might differ now most widely. In the meanwhile each must go his way (not individually, I don't mean, but according to the two great parts into which we are, unhappily, divided), not separating with any ill-will to each other, but with the earnest hope that our separation may be temporary, and that we may soon find ourselves together again in our old connexion; the idea of continuing measures in which we might appear in conduct to be as much united—as we still are, I am persuaded, in affections—has been tried already without success, and been adhered to, perhaps, already too long.

. . . . .

“Fox, in the meantime, is seeking to abate something of the violence of people against him, and by different steps which he is taking, and by his language yesterday about war, is, I hope, preparing for a course of conduct which may do away with much of the injury which he has lately done to himself. Never was there a man who had made such war upon all his own hopes and advantages. Had this cursed institution of “The friends of the People” never taken place, or had he done with respect to it what regard to himself—equally with regard to his party—required, he would have been at this moment either in the lead of affairs, or in a situation still more proudly elevated, that of seeing his antagonists prostrate before him, and dependent for their power on his forbearance and magnanimity. All this he has now lost; and, in a way, in my opinion, never to be wholly recovered.

“The terror is that, finding other prospects more and more desperate, he should give more and more in to those French principles, and at last throw himself into the arms of that party.

“With respect to Coalitions, you need have no apprehensions. . . .

“With respect to War, Pitt's speech last night left it quit: undecided . . . but I hope that this country

may be ready and disposed to take all proper measures for the resisting this alarming progress of the French Power.

“ I will not, after such a long letter, add more than my request of compliments to the ladies, and that you believe me

“ Ever most truly and affectionately yours

“ W. WINDHAM.

“ HILL STREET, *December 21st, 1792.*”

It is to be regretted that Coke's answer to this letter has not been preserved. Within a week, however, he had determined to enter the fray, for on December 27th Fox wrote applauding his decision and begging for his presence on a particular day,—the first, Fox says, on which he himself proposed to attend.

“ I think,” Fox adds, “ every day more and more seriously of the mischievous consequences which this measure must produce, but I believe Pitt is determined to go on with it.”

On February 1st, 1793, war was declared with France. The announcement met with almost universal satisfaction amongst the bulk of the people, who as yet had not realised that a few years of successful achievements in arms may be dearly bought by a long period of national distress.

Soon after its commencement the commercial difficulties in which the country became involved gave weight to their arguments. Extensive mercantile failures occurred, owing to the sudden transition from a state of peace to a state of war, which, by affecting all the foreign commercial relations of the country, was destructive to mercantile credit. Pitt, it is said, was

never desirous for hostilities as his opponents represented him, but he had to bear the onus of the measure, and he certainly grievously miscalculated both the duration of the conflict, and its result on the prosperity of the country. For that war which Pitt and his supporters believed would not last two years, lasted upwards of twenty; and meanwhile the National Debt, which during the American war had increased from 150 to 250 millions, during the war with France increased to 800 millions.

“Would to God!” Coke said years afterwards, “that Ministers had seen their error before they plunged so madly into a war which has nearly been the ruin of the country”;<sup>1</sup> and once, during a period of acute national poverty and agricultural distress, he wrote an undated memorandum in a notebook:—

“If Pitt could look up from his grave, he might well say: ‘Behold the consequences of having interfered with France in ’92.’—George III and the Tories have to answer for it all!”

<sup>1</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, January 23rd, 1830.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## CHARITY, AND A WEDDING

1792-1795

*Ætat* 38-41

**D**ESPITE the prevailing political excitement at this period, Dr. Parr became occupied about a private matter, with regard to which he soon wrote to solicit Coke's assistance.

*Dr. Parr to Thomas William Coke.*

"HATTON, NEAR WARWICK,

"June 12th, 1792.

"Dear Sir,

"The experience I have had of your generosity and munificence induces me to take a second liberty in laying before you a case which extremely interests my feeling, and I trust will not be thought wholly unworthy of your attention. I shall do myself the honour of laying before you the most important particulars of the case, and for information I shall beg leave to refer you to Mr. Windham, who is personally acquainted with the extraordinary merits and the peculiar situation of the gentleman in whose behalf I am now writing to you.

"Mr. Porson is a native of Norfolk.<sup>1</sup> He was born of very humble parents in the neighbourhood

<sup>1</sup> Richard Porson, Professor of Greek in the University of Cambridge from 1792 to 1808. His father was a weaver and his mother the daughter of a shoemaker.

of North Walsham. His wonderful talents induced some worthy men to support him by subscription, first at Eton School, and afterwards at Trinity College, Cambridge. He justified and rewarded their kindness by a most astonishing proficiency in learning, and I hazard nothing when I assure you that at this moment he is the very best Greek Scholar in England. An University Scholarship, which he gained by his uncommon and indeed unparalleled erudition, has for some time been vacant, and in August next he must give up a very profitable fellowship at Trinity College, because he cannot, from motives of conscience, take orders, which by the statute of the society are necessary after a term of years. His honour therefore deprives him of the protection to which his learning entitles him, and he is thrown upon the world without a fortune and without a patron. One cruel aggravation of his case is that at Trinity College there are only two fellowships which laymen can long hold. Lately, one of these fellowships became vacant, and with claims such as no scholar could urge since the days of Dr. Bentley, Mr. Porson applied for it. I feel a pang when I tell you that the Master of the College who knows Mr. Porson's distresses, attainments, and talents, was pleased to refuse his request, and to give the fellowship to a relation of his own.

“Mr. Porson is a man of very few wants, not much acquainted with the world, and possessed of an independence of spirit, not favourable to his interests. Work he must, and work he will, for his bread; and work, too, in such a manner as will do honour to the literature of his country and age. But so great a man should not be left wholly dependent upon booksellers, nor exposed to the distresses which age or sickness may bring upon him. His friends, therefore, intend to raise the sum of thirteen hundred pounds for buying him an annuity, and probably they will consult his feelings by not informing him, in detail, who his benefactors are.

“Such, sir, is the case which I have the honour

of submitting to your consideration, and when I assure you that Norfolk never produced a greater man and that England at this day cannot boast of so good a scholar, I hope that you will forgive me for sympathising with his sorrows and for endeavouring to interest men of fortune and men of worth in his favour.

“I will again refer you to Mr. Windham for the confirmation of what I have said.” . . .

“Less said by you on behalf of Porson’s great mind,” replied Coke, “would have been sufficient, without referring me to a second person to induce me to contribute by a small gift of £50 to his future comfort, which I send a draft for.”

To which Parr replied, on June 27th :—

“Yesterday I had the honour of receiving your very obliging letter, together with a most valuable present of fifty pounds in favour of Mr. Porson, for which, both in his name and my own, I entreat you to accept my most respectful and grateful acknowledgments. To a man in whose mind benevolence is united with that delicacy which is the fruit of good learning, it is a great consolation indeed to have an opportunity of directing his application to men of that prompt and dignified generosity which I have more than once experienced in you.

“It will, I am sure, give you satisfaction to be told that our learned Norfolkian will probably be more comfortable for the rest of his days.”

In this instance, out of his own small means, Parr personally contributed fifteen pounds to the fund, and the result of the subscription collected was to provide Porson with an annuity of £100 a year. Thenceforward Parr always endeavoured to befriend the great Greek scholar, in spite of the strenuous opposition of Mrs. Parr, who objected, and not without ample reason,

to the dirty and drunken habits of her husband's celebrated protégé. Still more, although a vain man, and extremely jealous of his own priority in the Republic of Letters, Parr always magnanimously paid a tribute to Porson's learning. "Professor Porson," he would say, "is the best Attic Greek scholar in Europe"; only, one day, when out riding with a friend, Parr suddenly switched his horse with an uncontrollable impulse and exclaimed, determinedly: "Porson has more Greek, but no man's horse, John, carries more Latin than mine!"

Parr's readiness to acknowledge the merits of a rival, however, Porson did not share. Though grateful for the Doctor's efforts on his behalf, Porson viewed Parr very much in the light of sounding brass, and was keen to throw ridicule upon Parr's bombastic conversation. The only record of Coke ever meeting Porson was on the well-known occasion when, a large company being assembled at the Doctor's house, and Parr being minded to introduce some profound topic which should give full scope for displaying his own exceptional powers of reasoning, turned to Porson and inquired sententiously: "Pray, sir, what do you think about the introduction of moral and physical evil into the world?" A hush fell upon the company, and all awaited Porson's reply with respect. He thought for a moment, and then, with an air of solemnity which rivalled the Doctor's own, delivered himself of the conclusion which effectually nipped Parr's eloquence: "Why, Doctor, I think we should have done very well without either!"

Porson's unbroken assurance, in short, awed even the self-complacency of Parr; and the Doctor, who

invariably lost his temper when contradicted, was no match for the cool and impudent repartee of the great Grecian. On one occasion in a dispute with Porson, Parr, feeling he was getting the worst of the argument, said rudely: "Professor, *my opinion* of you is most contemptible!" "Sir," returned Porson calmly, "I never knew an *opinion* of yours that was *not* contemptible!"

The year following Parr's championship of Porson, another and a far different subject for charity presented itself to Coke.

At this date Fox's financial embarrassment, occasioned by his reckless extravagance, had reached a crisis which made it imperative that his friends should come to his assistance. Once Fox, alluding to his ill-health, had remarked that he was compelled to observe much regularity in his diet and hours, adding, "I live by line and rule, like clockwork." "Yes," replied his friend, "I suppose you mean you go *tick, tick, tick!*"<sup>1</sup> But by 1793 matters reached a point at which even this method of procedure was closed to him, and while Fox himself wondered, somewhat hopelessly, if he could make a living at the Bar, his friends decided to form a committee, secretly, to discover some plan of affording him relief.

