

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

Politics and Manners from  
Sir Robert Walpole to Sir Robert Peel

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IN 1839 LORD MELBOURNE'S GOVERNMENT was re-established following the so-called 'Bedchamber Crisis'. His reconstructed Cabinet included several newcomers. One was the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, who approached his duties with characteristic impetuosity. Indeed, as Lord Holland recorded in his Diary, he was presented to the Queen at Windsor and attended two Cabinet meetings before one of the other new members had even replied to Melbourne's invitation to join the administration.<sup>1</sup> This precipitate appearance at Windsor resulted in two unexpected embarrassments. The first concerned the Queen's daily cavalcade in Windsor Great Park, which ministers on duty at the Castle were expected to attend. Macaulay's horsemanship was not up to this test and he had to decline the honour, explaining that elephant-riding in India had left him unfitted for equestrian feats.<sup>2</sup> This was only a ripple of unease on the surface of court life but the second embarrassment is better known and was more awkward. While at Windsor, Macaulay wrote to his Edinburgh constituents, on notepaper headed Windsor Castle, a breach both of royal etiquette and good breeding. In this case the ripples spread beyond the Court and culminated in a Press campaign deploring the unsuitability of certain modern Cabinet

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holland House Diaries 1831–1840*, ed. Abraham D. Kriegel (London, 1977), p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

appointments. No lasting harm was done, but the episode retained a symbolic significance later recalled by Thackeray on Macaulay's death in 1859. Thackeray perhaps went too far in comparing Macaulay as champion of the middle class at Windsor to Napoleon dating his letters from the imperial palace of Schönbrunn after the Battle of Austerlitz, but he was in no doubt where the ultimate victory in the war of manners lay. 'That miserable "Windsor Castle" outcry', he wrote, 'is an echo out of fast-retreating old-world remembrances.'<sup>3</sup>

My concern this evening is to reconstruct a portion of that old world and to recapture something of the manners of politicians as they evolved between the two careers of two Sir Roberts, Walpole and Peel. During this period Britain invented a form of parliamentary government which was thought to have no parallel in contemporary experience and no precedent in recorded history. The constitutional implications were and are much debated. Less attention has been paid to the codes regulating the relationships of the men who lived through them. Yet what emerged between the Revolution of 1688 and the Great Reform Act of 1832 was a system of management, and management, as we are often reminded today, perhaps to the point of tedium, is a matter of style (or as the eighteenth century would have called it, manners) as well as technique. What was the distinctive style required of those who managed the modern British polity in its formative years? The question is an obvious one if only because the eighteenth century was itself so fascinated by manners and the structures that sustained them. Yet it is not often explicitly asked.

This may be because the evidence of public life is almost too voluminous to be comfortably managed. Moreover, some of the short cuts which suggest themselves turn out to be dead-ends. One such is the literature which consciously codified manners, a source which historians have used extensively for other purposes. Between the two Sir Roberts there was no shortage of such material, ranging from the courtesy books read by Walpole's contemporaries to the mass-market etiquette guides of Peel's day. Yet in this ocean of advice about how to behave, it is remarkable how little relates to politics. The most quoted of all such works, Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*, though addressed by a statesman of the first rank to a young man intended for a public career, has little to say about political advancement and nothing about the conditions which prevailed at the time of writing, in the 1740s. The

<sup>3</sup> G. O. Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (2nd edn., London, 1886), p. 388.

occasional exception, such as Thomas Gisborne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* of 1795, offered only pious injunctions against 'unchristian behaviour' and in favour of the 'public welfare'.<sup>4</sup>

The deficiency is all the more remarkable when it is recalled that there existed an older tradition of public instruction on this subject. The so-called 'Book of Policy' was a distinct branch of courtesy literature, well known in England as elsewhere. Yet it disappeared at just that moment when a revolution in government might have made its revision and reissue pertinent. The eighteenth century possessed nothing similar. It had 'vade-mecums' for various officials, from magistrates to excise officers, but these were in the nature of professional manuals. They told the would-be administrator what to do, not how to conduct himself. Those publications which did offer instruction on this point were in the nature of moral tracts, often written by clergymen who had first aired them as sermons. Explicit guidance to young politicians on the make was rarely attempted. Politics was surely the only trade, craft or profession of which this was true. Historians of the early modern Book of Policy have noted that 'policy tends to drop out of the English courtesy tradition' and concluded that the eighteenth century had ceased to be interested in what they call the 'production of a social leader'.<sup>5</sup>

A pioneer in this field eventually appeared in 1836 with the publication of *The Statesman* by the poet and civil servant Henry Taylor. Taylor's advice described upbringing and schooling, making contacts and acquiring a leader or followers, cultivating an official language, conducting interviews, and so on. The author's intention is said to have been satirical, though he denied it in his *Autobiography*.<sup>6</sup> In any event, his advice was severely practical and plainly derived from his experience as a clerk in the Colonial Office. It ranged from avoiding the use of metaphor in official despatches to the placing of furniture in a Cabinet minister's room so as to minimise the discomfort to all parties when interviews did not go well. Taylor made no apology for the seeming triviality. 'These are not frivolous considerations where civility is the

<sup>4</sup> 2 vols. (2nd edn., London, 1795), i, chs 6, 7.

<sup>5</sup> J. E. Mason, *Gentlefolk in the Making: Studies in the History of English Courtesy Literature and Related Topics from 1531 to 1774* (Philadelphia, 1935), pp. 219–20, 252; see also, George C. Brauer, *The Education of a Gentleman: Theories of Gentlemanly Education In England, 1660–1775* (New York, 1959), pp. 61–2: 'For the eighteenth-century gentleman, the world seemed to imply mainly polite society, conversation, and social intercourse in general.'

