

Author's Note

Eighteenth-century spelling, punctuation and capitalization were notoriously haphazard. I have generally standardized and modernized them for ease of reading, except where I feel meaning might otherwise have been lost. 'Reflexion' thus becomes 'reflection', 'sayd' is rendered 'said', 'shewing' is 'showing' and 'entir'ly' is 'entirely', while ampersands become 'and', nouns receive no automatic capitalization and so on.

Contemporary references to the 'premier', 'first minister', 'chief minister' or 'Prime Minister' in George III's reign referred to the First Lord of the Treasury, except in the case of the Chatham administration. I use the term Prime Minister even though it was not used officially until Benjamin Disraeli signed the Treaty of Berlin in 1878.

Some place names, such as Charles Town, South Carolina, have been updated as well.

The Julian calendar prevailed in Britain until 1751; I have given all dates according to the modern, Gregorian calendar.

When a word has a meaning today significantly different from the one current in the eighteenth century, I have given in a footnote the definition from the 1778 edition of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* that most closely approximates to what I think the writer meant.

The modern equivalents of eighteenth-century monetary values vary wildly according to context and date, but £1 then was worth very roughly £125 today.

Introduction

As he prances on to the stage in *Hamilton: An American Musical*, singing three show-stopping numbers, King George III somehow manages to be comic yet cruel, camp yet sinister. It is a difficult feat to pull off in the theatre, but the character as portrayed in Lin-Manuel Miranda's award-winning production does it to perfection. 'You'll remember you belong to me,' a sardonic, preening, pompous monarch sings, and 'You were mine to subdue,' and 'I will kill your friends and family to remind you of my love.'

Thomas Paine, the author of the most influential pamphlet of the King's reign, *Common Sense*, published in 1776, would certainly have agreed with these lines. He described George as 'the Royal Brute of Britain' who had 'athirst for absolute power', adding 'Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families.'¹

The theme of George's tyranny saw its apogee in Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence later that same year, which justified the American War of Independence through no fewer than twenty-eight intensely personal charges against the King. 'A prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant,' Jefferson wrote, 'is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.'²

This portrait of a heartless, absolute sovereign is repeated almost every single day in America's print and online media. Even two centuries after his death, hardly a day passes in the United States without some reference to George III in different publications, where he is still held up as the template for arbitrary government. He is an equal-opportunities hate-figure, an archetypal bogeyman attacked in the same measure by Democrats and Republicans alike.

Here are just some sentences plucked virtually at random from the United States media recently: 'In America,' says the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, 'we had our own problems with the notion of absolute power enshrined in the personage of a monarch residing on some distant throne.'³ 'The British King represented an oppressive arm of the English government,'

states the *Greenfield Recorder*.⁴ 'King George III didn't allow the colonists any say in the laws that governed them,' claims the *Huntingdon Daily News*.⁵ The *Boston Herald* calls him a 'power-mad little petty tyrant'.⁶ 'Would England have been better off if the King had not been so dictatorial?' asks the *North Augusta Star*.⁷ He was 'the last authoritarian ruler America had', according to the *Eugene Weekly*.⁸ 'They have a standing army inside their country and use it to take away people's liberties,' claims the *Deseret News* in reference to George's Britain.⁹ 'The last dictator we had was King George III,' states the *Altoona Mirror* of a man who, according to the *Hartford Courant*, was 'a despotic monarch'.¹⁰ The *Towanda Daily Review* meanwhile decries 'the tyrannical rule of King George III'.¹¹

This daily reviling of an eighteenth-century king in the twenty-first-century American media faithfully reflects Paine's and Jefferson's claims, but also the views of the British Whig and Liberal politicians and historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who, if anything, were even more personal in their dislike. 'In all that related to his kingly office,' declared Lord Brougham of the King, 'he was the slave of deep-rooted selfishness, and no feeling of a kindly nature ever was allowed access to his bosom.'¹² W. E. H. Lecky thought George 'ignorant, narrow-minded and arbitrary', adding that his plans for America were 'as criminal as any of the acts which led Charles the First to the scaffold'.¹³ Lecky also described George as 'A sovereign of whom it may be said without exaggeration that he inflicted more profound and enduring injuries upon his country than any other modern English king.'¹⁴ (One wonders what he could have said if he *had* wanted to exaggerate.) George Otto Trevelyan described George as 'a ruler who cherished every abuse in Church and State'.¹⁵ Not to be outdone, his son George Macaulay Trevelyan, in his enormously influential *History of England*, castigated 'the attempt of George III to recover the powers of the Crown' and put Britain's defeat in the American War of Independence entirely down to 'the unbending stubbornness of George III'.¹⁶

Lord John Russell, the Liberal Prime Minister, believed that 'The project of restoring to the Crown that absolute direction and control which Charles the First and James the Second had been forced to relinquish . . . was entertained and attempted by George the Third.'¹⁷ The Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin agreed. 'He hated the Cabinet system and he wanted to be, as King of England, the dictator of English policy,' he argued. 'He refused to submit to the Cabinet.'¹⁸

The historian Sir Lewis Namier diagnosed George's personality disorders as stemming from his childhood, because he had been a 'neurotic boy, bitter in soul and mentally underdeveloped'.¹⁹ The King's biographer C. E. Vulliamy went much further, declaring that 'He abandoned his men and

his principles . . . We should recognise him if we met him at a party in the underworld.²⁰ Another biographer, J. C. Long, agreed, presenting George as ‘sometimes seeming possessed of the Devil’.²¹

As well as his character, George’s intellect has been denigrated for generations. When the Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin was asked by an American visitor why he had a gigantic portrait of King George III behind his desk, he answered: ‘E’s my hero. If he hadn’t been so stupid, you wouldn’t have been strong enough to come to our rescue in the war.’²² Bevin’s Tory wartime boss, Winston Churchill, merely thought George ‘a limited man’.²³ Vulliamy described George as ‘a stupid man at the end of his tether’, and even as recently as 2018 a book on Lexington and Concord described the King having a ‘vague, simplistic understanding of history and economics’.²⁴ The biographer Philip Guedalla thought him ‘singularly unimpressive’; the Unitarian writer Alexander Gordon dubbed him ‘George the Third-Rate’, while the historian J. H. Plumb equated him with King John as ‘one of England’s most disastrous kings’.²⁵