Coke was one of the first to respond to, if he did not actually originate, the means to be adopted to this end. The committee consisted of himself, Lord G. Cavendish, Lord John Russell, and Messrs. Crewe, Coombe, Adair, Byng, Francis Wyner, Wrightson, Skinner and Pelham. They met at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand on June 1st and discussed how the proposed

<sup>1</sup> Wraxall, *Posthumous Memoirs*, Vol. I, p. 239.



assistance could be proffered in a guise which would not offend. It was finally decided that it should take the delicate form of "offering to Mr. Fox some effective testimony of gratitude for his long and unwearied public exertions."

The question had no sooner been bruited than Parr got wind of it. He waited till after the meeting, and then wrote to beg Coke to give him further information that he might become "a humble fellow-labourer in this important work of justice to the most injured of men, and of gratitude to the most useful of citizens, and of reverence to the most accomplished of Statesmen."

"It gives me great pleasure," Coke replied, "to find that we may rank you with the promoters of the present laudable undertaking, which succeeds beyond the most sanguine expectations we could form! Nor am I less pleased to find that you agree with me in thinking that Mr. Fox never deserved better of his country for his parliamentary conduct during the present Session, in opposing measures which I fear will shortly be proved to have plunged this country in very serious difficulties, with no better plea on the part of the Administration than to avert very distant evils, or rather danger of their own creating, in order, by working on the fears of the timid, to obtain the sanction of Parliament for involving us in the present calamitous war. All we have now to hope for is a speedy conclusion of it. But this we must hope for in vain, as nothing less than unconditional submission on the part of France will be accepted by those in power, notwithstanding our dearly-bought experience in America."

Mrs. Coke also wrote furnishing Parr with particulars respecting the proposed fund, and a fortnight later the Doctor replied that he was "happy and proud to

acknowledge" the letters by which he had been honoured from both, and to explain that he had sent his "little contribution" to the Fund. "It contains," he adds with a simplicity which contrasts with his otherwise bombastic utterances, "a full half-year of my ecclesiastical income—I wish it could with convenience have been more."

He forthwith started an active canvass on behalf of the Fund, and forwarded to Holkham a detailed account of his stewardship.

"With the good people of Warwick I had many interviews; they are few in number and not very affluent in circumstances, but truly Whiggish in principles, and to Mr. Fox most friendly in attachment. Just before I left the country it was settled that upon the return of some reputable tradesman from Chester Fair, my friends should meet and agree upon their contributions. I left with them two guineas, which I received at a Bowling Green from a country clergyman and a country surgeon whose hearts are with us and whose gifts would have been larger if prudence had permitted. A wise and worthy man who lives at Birmingham, and whose firmness in seasons of danger and difficulty would stand even comparison with your own, gave me a hundred pounds. . . . I applied to a neighbouring clergyman at Kenilworth—whose property and person have been threatened as well as my own, because his opinions are just and his spirit as firm as my own—and though encumbered with a family of six or seven children, he assured me he would send ten pounds."

A Quaker and an "opulent Dissenter" in Birmingham were the next objects of Parr's attacks. In Worcestershire he had the good fortune to encounter a "sturdy Whiggish yeoman," and "by my conversation with him I obtained a promise that he would give,

and persuade others to give to the full extent of their power ; neither he nor his neighbours are rich, but they will do something, and whatever they do will be well meant." In Monmouthshire he stayed with friends whose principles gave him the liveliest satisfaction.

"You would sympathise with the joy I feel, not only from the hospitality and politeness of my host and hostess, but from the sincerity of their attachment to Whiggism, and from the warmth of their regard for Mr. Fox. I am at this moment surrounded by Welsh mountains, and I have a better taste for their grandeur from the presence of four Whigs whom no Court can corrupt, whom Pitt could never delude, and whom Mr. Windham himself could not intimidate ; from one of them I shall this day send up a contribution of ten pounds, and of the rest I am happy and proud to assure you that they feel all the ardour, and will act with all the generosity which you or I could wish. . . . My worthy host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Greene, are just as warm in the business as myself, and will do what is considered proper. Believe me, dear Sir, that if the success of our cause depended upon honest hearts and wise heads, these four Whigs would lead four hundred Tories captive, and put four thousand to shame by the rectitude of their intentions and the manliness of their conduct. . . ."

Apart from the burning question of party politics, and of patriotism as interpreted by active antagonism to Pitt, if posterity needed proof of the affection which Fox was capable of inspiring, they might surely find it in Dr. Parr's letter. The people of Warwick "not very affluent in circumstances," the "reputable tradesman" at Chester, the country clergyman and surgeon at the Bowling Green, the parson at Kenilworth with his large family, the "sturdy Whiggish yeoman," the

“well-disposed attorney,” and others apparently of small means, all giving what they could ill afford, not to mention Parr himself cheerfully resigning half his slender yearly stipend—these are surely remarkable proofs of the sway which Fox exercised over the minds of his countrymen, more especially when one considers that all these contributors to the Fund must have been fully aware that Fox owed his distress, not to undeserved misfortune, but wholly to his own reckless folly and vice ; a cause by which they had no guarantee that their offerings would not also be quickly dissipated.

And if further evidence were needed, it might be found in the fact that a man, then almost in as great straits pecuniarily as was Fox himself, gave handsomely to the Fund. That man was Coke’s old friend Lord Moira (formerly Lord Rawdon), and his donation was due to the following curious chain of events.

While Lord Moira was absent in India, the Duke of Richmond made certain observations respecting him in the House of Lords at which Lord Moira took great offence. Immediately upon his return to England, he called upon the Duke, and demanded a retraction and an apology. To this the Duke at once consented, but Lord Moira, not deeming a private apology adequate, required the Duke to read a public apology in the House of Lords. This also the Duke did, and Lord Moira then decided to call upon Fox to do the same in the House of Commons. Coke, knowing Fox’s independent spirit, and that he would never consent to make an apology in any but his own words, went to the House of Lords—the first occasion on which he ever set

foot inside its walls—and sent for Lord Moira. He implored the latter not to put his intentions into execution, saying, “Fox is my dearest friend; and if you did but know him as well as I do, you would love him as much.”

At length Lord Moira consented to forego his intention; whereupon Coke insisted that he should come, forthwith, and be introduced to Fox. From that time forward these two great men, on the strength of their common friendship for Coke, became devoted to each other. When the subscription for Fox was being privately raised, Coke, knowing that Lord Moira was himself in pecuniary distress, did not wish him to contribute to it, but happening one day inadvertently to mention the existence of the Fox Fund in Lord Moira’s presence, the latter, with characteristic generosity, at once exclaimed, “Tom, I am delighted you have mentioned it to me—here is a thousand pounds!” and without a moment’s hesitation he presented Coke with a cheque for the amount named.<sup>1</sup>

The result of the subscriptions got together by Fox’s friends was a sum which enabled them to present him with a handsome annuity of £3000, for which Coke and two of his friends were appointed trustees; and which Fox accepted in the spirit in which it was tendered. From that day forward Fox never attended Newmarket,<sup>2</sup> nor ever again played for money; and although this must be considered as only what was due to the friends who had helped him in his embarrassment, yet in view of the habits of his whole former life it also

<sup>1</sup> Told by Coke to the Hon. the Rev. Thomas Keppel, Holkham MSS.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of the Whig Party*, by Henry Vassall, third Baron Holland (1854), Vol. I, p. 66.

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indicates a strength of moral character with which his enemies did not always accredit him.

During the months which followed, Coke does not appear to have taken any prominent part in current politics. The adherents of Fox were too much in the minority to stem the tide of events ; the great measures which Coke had most at heart—Parliamentary Reform, Catholic Emancipation and the Abolition of the Slave Trade—were all, perforce, in abeyance. Measures more pressing at the moment, though of less permanent national import, occupied the attention of the House. Foremost amongst these was the unsettled condition of the lower orders throughout the land. For the spirit and the panic of impending revolution had spread through England till it had become a terror which inflamed the disaffected and paralysed the orderly ; and the measures by which Pitt endeavoured to cope with it seemed only to increase the passions of the seditious and to alienate the peaceable, who were indignant at what they considered his interference with the sacred rights of the individual.

Still more, the result of the war which Coke had anticipated was already taking effect ; the National Debt went up by leaps and bounds, taxation became intolerable ; while, daily, the uselessness of interference with France became more apparent. For even the more moderate among the French politicians who condemned the methods by which France was obtaining her freedom, recognised that freedom to be a matter of such vital necessity that, whatever the cost, they were pledged to defend and maintain it.

Throughout this period Dr. Parr never ceased to inveigh loudly in his lengthy letters to Coke against "the cunning of Mr. Pitt and the ingenuity of our friend Mr. Windham." Twice he relates sarcastically how he encountered Windham and expostulated personally with the Apostate :—

"I was well aware of the blind zeal which actuates our Felbrigg friend, but I had not heard of his intolerance. I met him twice last February; the conversation was warm each day, and on the second day he, with some precipitation, left the room. . . . I did not find that he was gifted with a new stock of ability to defend his new system of politics. . . . It took Mr. Windham some hours to explain his meaning, and it will take me many years to understand it!"

And again he laments :—

"It gives me the most agonising feelings to find our honourable friend, Mr. Windham, so devoted to bad men and so enslaved to a bad cause. Of his integrity you and I can have no doubt, and for his desertion even my partiality can make no apology. . . . Let the intrigues of the Court, or the division of parties, or the madness of the people be what they will, I know that you are acting the wise, as well as the honourable part. And I know also that the day cannot be very distant when they who now condemn, will hereafter applaud and thank you."

But seeing that little hope existed, as yet, of stemming the adverse tide of politics, Coke tried to devise other means of lessening the universal distress. About this date we find him writing earnestly to Arthur Young to point out how the riots among the lower classes might always be traced to the same cause—the high price of provisions, especially of bread. "From my own

observation," he remarks, "I do suspect the poor suffer greatly from the shameful practices and combinations of the millers," and he proposed framing a bill to fix an assize on flour, according to the average price of wheat, which should enforce millers to grind for all persons at a certain sum per bushel, such persons being at liberty to inspect the corn whilst grinding, and penal clauses to be enacted against any adulteration of the wheat, or mixing water with the meal to increase the weight.