<sup>6</sup> *Autobiography of Henry Taylor, 1800–1875*, 2 vols. (London, 1885), i, p. 202.

business to be transacted', he said.<sup>7</sup> The hostile reception accorded *The Statesman* helps to explain the previous neglect of the subject. To write on political advancement without appearing cynical on the one hand or satirical on the other was in truth difficult. William Maginn in *Fraser's Magazine* suggested that a better title for Taylor's book would have been 'The Art of Official Humbug systematically digested and familiarly explained'.<sup>8</sup>

Another stand-by of historians of manners, literary sources, are not more helpful. Clara Reeve's celebrated manifesto for the novel as a portrait of 'real life and manners' might lead one to expect that real politics would figure in such works.<sup>9</sup> It is true that novels of the period feature innumerable peers, MPs, and even ministers, but their political activities are rarely described. There was evidently a sensitive spot on the psyche of the eighteenth-century patriciate. It was quite feasible to denounce the horrors of political corruption in almost every form of polemic: parliamentary, journalistic, poetic. But to depict the effects on the lives of the gentlefolk who peopled the pages of fiction seems to have been thought too daring. When Maria Edgeworth attempted it in her book *Patronage* in 1814, she had an uncomfortable time. She seems to have repented of her temerity in this respect, observing in 1831 that to depict the 'ways of rising in the world . . . to say the best is very problematical in point of morality'.<sup>10</sup> By then, of course, political novels in the sense that we would recognise them had started appearing from the pens of Plumer Ward, Normanby, Lytton, and Disraeli, and thereafter there was no stopping them. 'No nation other than Victorian-Edwardian Britain has ever explored its elective institutions so extensively in fiction', it has been observed.<sup>11</sup> The contrast with Georgian Britain, which definitively empowered these elective institutions, is the more remarkable.

For a starting point then, I am driven to another source, the satire which was directed against the ruling manners, especially by the Augustans. It is of course little better than propaganda, but it does have the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58–9.

<sup>8</sup> 14 (1836), 393–8.

<sup>9</sup> J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contrasts of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (New York, 1990), p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *Letters from England 1813–1844*, ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford, 1971), p. 508.

<sup>11</sup> George Watson, *The English Ideology: Studies in the Language of Victorian Politics* (London, 1973), p. 133.

advantage of highlighting some central issues. Let me select one example, that offered by Addison and Steele in their *Spectator*, of double interest because it was so influential in popularising fashionable ideas and because its authors were themselves active politicians. I have in mind *Spectator* 193, in which Steele pictures himself on a busy street, observing the variety of faces and persons, and speculating about one of the commoner classes to be encountered there, those ‘whom we call good Courtiers, and such as are assiduous at the Levées of Great Men. These Worthies are got into an habit of being Servile with an Air, and enjoy a certain Vanity in being known for understanding how the World passes’. Steele traced their peculiar bearing to its ultimate source, ‘that Market for Preferment, a great Man’s Levée’. The levée (or ‘levee’ as I shall call it, in deference to the form of Franglais favoured at the time), had a long history and a close association with court life. Men of station not only attended the King’s levees, but also held their own. Steele conducts us to one such to reveal a patron receiving his visitors. Colleagues and clients are fielded, flattered, and fussed over. The patron is not so much approachable as fawning in his anxiety to leave no supplicant unnoticed. For their part, his petitioners are equally hypocritical and even more offensively obsequious. Steele’s concern in picturing what he called ‘a direct Farce’ is not only the obvious one, that free-born Englishmen were degrading themselves by such courtship, but also that it unmanned the patron himself. ‘A Girl in new Ribbons is not more taken with her self, nor does she betray more apparent Coquetries, than even a Wise Man in such a Circumstance of Courtship.’<sup>12</sup>

In pursuing this theme, of men of power approaching each other and those they patronised, I am all too aware that I am scratching the surface of a rich subject. There are advantages, however. One is that it is specific to the political process. It would be easy to show that the manners of politicians changed with those of the Upper Ten Thousand as a whole; that, if you like, Peel’s generation sported canes where Walpole’s wore swords, shook hands where Walpole’s showed a leg, danced waltzes where Walpole’s performed minuets; but my question is about the manners required by participation in political life. Moreover, the effects are not limited to a handful of levee loungers. Steele estimated that one-third of the nation was locked into patron–client

<sup>12</sup> *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1965), ii, pp. 256–60, 12 October 1711.

relationships. It was precisely the anxiety of the Augustans that parliamentary government had multiplied the opportunities for corruption and therefore enslavement.<sup>13</sup> Steele's levee was emblematic of the nation's plight, governed and governors. It was 'a Conspiracy of a Sett of Servile Slaves, to give up their own Liberty to take away their Patron's Understanding'.<sup>14</sup>

The *Spectator* was not on its own. As the Hanoverian regime took root, its opponents targeted style as much as substance. In prints and journals the theme of Englishmen having to bow and scrape is common; peers of the realm are humiliated, MPs appear as footmen. Walpole's towering presence turned the political nation into a veritable Lilliput. Nor was it necessary to be an enemy to see force in these charges. Walpole was notoriously proud of his power. The magnificence of his Norfolk palace at Houghton, the much-reported richness of its contents, from old masters to mahogany privy seats, the pleasure that he took in his possessions, dress and retinue, all suggested an uninhibited parade of status. The famous congresses held at Houghton called to mind the provincial gatherings mustered by great magnates of the past. Even in London, at Chelsea and Downing Street, the appearance was of homage rather than companionship. Walpole's birthday was a ceremonial event second only to that of royalty. When newspapers as far afield as Edinburgh, Amsterdam, and Paris told of the nobility who attended his lodgings to congratulate him, their readers can have been in no doubt that here was a minister who, for all his dependence on a British Parliament, enjoyed the standing of a Sully or a Richelieu, or to come closer to home, a Wolsey. Moreover the new breed of Whigs who thrived with Walpole—the Dodingtons, the Foxes, the Winningtons—revelled in this atmosphere. The Walpole years were years of unashamed triumphalism.

If this was a realisation of the fears of Addison and Steele's generation, it was, however, short-lived. During the decades which followed Walpole's fall, there was growing reluctance to show the full extent of political power over others. This was displayed not least in the language employed. When Walpole's son Horace published his *Description* of Houghton's collections, he dedicated it to his father with the words: 'Your power and your wealth speak themselves in the grandeur of the whole building'.<sup>15</sup> Sentiments of this kind, even from a

<sup>13</sup> *The Spectator*, ii, p. 335, 5 November 1711.

<sup>14</sup> *The Spectator*, ii, p. 260, 12 October 1711.

<sup>15</sup> See Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 1993), p. 21.

son, would have seemed vulgar and offensive to subsequent generations. The Peels were proud of Sir Robert's country house at Drayton, and his art collection in Whitehall was scarcely inferior to Walpole's, but it is difficult to imagine his sons addressing him publicly in such terms. Wealth and power might be combined with a political career, might even result from it, but not as a matter of open avowal.