Ditty-writers concur: here are two humorous ones:

George the Third
Ought never to have occurred.
One can only wonder
At so grotesque a blunder.²⁶

Edmund Clerihew Bentley

George the First was always reckoned
Vile, but viler George the Second;
And what mortal ever heard
Any good of George the Third?
When from earth the Fourth descended
(God be praised!) the Georges ended.²⁷

Walter Savage Landor

Before mental illness came to be seen in a decent and modern way, historians regularly stigmatized George and ascribed what was called ‘the King’s Malady’ to supposed defects in his personality. In 1941, Manfred Guttmacher linked the King’s manic-depressive psychosis to his failure to establish autocratic power.²⁸ Plumb bizarrely believed it had been brought on by the strain of having to make love to his unattractive wife Queen Charlotte. In 1976 a biographer thought it worth asking ‘whether or not it was the blight of God’.²⁹

Yet now that Queen Elizabeth II has allowed over 200,000 pages of the Georgian Papers kept in the Royal Archives in the Round Tower of

Windsor Castle to be published – 85 per cent of them for the first time – it is at last possible to show that every single word quoted above about George III is completely wrong.

George undoubtedly made many errors during his sixty-year reign, and in an undated memorandum (probably written around 1766) he looked uncompromisingly at them. He wrote it, he said, so that ‘the tongue of malice may not paint my intentions in those colours she admires, nor the sycophant extol me beyond what I deserve . . . That I have erred is undoubted, otherwise I should not be human, but I flatter myself all unprejudiced persons will be convinced that whenever I have failed it has been from the head not the heart.’³⁰

What follows here is the true story of King George III. I hope that I have written without malice or sycophancy for ‘all unprejudiced persons’ to judge George objectively by the facts, unswayed by the opinions of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, Whig politicians and historians, Winston Churchill, modern websites and psycho-historians, or even by Lin-Manuel Miranda. At the end, all I request is that you ask yourself whether you have read the biography of a brute (‘nay worse than brute’), a dictator and a tyrant, or rather the most unfairly traduced sovereign in the long history of the British monarchy.

I

Prince of Wales

June 1738–May 1756

Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong: and a boy deprived of his father's care often develops . . . an independence and vigour of thought which may restore in after life the heavy loss of early days.¹

Winston Churchill, *The River War*, 1899

Prince George William Frederick of Hanover was born at Norfolk House in St James's Square, London, between six and seven o'clock on the morning of 4 June 1738. He was the second child and first son of Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales, and Augusta, the daughter of Frederick, Duke of Saxe-Gotha. Born two months premature, he was privately baptized by the Bishop of Oxford at eleven o'clock that night, in case he should die. He was named in honour of his late great-grandfather, King George I, whose Hanoverian dynasty had come to the throne of England just twenty-four years earlier.

The Hanoverian dynasty has become a byword for family dysfunction. George I had hated his eldest son George II, who had acceded to the throne in 1727, and who in turn loathed his own eldest son Prince Frederick. Indeed, the reason why the baby Prince George had been born in the Duke of Norfolk's mansion house rather than in a royal palace was that George II and his wife Queen Caroline of Ansbach so despised their eldest son that he had escaped from them at the time of the birth of his first child.

Prince Frederick and Princess Augusta had been staying at his parents' country residence of Hampton Court Palace when Princess Augusta's waters broke in the middle of the night on 31 July of the previous year, 1737. Rather than have the baby born under his parents' roof, Frederick had Augusta driven 12 miles by coach to St James's Palace to have the baby – George's elder sister – delivered in London instead. Queen Caroline retaliated by encouraging a rumour that her eldest son was impotent, thus casting doubt on her own granddaughter's legitimacy. The rumour did not

take root, since it was known that Frederick kept a string of mistresses; as well as the beautiful courtesan Anne Vane, there was the daughter of a playhouse oboist, a prima donna at the opera, an apothecary's daughter from Kingston, and Grace, Countess of Middlesex, Princess Augusta's Mistress of the Robes.²

Queen Caroline was irreconcilable in her hatred of Prince Frederick, a consequence of his political opposition, supposed overspending and perceived unfilial slights against his parents. 'Look, there he goes,' Queen Caroline once told the courtier Lord Hervey on spotting Frederick from an upstairs window. 'That wretch! That villain! I wish the ground would open this moment and sink the monster to the lowest hole in Hell!'³ In the German language which that generation of the royal family customarily spoke among themselves, the King called Frederick a *Wechselbalg* (changing), but the Queen seems to have disliked him even more, telling Hervey, 'My dear first-born is the greatest ass, and the greatest liar, and the greatest canaille [blackguard], and the greatest beast, in the whole world, and I most heartily wish he was out if it.'^{4*}

If Prince Frederick tried to visit his mother on her deathbed, the King ordered a courtier to 'Bid him go about his business; for his poor mother is not in a condition to see him act his false, whining, cringing tricks now, nor am I in a humour to bear his impertinence; and bid him trouble me with no more messages, but get out of my house.'⁵ Queen Caroline died on 20 November 1737, but not without a vicious parting shot at her eldest son. 'At least I shall have one comfort in having my eyes eternally closed,' she said of him, '- I shall never see that monster again.'⁶

When Prince George was born seven months later, Frederick's friend John Perceval, 2nd Earl of Egmont, noted in his diary that 'His Majesty took little notice of it, on account of the difference between him and His Royal Highness, only laughed and said the saddler's wife was brought to bed,' an allusion to Frederick's recent election to the governorship of the Worshipful Company of Saddlers, a City livery company.⁷ The King had demanded Frederick's eviction from St James's Palace, 'as soon as ever the safety and convenience of the Princess will permit', forcing Frederick to take the lease on the Duke of Norfolk's house until 1743 when he was able to buy his own residence, Leicester House in Leicester Square.^{8†}

Personality clashes, oppositional politics and vicious rows over money all combined to ensure that George grew up in an atmosphere overshadowed

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* Hervey's diaries need to be treated with caution, however, as Anne Vane had left him for Frederick.