"I must also mention another cruel grievance to the poor," he added; "that there is no legal restraint on shopkeepers in villages respecting their weights and measures. Could no means be devised to protect the buyer from the artifices of the seller without injury to the latter in their honest gains? Why might not magistrates have the power of punishing for short weights and measures, complaint to be made within six days?"<sup>1</sup>

But Arthur Young's answer has not survived, and more than a century was to pass before Coke's suggestion of a Government supervision of weights and measures was adopted.

While these matters were occupying his attention, however, an event happened at Holkham in which he was, no doubt, even more interested than in a vain attempt to bring about the betterment of public affairs.

His two daughters, Jane and Ann, were now approaching womanhood. Jane, on December 22nd, was about to complete her sixteenth year; while Ann had passed her fourteenth birthday on the previous January 23rd.

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography of Arthur Young*, ed. by M. Betham Edwards, p. 212.



The former had become a strikingly beautiful girl, the exact counterpart of her mother in feature, colouring and expression, although she is reputed never to have attained to Mrs. Coke's perfection of figure. A picture of her by Hoppner when she was quite young shows a lovely, roguish face, with a marvellous wealth of auburn hair piled carelessly above her forehead and falling in luxuriant masses about her shoulders. To her mother's beauty she united much of her father's brain; and the inherent love of art, which had shown itself in two generations of Cokes, found expression again in her wonderful genius for painting.

She was only fifteen when she painted a most remarkable picture, with about five life-sized figures, of Belisarius begging—an ambitious and successful work, even for an artist of more mature age; and had she belonged to a later generation, or been born in a different sphere, there can be no doubt that she would have made her mark as an artist of no small repute.

Ann, too, had a great artistic talent. Some of her pictures painted when she was quite young, both original portraits and copies from the old masters, are extraordinarily clever; while the exquisite manner in which, later in life, she copied and renovated some of the delicate illuminations in the old missals at Holkham, as we shall see, filled Roscoe with admiration.

Both she and her sister were pupils of Gainsborough, who stayed at Holkham to teach them; and although it is impossible to tell if the master's brush improved the pupils' work, it is certainly difficult in some instances to distinguish between the paintings of the former and of the latter.

Ann, without being possessed of the really dazzling beauty of her sister, was an unusually handsome girl, with fine eyes and a brilliant complexion. She had been more carefully relegated to the schoolroom than Jane, who, in her position of elder daughter, had taken a certain part in social events ever since she had opened the ball in 1788. Yet both girls had been brought up with the greatest care and a complete absence of luxury. Everything which could make them simple in their tastes and hardy in health was carried out in their education. Their food was of the plainest description, they were never allowed a fire in their bedrooms, or to approach the fire in the schoolroom by stepping upon the hearthrug,—and this despite the fact that, according to the fashion of the day, they always wore dresses with short sleeves and low necks, even in the depth of winter. To such a Spartan discipline, however, on the bleak Norfolk coast, and in a large, cold house, even habit could not always inure them; and I have heard a tale that, on one occasion, Ann yielded to the inclination to approach the fire. Coming down to the schoolroom one day at 7 a.m., the hour when they always began lessons in the darkness of the cold winter mornings, Ann found a miserable little apology for a fire flickering out its uncertain life in the large grate. No one being about, the temptation to warm her frozen hands and arms was too strong. She trod upon the forbidden hearthrug, and was lifting up the poker with the intention of poking the fire, when, to her intense dismay, *the poker came in two in her hands!* She used to say that she could never forget the horror of that moment when she



*Portrait of Gainsborough by himself*  
*Painted whilst at Holkham*  
*In the possession of the Earl of Leicester*



recognised the judgment with which her disobedience was so pointedly visited !

It was in the autumn of 1793 that Ann, looking out of the schoolroom window, saw a coach drive up to the front door, and heard that young Mr. Thomas Anson and his father had driven over to see Mr. Coke. The visitors remained for some time apparently in private conversation with her father, and Ann heard it whispered as an open secret that young Mr. Anson had come over to propose for her sister Jane. He was, at that time, twenty-seven years of age, and was heir to Shugborough, which his father had inherited from a maternal uncle.

Suddenly a message arrived in the schoolroom to say that Ann was to descend to the Saloon at once. She ran down in her schoolroom dress, with her long hair falling over her shoulders ; and, to her astonishment, received the announcement that it was for her, and not for her elder sister, that Mr. Anson had proposed.

The engagement was made public shortly afterwards. "I am very happy," wrote Fox on December 19th, "to hear that Miss Ann is to be disposed of in a manner in all respects so eligible. I scarcely know Anson myself, but everybody speaks well of him." At the date of this letter, Ann was within a month and a day of completing her fifteenth year. Five days later, a Norfolk clergyman, who was invited to Holkham, wrote :

"So to Holkham, where we had twenty-three in family, and the most magnificent, elegant, and at the same time agreeable style of living. Lord and Lady Melbourne and three daughters, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Coke, and Mr. Anson made part of the

society. The last-named gentleman is the husband elect of Miss Ann Coke, at present fifteen [*sic*]. She is to wait therefore a year to attain the age of sixteen, before she assumes the Dignity and functions of a matron and Mistress of a Family. Mr. Anson is said to have an Income of £22,000 per annum, and certainly not less than £14, or £15,000.”<sup>1</sup>

Ann wept copiously when her hair was put up for the first time, as she was greatly afraid that Mr. Anson, who had only seen her with it down her back, would not recognise her, or approve of the alteration. The wedding took place on September 2nd of the following year, when she was still within four months of completing her sixteenth birthday. At the wedding breakfast she looked such a child that Dean Anson said mischievously to her: “Ann, if you will run round the table, I will give you a sovereign!” Scarcely had the words left his lips, than away went the delighted bride, and, racing round the table, triumphantly claimed her reward. She had four children before she was twenty, and was so young when she began to go out in London, that her husband provided for her being chaperoned, and at balls insisted on her sitting at cards with the dowagers, which unfortunately gave her a taste for gambling.

Some years later, grave Arthur Young, who viewed all luxury with suspicion, dining at Mr. Anson’s to meet “a farming party,” whom he describes as “all M.P.’s or in high life,”—relates how Mr. Anson’s was “a splendid house, one of the best in London, magnifi-

<sup>1</sup> *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd*, edited by J. H. Adeane (1896), p. 255.

cent furniture, plate, servants, wines and everything equal to £30,000 or £40,000 a year; "but," adds Arthur Young severely, "he has no such income!"<sup>1</sup>

The year after Coke lost his second daughter by marriage, a third daughter was born to him, on March 31st, 1795, who was thus just over sixteen years younger than her next sister, and only a few months older than her niece, that sister's child, who was born the following year. She was christened Elizabeth Wilhelmina, the first name being that of Coke's mother and of his younger sister, Lady Sherborne, while the latter name was given her at the request of the Duke of Clarence, and was then almost unique in England—in fact, I have heard it said that she was, at one time, the sole possessor of the name in this country.

Before her birth, however, Coke had again been drawn into public life. The year 1794 dawned darkly for England with dissension at home and war abroad. On February 7th, Fox wrote from the House of Commons to urge Coke to attend on the following Monday, "when," he says, "Grey makes a motion upon the illegality of introducing foreign troops into this country without the consent of Parliament, which I think a very material question, and on which one would hope we should have some of our old friends again. On Thursday I moved an inquiry into neglects about convoys, and upon both these occasions we shall certainly divide." At this juncture Fox must have clung more tenaciously to those amongst his former friends who, through good and evil report, remained loyal to him.

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography of Arthur Young*, p. 394.

The July following there took place the great secession of the Whigs headed by the Duke of Portland. The Ministry was reconstructed and a new Conservative party was formed; Portland became Home Secretary, Grenville Foreign Secretary, Windham Secretary of War and Fitzwilliam Viceroy of Ireland.

The desertion of the Duke of Portland struck consternation into the ranks of those who adhered to Fox. Coke always maintained that the true cause of the Duke's change of politics was his desire to obtain a renewal of certain property in Marylebone which he held under Government, worth £200,000. But whatever construction may be put on the Duke's motives at this crisis, he fell into the same error of which Pitt had been guilty before him, and endeavoured to bribe Coke into deserting his party. He wrote to Coke telling him that His Majesty had given permission to make three peers, and begging him to choose his title.

Coke's indignation would not permit him to send a mere formal refusal. He at once posted to London and went straight to see Mr. Plumber, a very old and staunch Whig member. He inquired abruptly from the latter whether he was now a friend of Fox or of Portland, "for since so many had changed their principles, it was difficult to know where to find a friend." Mr. Plumber, whose politics were unswerving, replied warmly that if any other man had dared to ask him such a question he would have considered it as a direct insult, but that, since he knew Mr. Coke must have some good reason for such an inquiry, he begged him to explain what this might be.

Coke then told him of the Duke's offer, and that he



wished Mr. Plumber to accompany him to Burlington House, as he required a witness to his interview with the Duke. Mr. Plumber replied that, unfortunately, this was impossible, as he himself had, that very day, taken leave of the Duke for the last time, and had vowed that he would never again set foot in Burlington House.

Coke then repaired to Sir John Miller, to whom he repeated his previous request. Sir John immediately complied, and they went together to Burlington House. Mr. Keppel gives a more explicit account of the interview than that recorded by the Press version of Coke's speech.<sup>1</sup> On entering the room, he says, Coke and Sir John Miller found the Duke of Portland surrounded by about half a dozen friends who were evidently paying great court to him. Directly, however, the Duke saw who his fresh visitors were, he rose, and hurrying eagerly forward, held out both his hands, and welcomed Coke warmly to Burlington House. Coke drew back, and amidst the sudden silence of those present, addressed the Duke in the following words: "My Lord Duke, I have come in person to answer your letter, and to express my astonishment and *disgust* at your Grace's believing me capable of selling my principles for a peerage; and I beg to acquaint you that from this hour I will never again set my foot within your doors. Good morning, my Lord."<sup>2</sup>

He then turned and quitted the room, leaving the Duke confused and the rest of the company much astounded at the episode. "Mr. Coke," said Sheridan

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Holkham MSS.

subsequently, "disdained to hide his head within a coronet when offered him!"<sup>1</sup>

How bitterly Fox felt the desertion of his former friends is shown in the following letter which he wrote to Coke on September 5th, the week before Ann Coke's marriage.