Earlier, there had seemed nothing tasteless about emblems of power. Walpole would have approved the modern maxim 'if you've got it, flaunt it'. Portraits show him in all his official glory, robed, ribboned, decorated. These appearances were not confined to the artist's studio. As the first commoner to be awarded the garter, Walpole took pride in wearing it in the Commons. His successors came to shun such displays. Lord North was, I think, the last premier regularly to wear his decorations in the House of Commons. For ministers who took pride in their representative credentials, such honours looked like a mixed blessing. The Younger Pitt was expected to nominate himself to the Garter but declined doing so when opportunity offered in 1788. Again, in 1790 when the King himself pressed him to do so, he preferred to honour his brother, the second Earl of Chatham.<sup>16</sup> Even in the Lords, Knights of the Garter abandoned their Blue Ribbons.<sup>17</sup> Such unobtrusiveness became a peculiarly English form of distinction, the most famous example perhaps being Castlereagh's sensational *unadornment* at the glittering Congress of Vienna in 1814.<sup>18</sup>

A simple indicator of change is the dignity of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, an office of state which was held either by the Prime Minister himself or by the leading minister in the Commons for much of the period between 1720 and 1850.<sup>19</sup> The gorgeous robes which went with the office gradually disappear in the portraiture of the period. Walpole delighted in appearing in them of course, in oils as in the flesh. So did his successors Henry Pelham, and Henry Bilson Legge, who not only posed in his robe but positioned the Chancellor's purse of office on an adjacent table. In the 1760s, George Grenville, Charles

<sup>16</sup> *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, ed. Charles Ross, 3 vols. (London, 1859), i, pp. 361–2; John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt*, 3 vols. (London, 1969, 1983, 1996), ii, p. 189.

<sup>17</sup> G. W. E. Russell, *Collections and Recollections of One Who Has Kept a Diary* (London, 1898), p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> *Roundabout Papers*, The Oxford Thackeray, ed. George Saintsbury, xvii, p. 377.

<sup>19</sup> Changing conventions can be traced most readily in the *Catalogue of Engraved British Portraits preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, 6 vols. (London, 1908–25).

Townshend, and Lord North were all pictured in them: thereafter, there is a significant change. The numerous paintings and engravings of the Younger Pitt include only two of him wearing his Chancellor's robe. In others it is slung over a chair, or reduced to a flash of gold braiding in the chiaroscuro. Pitt's successors up to the 1850s were to dispense with it altogether. The sole exception seems to have been Vansittart, who had to fend off Canning's attempt to separate the possession of 10 Downing Street from the Exchequer, and took a proprietorial interest in the office.<sup>20</sup> Disraeli was also attached to his gilded robe of office, positively refusing to allow his successor Gladstone to have it, though convention required that it be passed from Chancellor to Chancellor.<sup>21</sup> The robe, believed to have been newly woven for the Younger Pitt, is still at his home of Hughendon today. Not even Disraeli, however, thought it appropriate to appear before his public in it.

Symbols of authority once considered unexceptionable, such as wands, sticks, maces, batons, bags, and purses of office, disappeared from view in political portraiture. Later, the despatch box provided the ideal means of suggesting the burdens of office rather than its perquisites or power. But that does not seem to have happened until the end of Peel's career and in the meantime even more discreet signals were employed. Politicians often appeared with pen and paper, but artists normally adept at using the written word as a visual device seem to have been wary of hinting at the contents of a paper borne by a politician. Close inspection does not reveal the commencement of a Treasury minute, or the sketch of a speech in Parliament, let alone something more interesting such as the words, 'Sir, I have the honour to inform you that His Majesty no longer requires your services'. There are a few exceptions but they are rare and the most striking, Pitt's portrayal as the 'Saviour of his Nation' with a copy of his Bill for the Redemption of the National Debt, which hung in Windsor Castle and was widely reproduced in engraved form, was in fact a posthumous work.<sup>22</sup> Few statesmen after 1750 had themselves depicted exercising their power. In the National Portrait Gallery one might take Georgian politicians for ordinary English gentlemen in their studies and libraries. There is not the same difficulty with judges, generals, and admirals.

<sup>20</sup> *The Diary of Henry Hobhouse (1820–1827)*, ed. Arthur Aspinall (London, 1947), p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> R. Blake, *Disraeli* (London, 1966), pp. 351–2.

<sup>22</sup> *The Holland House Diaries 1831–1840*, p. 16.

One innovation in self-portraiture there was. It became common to be shown addressing an audience, either the House of Commons or an extra-parliamentary body. Peel seems to have been the first so depicted during his lifetime in print form, and in his own Statesman's Gallery at Drayton, took pride in showing others in a parliamentary setting.<sup>23</sup> Of course, an orator is not as such exercising political power or disposing of patronage: he is merely a patriotic persuader.

The parliamentary context was crucial, for it was there that politicians rose and fell and there that the need to accommodate themselves to a wider body of opinion was felt. The House of Commons was no respecter of persons. When Charles Abbott entered the House he found MPs' inattention to the Younger Pitt, then a Premier of twelve years' standing, startling.<sup>24</sup> Those who knew Parliament were familiar with such irreverence, and prudent ministers did well not to let it irritate. Pitt's Secretary to the Treasury, George Rose, remarked that his complete want of any 'air of authority' was one of his greatest political assets.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, no attempt was made to adapt the rules of rank to the realities of power. Senior ministers in the modern departments of State featured low in lists of precedence, and junior ministers hardly at all, though royal household officers, many of them sinecurists, were guaranteed a good position on Coronation day. Foreigners were bemused by the mismatch between power and status. How, asked Léon Faucher, could Peel as Prime Minister rank below the most imbecile peer at a Court gala?<sup>26</sup> Those who did value status sometimes had difficult choices to make. It was said that the notoriously haughty Lord Durham, who boasted to Princess Lieven that he was descended from kings, chose the office of Lord Privy Seal because it allowed him to lord it over dukes and marquises.<sup>27</sup> The paradoxical understatement of power was often reflected in terminology. As Trollope's Madame Goesler remarked, a brilliant political career which commenced with a lordship, progressed to a presidency and finally attained the heights of a secretaryship sounded to the uninformed more like descent than ascent.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *The Private Letters of Sir Robert Peel*, ed. George Peel (London, 1920), pp. 6–7.