† On the site of today's Empire cinema.

by his grandfather's hatred of his father, a loathing that was fully reciprocated. It had been a joyous day for the King in 1737 when the House of Commons turned down a proposal to increase his son's allowance from £50,000 per annum to £100,000 per annum – the sum he himself had enjoyed when Prince of Wales – by 234 votes to 204.⁹

What made the Hanoverians' intergenerational hatreds all the stranger was that as a very young dynasty in Britain – although an old one in their native Hanover – their throne was hardly secure. The Act of Settlement in 1701 had vested the succession, after the death of the childless Queen Anne, in her second cousin Sophia, the wife of Elector Ernest Augustus of Hanover and mother of the future George I. Sophia was a niece of the deposed Charles I of England and sister of Prince Rupert of the Rhine, and the only Protestant with a reasonably direct claim to the throne.

The main purpose of the Act was to exclude Roman Catholics from the succession, so the Hanoverians essentially owed their claim entirely to their Protestantism (they were Lutherans who converted to Anglicanism when George I acceded), and to the Bloodless and Glorious Revolution of 1688 that had deposed Charles I's Catholic son James II, replacing him with the Protestant King William III, Stadtholder of the Netherlands, and his wife Queen Mary II (James II's daughter). The Revolution had thus overthrown the absolutist Stuarts in favour of a limited, constitutional monarchy, but there followed two major Jacobite (from Jacobus, Latin for James) uprisings in 1715 and 1745 as first James II's son the Old Pretender and then his grandson the Young Pretender ('Bonnie Prince Charlie') sought to recapture the throne. Yet even these grave international and domestic threats could not unify the Hanover dynasty.

For all the danger presented by his premature birth, Prince George grew into a healthy boy. He later put this down to the ministrations of his wet nurse, Mary Smith. 'She suckled me,' he wrote upon her death in 1773, 'and to her great attention my having been reared is greatly owing.'¹⁰ In thanks he made her the royal laundress when he became king and ensured that her daughter inherited the post after her. The four-year-old Prince George was described by an MP's wife as a fat and 'lovely child'.¹¹ He certainly had loving parents, a welcome exception to the Hanoverian custom. 'You have a father who loves you all tenderly,' Frederick wrote to his children on one occasion, and on another he told George that he was 'a father who (what is not usual) is your best friend'.¹²

Frederick had been born in Hanover and only came to England in 1728 aged twenty-one, but he fully identified as British. This was probably another reason why his parents hated him, as George II was happiest when

he was in Hanover, where he went for several months every other year. Frederick was also determined that his own children – of whom there were nine born between 1737 and 1751 – should be brought up as British. At a ball he threw for his eldest daughter Princess Augusta's third birthday at Cliveden in Buckinghamshire, the country house he leased for the summer months, Frederick commissioned Thomas Arne to compose the music for *The Masque of Alfred* about the ninth-century English monarch Alfred the Great, a piece today best known for its powerful finale, 'Rule, Britannia!'.

In sharp contrast to the philistinism of the Court of George II – Alexander Pope called him 'Dunce the Second' – Frederick and Augusta were cultured patrons of the arts. They collected Van Dyck, Rubens, George Knapp and Barthélemy du Pan, and employed William Kent to design botanical gardens at Kew (where they had a summer residence) and to reconstruct the Prince of Wales' official residence at Carlton House on the Mall. They are widely credited with having brought the rococo style to Britain. Frederick wrote French verse, visited Pope at Twickenham and knew Jonathan Swift. He supported the natural philosopher John Theophilus Desaguliers, Sir Isaac Newton's experimental assistant. Augusta promoted the painter Jean-Étienne Liotard, as well as the craft of clock- and watchmaking.¹³ George therefore grew up in a highly cultured household.

A lover of music, Frederick played the cello, commissioned Handel to compose an anthem for his wedding and put on amateur dramatics at Cliveden featuring his own songs and poems, which, even if they were not particularly distinguished, still placed him on a far higher artistic plane than George I or George II. Frederick was also an early enthusiast for cricket, although his captaincy of the Surrey team probably owed more to his rank than to proficiency at the crease.

Despite being fated always to be in political opposition – such was the patronage and power available to the governments of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that they rarely lost general elections – Frederick had a strong sense of what he wanted to achieve when he became king, and a natural sense of public relations. He would walk the streets unattended by bodyguards, he would drink at the local public houses around Cliveden and he was ready to enter, in the words of one near-contemporary, 'the cottages of the poor, listen with patience to their twice-told tales, and partake with relish of the[ir] humble fare', leaving them with a few guineas as well as his friendly regards.¹⁴

On 27 June 1743, when George was five years old, his grandfather became the last British king to command an army in person, defeating the French at the battle of Dettingen in the War of Austrian Succession. The thirty-six-year-old Frederick's request to take part in the campaign had

been ignored by his father. Instead, the King's third and favourite son, Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, was given a corps to command and was severely wounded in the leg by a musket ball. He became a national hero, but it caused bad blood between him and Frederick that would fester for years.

The situation worsened two years later when Cumberland was chosen to command the forces that put down the Jacobite rebellion of James II's grandson the Young Pretender. Once again Frederick offered to serve, but was turned down, even though every English male monarch for the past two and a half centuries (except for the boy-king Edward VI and the pacific James I) had fought on a military campaign.¹⁵ According to the Whig MP and diarist Horace Walpole, whose father Sir Robert Walpole had been Prime Minister at the time, 'When the royal army lay before [the Jacobite-held city of] Carlisle, the Prince, at a great supper that he gave to his Court and his favourites . . . had ordered for the dessert the representation of the citadel of Carlisle in paste [pastry], which he in person, and the maids of honour, bombarded with sugar plums!'¹⁶

Was this levity intended to draw attention to Frederick's frustration at being forbidden to fight, or a somewhat laboured jape, or just a fun post-prandial diversion? Was it even true, given Horace Walpole's capacity for malicious invention? If it did happen, it emphasizes Frederick's enforced impotence compared to the effectiveness of Cumberland, a brother fourteen years his junior who was busy in the north saving the dynasty. Even Cumberland's brutal reprisals against the Jacobite Highlanders after his victory at the battle of Culloden in April 1746, which earned him the nickname 'Butcher', failed to dent his popularity in the Court or the country; indeed, it might even have enhanced it.