"Dear Coke,—I deferred writing till I had seen Lord Robert, in order to be able to tell you with more certainty about my time of going into Norfolk. I mean to be at Thetford the 15th, and think I shall certainly be at Holkham before the end of the month, probably about the 29th, but when I am in Norfolk I shall be able to let you know for certain.

"Respecting those political events you mention, I have nothing to add to what you say, I am truly sorry for them on every account. It is, in my opinion, a blow to the reputation of all public men, for which even those who, like you and me, are clear of the transaction and disapprovers of it, cannot fail in some degree to suffer; for it will be reasonably said why is [this?] or that man more trustworthy than those who are gone? But enough of this unpleasant subject, and I beg of Mrs. Coke and you to accept my most sincere congratulations on Miss Ann's marriage which I understand is to take place next week.

"You know my stay in Norfolk is cut by the necessity which I am under of being in London on the 10th of October; but I hope both before and after that day to spend some very pleasant days at Holkham. Just about me there are but few birds this year, but I believe this is accidental, as at Oatlands and other places in the neighbourhood there are more than usual, and I saw yesterday above thirty pheasants where I do not think I ever saw more than two or three in former years.

"Yours ever,

"ST. ANN'S HILL, *Sept. 5th.*

"C. J. FOX.

<sup>1</sup> Wraxall, *Posthumous Memoirs*, Vol. I, p. 3.

“Pray tell Ralph,<sup>1</sup> who is I believe with you, that I shall be at Thetford to shoot and dine on the 10th. It would induce him possibly to come thither a day or two before we go to Colham, which I understand to be fixed for 17th.”

In the excitement of his favourite sport at Holkham, Fox tried to bury the recollection of political troubles, but the effort was probably attended with but small success. It was while paying this visit that he wrote to Lord Holland (October, 1794) on the utility of party politics: “I am of opinion,” he says—“I hope not from mere obstinacy—that Party is far the best system, if not the only one, for supporting the cause of liberty in this country. I am convinced that this system, and this alone, has prevented Great Britain from falling into what Hume calls the *euthanasia* of absolute Monarchy. . . . The master of this house, the Duke of Bedford, Guildford, and Derby, and some others, with myself, make undoubtedly a small basis; but then how glorious it would be from such small beginnings to grow into a real strong party such as we once were.”<sup>2</sup>

There is a ring of pathos about the concluding sentence which shows a determined hopefulness in the face of mighty odds. As a result of the defection of so many of his old friends, he wrote more persistently to beg for Coke’s support—for and against measures brought forward in the House.

On January 5th, 1795, Sheridan moved for leave to bring in a bill to repeal the Act of the last session, the

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Dutton, Mrs. Coke’s brother.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life and Times of Charles James Fox*, by Earl Russell (1866), Vol. III, p. 68-9.

Suspension of the Habeas Corpus, and Fox wrote to beg the assistance of both Coke and his brother. Coke was then in town ; none the less, Fox seemed to fear that he would not be present for the division, for writing again more urgently, Fox pointed out the importance of the measures and reiterated—"Unwilling as I am to trouble you, I cannot help very earnestly desiring you to come."

This bill, which was opposed by the apostate Windham and discussed at length by Lord Erskine, was thrown out. Against the Salt and Husbandry Tax, Fox also requested Coke's support, and when the Treasonable Practices Bill and the Seditious Meetings Bill came on he wrote to beg Coke to come up specially from Holkham. "I should be very sorry if these bills were to go without a vote of yours against them," he explains. In the celebrated motion of Fox censuring the Ministers for having unconstitutionally advanced money to the Emperor of Germany and the Prince Condé, Coke again upheld him ; and Fox, in return, gave Coke his aid when the latter carried into law a bill, in which they were both interested, for extending the legal time of shooting.

But to one matter, which was dear to Fox's heart, Coke refused his countenance. In September 1795 Fox married Mrs. Armistead, with whom he had lived for many years ; but great as was Coke's friendship for Fox, he always refused to receive Mrs. Fox at Holkham. Lord John Russell says : "His (Fox's) life from his youth had been one of loose morality. Even now he seems to have been ashamed to avow to his friends and to the world that he was able to call an affectionate and



*The Hon.<sup>ble</sup> Mrs. Charles James Fox.*

*From a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds, in the possession of  
the Hon.<sup>ble</sup> Stephen Parnis of St. Anne Hill, Chertsey*



faithful woman his wife. Hence Mr. Coke, his steady adherent, while he every year gladly received Fox at Holkham, refused to admit Mrs. Fox into his house." Although Mrs. Fox stayed at Woburn, at Mr. Whitbread's, at Lord Robert Spencer's and at the houses of most of his friends, and although Coke must have met her often at St. Ann's Hill, yet he never acknowledged her existence other than by forwarding to her ample presents of Holkham game, or by putting a formal inquiry respecting her health at the end of his letters to Fox; to which Fox replied with an equally polite acknowledgment.

## CHAPTER XIX

## A DUAL BEREAVEMENT

1794-1800

*Ætal* 40-46

**I**N the year of Fox's marriage, another wedding took place of less happy omen. Rumour, which had so often prophesied a separation between the Prince of Wales and Mrs. Fitzherbert, had been particularly active with regard to this matter during the year 1794. "Princess Fitz," as she was facetiously called, was, gossip reported, about to be deserted for some German wife of the King's choosing. Under the circumstances, Coke—not only on account of his intimacy with the Prince, but on account of his friendship with Lord Moira, the Prince's confidant—was constantly applied to as an authority for correct information. On July 15th, 1794, Lord Mornington wrote triumphantly from Brighton to Lord Grenville:

"I heard last night from no less an authority than Tom the Third [Coke] that a treaty of separation and provision is on foot (if not already concluded) between his Royal Highness and the late 'Princess Fitz.' I think you ought to marry his Royal Highness to some *frow* immediately; and I am told (by the same eminent authority) that he is very well disposed to take such a wife, as it may be his Majesty's pleasure to provide for him."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fortescue MSS., Historical MSS. Com., Vol. XI.



Coke's information proved correct. The Prince, in order once more to secure payment of his debts, deserted Mrs. Fitzherbert with as little scruple as he had before exposed her to public dishonour with the same object in view. On April 8th, 1795, he was married to his cousin, the Princess Caroline of Brunswick—a wedding which was succeeded by a separation immediately after the birth of the Princess Charlotte of Wales, on January 7th, of the following year.

The month after this event Coke dined at the Speaker's. The rule was for the Speaker to give a dinner upon the first Saturday of the session to the Ministers and their friends in office, who were Members of the House of Commons. The first Sunday was reserved for the Opposition; afterwards his parties were promiscuous, consisting chiefly of his private friends and those who attended his levées on Sunday evenings. At the Ministerial dinner that year there were twenty-three present; at the Opposition dinner three persons appeared neither in full dress, nor powdered, viz. Grey, Whitbread and General Tarleton; but Fox was in full dress and powdered.

At the dinner when Coke was present, the party, which numbered twenty, dined in a vaulted chamber, an ancient crypt of St. Stephen's Church. They were served on plate bearing the King's arms, and were waited on by three men out of livery and four men in full liveries and bag-wigs. All the guests on that occasion wore Court dress, including the Speaker, except that he wore no sword. Charles Abbot,<sup>1</sup> after-

<sup>1</sup> Charles Abbot (1757-1829), Speaker of the House of Commons, 1801; created Baron Colchester 1817.

wards Lord Colchester, who was one of the guests, relates that: "The style of the dinner was soups at top and bottom, changed for fish, and afterwards changed for roast saddle of mutton and roast loin of veal. The middle of the table was filled with a painted plateau ornamented with French white figures and vases of flowers. Along each side were five dishes, the middle centres being a ham and boiled chicken. The second course had a pig at top, a capon at bottom and the two centre middles were a turkey and a larded guinea-fowl. The other dishes—puddings, pies, puffs, blancmanges, etc. The wine at the corners was in ice-pails during the dinner. Burgundy, champagne, hock, and hermitage. The dessert was served by drawing the napkins and leaving the cloth on. Ices at top and bottom; the rest of the dessert, oranges, apples, ginger, wafers, etc. Sweet wine was served with it. After the cloth was drawn a plate of thin biscuits was placed at each end of the table and the wine sent round, viz. : claret, port, madeira, and sherry. Only one toast was given—"The King." The room was lighted by patent lamps on the chimney and upon the side tables. The dinner table had a double branch at top and bottom, and on each side of the middle of the table. Coffee and tea were served on waiters at eight o'clock. The company gradually went out of the room, and the whole broke up at nine."<sup>1</sup>

The great subject of conversation at this dinner party was the strained relations between the Prince and his wife. The general impression at that date was that the alienation would prove temporary, and that in the inter-

<sup>1</sup> *Diary and Correspondence of Lord Colchester*, Vol. I, pp. 34-35.

ests of the State the Prince would be induced to conquer his dislike to the unfortunate Princess. Coke, aware of the wilfulness of the Prince's disposition, was less sanguine—a view which was shared by his friend Francis, Duke of Bedford, who was always said to be in love with Mrs. Fitzherbert.

In May, 1796, Fox brought forward his famous motion on the conduct of the war with France, when he again wrote to ask for Coke's support. Later in this month Coke was canvassing for re-election as Knight of the Shire.