<sup>24</sup> *Diary and Correspondence of Charles (Abbot) Lord Colchester*, 3 vols. (London, 1861), i, 75–6.

<sup>25</sup> *The Diaries and Correspondence of the Right. Hon. George Rose*, ed. Leveson Vernon Harcourt, 2 vols. (London, 1860), ii, p. 293.

<sup>26</sup> Léon Faucher, *Études sur L'Angleterre*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1845), i, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Letters of Dorothea, Princess Lieven, during her Residence in London, 1812–1834*, ed. Lionel G. Robinson (London, 1902), p. 328.

<sup>28</sup> *Phineas Finn*, ed. Jacques Berthoud (Oxford, 1982), ii, p. 54.

Unpretentiousness in high office acquired an English connotation, enhanced by the manner in which Prime Ministers lived. Downing Street was symbolically unimposing. 'In a small German Principality such a house would be considered too mean for a porter's lodge', it was said, 'but in England we have not cared much to keep up appearances, wearing the star of our order within.'<sup>29</sup> It had the advantage of making criticism of Prime Ministerial grandeur difficult. Downing Street defied caricature, so humdrum and homely did it appear. Cartoonists showing ministers in their official setting before the heroic age of Whitehall office-building, were reduced to using unimpressive symbols of bureaucracy. Pitt on his way to open his Budget in 1796 was seen emerging from the Old Treasury arch, and when Fox was displayed knocking on the doors of power, the door was not that to 10 Downing Street, but the Treasury office.<sup>30</sup>

The Commons itself did not evolve a more pretentious code of manners for its members. In dress there was indeed a trend towards uniformity. Aside from the Speaker and his clerks, who wore what foreigners thought of as outmoded Spanish wigs, MPs were informally dressed. Back-bench and Opposition MPs gloried in the right to wear their most ordinary street clothes, to keep their hats on their heads, to wear outdoor boots. In this sartorial warfare they, not governments, were the winners. Ministers under George III grew self-conscious about appearing in formal attire. Canning, seconding the address in 1794, objected to wearing a dress coat for the occasion. 'But', he recorded in his diary, 'the Secretary of the Treasury averring that to come in a frock to second an Address would be such a departure from the established usage of Parlt as in these times to threaten the downfall of the constitution, I submitted'.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, Canning was remembered later by Disraeli as the last minister who 'always came down in silk stockings and pantaloons or knee-breeches'.<sup>32</sup> By the 1840s, differences in dress were matters of personal preference and not very marked then. Palmerston's famous sensitivity to his audience did not fail him in this

<sup>29</sup> *Autobiography of Henry Taylor, 1800–1875*, 2 vols. (London, 1885), ii, ch. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, eds. F. G. Stephens and M. D. George, 11 vols. (London, 1870–1954), vii, pp. 8836, 8981.

<sup>31</sup> *The Letter-Journal of George Canning, 1793–1795*, ed. Peter Jupp, Camden Fourth Series, vol. 41 (London, 1991), p. 173.

<sup>32</sup> G. W. E. Russell, *Collections and Recollections of One Who Has Kept a Diary* (London, 1898), p. 158.

respect. As a young man he had been something of a dandy, but in his prime his dress verged on the casual.<sup>33</sup> By this time the absence of ministerial pomp presented a striking contrast with continental practice. Giovanni Beltrami was particularly impressed when he viewed Parliament in 1822. 'And the embroidered suits, the orders, the haughtiness, the stately repulsive air, of our ministers? No such thing! The ministers of England, often the arbiters of both hemispheres, are not distinguishable from the other members of parliament, either by their seats, their dress, or their manners.'<sup>34</sup>

There remained distinctions of dress, but none of them contradicted the underlying trend. County members uniquely enjoyed the right to wear their spurs, sustaining the pleasant conceit of the legislator who rode up to Westminster from the shires, and leapt from his horse to enter the chamber and speak for England; the officers of the House retained their lawyer-like robes and wigs; and military men were permitted to wear their uniform. Ministers, however, increasingly became indistinguishable from backbenchers, and politicians became indistinguishable from any ordinary gentlemen. As Constantine Phipps noted, there was logic in this. Once, politicians had represented the urbanity and sophistication of a metropolitan court, whereas ordinary MPs had represented the rusticity of the provinces. Silk and powder had confronted riding crops and round hats. Now all were united as members of a cohesive club, the gentlemen of England.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, views of Parliament in the 1830s displayed a body of men dressed in remarkably similar fashion. The same was true of the House of Lords, the dignity of the peerage notwithstanding. Legislators and governors were expected to look like other Englishmen of their class.

The resulting want of glamour could be disappointing. The most famous of all depictions of the eighteenth-century legislature, Copley's portrayal of the death of Chatham, lent colour and pomp to the scene by showing the peers debating in their robes. This was a gross solecism, also perpetrated by Bacon in his Westminster Abbey statue of Chatham.<sup>36</sup> Only on State occasions would the peers have been so dressed. Foreign visitors were dismayed by the unkempt appearance of Britain's

<sup>33</sup> William White, *The Inner Life of the House of Commons*, ed. Justin M'Carthy, 2 vols. (London, 1897), i, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America*, 2 vols. (London, 1828), i, p. 277.

<sup>35</sup> C. H. Phipps (later Marquis of Normanby), *The English in France*, 3 vols. (London, 1828), ii, pp. 289–90.

<sup>36</sup> John Taylor, *Records of my Life*, 2 vols. (London, 1832), i, p. 119.

legislators, and it was left to the French, when they invented their own brand of representative politics in the 1790s, to provide their lawmakers with robes and insignia. The very idea seemed un-English.