No record survives of what the seven-year-old George felt during those nerve-racking days of the Jacobite rebellion, when the rebels marched as far south as Derby, just 130 miles from London. However, in September 1747 Frederick announced himself 'well pleased' with his son's spirited strictures against the Governor of Bergen op Zoom for surrendering his city without a fight towards the end of the War of Austrian Succession. We cannot know whether a horror of rebellion was instilled in the boy by the frantic preparations of Londoners to escape the capital should it fall to the Jacobites in 1745, but he certainly grew up in the knowledge that his ultimate accession to the throne was still threatened a full three decades after his great-grandfather had become king. Instinctive to the Hanoverian dynasty was the assumption that rebellions, if they could not be reasoned with, must be crushed by overwhelming force.

One of the reasons why Prince Frederick emphasized his own and his

son's Englishness was that it served as an unsubtle critique of his Germanic father the King, but another was that so long as the Hanoverians were perceived as foreigners their occupation of the throne might be insecure. Frederick's campaign of anglicization reached its apogee when he staged a production of Joseph Addison's play *Cato* 'before a numerous court of the nobility' at Leicester House on 4 January 1749.* A paean to the liberty brought over by William III during the Glorious Revolution, it lauded 'the great William brought to bless this land . . . Of power well bounded'.¹⁷ The cast included Frederick and Augusta's four eldest children – Princess Augusta (who was eleven), Prince George (ten), Prince Edward, Duke of York (nine) and Princess Elizabeth (seven). George played Portius and delivered a prologue specially written by his father:

'tis the first great lesson I was taught,
 What, tho' a boy! It may with truth be said
 A boy in *England* born, in England bred,
 Where freedom best becomes the earliest state,
 For there the love of liberty's innate.¹⁸

One of the other child actors in that production was the sixteen-year-old Frederick North, playing Syphax. He was the son of Francis North, Lord Guilford, one of Frederick's lords of the bedchamber (a post traditionally held by the Prince's closest friends and advisers). As George did not go to school, his playmates and friends were drawn from his own siblings and a small group of aristocratic courtiers' children, of whom Frederick North was one, despite the large age gap. The Prince and Princess of Wales' Court was a close-knit group that made its own amusements. In 1748, Lady Hervey noted that the young Prince George and the other royal children were playing 'at baseball, a play all who are or have been schoolboys are well acquainted with'.¹⁹ She added that 'the ladies as well as the gentlemen join in this amusement'. It was a form of rounders that later became popular in America – a game that, ironically, George III played but George Washington did not.

Nine days after the production of *Cato*, Frederick wrote a political testament for his son's guidance in the event of his early death, the full title of which included a dig at his father: 'Instructions for my Son George, Drawn by Myself, for His Good, that of my Family and for that of His People, According to the Ideas of my Grandfather and Best Friend, George I'. 'To my son George,' it began:

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* The Irish actor James Quin, who coached George during the rehearsals, would later try to take the credit for George's clarity of delivery when he gave his first Speech from the Throne.

as I always have had the tenderest paternal affection for you, I cannot give you a stronger proof of it than in leaving this paper for you in your mother's hands, who will read it to you from time to time and will give it to you when you come of age or when you get the Crown . . . I entertain no doubt of your good heart, nor of your honour; things I trust you will never lose out of sight. The perverseness and bad examples of the times, I am sure, will never make you forget them.²⁰

The assumption that they had the misfortune to be living through a particularly dissolute and dissipated era was a common one, and was later to be enthusiastically adopted by George.

Although Frederick was only forty-one, the testament was written as if he were on his deathbed. 'I shall have no regret never to have wore the crown,' he wrote, 'if you do but fill it worthily. Convince this nation that you are not only an Englishman born and bred, but that you are also this by inclination, and that as you will love your younger children next to the elder born, so you will love all your other countries, next to England.'²¹ Frederick also mentioned the rarity and value of finding a trustworthy friend who would tell the Prince the truth. In future years, as we shall see, George cleaved to this advice if anything too closely.

The specific policies that Prince Frederick advocated in his letter were few: they included the avoidance of war and the gradual repayment of the National Debt by keeping public spending within the revenues raised by the two-shilling (10 per cent) land tax and the malt tax. He also suggested breaking the personal union of Britain and Hanover under the British Crown, by having one of Frederick's brothers or uncles become Elector of Hanover when George became King of England. There was nothing about trying to increase the already very wide prerogatives enjoyed by the Crown under the Act of Settlement of 1689, which had sealed the Glorious Revolution. Later commentators, such as the Irish-born Whig MP Edmund Burke, came to believe that Frederick had wanted to extend Crown powers, but there is no evidence for it; indeed Frederick specified that his plan to decouple Hanover depended on gaining 'the sanction of the [Holy Roman] Empire and the authority of an Act of Parliament'.²²

Frederick believed that reduction of the National Debt was vital, and 'if not done, will surely one time or other create such a disaffection and despair that I dread the consequences for you, my dear son'.²³ In hoping that George would be a wise man and brave prince, Frederick added, 'If you can be without war, you must not bring it into it. A good deal of the National Debt must be paid off before England enters a war: at the same time, never give up your honour nor that of the nation.'²⁴ To

this concept of intertwined personal and national honour George was to return again and again throughout his reign, probably impelled by his father's clearly heartfelt political testament.

Although only half a dozen letters from Frederick to his children survive, they all show a loving father, deeply interested in their upbringing. 'That none of you, my dear George, may ever forget your duty but always be a blessing to your family and country is the prayer of your friend and father,' reads one; another asks the boy to write more often, 'which will make me happy as nothing can do more than a prospect to say my children turn [out to be] an honour to me and a blessing to my country'.²⁵ 'Pray God that you may grow in every respect above me,' he wrote in another, '- goodnight, my dear children.'²⁶

On 22 June 1750, George II invested the twelve-year-old Prince George as a knight of the Garter, England's oldest and grandest order of chivalry, dating back to 1348, although he possibly only did so under advice from his ministers, who recognized that one day Frederick would be king. Frederick arrived to attend the ceremony, held in the King's Chamber at Hampton Court, but was forced to watch it through an open door from the next room because his father refused to receive him. The day after the investiture, George wrote his earliest extant letter, which was to the King in well-formed script: 'Sir, I hope you will forgive me the liberty I take to thank Your Majesty for the honour you did me yesterday. It is my utmost wish and shall always be my study to deserve your paternal goodness and protection. I am with the greatest respect and submission, Sir, Your Majesty's most humble and dutiful subject, George.'²⁷