This was the fourth election in which he had stood for the county of Norfolk, and these contests, as has already been shown, were extremely ruinous. The expense of bringing voters from a distance in those days was very great, and the drink consumed during the poll was a considerable item. Had he accepted a peerage, it would have saved him half a million of money, for in the course of his political life he spent more than this sum on his electioneering expenses. He possessed a large landed property near Manchester, which had been purchased originally by the Lord Chief Justice, and this he sold to defray some of those expenses, parting with it, of course, at a fraction of what its modern value would have represented.

His efforts on behalf of the county were commemorated by a song which used to be sung by the farmers on the estate, the refrain of which ran as follows :—

Squire Coke went to Lunnon to kick up a fūss ;  
He'd best stay at home and grow tur-r-nips with oūs !

Yet they tried to sympathise with what they recog-

nised to be his endeavour to represent their grievances in Parliament. The well-known coach-and-four, with the postillions dressed in blue and buff, and the horses decorated to match, in which he drove about the county on his electioneering campaigns, was sure of a welcome, even in districts which were disaffected to the Whig cause. But on one occasion, when he was returning from canvassing a part of the county supposed to be antagonistic to him, a number of sympathetic tenants, afraid lest he had been disheartened, lay in wait for him outside the park gates, and as his coach approached, the spokesman of the party shouted reassuringly, "Never ye mind, Coke, lad: we'll gie ye *our* vote!" Whereupon the whole party insisted on stopping the coach and shaking him by the hand in order to put heart into him.

Another time, when he was canvassing in a neighbourhood where politics were of a mixed character, he came across a party of rustic politicians, who, arguing hotly, were also staking whatever pence their means allowed on the immediate success or failure of the Whig cause. As he appeared, one of his postillions, who always accompanied him on his electioneering campaigns, came hurrying towards him from the group, scarlet in the face with excitement, and explained naively, "Oh, sir, *such* a thing! I've only got pence on me. Will you, sir, lend me a shilling till we get home, or they'll think me a Jacobin!" Evidently the prestige of his master and of the Whig cause would have been lowered if he, of all people, had failed to produce a sum adequate to the great issue at stake.

In those days to secure success at an election many a

stratagem was resorted to which would now be thought incredible. It is said that on one occasion Coke's partisans planned to make the Tory freeholders drunk at his expense, intending when they were past scenting danger, to lure them on board a ship and keep the ship out at sea till the polling was over. The Tory freeholders fell in readily with the first part of the programme, and feasted royally at the cost of the Whigs; but when the second part of the scheme was about to be put into execution, even their muddled wits became suspicious, and no plausible pretext could induce them to embark on the proposed trial trip. This triumph of intelligence on their part was afterwards celebrated by them in a song, the exultant chorus of which ran—

The Norfolk Freeholders ain't going to sea  
Though a dozen old women put drink in their tea!

That surnames, to which any meaning could be attached, should afford great scope for wit in electioneering times, was only to be expected. The name *Coke*, as is well known, is pronounced *Cook*, and a ridiculous legend runs that it was always called *Cōke*, till coal was found upon the Derbyshire estate, when its present pronunciation was hurriedly adopted, in view of the painful facility for Tory gibes which the older pronunciation would thenceforward afford. It is doubtful whether such a change could ever have recommended itself for such a reason; yet Coke and his friend and neighbour, Lord Albemarle, were fellow-sufferers in this respect, though perhaps Lord Albemarle was peculiarly unfortunate, as his somewhat lugubrious title of *Bury* offered special tempta-

tion to local wags. Coke used to tell a good story that, upon one occasion when he was standing for election with Lord Albemarle, the latter was interrupted upon the hustings by a would-be wag in the audience: "Is thy name Bury?" asked the wag. "It is," replied Lord Albemarle; "have you any objections?" "Well, it has a churchyard sound," complained the wag. "Quite so," said Lord Albemarle; "I have come to *bury the other side!*"<sup>1</sup>

But in Norwich a story is remembered in which Coke did not come off so well as did Lord Albemarle on the above occasion. Previous to the Election of 1796 Coke was walking down the park one day at Holkham with Lord Ormonde (Hereditary Chief Butler of Ireland), when they saw coming towards them a sweep, well known to be a rabid Tory, who at that moment was so extremely black that Coke could not resist inquiring facetiously from him as he passed: "How he had left his father, the Devil?" The sweep showed some gleaming white teeth and replied grimly: "He'll be better soon—he's wanting a *Cook and Butler!*"

For many years in Parliament there had been three Members of the name of Coke, viz. T. W. Coke, M.P. for Norfolk; Edward Coke, of Longford, his brother, M.P. for Derby; and Mr. Daniel Parker Coke, many years M.P. for Nottingham. In order to distinguish which Member was being quoted in the record of parliamentary speeches, Coke was always referred to as "Mr. Coke of Norfolk." This name, used first

<sup>1</sup> I have heard this story told as belonging to modern times. Possibly history repeats itself, but it was William Charles, Lord Albemarle, of whom Coke used to relate it.

merely for purposes of identification, afterwards became a title of honour, and "Coke of Norfolk" was a name which, as its owner's fame grew, was only replaced by that of "the great Coke of Norfolk." Yet some there were who, while familiar with the name, remained ignorant of the causes to which it was to be ascribed, and thus, on one occasion, Coke profited by the dual interpretation which his patronymic afforded. He was journeying through a district where he was unknown, and at an inn where he had prearranged to stop for refreshment he was, to his surprise, served with dinner, which in the number of its courses and the excellence of its cooking rivalled the banquet ordered years before at the village of Bawdeswell by old Lady Leicester. Somewhat mystified at the magnificence of the repast, he inquired the cause: "Ah," responded his informant slyly, "you see we were warned that the Great Cook of Norfolk was about to honour us with a visit, so we did not wish to be outdone!"

George, Lord Albemarle, tells an amusing story of Betty Radcliffe, the landlady of the Bell Inn, Thetford, which probably belongs to the year 1796. "Betty," he explains, "wore a high cap, like that in which Mrs. Gamp is seen in Dickens' novels; and a flaxen wig, which she appeared to have outgrown, for it ill concealed her grey hairs. Being the sole proprietress of post-horses in Norfolk, she assumed an independent demeanour and language, to which every one was compelled to submit. Prior to one of those ruinous election contests in which Messrs. Coke and Wodehouse (afterwards Lords Leicester and Wodehouse) engaged, the

former said to Betty: "I want all your post-horses for the next fortnight." Betty gave Mr. Coke a knowing wink and said: "I dare saa you do, but cub baw [come, boy] along wi' me. What do you see painted on that board?" "'The Bell,' of course." "And on the other side?" "'The Bell,' too!" "Just so," said Betty. "Don't you see that my sign is painted o' both sides? You shall have half my horses, but Wuddus [Wodehouse] the other half."<sup>1</sup>

It is often difficult to assign a date to any particular electioneering ditties, as, if popular, they did duty, with appropriate alterations, for more than one year's canvassing; but one Bacchanalian ditty, which was long a favourite in Norfolk, first saw daylight in the year 1796—the year when Jane Coke married Lord Andover, although the wedding did not take place till after the election, and the name thus bestowed upon her was premature. There are seven long verses, three of which run as follows:—

I can't for my life think it anyway fit  
 That you should be toasting each high-titled man;  
 What have we sons of Norfolk to do with Bill Pitt?  
 Or yet with Charles Fox—that illustrious Statesman?  
 Fill a bumper, my host, and I'll give you my Toast,  
 On whom Norfolk's Yeomanry joyously look.  
 Fill up to the top on't,  
 And drink every drop on't,  
 And cherish your hearts with a bumper to COKE!

*Chorus.*

Then fill high your glass, and around let it pass,  
 Your wine will gain relish by drinking to Coke!

<sup>1</sup> *Fifty Years of My Life*, by George Thomas, Earl of Albemarle (1876), Vol. I, p. 314.



The landlord so good, and the friend so sincere,  
The generous heart that with kindness o'erflows,  
He who wipes from the moist eye of mis'ry its tear,  
Whose soul neither av'rice nor haughtiness knows ;  
Whose liberal hand doth with bounty expand,  
Who the mite from the widow or orphan ne'er took,  
With that true manly pride,  
That's to virtue allied,  
Such a soul is still found in the bosom of COKE !

*Chorus.*

Then replenish the bowl for each honest, true soul,  
And toss off a bumper to Freedom and Coke !

The damsels of Norfolk our triumph to grace, too,  
For Coke and for Freedom their charms will display ;  
See Andover comes with her beautiful face, too,  
And lovely blue eyes that might rival the day.  
That Norfolk for lasses, each county surpasses  
By their sweet selves I swear, and their lips be the book ;  
Thus wine our hearts firing, and Beauty inspiring,  
First drink to the Ladies, and then drink to COKE !

The Holkham freeholders were very proud of the beauty of Coke's eldest daughter, and when during the election her engagement became known, the news was received with universal interest and satisfaction. Now nineteen, she had become celebrated in society for her beauty. During the last two years her likeness to her mother had become accentuated ; as she had lost the plumpness which had belonged to her schoolroom days, her features had acquired the peculiar delicacy of outline for which Mrs. Coke was distinguished, and although her figure is said to have been less fine than her mother's, she was none the less renowned for her gracefulness and her beautiful dancing. Some years

afterwards, when it was put to the question at a large dinner at the Pavilion, who was the handsomest woman in England, the Regent gave it as his opinion—"Without doubt, Lady Andover."

Her attachment for Lord Andover had been of some duration, but he was poor and Coke objected to the marriage. Lady Suffolk, much affronted, inquired, "And pray, sir, does the blood of all the Howards count for nothing?" "Madam," was Coke's answer, "I count my blood as good as the blood of all the Howards."

Apart from the pecuniary objection, none existed, and Coke at length gave his consent. Lord Andover, who was a year older than Jane Coke, was clever, good-looking and extremely attractive. He had greatly distinguished himself at college, and when the marriage at last took place on June 27th, the Dean of Christchurch, who had a great affection for him, journeyed all the way from Oxford to Holkham to perform the ceremony.