Demeanour for students of manners mattered as much as dress, and one of the common observations from the 1780s onwards was the growing coolness, reserve and circumspection which were thought to mark it. The alleged coldness and even repulsiveness of leading figures of the period are so often emphasised that it can hardly be merely a function of personality. Pitt the Younger, Lord Grenville, Lord Grey, and Sir James Graham were among the best-known examples of the tendency. Interestingly, in all these cases friends and biographers of these men found themselves having to emphasise that in their private capacity there was no sign of such coldness. Pitt, well-known for his off-putting manner, was apparently never happier than when he was romping with his nephews and nieces at home, or carousing with the friends of his youth. Grenville was described as 'in his outward manner offensive to the last degree'.<sup>37</sup> Yet his biographer Peter Jupp produces numerous instances of warmth and accessibility which impressed those contemporaries who dealt with him in a private or domestic setting.<sup>38</sup> According to Graham's biographer, at home he was the most congenial of men, but 'from the moment he crossed his own threshold appeared to assume a repellent air and mien, as though he were haunted by the fear of being intruded on'.<sup>39</sup> Of Grey it was remarked that 'he is reported to be as gentle and good-natured in private life, as in public he is stiff, arrogant, and supercilious'.<sup>40</sup> Here was evidently a need to provide the public with wholesome domestic images at a time when the moral imperatives of the home were hardening. But the tension between the constraints of a political existence and the release of private life may have been real enough. In Walpole's time, an open and engaging manner had been part of the conventional image of ministers of state; by Peel's, it was best kept for the fireside.

Confronting inferiors was different from associating with equals. But the trend was similar and towards a less assertive, more distant style of leadership. In fact the form of abasement which Steele had highlighted, the ministerial levee, was a victim of this change, though it still

<sup>37</sup> Philip Ziegler, *Addington* (London, 1965), p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> *Lord Grenville, 1759–1834* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 103–4, 295, 415–6.

<sup>39</sup> Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, 2 vols. (London, 1887), ii, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> *Parliamentary Portraits* (London, 1815), p. 24.

flourished in the middle decades of the century, often irritating friends as well as foes. Walpole's supporter Hervey was embarrassed by the 'kissing, whispering, bowing, squeezing hands [which] were all acted' at his levee, and his enemy Argyle launched an astonishing public attack in the Lords on it in 1741, denouncing 'men whose birth and titles ought to exalt them above the meanness of cringing to a mere child of fortune'. 'This scene, my lords, is daily to be viewed, it is ostentatiously displayed to the sight of mankind; the minister amuses himself in public with the splendour, and number, and dignity, of his slaves; and his slaves with no more shame pay their prostrations to their master in the face of day, and boast of their resolutions to gratify and support him'.<sup>41</sup> After Walpole's fall, the followings of Walpole himself, Henry Pelham and Lord Carteret, could be reckoned by counting the carriages that waited outside their respective doors, conveniently, since all three lived in Arlington Street.<sup>42</sup> The Duke of Newcastle never stopped 'keeping levee' to use the proper phrase; in *Humphry Clinker* there is a memorable satire on it, as it still flourished in 1766, two years before Newcastle's death.<sup>43</sup> A little later it was still possible for Junius to deride levee-attending by an Opposition supporter as evidence of forthcoming defection;<sup>44</sup> but thereafter it fell into decay. Lord North was surely the last Prime Minister to be accused of bribing MPs at his levee, as Fox accused him in the Commons in 1781: 'Here Mr Fox personated the minister conversing with some dependent member of parliament, at his levee'.<sup>45</sup> Significantly, the levees which did flourish were given by those who were increasingly expected to be above party politics—the Crown itself and the Speaker of the Commons. In each case, attendance was transformed from an act of allegiance to a social privilege.

Patronage was ceasing to be an appropriate matter for public display. Ministers, far from advertising their services, retired or pretended to retire behind the protection of doorkeepers and secretaries. It suited politicians to portray themselves as victims of the patronage system

<sup>41</sup> Quoted Andrew Arthur Hanham, 'Whig Opposition to Sir Robert Walpole in the House of Commons, 1727–1734', Ph.D. thesis (Leicester, 1992), p. 92; *Parliamentary History*, xi, pp. 1185–6.

<sup>42</sup> *Letters of Horace Walpole*, ed. W. S. Lewis, xviii, p. 349.

<sup>43</sup> Ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1967), pp. 141–7.

<sup>44</sup> *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, ed. Charles Ross, 3 vols. (London, 1859), i, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> *The Speeches of the Right Honourable Charles James Fox*, 6 vols. (London, 1815), i, p. 364.

rather than its beneficiaries, disdaining personal approaches, deploring the necessity for petty calculation, and acting with extreme circumspection to all but close friends. Irish politicians seeking a career in London were warned that a less frosty Dublin manner was not helpful. Spring Rice was said to have made many enemies by his inability to fend off would-be clients, learning the hard way that cordiality was not a virtue in a Westminster politician.<sup>46</sup> Such claims had been made against not a few English ministers of the Pelhamite era, including the Duke of Newcastle. It was rarely made after 1800. Conversely, a minister such as Henry Pelham himself ‘so honest and unreserved, that he has often been known to make a friend of the man, whose suit he has been obliged to reject’ was held up for public admiration under George II, but under his successors the boast would hardly have been plausible.<sup>47</sup>

From the client’s standpoint the art of pleasing in politics was reduced to knowing how to write a begging letter, not how to acquire the mien, carriage, and conversation of a client. In the diaries of impecunious young men it is possible to chart this shift. The naval officer Augustus Hervey in the 1740s regarded waiting on the great with cheerful cynicism as a necessary part of professional advancement.<sup>48</sup> Twenty years later Richard Cox, a clerk in the Navy Office, agonised about the propriety of courting his contacts among MPs, planning contrived visits with pretty address conned, as he put it, but eventually funkling the whole thing.<sup>49</sup> Twenty years on again the young Bland Burges was embarrassed and angered by his father’s insistence that he should pay court to a former Lord Chancellor, the Earl Camden.<sup>50</sup> These are, of course, merely individual instances and doubtless there were bumptious young men in the late eighteenth century as there had been earlier. None the less, the conventions of patronage were, I think, moving away from face-to-face contact between seller and buyer. The new, egalitarian sensibilities of the 1760s must have contributed to this withdrawal from public bonding.

Personal interviews with politicians were expected, at least in theory, to concern questions of policy, not patronage. Pitt was master

<sup>46</sup> *Autobiography of Henry Taylor, 1800–1875*, 2 vols. (London, 1885), i, p. 212.

<sup>47</sup> Alexander Jacob, *A Complete English Peerage*, 3 vols. (London, 1766–9), i, p. 352.