Initially George's education, together with that of his younger brother Prince Edward, was undertaken by the Rev. Francis Ayscough, Clerk of the Closet, but in September 1749 Frederick's friend Lord Guilford was appointed as their governor, Ayscough then concentrating solely on their religious education. Their new tutor was the scholar-mathematician George Lewis Scott. Although Scott had been recommended to Frederick by the Tory politician Lord Bolingbroke and was later accused by Whigs of having been a Jacobite sympathizer, he had in fact been born in Hanover (where his father had held a Court appointment from George I, after whom he was named), and there was no hint of any unpatriotic allegiances.*

Between them, Frederick and Guilford laid down a programme of instruction for the two young princes that covered almost every moment of their weekdays. They awoke at 7 a.m., attended classes from 8 a.m. to

* At least at that point in his career; much later on Scott became a follower of Thomas Paine, a very strange political trajectory.

12.30 p.m., then enjoyed an hour of play before more lessons. After dinner at 3 p.m. there were further lessons until supper at 8 p.m., and the boys went to bed between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. They learned Latin, mathematics, history, French, German, geography, elementary science, art and architecture, as well as dancing and fencing. On Sunday mornings there was divine service, followed by ninety minutes of instruction in the doctrines of the Church of England, from which George developed the devout Anglican faith that guided him throughout his life.

It was an unrelenting schedule, and while it offered a much better education than most of the great public schools provided, crucially the boys did not grow up in the company of children of their own age beyond a few of their courtiers' sons, with the result that George developed into a somewhat shy and introverted boy. He was not a stupid one, however. Horace Walpole and a succession of Whig historians presented George as a slow pupil who struggled with reading and writing. It is an enduring claim that still persists; a typical accusation is that George was 'apathetic, sleepy, dull and backward, unable to read properly until he was eleven'.²⁸ In fact his exercise books in the Royal Archives show that George was perfectly competent at reading and writing English by the age of nine and corresponded with his father in German aged twelve. By fifteen he was translating from Latin, translating classical texts including some philosophy. Around this time he also composed an essay in French on kingship from the story of Telemachus.²⁹

Early in 1751, Frederick and Augusta settled the twelve-year-old George and eleven-year-old Edward at Savile House, adjoining Leicester House. It was the Hanoverian practice to give princes their own establishments early, and Savile House, built in the 1680s, was to become George's London home for the next nine years. His mini-Court there consisted of a governor, preceptor (responsible for teaching), sub-governor, sub-preceptor and treasurer, with part-time teachers for languages, fencing, dancing and riding brought in from outside. He studied algebra, geometry and trigonometry. He was the first British monarch to study science, being taught basic physics and chemistry by Scott. He was receiving a good, all-round, enlightened education.

The monarch was the head of eighteenth-century governments, which tended to be formed by factions formed around prominent individuals; there were no political parties based on delineated ideology in the modern sense. Cabinet ministers considered themselves to be directly responsible to the King rather than to a prime minister and there was no concept of a Loyal Opposition, merely the supporters of factions that were not in

government, whose exclusion from power and influence was underlined by the fact that the King did not invite them to Levees and Drawing Rooms, and they were therefore consigned to the political wilderness. Honours, patronage and sinecures were reserved solely for government supporters, hence the constant jockeying for position among the factions that so characterized the politics of the era.

Neither the Whigs nor the Tories were political parties in anything approaching the modern sense of the term, in that a member of Parliament would consider himself to be not so much primarily a Whig or Tory MP as a county or borough MP, or a friend of Mr Pelham, or a Court supporter, and so on. Whigs and Tories had separate political philosophies, but it was not until the nineteenth century that MPs identified themselves through ideology as opposed to faction.

Britain had effectively become a one-party state in 1714, when soon after coming to the throne George I had expelled the Tories from all positions of authority in the country because they were suspected – in a few cases correctly, but mostly wrongly – of having Stuart rather than Hanoverian sympathies. Some three decades later, Toryism remained a political philosophy that dared not speak its name. There were fewer than a hundred Tory MPs in a House of Commons totalling 558, and almost none of any stature, since anyone of talent or ambition joined the ruling Whigs. Yet although to George I and George II Tory men were pariahs to be kept away from government, Tory measures could seep back into the body politic, albeit championed by politicians who outwardly at least still professed to be Whigs.³⁰ In the reigns of those two Hanoverians, neither the Whigs nor the Tories had elected leaders or had a party membership. Both reflected tendencies and traditions that went back to the Civil War period of the 1640s.

Yet Tories no longer passed their wine glasses over water jugs as they toasted the monarch at dinner, a secret code indicating that their true allegiance was to the Jacobite Pretender, who lived ‘over the water’ in exile in Rome. Similarly, all but the most fanatical Jacobites had long ceased toasting ‘The little gentleman in the black velvet waistcoat’, an equally euphemistic reference to the mole whose burrow had caused William III’s horse to throw him, break his collarbone and bring about his early death from pneumonia.

Although Prince Frederick and the Leicester House Set were not Tories as such, several had Tory sympathies and they wanted to reform the system by which parliamentary elections had for decades been manipulated by the ‘Old Corps’ or ‘Old Whig’ government – also nicknamed the ‘Old Gang’ – that had ruled Britain since the Glorious Revolution. Whigs tended

to emphasize the advantages of trade, Continental commitments to protect Hanover and sharing out jobs ('places') between themselves. Yet, for all their reformism, the various means by which the Leicester House Set intended to win and keep power looked suspiciously like those by which the Old Whigs such as Sir Robert Walpole and the Pelham family – Henry Pelham and his brother Thomas Pelham, 1st Duke of Newcastle – had ruled through an oligarchy of Whig aristocrat cousins.³¹

Prince Frederick and the Leicester House Set were attracted by the political philosophy of the septuagenarian Tory radical Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke, who had long been Walpole and the Old Whigs' greatest ideological and parliamentary adversary. Bolingbroke had indeed been a Jacobite for a period and had been forced to live in exile until 1723, but he was a gifted intellectual who numbered Pope, Voltaire, Jonathan Swift and Thomas Gray among his friends. In the late 1720s and early 1730s, he hoped to create a political movement in which a 'Country' (that is, anti-London) party of squires and patriots would oppose what he saw as Old Whig corruption and demand a more efficient government, one that would end – or at least ameliorate – the system of jobbery, nepotism and patronage personified by Sir Robert Walpole.

