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The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Account of my Conduct relative to the Places I hold under Government

Nutzungsbedingungen

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ACCOUNT OF MY CONDUCT, &c.

IN my youth my father, the Right Honourable Robert Walpole, then Prime Minister, gave me the two great seals which I still hold, of Clerk of the Council and Comptroller of the Great Seal, which together produce about near 3000 l. per annum. When I was about sixteen or seventeen he gave me the place of Inspector of the Customs and Excise in the Custom-house, which I retained in about a year, on his giving me the great place of Clerk of the Council, then Secretary of State, from that time I have continued in that office, and have had the honour of a Baronet's title, which I have not in derogation of his office, but in addition to it, and to show that I was content with that title, and not from the love of money, I was no charge to the public.

ACCOUNT OF MY CONDUCT
RELATIVE TO THE
PLACES I hold under GOVERNMENT,
AND TOWARDS
MINISTERS.

Before my father's quitting his post, he, at the instance of my eldest brother, desired that as Clerk of the Council, who had the custody of the Great Seal, I should be made a Knight, which he refused to do, but I was made a Knight of the Bath, which was a great honour, and was a great encouragement to me, and I was content with that title, and not from the love of money, I was no charge to the public.

ACCOUNT OF MY CONDUCT, &c.

IN my youth my father, sir Robert Walpole, then prime minister, gave me the two patent little places I still hold, of clerk of the estreats and comptroller of the pipe, which together produce about or near 300 l. per annum. When I was about eighteen or nineteen he gave me the place of inspector of the imports and exports in the custom-house, which I resigned in about a year, on his giving me the patent place of usher of the exchequer, then reckoned worth 900 l. a year. From that time I lived on my own income, and travelled at my own expence; nor did I during my father's life receive from him but 250 l. at different times; which I say not in derogation of his extreme tenderness and goodness to me, but to show that I was content with what he had given to me, and that from the age of twenty I was no charge to my family.

Before my father's quitting his post, he, at the instance of my eldest brother, lord Walpole, had altered the delivery of exchequer bills from ten pounds to an hundred pounds. My deputy, after that alteration made, observed, that, as usher of the exchequer, who furnishes the materials of exchequer bills, on which, by the table of rates in the exchequer, I had a stated profit, I should lose ten per cent. which he represented to my father; who, having altered them to oblige my brother, would not undo what he had done; but to repair the prejudice I had suffered, sir Robert, with his wonted equity and tenderness, determined to give me 2000 l. in lieu of what I lost, and would have added that legacy in a codicil to his will:—but this happening only two days before his death, when he was little capable of making that codicil, my brother lord Walpole engaged, at my father's desire, to pay me 400 l. a year; which not long after my brother redeemed for the intended 2000 l.

King George the first had graciously bestowed on my father the patent place of collector of the customs for his own life, and for the lives of his two elder sons Robert and Edward; but my father reserved in himself a right of disposing of the income of that place as he should please during the existence of the grant. Accordingly having afterwards obtained for his eldest son Robert the great place of auditor of the exchequer, and for his second son Edward that of clerk of the pells, he bequeathed, by an instrument under his hand, 1000 l. a year

a year to me out of the patent for the remainder of the term, and devised the remainder, about 800l. a year, to be divided between my brother Edward and me.

Having provided thus largely for my brother Edward and me, and leaving nothing but an estate in land of nominally 8000l. a year, and a debt of between 40 and 50,000l. he gave to my brother Edward and me only 5000l. a piece, of which I have never received but 1000l. and none of the interest. He also gave to my brother Edward a freehold-house in Pall-Mall, and to me the remainder of a house in Arlington-street, which went away from me in 1781, the term being expired.

Though my portion was much inferior to my brother's, still it was a noble fortune for a third son, and much beyond what I expected or deserved. Yet undoubtedly so excellent a parent would not have made so very slender a provision as 5000l. for a son he loved, if he had not had the opportunity and the legal right of giving me a much ampler fortune of what he had obtained by his long faithful and very essential services to the kings George the first and second.

I presume boldly to say that my father had a legal right of making the provision for me he did in the places I hold. Patent places for life have existed from time immemorial, by law, and under all changes of government. He who holds an ancient patent place enjoys it as much by law as any gentleman holds his estate, and by more ancient tenure than most gentlemen hold theirs, and from the same fountain, only of ancients date, than many of the nobility and gentry hold their estates, who possess them only by grants from the crown, as I possess my places, which were not wrung from the church, and in violation of the intention of the donors, as a vast number of estates were; nor can I think myself as a patent placeman a more useless or a less legal engrosser of part of the wealth of the nation than deans and prebendaries. While there are distinctions of ranks, and unequal divisions of property, not acquired by personal merit, but by birth or favour, some will be more fortunate than others. The poor are most entitled to complain; but an archdeacon or a country gentleman has very little grace in complaining that any other unprofitable class is indulged by the laws in the enjoyment of more than an equal share of property, with the meanest labourer or lowest mechanic.