<sup>48</sup> *Augustine Hervey’s Journal*, ed. David Erskine (London, 1953), p. 42.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Frederic Hardy (ed.), *Benenden Letters: London, Country, and Abroad, 1753–1821* (London, 1907), p. 70 *et seq.*

<sup>50</sup> *Selections from the Letters and Correspondence of Sir James Bland Burges, Bart.*, ed. James Hutton (London, 1885), p. 51.

of the medium and acquired a reputation for knowledgeable handling of the diverse groups which lobbied Downing Street. This was the Great Man not as patron, but as legislator. Not everyone approved. In fact in 1800 there were complaints by MPs that the use of the Downing Street parlour as a kind of legislative ante-chamber was highly injurious to the dignity of Parliament.<sup>51</sup> Fifty years earlier the worry would have been about the jobbery that was going on within it.

There were alternative forms of gathering, of course. Some depended on the increasing influence of women in West End Society from the 1760s onwards. Routs, couchers, and evening parties of all kind fulfilled various functions, and by the heyday of the salons in the 1830s and 1840s it is conceivable that political hostesses were behaving more like Steele's Patron than their menfolk, though I wonder whether there were really many Phineas Finns who owed their rise to such patronage. In any event, such hospitality did not lessen the trend towards specialisation and segregation when men devoted themselves to politics, from Cabinet dinners all the way down to clubland politicking, culminating in the foundation of the Carlton and the Reform in the 1830s.<sup>52</sup> What these assemblies had in common was precisely what made them less objectionable in the *Spectator's* terms. They were nominally gatherings of equals. They did not threaten the independence of the individual with courtly manners and hierarchies. This was a long way from the kind of patronising association envisaged in the early eighteenth century, when Henry St John's Brothers' Club had as its avowed object 'to reward deserving persons with our interest and recommendation'.<sup>53</sup> Creevey in old age recalled how as a new MP in 1802 he had declared allegiance not to a patron but to a party. In this way a young nobody 'became at once a publick man, and had a position in society which nothing else could give him. I advert particularly to such persons as myself, who came from the ranks, without either opulence or connections to procure for them admission into the company of their betters'.<sup>54</sup> A century before he would surely have had to brush up his skills as a levee-man.

<sup>51</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 24 April 1800.

<sup>52</sup> *Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, MP*, ed. Leonard Horner, 2 vols. (London, 1843), i, p. 253.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Handasyde, *Granville the Polite: The Life of George Granville Lord Lansdowne, 1666–1735* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 114–5.

<sup>54</sup> *The Creevey Papers: a Selection from the Correspondence and Diaries of the late Thomas Creevey, MP*, ed. Sir Herbert Maxwell, 2 vols. (London, 1903), i, p. 224.

Men of power still needed followers, but the way they were described changed. The language of interest and connection gave way first to the language of friendship, implying reciprocity rather than dependence, and eventually to the language of party, implying common devotion to a principle or policy. Men of business had earlier been overtly the servants of a patron, even his secretary. They could be painted in Renaissance fashion as unequal but close companions, as Henry Legge was painted with Walpole, John Roberts with Henry Pelham, and Burke with Rockingham. A generation later such an avowal would have embarrassed both sides. I cannot find that the painfully loyal Rose was ever painted with Pitt. Early nineteenth-century politicians had their men of business of course, to draft their letters, research their interests, even write their speeches, but they were usually young, they were unequivocally employees and, in the case of the emerging parliamentary private secretaries, they were employees of the public.<sup>55</sup>

Summarising the changes I have sketched, we might think in terms of two models of statesmanship. One presents the statesman as courtier and courted, deriving respect from display, affable to equals and inferiors but not afraid to proclaim his superiority, uninhibited in his conduct, bold in his demeanour, and proud of his homage. The other reveals the statesman as orator and legislator, discreet in manner, unpretentious in appearance, reserved if not cold, keeping his warmth for his home and hearth, disdainful of men and their wants, devoted to public duties. Walpole and Newcastle could be portrayed as fulfilling the attributes of the first, Pitt and Peel those of the second. I do not pretend that individuals can be pigeonholed in this way, only that here were alternative sets of images and associations to fit changing requirements.

Foreigners were well placed to assess the resulting distinctiveness. Wendeborn was one of the first to affirm that British politics was breeding a kind of civility quite unlike that traditionally associated with the Court as a centre of power, one in which politeness and ease of conversation (in its widest sense) seemed less attainable. He also thought that official life was disabling in this respect. In his time, familiarity where inferiors were involved was more likely to be found among Opposition Whig aristocrats, whereas in Pitt's corridors of power condescension was not to be expected.<sup>56</sup> Whigs themselves

<sup>55</sup> F. MacDonogh, *The Hermit in London: or, Sketches of English Manners*, 5 vols. (London, 1819–20), i, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> F. A. Wendeborn, *A View of England towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London, 1791), i, p. 17.

would have agreed. They often accused their opponents of being what Sheridan called 'stiffnecked and lofty'.<sup>57</sup>

There were more complimentary ways of putting it. Propriety, decency, modesty, were the approved terms for the coldness, correctness, and unpretentiousness which made modern statesmanship superior. At bottom this claim is to a higher virtue; it is about morals as much as manners. We think of the mounting certainty that public life had improved and was improving as Victorian, but its origins lie much earlier, with the generation which was born around 1760, entered public life around 1790, and summed up the lessons of a lifetime around 1820. One such was Robert Plumer Ward, who in his visionary political romance, *De Vere*, sought to distinguish, said, 'what men have been, not what they are. To look into the accounts formerly given by public men of themselves, as well as of each other, makes us tremble; and we are only consoled by the conviction that such accounts are deserved no longer. The whole Walpolian and Pelham school is at an end'.<sup>58</sup> This view commanded a consensus. Whigs and Tories disagreed about history as about everything else, but that the nineteenth century had achieved superior 'political honesty' came to be considered unchallengeable truth.<sup>59</sup> In the 1820s a spate of publications about eighteenth-century men and manners, Horace Walpole's *Letters* and *Memoirs*, Waldegrave's *Memoirs*, and Jesse's *Life of Selwyn*, reinforced the conviction.

That values changed in these years and that institutions were reshaped in consequence is indisputable, but the underlying realities of relationships are not so readily transformed. Reading Peel's correspondence with his Oxford friends in the 1820s, I cannot say that I find its substance unlike Newcastle's correspondence with his Cambridge friends in the 1750s, and Lady Salisbury's conversations with Peel and Wellington are not a world away from those of Hervey with Walpole or Queen Caroline. That nineteenth-century politicians were innately higher-minded than their predecessors would be difficult to prove, but what we can say is that regardless of vice or virtue, the fashion in which public figures met the requirements of their contemporaries was to a considerable extent a question of manners rather than morals. What was it about Georgian politics which made adjustments necessary?