Because the monarch was the head of state, and government ministers were his servants, it followed that any Prince of Wales who was estranged from him would naturally come to be seen as the leader of the oppositional faction in Parliament and the country. In his struggles with a hateful father and what he considered a corrupt Court, Frederick seemed to have one inestimable advantage on his side: time. 'The Prince of Wales gains strength in Parliament', noted the statesman and writer Lord Chesterfield in April 1749, 'in proportion as the King grows older.'³² Frederick gathered around him at Leicester House a shadow Cabinet of Opposition politicians, who would take over the government on the death of the King. The Leicester House Set included Lord Egmont (whom Frederick intended to make Prime Minister), Robert Henley (later Lord Northington), George Bubb Dodington MP and Sir Francis Dashwood MP, who enjoyed an exaggerated reputation as a libertine.³³

The political ideas of Lord Bolingbroke coalesced in the mid- to late 1730s, just at the time that Frederick and the Leicester House Set were looking for a political ideology to differentiate themselves from George II, Walpole and the Pelhams. For Frederick and his friends, Bolingbroke was no longer the feared and suspected Tory-Jacobite of old: having now embraced loyalty to the Hanoverian succession, he was for them an eloquent harbinger of a new concept of politics. Bolingbroke's book *The Idea of a Patriot King*, written and distributed privately in 1738 but only

published in 1749, became their unofficial manifesto. Yet, for Bolingbroke's Old Whig opponents, the 'Patriot' or Country movement ideologically entwined with the Leicester House Set looked suspiciously like the Stuart absolutism that their forefathers had overthrown half a century earlier in the Glorious Revolution.

Given their subsequent influence on Prince George, as well as on his father and his father's friends, the thinking expressed in *The Idea of a Patriot King* is worth examination. Bolingbroke's condemnation of the political establishment of his age from a Country perspective has been described as 'a classical, humanistic and agrarian dread of corruption, and the sad conviction that eighteenth-century England was corrupt to the core, or very near it'.³⁴ Bolingbroke opposed the Whig special-interest groups that he believed were becoming increasingly dominant in politics and society. This could only be done by what he called 'a coalition of parties meeting on a national bottom'.³⁵ The genesis of George's attempts throughout his reign to replace the Whig oligarchs with a broadly based national coalition of patriots regardless of faction can be traced back to these ideas of the 1730s.

Contrary to the Whig imperative of minimizing royal power, *The Idea of a Patriot King* argued that the role of a constitutionally limited hereditary monarchy was important. Bolingbroke fully accepted that such seventeenth-century notions as the Divine Right of Kings had 'no foundation in fact or reason', and he believed 'a limited monarchy the best of governments'.³⁶ The limits on the power of the Crown, he maintained, should be 'carried as far as is necessary to secure the liberties of the people' and enough to protect the people against an arrogant (by which he meant Old Whig) aristocracy.³⁷ Bolingbroke's patriot king would revere the constitution, regard his prerogatives as a sacred trust, 'espouse no party' and 'govern like the common father of his people'.³⁸

A key message of the book was that government by party inevitably resulted in a factionalism disastrous to the state. 'Party is a political evil,' Bolingbroke wrote, 'and faction is the worst of all parties. The king will aim at ruling a united nation, and in order to govern wisely and successfully he will put himself at the head of his people,' so that he can deliver them 'tranquillity, wealth, power and fame'.³⁹ These notions might sound utopian, but George took them to heart, and many of his actions as monarch can be seen as attempts to live up to the idea of a patriot king that this Tory political philosopher had prescribed for his father. Indeed, it is impossible to understand many of George's actions as king unless one recognizes the profound influence of *The Idea of a Patriot King*, the wider political assumptions of the Leicester House Set and his revered father's

political testament. Many of their ideals were naive, but they were undeniably attractive compared to the Old Whigs' governing principle of relentless appeal to politicians' love of titles, money and sinecures.

The patriot rulers that Bolingbroke most admired included Henri IV of France and Elizabeth I of England, because he saw their rule as 'broad-based upon the people's will'. He argued strongly against unnecessary foreign entanglements and against the retention of a large standing army, except as a last resort and for short periods in order to foster the balance of power in Europe. An important aspect of a patriot king's rule was that upon his accession he would expel adventurers and corrupt politicians from office and replace them with honest patriots, thereby winning the support and love of a contented people. When Bolingbroke was writing in 1738 this meant ousting Walpole, who had been Prime Minister since 1721 and was to remain so until 1742. In foreign policy, Bolingbroke contended, Britain ought to look to her colonies around the globe rather than to Europe (including Hanover), where he believed the patriot king would triumphantly extend 'the right and the honour of Great Britain as far as waters roll and as winds can waft them'.⁴⁰

In April 1749, Frederick and Egmont drew up a 'List of those who must if possible be kept out of the House of Commons', which, although never acted upon, is useful for identifying those whom the Leicester House Set saw as their chief opponents. The Old Corps stalwart Henry Pelham was 'to be obliged (if he can be made) to go up to the House of Lords'; the venal Commons influencer Henry Fox was 'to have some very profitable employment (though it should be for life) which will be inconsistent with a seat in Parliament'; the ambitious Whig orator William Pitt was 'to have likewise some profitable employment and inconsistent with a seat in Parliament'; the capable but unprepossessing George Grenville* was 'to be kept out', as were his fellow moderates William Legge and William Barrington ('but perhaps in time brought in by us'). There was another list, comprising eighteen of 'The most obnoxious men of an inferior degree', which included staunch Whigs such as Colonel Henry Conway and Lord George Sackville.⁴¹ Frederick and Egmont understood the political landscape: their diverse list included all the impressive up-and-coming Whig politicians of the day, as identified by a clique seemingly determined to define itself by its enemies.