Having said this with the confidence that does not misbecome a legal possessor,

essor, I am far from pretending to any other plea, much less to any merit in myself. A tender parent lavished riches on me greatly beyond my desert, of which I am so little conscious in myself, that, if the distresses of the public require a revocation of gifts bestowed by the crown in its splendour, I know no man who can plead fewer services to his country, or less merit in himself than I can. In one light only I can wipe off an aspersion in which patent placemen have been confounded with other placemen. No man who holds a place for life, is dependent on the crown farther than his duty or his gratitude binds him. I, perhaps, by the nature of my office, which I shall explain hereafter, am more dependent than almost any patent-holder—and yet I may presume to say, that having suffered by that dependence because I would not violate my principles and conscience, I cannot be deemed a servile placeman'.

Endowed so bountifully by a fond parent as I have allowed myself to be, it would be ridiculous to say that I have been content; yet not having unfolded some peculiarities in my situation, I may venture to say that I have shown that I could be content with a considerable diminution. I have never made any merit of that moderation: but when I am held out to the public as one whom the public are called upon to reduce to an humbler lot, which I am ready to admit, if it be but allowed that all my guilt consists in holding what somebody else would have held if I did not, it may be permitted to me to prove, that while I assumed no claim of merit, I have declined every offered opportunity of enlarging or securing my fortune, because I would not be bound to serve any minister contrary to my principles, and because I chose to have no obligations but to one to whom I owed every thing, and to whom it was my duty, and whom it would be my pride to obey, if he were on earth to exact that obedience!

I have said that my father left me much the larger share in the income of the patent place in the custom-house. I have also mentioned that the patent was granted to my father during the lives of him and his two elder sons: on his death there remained the lives of my two brothers, and that my share would consequently cease entirely if I survived them. The health of my eldest brother declining, and my brother Edward being eleven years older than me, two or three of my best friends urged me to ask to have my life added to the patent. I refused—but own I was at last over-persuaded to make application

My conduct while I sat in parliament is most probably forgotten; but no man can recollect that it looked like servility to ministers. It is needless to obviate what never was objected to me.

to Mr. Pelham—how unwillingly will appear by my behaviour on that occasion, which did not last two minutes. I went to him and made my request. He replied civilly, “he could not ask the king to add my life to the patent, but if I could get my brother Edward to let my life stand in lieu of his, he would endeavour to serve me.”—I answered quickly, “Sir, I will never ask my brother to stand in a precarious light instead of me;” and hurrying out of his house, returned to two of my friends who waited for me, and said to them, “I have done what you desired me to do, but, thank God! I have been refused.”—This was in the year 1751, and was the first and last favour I ever asked of any minister for myself.

Had I been an ambitious or an interested man, I certainly have had eminent opportunities of indulging either passion. At the beginning of the present reign an overture presented itself to me, which a more selfish man would have thought flattering to his views. How I embraced that occasion may be seen by Letter VIII. in page 378.

I may be allowed to say, that I have waved more substantial and real offers. Twice I have been offered to have my share of the patent, which I now hold only during my brother's life, conferred on me for my own. Both times I positively refused to accept that offer. Having rejected a certainty of 1400l. per ann. for my own life, instead of holding it during the life of one eleven years older, I hope I shall not be thought a very interested man.

I will now explain the nature of my office of usher of the exchequer, stated by the commissioners of accounts to render to me clear four thousand two hundred pounds a year, and which I said was given to me as producing but nine hundred a year, and which, on an additional tax being laid on places, I gave in as producing 1800l. a year, and which, had it been adverted to, would make me seem to have given in a very fraudulent estimate; but I am so conscious of my innocence and integrity in that respect, that I chose—perhaps out of vanity—to recollect that circumstance myself, as it certainly reflects no dishonour on me. When I was called on to give in the value of my place, I took my book of accounts and receipts for the last twelve years, and gave in the medium of those twelve years, which was 1800l. a year. As mine has been an increasing place by three wars, and other circumstances, and as for the first years of my holding that place it was much less, the medium sum would have been less than 1800l. a year, if I had taken my receipts farther back than twelve years; so that I plainly exaggerated, instead of diminishing
what

what I had received annually from my first nomination to the office. If I have enjoyed too much, as I confess I have, at least I have not fought to increase my income by any indirect or dirty methods.

The duty of my office is to shut the gates of the exchequer, and to furnish paper, pens, ink, wax, sand, tape, pen-knives, scissars, parchment, and a great variety of other articles to the exchequer, treasury, and their officers, and to pay the bills of the workmen and tradesmen who serve those offices. Many of the articles specified are stated in a very ancient table of rates in the exchequer (I think of the time of Edward III. so that my office is, if a grievance, no very novel one), and on those, large profits are allowed to the usher; whence my profit arises, and whence, if it is largely augmented of late years, a candid examiner will observe, that that increase proceeds from the prodigious additional consumption of paper, pens, ink, wax, which the excessive increase of business at the treasury must occasion; and therefore should a much less quantity of those implements be employed, my profits would decrease in proportion. When therefore I am charged as receiver of 4200*l.* a year, it should be remembered, that though I was so in the year 1780 (though I shall show that even that is an arbitrary statement, and not calculated on any medium), yet I cannot equitably be reckoned *communibus annis* to receive so large a sum. I have shown that 1800*l.* a year was the medium on twelve years, and those not of my least receipts.