Before that date, however, on June 1st, Coke and Sir J. Wodehouse—no doubt with the aid of Betty Radcliffe's post-horses—were both elected without opposition for the county.

Politically, England was approaching a disagreeable crisis. The prospect of a more permanent Government in France had appeared, for a time, to give hopes of that peace for which Pitt was now avowedly anxious. In the autumn of 1796, Lord Malmesbury was dispatched to Paris to enter into negotiations with a view to this conclusion; but France refused to come to terms, and he was requested to leave Paris within forty-eight hours.

Already the star of Napoleon was in the ascendant, and as a young and victorious general he was attracting the attention of Europe. The fear, therefore, of invasion from abroad, the heavy taxation entailed upon the country, the terrible financial distress, aggravated by a succession of poor harvests, and by mutinies in the navy which threatened our maritime power, all combined to render the position of the country extremely serious.

Parr's comments to Coke upon the "Heaven-born Minister," Pitt, waxed yet more scathing :—

"I am not so keen-sighted as some of my brethren in the Doctrine of Original Sin among the natives of the earth ; but if Pitt was born in Heaven I should have no great reliance in the efficacy of original righteousness among the natives of these higher abodes—the Devil, it is said, was born in Heaven, and we know where he now resides. Pitt may be his Minister and Hoadley<sup>1</sup> may be his chaplain, but I have no ambition to keep company with them !"

In April, 1797, a county meeting was held in the open air, on the Castle Hill, in Norwich, which was attended by Coke and Lord Albemarle, and by representatives from most of the great Whig houses, when a petition was moved by Mr. Fellows praying His Majesty to dismiss his present Ministers as the most effectual means of reviving the national credit and restoring peace. This was almost universally adopted. Later in the year, Coke was warned that by thus contumaciously opposing those in power he was sacrificing his popularity. His reply was decisive :—

"I shall not hesitate in so doing," he wrote in the month of September ; "those who are with us upon

<sup>1</sup> Hoadley, chaplain to the Regent.

principle are not to be shaken ; those who are against us will do all the mischief they can whensoever an opportunity occurs. I was brought up to those sentiments—to attach myself to my friends, and to disregard my enemies, and not to betray those who had placed confidence in me, by bargain and sale !”

Throughout that month Fox remained at Holkham. “Mr. Fox has been here since the commencement of the sporting season and stays till ye 6th or 7th of October,” Coke wrote ; but when Parliament reassembled, Fox and Coke, in conjunction with Grey, Sheridan and Whitbread, absented themselves from the House. There was no hope, Coke agreed with Fox, of awakening the nation to a sense of its real condition, and all power of serving the country or his constituents by attendance in Parliament was rendered impossible, when the Minister, by undue influence, had secured for himself a majority which carried everything as he wished.<sup>1</sup>

On December 4th Pitt introduced a bill for trebling the amount of the Assessed Taxes. This appeared to Fox to call for strenuous opposition, and he wrote from town requesting Coke’s attendance in the House. “If the increase of the Assessed Taxes should be as much disliked in Norfolk as it is here,” he suggested, “I think you ought to come up to give one vote against them. I shall come up for it, of course. The dislike to the measure here is very strong indeed, and nearly universal.—Thanks for your game last Friday !”

As a result of this letter, on the 14th of December, when the second reading of the Assessed Taxes Bill

<sup>1</sup> *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, first Baron Colchester*, ed. C. Lord Colchester (1861), Vol. I, p. 122.

was to take place, Fox, Sheridan and Coke again made their appearance in the House. As they passed through the lobby, which was full of strangers, they were greeted by a great burst of applause and clapping of hands. Fox made a long speech ; but the Ayes on the motion for the second reading of the bill were 175 against Noes 50.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the fear of invasion from abroad was hourly increasing throughout England. The alarm reached a climax in May, 1798, when Napoleon, keeping his destination a profound secret, prepared to sail with his troops from Toulon on the 19th. Eventually it was discovered that he was intending a campaign in Egypt, but the impression in England was that his designs were directed against this country, and while his preparations for departure were going on in France, equally rapid preparations were being made in England for his expected arrival. Piles of faggots were ready to be fired in warning of his approach by night, and red flags were sent to each parish to be hoisted on the church steeples as a signal of his approach by day. In many rural districts active steps were taken towards strengthening the national means of defence ; and Coke, although at no time does he appear to have entertained fears of Napoleon's arrival in England, so far yielded to the general panic, that he approached his old friend the Prince of Wales, with a view to strengthening the means of defence on the Norfolk coast.

By now a friendly footing had been re-established

<sup>1</sup> It was again debated in the Commons January, 1798, and finally passed.

between the Prince, Fox and Coke, for the space of about ten years. Annually the Prince had visited Holkham, even during the year of his unfortunate marriage; and whatever opinion Coke entertained, privately, of the Prince's character, the Prince was the avowed friend of his party, and their outward relations were cordial.

*Thomas William Coke to the Prince of Wales.*

“Sir,

“*May 6th, 1798.*

“I hope your Royal Highness will excuse my Presumption in writing this letter, and if, in the request I am going to make, I trespass against the rules of etiquette, I entreat your Royal Highness to pardon my transgression, which must be ascribed to my entire ignorance in these respects.

“Feeling eager to show my zeal in defence of my King and Country at this alarming crisis (however I may distrust Mr. Pitt and his measures, which have produced the dangers which threaten the British Empire), I think the best service I can render is by raising a Squadron of Horse, of the most respectable Yeomanry in this neighbourhood; and I have to request your Royal Highness's permission that we may wear the colours of ye 10th for our Uniform, and that your Royal Highness would have the Condescension to order two soldiers from that Regiment to drill us; and it shall be our study to show ourselves not undeserving these favours by our unremitting endeavours to profit by their instructions, of which I hope your Royal Highness will have the opportunity of judging by honouring Holkham with your presence in the autumn. I have the satisfaction to assure your Royal Highness from every enquiry I have been able to make, all descriptions of people, from the biggest to the lowest, are equally zealous to exert their utmost powers to repel the French and to fight to the last gasp in defence of their King and Country.

“Military operations are forming in every part of this County, the Merchants and inhabitants of Lynn and Wells are arming all their small craft as expeditiously as possible, which is a very wise measure, as the object is to prevent the landing of the enemy in such ships as they must make such an attempt in, with any prospect of success, on our flat shores.

“I am happy to think an united people have little to fear from an invading foe, and I freely confess that the hourly increase of the National Debt till the blessings of Peace shall be restored, and the deplorable condition of Ireland, are more serious objects of terror to me than all the menaces of the French Directory. That every happiness may attend and every evil be averted from your Royal Highness and your Posterity is the fervent prayer of

“Sir,

“Your Royal Highness’s much attached servant,

“THOMAS WILLIAM COKE.”

Apparently, all imminent fear of Napoleon’s advent having been set at rest by the discovery that Egypt was his present destination, a certain delay occurred before the Prince was able to comply with Coke’s request, and another letter from Coke must have urged its fulfilment, occasioning the following correspondence from the Prince:—

*H.R.H. the Prince of Wales to Thomas William Coke.*

“CARLTON HOUSE, *July 12th, 1798.*

“My dear Coke,

“I this morning received your letter, and immediately take up my pen to answer it by return of Post. I assure you I have neither been forgetful nor neglectful as to my not having already sent you a Sergeant to drill and to instruct your Corps; but the sudden order for the march of my Regiment and

for the immediate change of our Quarters, together with the order for our being reviewed by the King, and which is to take place at so early a period as Tomorrow Se'nnight, has entirely prevented my already forestalling your wishes; I have found you a Sergeant, whom I will forward to Holkham as soon as possible after the Review; besides being a good Sergeant, he happens to be one of our best Rough Riders, and consequently perfectly acquainted with the mode of treating the Horses, as well as drilling the Men just as they ought to be for Squadron duty. His name is Holtham, and I think when you see him you will be of opinion that I do not starve the Regiment.

"I beg my very best compliments and kindest remembrance to Mrs. Coke, and am, dear Coke,

"Ever very sincerely yours,

"GEORGE, P."

"P.S.—I hope you have a good prospect of sport, and that the Wet will not effect [*sic*] the Birds, in which I confess I am not a little selfish."

In July, Coke was appointed Major Commandant of the Holkham Yeoman Cavalry, and on the 23rd the Prince wrote to him again, still ignoring all the pressing questions of national import, but dwelling with keen anxiety on the problem whether the Sergeant he was sending to Holkham, would or would not indulge in a failing to which his Royal Master was unquestionably addicted.

"My dear Coke,

"Our Review was over last Friday, and Yesterday I ordered Sergeant Holtham up to town, to take his departure by this evening's stage for Holkham. I think he will not disgrace the Regiment, and that he will be diligent and conduct himself so as to recommend himself to your pro-



tection ; he is honest, and good-tempered, but apt now and then to drink more than he should do, and when intoxicated he forgets himself entirely ; should this happen, it is best not to say anything to him till he comes to himself, and then no man can be more sensible of his error than he is ; he has been perfectly sober of late, but I think it but fair in recommending him to you to state all I know of him to you. Should he, which I flatter myself will be the case, conduct himself quite to your satisfaction, perhaps you may find the means of procuring him in the country some permanent situation for the rest of his Life, in which case I could give him his discharge, as I have done by one, Sergeant Taylor, whom I lent to Lord Egremont, and for whom he has procured a permanent situation for Life in his Yeomanry Corps. Should Holtham conduct himself unworthily, I beg you will make no scruple in writing to me, and I will instantly order him back to the Regiment Bat<sup>n</sup>. I really believe him to be an *excellent fellow*, and that he is perfectly suited to what you want of him.