On 16 March 1751, Frederick was gardening at Kew when he was suddenly caught in a rain shower. He later attended the House of Lords in

* Spelt 'Greenville' in that and many other documents.

heavy, sodden clothes, before changing into lighter ones, went back to Kew for a walk in the garden and at last returned to Carlton House on the Mall where he reportedly rested by an open window. This seems to have triggered a pre-existing condition, and the next day he was taken ill with what the doctors correctly diagnosed as pleurisy, or inflammation of the lungs. He was blistered and bled according to standard practice, and by 26 March he seemed out of danger. On the evening of Wednesday 31 March, however, he was eating bread and butter and drinking coffee when he had a sudden coughing fit. He then laid his hand on his stomach and said, 'Je sens la mort.'⁴² His valet, Schrader, is said to have called out to Princess Augusta, 'The Prince is going,' but by the time she had found a candle and arrived, Frederick was dead.⁴³

A post-mortem found that the forty-four-year-old Prince of Wales had died from an 'impostume' or swelling abscess in his breast that had burst and suffocated him. This was variously attributed to a blow from a cricket ball sustained at a match at Cliveden with his sons three years earlier or to a fall the previous summer, which had been aggravated by the pleurisy.⁴⁴

Frederick was not widely mourned; today he is best known for the Jacobite squib:

Here lies poor Fred, who was alive and is dead.
 We had rather it had been his father,
 Had it been his brother, better'n any other,
 Had it been his sister, no one would have missed her,
 Had it been the whole generation, all the better for the nation,
 But as it's just poor Fred, who was alive and is dead,
 There's no more to be said.⁴⁵

George was two months short of his thirteenth birthday when his father died. It dealt him a devastating blow from which he took years to recover. When Ayscough told him the news, he went pale, pointed to his heart and said, 'I feel something here, just as I did when I saw two workmen fall from the scaffold at Kew.'⁴⁶ His mother Princess Augusta was thirty-one and pregnant with a ninth child, and she now had to take on her husband's sizeable debts. She was over-protective towards George, and occasionally given to paranoid fears about her in-laws, but she was not the strong-willed, power-obsessed, 'passionate, domineering woman' and political absolutist portrayed, with no evidence whatever, by Walpole and later Whig historians and propagandists.

Augusta was only sixteen when she had arrived in England to marry Frederick, not formally educated and speaking no English, but she learned

it quickly and was a good mother and good person, and certainly did not deserve the slurs that were shortly to be directed at her. (She was even widely accused of having poisoned her husband, with no evidence.) Overshadowed by Weimar in today's imagination, in the eighteenth century Augusta's birthplace of Saxe-Gotha was well known as a centre of Enlightenment culture and science, and modern historians free of the political and misogynistic bias of Horace Walpole and others agree that she was a credit to her origins.⁴⁷ In December 1804, long after her death, George reminisced that 'his mother was a very sensible woman and entirely governed his father at the end of his life'.⁴⁸ She was now left in an impossible position, and could only appeal to the mercy of her father-in-law, writing to the King the day after her husband's death, 'I throw myself, with my children, at your feet. We commend ourselves, Sire, to your fatherly love and royal protection'.⁴⁹

There had been no fatherly love whatever, as they both knew. 'I have lost my eldest son,' George II said at the end of the year, 'but I was glad of it.'⁵⁰ As for Frederick's burial, the King merely 'ordered the bowels to be put in a box' and three days later the undertakers had still not taken the box or the body away. 'The bowels not yet sewed up nor the body embalmed,' Egmont noted in his diary, 'a scandalous neglect. The smell is to be perceived over the whole house and descended even into Prince George's apartment.'⁵¹ The key new relationship in British politics – that between George II and his grandson and heir apparent Prince George – therefore started off with the Prince subjected to the stench of his father's rotting corpse thanks to his grandfather's neglect.

The funeral took place in the Henry VII Chapel at Westminster Abbey on the afternoon of 13 April 1751. It was a cut-price affair, one mourner noting that 'no organ went, nor was there any anthem.'⁵² George and his siblings were considered too young to attend, and, aside from Augusta, the official chief mourner at the funeral was the non-royal Duke of Somerset as the rest of the royal family and senior aristocracy, taking their cue from the King, stayed away; except for the pall-bearers there were no English lords, one lone bishop and only two privy councillors.⁵³ The procession was rained upon as no one had thought to erect a canopy between the House of Lords and the Abbey. Nor were there any catering arrangements, so Dodington, a friend of the Prince, and the Prince's former lords of the bedchamber were obliged to send out 'for a great cold dinner from a common tavern in the neighbourhood'.⁵⁴

It was arranged that if the sixty-seven-year-old King died before George became eighteen, Augusta would become Dowager Princess Regent, but

effective power would lie with the Duke of Cumberland and the Pelhams in a Regency Council. The King had originally wanted Cumberland to be Regent, but he was too unpopular among the Old Whig ministry. Augusta somehow gained the impression that Cumberland might launch a military coup against her regency, and over the coming years she passed on to George her intense distrust of his uncle.

George was allowed to continue to live at Savile House, and was occasionally invited to meet his grandfather at Hampton Court. These visits tended to be unhappy and unsuccessful, and on at least one occasion the King lost his temper and boxed the boy's ears so hard that, in the words of one of George's children many years later, 'The blow so disgusted him with the place that he could never afterwards be induced to think of it as a residence' – the reason why George never lived at Hampton Court as king.⁵⁵ (Indeed, when a fire broke out there in June 1770, he told a courtier that 'he should not have been sorry had it been burnt down'.)⁵⁶ The psychological impression made upon a twelve-year-old boy first by the death of a loving father and subsequently by the physical abuse at the hands of his callous grandfather naturally led George further to revere the memory of the former and despise the latter.