<sup>57</sup> Henry Jephson, *The Platform*, 2 vols. (London, 1892), i, pp. 292–3.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Plumer Ward, *De Vere*, 3 vols. (3rd edn., London, 1827), i, pp. xii–xiii.

<sup>59</sup> Frances Anne Kemble, *Further Records, 1848–1883*, 2 vols. (London, 1890), i, pp. 153–4.

First, there is the sense of having to conform to a narrower definition of defensible behaviour. The results are best known in the realm of sexual morality, where conduct which would have been considered unremarkable in the mid-eighteenth century had either to be suppressed or kept secret by the mid-nineteenth. The same process of constriction also occurred in other matters. A favourite expression of the period, 'propriety', applied to all kinds of behaviour. One might suppose that the men I have been talking about, as members of a governing élite, would have been relatively free of constraints and not prone to feelings of social insecurity. Yet the truth was that not a few were either parvenus or regarded as parvenus. In any case there were so many gradations and nuances within a loosely defined genteel class that a sense of inferiority or superiority was easily engendered. Once gained, a reputation for unsociability could be ruinous. What wrecked the career of one of the eighteenth century's most promising statesmen, the Earl of Shelburne, was an unfortunate personal manner, attributed by some to a backwoods Irish upbringing which even two years at Christ Church could not correct. Moreover, those who did share the background and education of the *crème de la crème* were often younger sons, a class whose collective unhappiness and energy is one of the constants of British history. 'Dependence is the greatest curse in nature', complained William Grenville, younger brother of the Marquis of Buckingham and member of one of the wealthiest families in Europe.<sup>60</sup> Hardly a Robespierre, but as his biographer Peter Jupp argues, such feelings powerfully contributed to the alienation and distrust which marked his political relationships. There were many blue-blooded young men who believed themselves uniquely victimised by fate and a titled elder brother. And of course, when they gambled on a political career they were taking a risk, for the rewards were speculative. Other professions, the law for example, offered higher prizes and made less demands in point of personal behaviour. A succession of brutish Lord Chancellors—Northington, Thurlow, and Eldon—got away with manners which would not have been tolerated in ministers lacking the authority of the judicial bench.

I do not mean to imply that what was required was what was needed to impress the ladies of Almack's or cut a figure in Grosvenor Square. The plimsoll line of acceptable behaviour settled lower than that, around the level of the country gentlemen who stocked the backbenches

<sup>60</sup> Peter Jupp, *Lord Grenville, 1759–1834* (Oxford, 1985), p. 102.

in the Commons, or the metropolitan middle class whose opinions were so influential outside Parliament. That the ordinary backbencher could be representative of opinion at large is something which arouses the scepticism of historians, but it was an axiom of early nineteenth-century thought that at least when men and manners were being judged, that was the case. Edward Whitty, an experienced parliamentary reporter, unsmilingly advised aspiring statesmen to gauge their progress by selecting among the backbenchers one of the less distinguished intellects as what he called 'a foolometer'.<sup>61</sup> The chances were, he thought, that the reactions observed would be close indeed to that of the man in the street.

Not that the man in the street did not have his own input. It was the belief of many parliamentarians of Peel's era that they were subject to more intrusive scrutiny by the public at large than any preceding generation. Politicians often hold this view, of course, but in this case there may have been justice in it. Some dated the decisive change to the 1770s, when parliamentary debates became the staple fare of the newspapers, when the gossip columns swelled with the reported doings of West End society, when it became possible to identify the faces of prominent individuals in the cartoons of the day. Students of the so-called 'public sphere' assume a solemn interest in the public good on the part of the men and women who enjoyed the information revolution of the eighteenth century, but going by the newspapers, men and women were thought as fascinating as measures. The quantity of print devoted to the personal doings and characteristics of people in public life struck foreigners who encountered it as quite without parallel. When the King of Saxony visited England in 1844 he decided that this incessant 'prying and observation', as he called it, explained a style of statesmanship which contrasted with other modes he knew. 'The [British] statesman', he wrote, 'is not suffered to intrench himself behind . . . documents, but must come forth personally'.<sup>62</sup> English journalists themselves were aware that they were turning the private lives of statesmen into a form of public property. As the anonymous biographer of Lord Liverpool observed in 1827:

<sup>61</sup> *St Stephen's in the Fifties: The Session 1852-3: A Parliamentary Retrospect*, intro. Justin M'Carthy (London, 1906), pp. 301.

<sup>62</sup> C. G. Carus, *The King of Saxony's Journey through England and Scotland in the Year 1844*, trans. S. C. Davison (London, 1846), pp. 36, 157.

[I]n our own country, in particular, the value of this kind of property has been duly estimated by the public. It is this which has thrown open the doors of Parliament, and the deliberations of the Cabinet, sooner or later, to every man in the empire, for the last fifty years. We have felt that our constitution has a practical efficiency as yet unparalleled in any other country, for we have watched its minutest operations: our most distinguished public men have laboured throughout life, as it were, in a glass bee-hive.<sup>63</sup>

Politicians responded with a cult of personality which would have puzzled their fathers and grandfathers. Walpole endured more abuse from the Press than any of his successors, but only in stereotyped images which made his personal behaviour almost irrelevant. It would not have occurred to him that creating a set of publicly identifiable characteristics was the means by which political success was to be achieved. Yet this was the belief of the late eighteenth century. ‘My road must be through character to power’, wrote Canning.<sup>64</sup> Recently, John Ehrman has shown how the Younger Pitt became obsessed with the public perception of his own character—with, in his own words ‘character, not office’.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps he was an extreme case, but the sense that politicians had become artists modelling their own reputation rather than appealing to any particular patron, force or sectional interest, is quite marked. It helps to explain many features of the post-1770s world. The increased resort to political duels was surely a result of the priority of preserving reputation at all costs. Perhaps, too, the incidence of suicide among politicians, said to be higher in the early nineteenth century than before or after, owed something to this dread of opinion; and not least there was the horror of guilt by association, something which had not troubled Walpole and his colleagues, but troubled many who were touched by the scandals of the Napoleonic Wars. The period had not invented the term ‘deniability’, but it certainly had the concept, as Canning’s secretary revealed in 1827 when he explained to a journalist that ministers must have it in their power to deny in Parliament improper transactions.<sup>66</sup> Walpole and Newcastle had had a healthy respect for the power of the Press, and did their best to manipulate it, but never showed the genuine fear of it which afflicted later generations. No eighteenth-century owner of *The Times* would have been

<sup>63</sup> *Memoirs of the Public Life and Administration of the Right Honourable the Earl of Liverpool* (London, 1827), pp. 1–2.