“In short, my dear Coke, it shall not be my fault, if from the advice I have given, he is not everything he ought to be. My sincere wishes are that he may please, and when I have the pleasure of paying you a visit to Holkham in October, or November, I may have ocular [*sic*] demonstration of his having done his duty by the forwardness in which I shall find your Men and Tenants.

“I beg my best compliments to Mrs. Coke, and to Ralph, should he be with you, and am at all times, my dear Coke, ever your sincere Friend,

“GEORGE, P.”

Ralph Dutton, Mrs. Coke's brother, to whom the Prince desired to be remembered, was a great favourite with His Royal Highness. His marriage was an unusual romance, and occasioned considerable amusement amongst his relations. His nephew, Lord Sher-

borne's eldest son, fell in love with a beautiful Miss Honor Gubbins, whom he met at Bath. She was of good family, but poor, and his parents were anxious that he should marry an heiress, Miss Legge. Ralph Dutton was therefore deputed to go to Bath and reason with his erring nephew. He did so, but himself fell in love with the beautiful Honor Gubbins, whom he married ; thus effectually ending his nephew's romance ; so that the unfortunate youth had to return home and marry Miss Legge, his parents' choice.

Ralph, who was constantly at Holkham, both before and after his marriage, appears to have been there in 1798, when the Prince paid his visit ; and it was on this occasion that a funny incident occurred.

Staying in the house at Holkham, in order to examine some of the historical works, was a venerable Professor. A great historian and bookworm, he had never had a gun in his hand in his life ; yet when he saw the rest of the party setting off cheerfully for a day in the covert, he so visibly regretted remaining behind, that Coke, with his customary good nature, urged him to accompany them. Arrived at their destination, however, Coke took the precaution to place his learned guest at a corner of the covert where he believed the other sportsmen would be well out of his reach. During the course of the morning he heard a most valiant and continuous firing from this portion of the ground, and at length becoming exceedingly curious to know its result, he made his way back to the Professor. "Well, what sport?" he inquired. "You have been firing pretty frequently!" "Hush!" exclaimed the Professor excitedly ; "*there it goes*

*again!*” and he was in the act of raising his gun to his shoulder to fire, when a man walked very quietly from the bushes about seventy yards in front of him. It was one of the beaters who had been set to stop the pheasants, and his leather gaiters, dimly seen through the bushes, had been mistaken for a hare by the Professor, who, much surprised at the animal’s extraordinary tenacity of life, had been firing at it whenever he saw it move. But—and it was this fact which, needless to say, roused the hilarity of the assembled sportsmen—not once had the beater discovered that the Professor was shooting at him !

Fox, who might possibly, for personal reasons, have seen less humour in the incident, was not present on this occasion. His hand had been injured by the bursting of his own gun when out shooting, and he wrote regretfully that he could not come to Holkham that autumn :—

“The doctors apprehend that there is yet more bone to come away from my hand, so that, for this year, I fear Norfolk is out of the question.”

In a later letter he says :—

“A Gentleman, a neighbour of mine, who was speaking with me last Wednesday, had a double-barrelled Gun burst in his hand, so that double-barrels are more decried here than ever.”

Two years later, Coke had sad reason to endorse Fox’s opinion respecting the danger of what was then considered the new-fangled double-barrelled gun.

The year 1799 appears to have passed uneventfully. The only record of it relates to a visit paid by

Coke in the month of June to Woburn, where the Duke of Bedford had for some time emulated Coke's example and established an agricultural meeting on the same pattern as that first instituted at Holkham.<sup>1</sup> On this occasion there took place a great dispute respecting the rival merits of the New Leicester and the Southdown sheep, and Coke created some excitement by offering the Leicestershire Society a bet of £500 that he would stock one hundred acres with Southdown wethers, against another hundred acres to be stocked by the New Leicester breeders. This offer was, no doubt wisely, declined by the New Leicester champions, so that the Leicester sheep were considered to have received a severe blow to their reputation, which was further augmented when Coke gave the Duke one hundred and fifty guineas for a Southdown ram.<sup>2</sup> Coke's own Sheep-shearing at Holkham took place the following week, and was succeeded in the autumn as usual by a series of shooting parties. Coke had given up keeping foxhounds in 1797, when Jones the huntsman had been made head of the stables; but he continued as keen a shot as ever, and there was seldom a week during the autumn and winter months when his house was not filled with energetic sportsmen.

<sup>1</sup> It has been stated that the Sheep-shearing took place alternately at Holkham and at Woburn; but for forty-three years, during the years from 1778 to 1821, there appears to be no break in the annual meetings held at Holkham. By 1813 the Woburn Sheep-shearings were given up on account of the expense (see Brougham's *Life and Times*, Vol. II, p. 79), but the Duke would not state the true reason, and his popularity suffered in consequence. In the print of the "Woburn Sheep-shearing" published by Garrard in 1811, reproduced in Vol. II, Coke is represented conversing with Sir Joseph Banks, Sir John Sinclair and Arthur Young, while Professor Davy is standing in a listening attitude behind him.

<sup>2</sup> The *London Chronicle* for 1804, July 3rd-5th.

In January, 1800, a large party, who had assembled at Holkham for the New Year, were invited to prolong their stay for the series of 'shoots' which took place during that month; and of the number who thus remained were Lord and Lady Andover and Mr. and Mrs. Anson. The latter had brought their children with them, who were in the nursery with their small aunt, Eliza Coke; but Lord and Lady Andover, although they had been married about four years, were still childless. They were, however, a most devoted couple: both young, clever and congenial in all their tastes, their marriage had been one of unclouded happiness and affection, and they were so absorbed in each other's society that they were still like bride and bridegroom.

On January 8th it had been arranged that the shooters were to start early for their day's sport; and although there was a sea-fog that morning, it was not sufficiently bad for them to alter their programme. At breakfast, however, Lord Andover announced that he had given up his previous intention of going with them, and meant to remain at home. Being pressed for an explanation of his change of plans, he at length admitted that his wife had had an unpleasant dream about him the night before, and was feeling so nervous that he had decided to spend the day with her.

Lady Andover was well known by her family to have the most extraordinary gift of foreseeing events in her dreams; so much so, that her relations used to beg her not to relate anything she had dreamed because they dreaded its fulfilment. But on the present occasion, curiosity was roused, and every one at the table was

anxious to hear full particulars, until at length Lady Andover related how she had dreamt that while her husband was with the shooters his gun exploded and he was killed. All present listened to and commented upon the story ; some, naturally, made light of it, and urged Lord Andover not to lose a day's sport for such an absurd reason ; but he would not be persuaded, and after breakfast the shooters went off without him.

He and Lady Andover thereupon went to the Landscape Room, where they spent an hour or more very happily, she working at a copy she was painting of a Poussin, and he reading Shakespeare aloud to her. By and by the fog cleared off, and it came out a most glorious day. Then her heart smote her for persuading Lord Andover to stay indoors on such a lovely morning, and she felt as though she were being very selfish. In a fit of compunction she begged him to go out shooting, assuring him that she no longer felt nervous, and would think no more about her unpleasant dream. He hesitated, but at last admitted that it seemed a pity to lose a day's sport, and said : " If you will promise me that you really will not be nervous, I should very much like to go." She reiterated that she was no longer nervous, and with this assurance he left her. No sooner, however, had he gone, than she bitterly regretted what she had done ; all her fears returned, and in a few minutes, unable to control her forebodings, she rushed after him, hoping to stop him and bring him back.

She was, unfortunately, too late ; Lord Andover had already started, and rode away from Holkham never to return. Accompanied by one servant, he went towards

the farm at South Creake, about five miles from Holkham. Arrived there, he put up the horses, and walked on a mile farther with his servant to a common where birds were usually plentiful. Probably he hoped to fall in with the rest of the party, but he did not do so. About 1.30 the dogs pointed, and he went towards them, cocking his double-barrelled gun; but one of them sprang at the birds, and, wishing to correct the animal, he called it to him, handing his gun, ready cocked, to his man who was behind him. Just as he was stooping to catch the dog, by some unhappy accident the gun which his man was holding went off, and lodged its whole contents in Lord Andover's back near the shoulder.<sup>1</sup>

He fell instantly, and bled profusely. Convinced that he was dying, he refused to allow the servant to leave him and go for help. The horror of the scene can be imagined, and it was increased by the intense loneliness of the spot where the accident happened. The common was a mile from the nearest house, not a human being was within sight or call, while the unfortunate servant was literally beside himself with terror and distress. It soon became evident that the shot must have penetrated the vertebræ of Lord Andover's spine, probably in an oblique direction, as the lower extremities became paralysed. At last, being in great suffering, which was intensified by the extreme cold, he consented that the man should go for assistance. The latter took off his own coat with which to cover his master, and leaving him lying helpless upon the

<sup>1</sup> One account relates that the servant was on horseback, and the horse suddenly swerved.

ground and apparently fast bleeding to death, ran like a madman back to the farm. After as little delay as was possible, he returned with the farmer in a one-horsed chaise. They found Lord Andover was still alive, and lifted him with difficulty into the bottom of the chaise, where he lay, supported by the farmer. The motion of driving over the rough road increased his bleeding, and they feared he would not live to reach the farm. His brain was quite clear, meanwhile, and his one anxiety was that no blame should be attached to his unfortunate servant. As they moved slowly on their way he begged repeatedly that every one would be kind to the man and comfort him. "If I die before the family arrive from Holkham," he said, "they are to be told this was my great wish."

The farm was reached at last, but Lord Andover could not bear the pain of being carried upstairs, so a bed was arranged for him in the parlour; and even when the terrible faintness somewhat diminished, he refused to allow himself to be moved, for fear he should bleed to death before his wife could arrive. The servant had been dispatched to Holkham with all haste to take the news, and to tell Lady Andover and the family to come without delay.