It is very difficult to state my case, and not seem to defend it. But I am telling the truth, and not pleading for favour—at least, my object is to obtain a favourable opinion of my character. I am far more indifferent about my fortune. But surely any impartial man will reflect how grievous it must be to a disinterested mind to be held up to the public as a blood-sucker, under the invidious name of a placeman—to be one of those pointed at by county associations, as grievances that call for speedy correction and removal; in short, to be confounded with contractors and other leeches that have grown out of the profusions and abuses of the time, though my office has existed from the oldest times, and has existed under the best government. Public distress demands œconomy and correction. Be they exercised; I desire no exception. But being guilty of no servile, of no indirect means in obtaining, augmenting, or retaining my office, I am ready to resign that office; but I will prove (and defy all mankind to detect me in a single falsehood) that I have held my place with honour, and have nothing to palliate or conceal in my execution of it.

The

The place is held under many disagreeable circumstances. I advance money to the tradesmen and workmen; I contract to pay the principal merchant with whom I deal for paper, though I should never be repaid. There is no specific time appointed for my being paid; it depends on the good pleasure of the first lord of the treasury; and yet, though a mere tradesman in that respect, I believe no man will accuse me of having ever paid court or even attendance on a first lord of the treasury. I was *once*, forty years ago, at the late duke of Newcastle's levee, the only minister's levee at which I ever was present except my own father's. Yet with very few have I had cause not to be content in my own particular. If I have been proud, they have been just. Yet some of my predecessors have met with harder fates. Mr. Naylor, my immediate predecessor but one, lost twenty thousand pounds by the death of queen Anne.

Risks by prudent men are calculated as drawbacks; but where advantage preponderates, even the terrors of calculation are surmounted. More prudent men than I am would have combated those risks, by making the most of their advantages. I have ever disdained that pitiful arithmetic. All the goods I furnish have always been purchased by me at the highest prices—and never came a complaint from the treasury that was not instantly remedied by my orders. In more than forty years I have never received an important complaint, nor given occasion to one.

Having said that there is no certain time settled for my being paid, and as I have sometimes had large arrears due, and consequently as one year frequently runs into another, and thence I may in one year receive four or five thousand pounds, because in the preceding I did not receive half so much, the commissioners of accounts having examined my deputy but on a single year, were just in their report of what I received *that year*; but, had they gone farther back, would certainly not have given in 4200l. as my receipt *communibus annis*. This unintended misrepresentation I bore in silence, it having been

* From lord North I always received regular justice and civility, though I never paid any court to him, nor disguised my disinclination to his measures. This compliment, which now cannot be misinterpreted, is due to him, and is an unambiguous evidence of his good humour and averfens from all malignity. When I am

grateful to the living for civilities, I scorn to recollect the rancour of the dead.

* My deputy received my positive orders to give to the commissioners the most particular detail of my profits, and to offer them in my name my account-books of all my receipts, which they declined accepting, and which would have shown them

been my stedfast purpose not to interfere with the public examination of places, nor take the smallest step to mitigate my own fate, which I submit implicitly to the discretion of the legislature. What I hold, I hold by law: if the law deprives me, I have too much reverence for the laws of my country to complain. No man ever heard me utter a syllable in my own behalf. My nearest friends know that I have required them not to interpose to save me. This dread of seeming to make interest to save my place preponderated with me to appear ungrateful for a time, lest it should look like a selfish compliment: I have never yet thanked Mr. Burke for the overflowing pleasure he gave my heart, when, on moving his bill, he paid that just compliment to the virtues of my honest excellent father. This acknowledgment I hope he will accept as a proof, that, though silent, I was not insensible to the obligation. Just praise out of his mouth is an epitaph of sterling value, and, standing in his printed speech on that occasion, will enjoy an immortality which happens to few epitaphs.

This apology for my own conduct will I hope be accepted from a man who has nothing to boast but his disinterestedness, and is grievously wounded by standing in a light of one by whom the public suffers. Were my place worth double 4000l. I could resign it cheerfully at the demand of my country; but having never flattered the ministers I disapproved, nor profited to the value of a shilling by my dearest friends when in power, which they have been twice of late years (and having so much reason to be proud of their friendship, why should I not name two such virtuous upright men as the duke of Richmond, and general Conway?), I cannot bear to appear in the predicament of one enriched to the detriment of the country. This stab has been given to my peace, and the loss of my place will not enlarge the wound, nor will the retention of the place heal it. It is this most scrupulous state of facts that alone can rehabilitate me in the eyes of the public, if any thing can; — and though nothing would have drawn a vain detail from me, unprovoked, it cannot be thought arrogant to endeavour to wipe off reproach, nor impertinent to aim at negative merit with the public, instead of subscribing to undeserved and invidious obloquy.

March 30, 1782.

HORACE WALPOLE.

them a very different state of the medium of my place. Had they accepted those books, I intended to send them word, that they were welcome to examine my receipts; but that I hoped, as

they were gentlemen, they would not look at the foolish manner in which I had flung away most of what I had received.

LETTERS