<sup>64</sup> Augustus Granville Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times* (London, 1859), pp. 66–7.

<sup>65</sup> John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt*, 3 vols. (London, 1969–96), iii, p. 576.

<sup>66</sup> *Some Official Correspondence of George Canning*, ed. Edward J. Stapleton, 2 vols. (London, 1887), ii, p. 370.

dined in 10 Downing Street as John Walter II was and, I suppose, most of his successors have been. To later generations it seemed that the social acceptance and political influence of newspaper editors went naturally together as achievements of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup>

Politicians who did not work at their own character were punished by having it made for them, one reason why the art of modern political biography is effectively a creation of the Pitt era, and why the friends of retiring or deceased ministers attached importance to an early and authorised life. The long history of embarrassments caused by Cabinet ministers' memoirs begins, I think, with Stapleton's biography of Canning, suppressed at the insistence of his former colleagues in government, but eventually published in 1831.<sup>68</sup> It was not, however, necessary to be either a Cabinet minister or dead to find oneself described in print. From the 1780s there appeared compilations by parliamentary reporters, offering pen portraits of all the men whom they saw debating in Lords and Commons. Such material was overwhelmingly concerned with character, manners and oratory rather than what we would call principles or policy.

Two features of this flourishing branch of literature stand out. First, its authors were merciless in identifying idiosyncrasies. Accent, gesture, gait, dress, countenance, complexion, mannerism, were minutely delineated. Generally, the results match the impressions one might gain from unpublished sources, suggesting that publications of this kind did indeed provide a link between the member on the backbenches and the man in the street. Secondly, the manners approved by implication were those which I have tried to identify by other means this afternoon, gravity combined with modesty, unpretentiousness with dignity, manly reserve with gentlemanlike bearing. Rudeness, oafishness, clownishness, any form of what might be termed low manners, were devastatingly exposed, but equally, so was an excess of exhibition criticised. In these publications the reputation of being a fine gentlemen, or the most compleat gentlemen, or perfectly genteel, is implicitly condemned. It was not a disadvantage to appear as Peel was said to appear, 'conscious that the senate, not the ball-room, is his proper sphere'.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *A Selection from the Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826–93) between September 1869 and March 1878*, ed. John Vincent, Camden Fifth Series, vol. 4, (London, 1994), p. 200.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Reeve (ed.), *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV and King William IV By the late C. F. Greville, Esq.*, 3 vols. (3rd edn., London, 1875), i, p. 272.

<sup>69</sup> *Sir Robert Peel, as Statesman and Orator* (London, 1846), p. 16.

Was there an alternative to the trend which I have tried to sketch? Probably not, though the possibility of another cast of politician, demagogic on the American and French model, or (so to speak) camera-list on the German model, is worth considering. Demagogy never really threatened the gentlemanly ethic. Many Radicals prided themselves on their genteel manners. It was, after all, the populist Sir Francis Burdett whose idea of punishing the Irish nationalist O'Connell for his subversive activities was to move that he be expelled from Brook's.<sup>70</sup> In any case neither House of Parliament appreciated demagogic oratory, and the difference between the rhetorical styles which MPs adopted for Westminster and their electors was often noticed.<sup>71</sup> As for the evolution of an elite caste of governors, it showed no sign of happening. On the contrary, the amateurism of politicians grew stronger as the professionalism of civil servants intensified. The result was famously described by Bagehot, when he observed that senior administrators 'regard the Parliamentary statesmen who are set to rule over them much as Bengalees regard the English—as persons who are less intelligent and less instructed than themselves, but who nevertheless are to be obeyed. They never think of changing places any more than a Hindoo thinks of becoming an Englishman'.<sup>72</sup> We associate this mentality with Victorian Civil Service reform, but in fact the tendencies were there as early as the 1760s, when the separation of political from administrative functions was being increasingly urged. The tension between the two was less marked earlier, and there were administrators who proved adept as politicians. A good example would be the fourth Earl of Sandwich, a genuinely committed naval administrator and at the same time a politician very much in the Walpolian mould, in fact almost an exemplar of that type I tried to describe, flamboyant in public and private life, famously approachable by all classes, unconcerned by the criticism of others. His biographer Nicholas Rodger says he 'came as near to being a professional politician as a nobleman well could do'.<sup>73</sup> But as a professional politician in the next generation, he would either have had to become a full-time administrator or change his tune, and, indeed, in his last years he looked outdated among a generation both less relaxed and

<sup>70</sup> *The Holland House Diaries 1831–1840*, pp. 330–1.

<sup>71</sup> Frederick von Raumer, *England in 1835*, 3 vols. (London, 1836), ii, p. 275.

<sup>72</sup> *Bagehot's Historical Essays*, ed. Norman St John Stevas (New York, 1966), pp. 175–6.

<sup>73</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl: A Life of John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich* (London, 1993), p. 87.

less versatile. Politicians, in short, chose to remain gentlemen, exposed to a Parliament of gentlemen and a public of would-be gentlemen.

I suppose what I have been describing is in essence a shift from a court-based culture to a club-based culture, as the priorities of managing first Parliament and then public opinion exerted themselves. Foreigners had been struck by the resemblances between the Commons and a gentleman's club as early as the 1760s, and as William White, the doorkeeper who divulged the secrets of the life of the Commons in the 1850s, contended, it was precisely clubmanship which best described the individual manners and collective behaviour of politicians.<sup>74</sup> The understated style adopted in managing the club is a long way from the hype and hassle of management methods today. On the other hand, this particular club survived a turbulent time during which its counterparts in other countries were devastated by social revolution or demoralised by the rise of democracy. Perhaps Georgian politicians knew more about styles of management than their successors have sometimes supposed.

<sup>74</sup> *Lettere e Scritti inediti di Pietro e di Alessandro Verri*, ed. Carlo Casati, 3 vols. (Milan, 1879–80), ii, p. 92; William White, *The Inner Life of the House of Commons*.