Lady Andover, meanwhile, had been passing a time of wretched disquietude; and at length, unable to bear the suspense any longer, she dressed and went out, hoping to meet Lord Andover returning home, or possibly to hear the sounds of shooting which might enable her to find him. It was a beautiful afternoon, and she cut across the crisp grass in the park, walking quickly, and listening as she went for the report of



guns in the still air. Suddenly she heard a clatter of horse's hoofs approaching at full speed up the drive, and turning, she saw the servant on her favourite horse, Baroness, galloping madly towards the house. Her first thought was: "How angry Lord Andover would be if he could see that man riding Baroness in such a manner"; her next was: "*Something has happened!*" As the man caught sight of her he turned his horse, and coming towards her, he cried out: "I have killed my lord! the kindest and best master that ever lived!"<sup>1</sup>

In an extraordinarily short space of time Lady Andover had reached the farm, where the rest of the family followed later. She found Lord Andover lying in the state the servant had described to her, and he greeted her with the words: "Dear, your dream has come true!" From the first the doctors pronounced his case to be hopeless, the shot having penetrated one lung. Yet his voice was strong and his mind remained clear to the last, while he met his fate with unflinching courage. He repeatedly begged the people of the house to pray for, and with him. He lingered from 1.30 on Wednesday 8th, when the accident happened, till about the same hour on Friday 10th.<sup>2</sup> Lady Andover never left his bedside, and he died in her arms. He was only twenty-four at the time of his death, she being thus left a widow at twenty-three; and the tragedy was heightened by the fact of their intense devotion to each other. It is said that in her great grief Lady Andover's beauty was intensified.

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1800), Vol. 1, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> One account says he lingered till the 12th.

She is reported to have possessed the rare gift of being able to weep without any facial disfigurement; the large tears used to well slowly in her beautiful eyes, and fall, without causing any of the unbecoming symptoms in which weeping usually results, so that her distress only enhanced her loveliness.

The body was put in a coffin on the 12th, and was subsequently removed in a coach-and-six to Tittleshall for burial on the 20th. It was borne to the vault by sixteen tenants, specially selected by Coke; but it was placed in the opposite part of the vault to that occupied by members of the Coke family. It seems curious that it should not have been taken to Lord Andover's home for burial, and a strange notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine* states that "his father was not anxious to convey the corpse to Wiltshire, his only request was that it should be privately and respectably buried."

As to the unfortunate man who had caused the disaster, he wandered about for days, refusing all consolation, and it was feared that he would go out of his mind; but, as Lord Andover had requested, he met with nothing save kindness from the family at Holkham, and was never blamed for the sorrow he had so unwittingly caused.

But the note of tragedy with which this year of 1800 had been ushered in was destined to be prolonged.

Only three months after Lord Andover's death, we learn that Mrs. Coke was seriously ill. Of what this illness consisted there is now no record, but on April 23rd Windham mentions in his diary how he was writing to Coke: "Who I am afraid is ill, as Mrs.

Coke is, dangerously." Later, apparently, she went to Bath for her health, and there she died on June 2nd, at the age of forty-seven. Again, Windham happens to chronicle the event. He arrived at Bath on the day of her death, and wrote to Mrs. Crewe the following day: "As if all were to be melancholy on our arrival here, the answer I received upon a message sent to inquire [at the hotel] after Mrs. Coke was that she had died a few hours before. . . . This loss . . . involves in it much that one had been in the habit of contemplating with satisfaction, and from which, at different times, part of my own happiness had been derived."<sup>1</sup>

In the papers we read that, a fortnight later, on June 16th, the funeral took place at Tittleshall "of the virtuous and most beloved wife of Mr. Coke, the body having been brought by slow stages from Bath." Lord Sherborne, her brother, and Tom Anson, her son-in-law, are mentioned as being present at the vault, where, less than six months before, the body of her other son-in-law had been laid to rest.

With her perished the companionship, the sympathy and the affection which had been the mainstay of Coke's happiness during the best years of his life. In his first romantic, boyish love for the beautiful Jane Dutton, his judgment had not been at fault. That she was a woman of exceptional charm and superior intellect we have seen; that she proved a wife who could enter into his temperament, further his schemes and promote his interests—both socially and in the world of active labour in which his soul delighted—we have also had evidence. That she never lived to reap, with him, the

<sup>1</sup> *Windham's Diary*, pp. 426-7.

just measure of his reward in the full comprehension and gratitude of his generation is to be regretted ; so also is it to be regretted that, her personality being what it was, the only records of it which have survived are scanty and unsatisfying. Compared, indeed, with what is known of other lives of a date no more remote, her entire existence, like the record of her early years at Holkham, remains almost legendary ; while of more intimate little personal relics, two only appear to be preserved. One of these is a letter in doggerel verses written by her to her sister when a child, which is kept at Sherborne ; and the other, a long thick lock of hair, found at Cannon Hall<sup>1</sup>—hair whose gold is still of a wonderful hue and brilliancy, although the head on which it once grew has been lying in the grave for over a century.

But the pictures which remain to perpetuate her beauty are three in number. One, the picture by Zoffany, at Sherborne, already referred to, a portrait of her in the proud, somewhat cold loveliness of her girlhood ; another, a pastel at Cannon Hall, which has all the grace of a Reynolds, a portrait of her as a young matron, more stately than in her girlhood days, more radiant in beauty and happiness ; with powdered curls framing her charming face, and a fichu which leaves revealed her beautiful neck and arms, while beside her, in quaint, white dresses down to their heels, are her two children, Jane and Ann.<sup>2</sup> The third portrait is by Barber, and belongs to a far later date. In

<sup>1</sup> The Yorkshire seat of Sir Walter Spencer Stanhope, K.C.B.

<sup>2</sup> This portrait, and also that of Lady Hunloke, reproduced in the present volume, are said to have been painted by a French artist, whose name is now lost ; but many believe them to be by Sir Joshua Reynolds.



*Barber Knapp*

*Mrs. Coke  
(Jane Dutton)*



it, the powdered locks are replaced by hair which is turning a natural grey, the brilliancy of her complexion is gone ; she looks older, more pale, more grave, but still we see the same sweetness of expression, the same delicacy of feature, the same winning grace ; and so she smiles at us across the century a charming, gracious presence, a true woman, a fitting mate of the man whom she married.

Dr. Parr, who considered that no greater honour could befall any man than that he should compose an epitaph on that man's decease, wrote an epitaph on the death of Mrs. Coke, which is described in his *Life* as the best ever written by him. The original appears to be lost, but Dr. Parr forwarded it to Fox, who, on December 23rd, 1801, replied :—

“I received a few days since your letter with its enclosure. I do assure you without compliment we admire the epitaph to the greatest degree. Words could not have been more happily chosen to describe a pious and domestic woman with a cultivated understanding and an affectionate heart” ; and he proceeds to criticise with great care and thought, whether each word and phrase is strictly appropriate. “Perhaps,” he concludes his long letter apologetically, “my general taste leads me rather to feel faults of this side too nicely, and to overlook proportionately those of negligence or carelessness. You see I criticise freely, and always expect my friends to do the same by me !”

But the epitaph which was put up to Mrs. Coke's memory in the church at Tittleshall where she was buried, in its touching simplicity and the quiet sorrow

which it reveals, appears to have been written by Coke himself. And even making allowance for the flattering nature of epitaphs at that period, it contains a very just estimate of a character which charmed all who came in contact with it.

#### SACRED TO THE MEMORY

of Jane, Wife of Thomas William Coke Esquire of Holkham  
in the County of Norfolk, and daughter of James Lennox Dutton Esquire  
of Shireborne in the County of Gloucester.

She was born at Shireborne November 29th 1753, and was married there October 25th 1775  
and died at Bath June 2d 1800, leaving three daughters. Jane Elizabeth,  
widow of Charles Nevison, Viscount Andover, eldest son of the Earl of Suffolk,  
Anne Margaret, wife of Thomas Anson Esquire of Shugborough in the  
County of Stafford. And Elizabeth Wilhelmina Coke.

Munificent without profusion and charitable without ostentation ;  
Calm and unassuming in the ordinary offices of social life. But inflexible  
and unwearied in the discharge of all its nobler and more arduous duties,  
Mrs. Coke deserved and obtained the love of equals, the respect of inferiors  
the attachment of domestics, the gratitude of the poor, the unfeigned esteem  
of every acquaintance, and the steady confidence of every friend :  
Her reverence towards God was accompanied by such benevolence towards mankind  
that religion seemed to reside in the sanctuary of her heart ; and saintly were  
the virtues which adorned her conjugal and parental character.  
He, by whom this monument is erected, will never cease to revere her memory  
and it is the fervent wish of his soul, that, by endeavouring to imitate her example  
himself and his children may become worthy to meet her again at the last day,  
and be partakers with her of the glory which shall be revealed  
to the spirits of just men made perfect.

Above this, Coke caused a most beautiful monument to be erected, the execution of which was entrusted to Nollekens at a cost of £3000. Its composition and workmanship are exceptionally fine, and it has a special interest, since the principal figure is at once a statue of Mrs. Coke and of Lady Andover. The latter was pronounced by Nollekens—as by others—to be the living representation of Mrs. Coke, and since he could not wish for a more exact model, she consented, during the first sad months of her own widowhood, to sit for the statue of her dead mother. To this must be attributed



a certain wistful sadness which has crept into the face of the figure, as she stands with gaze upraised towards a hovering angel, while Love, seated at her feet, holds up a flaming heart. The pose of the statue is beautiful and lifelike, and the lovely upturned face, with its small, exquisite features, is the face of Jane Dutton in the days of her girlhood.

Coke was thus left alone with his youngest daughter, Eliza, who was at this time just five years old. She forthwith became the object of his tenderest care, as she remained throughout his life that of his deepest affection. "My beloved daughter, the comfort of my life," he calls her in 1809, when writing to Dr. Parr. She was, however, brought up on the same system as her sisters had been, that of a complete absence of luxury, of simple food and hardy habits; until, at the age of eighteen, she left the schoolroom to become mistress of Holkham.

END OF VOL. I





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