Three weeks after his father's death, on 20 April, George, who had automatically inherited the Duchy of Edinburgh, was created Prince of Wales. The Old Whigs recognized that George's education needed to be radically overhauled if they hoped to stay in power during the next reign. The Duke of Newcastle cashiered Lord Guilford as George's governor and replaced him first with a political supporter, Earl Harcourt. In reality, however, it was the new sub-governor Andrew Stone, Newcastle's former private secretary, who directed George's education. Half a century later, George recalled Harcourt as 'well intentioned, but wholly unfit for the situation in which he was placed'.⁵⁷ He remembered Thomas Hayter, the Bishop of Norwich, who became his preceptor, as 'an intriguing, unworthy man, more fitted to be a Jesuit than an English bishop'.⁵⁸ Although Ayscough was dismissed, Scott, whom a friend of George recalled as 'amiable, honourable, temperate, and one of the sweetest dispositions I ever knew', was confirmed as sub-preceptor.⁵⁹ Soon after his fifteenth birthday George began Latin translations, ending one piece with 'Monsieur Caesar, je vous soite [souhaite] au diable' ('Mr Caesar, I wish you'd go to the Devil').⁶⁰

By October 1752, the notoriously miserly King's refusal to pay off Frederick's debts had left Augusta desperately short of money and extremely bitter. The King had clawed back Frederick's revenues from the Duchy of Cornwall on the basis that they belonged to the monarch's eldest son, not to that son's eldest son. George Dodington's diary records several

conversations at Kew in which Augusta was openly disrespectful of the King, saying in January 1753 that ‘She reckoned the King no more than one of the trees we walked by (or something more inconsiderable, which she named),’ and the next month that ‘The King would sputter and make a bustle’ but not offer any actual financial help.⁶¹ Of George and his tutors she said that ‘she wished he were a little more forward, and less childish, at his age; that she hoped they would improve him . . . : that Stone was a sensible man, and capable of instructing in things, as well as books: that Lord Harcourt and the Prince agreed very well, but she thought he could not learn much from my Lord: that Scott, she believed, was a very good preceptor.’⁶² She was unimpressed by the Bishop of Norwich.

Dodington took the view that George should not just be taught by books, but should ‘begin to learn the usages, and knowledge of the world’; however, the Princess thought ‘the young people of quality were so ill-educated, and so very vicious,* that they frightened her’.⁶³ She said of George ‘that he was a very honest boy, and that his chief passion seemed to be [his friendship for his brother] Edward’.⁶⁴ She has been criticized for keeping the heir to the throne away from his contemporaries, but when one considers the schooling of the upper-class youths of the day – the regular revolts and uprisings at Eton were a case in point – she probably had good reason. The highly ambitious Dodington was worried – possibly for his own sake – that George was not being brought up to remember Frederick ‘and those that were about him’, but the Princess put him right, assuring him that George ‘seemed to have a very tender affection for the memory of his father . . . she encouraged it as much as she could’.⁶⁵

In November 1752 a scandal erupted at Savile House when Harcourt accused Stone of making George read supposed Jacobite tracts supporting arbitrary government, citing *The Idea of a Patriot King*. Furthermore, because he was a mathematician and Fellow of the Royal Society, Scott was suspected by Hayter of being an atheist, while James Cresset the treasurer also fell under suspicion of secret Jacobitism.⁶⁶ The King set up a committee of inquiry which did not take long to establish that there was no truth to the allegations that Stone, Scott and Cresset were all ‘creatures of Lord Bolingbroke’ – who had died the previous December – beyond an anonymous letter that had been written to a friend of Cumberland’s. Many years later, Horace Walpole admitted to having written this himself out of hatred of Henry Pelham† for refusing him a lifetime sinecure of £1,400 per annum

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* ‘Devoted to vice’ (*Johnson’s Dictionary*).

† The animosity persisted even though the love of Walpole’s life was the Earl of Lincoln, Henry Pelham’s nephew and later the 2nd Duke of Newcastle.

that he believed was due to him as it had once belonged to his brother.⁶⁷ Walpole hoped it would damage Pelham with the King if it was believed that George was being infected with Jacobitism during Pelham's premiership, but the King and Pelham's brother Newcastle dismissed both the rumours and the letter. Harcourt and Norwich resigned, and, in Harcourt's place, James Waldegrave, the 2nd Earl Waldegrave, was appointed as George's governor and the Bishop of Peterborough was made preceptor.

Although Walpole had simply lied when he claimed that 'friends and pupils of the late Lord Bolingbroke' had co-opted George's education and were conspiring 'to overthrow the government and restore the exiled and arbitrary house of Stuart', the non-scandal had far-reaching ramifications.⁶⁸ Walpole's accusations of secret Jacobite influence, served to establish a myth that George had been indoctrinated by Tories as a believer in dictatorial Stuart theories of government, a conspiracy theory taken up by Whig politicians of the day and accepted by some Whig and Liberal historians thereafter. In a revealing self-portrait years later, Walpole wrote that he had 'a propensity to faction, and looked on the mischief of civil disturbance as a lively amusement'.⁶⁹

The immediate upshot was that George had a new governor in Lord Waldegrave, of whom he said in 1804, four decades after Waldegrave's death, that he was a 'depraved worthless man', although it is not at all clear upon what he based that judgement.⁷⁰ Waldegrave similarly disliked George, noting in his memoirs that 'Whenever he is displeased, his anger does not break out with heat and violence, but he becomes sullen and silent, and retires to his closet, not to compose his mind by study or contemplation, but merely to indulge the melancholy enjoyment of his own ill humour.'⁷¹ Although George might be excused for being little different from other teenagers in that regard, Waldegrave went on to say that 'Even when the fit is ended, unfavourable symptoms very frequently return, which indicate that on certain occasions His Royal Highness has too correct a memory.'⁷²

It was certainly true that George, as king, retained a long memory for slights and enmities, but he also had one for kinder things such as tending ill relatives and remembering promises. Waldegrave claimed that George was 'uncommonly indolent', snobbishly and sarcastically adding that he was 'full of princely prejudices, contracted in the nursery, and improved by the society of bedchamber women and pages of the back stairs'.⁷³ When George was twenty, Waldegrave, who had not been his governor for two years, declared:

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His religion is free from all hypocrisy, but is not of the most charitable sort; he has rather too much attention to the sins of his neighbour. He . . . does

not want* resolution, but it is mixed with too much obstinacy. He has great command of his passions, and will seldom do wrong, except when he mistakes wrong for right.⁷⁴

The accusation of obstinacy would dog him throughout his life and was often deserved; but, as we shall see, on occasion it could be put to good use.

On 6 March 1754, Henry Pelham, who had been Prime Minister since August 1743, died suddenly, and was succeeded by his brother the Duke of Newcastle. An important question for the future direction of the ministry was who would succeed Pelham in the key role of Leader of the House of Commons: would it be Henry Fox, the Secretary at War, or William Pitt (later known to history as William Pitt the Elder), the Paymaster-General of the Forces? The rivalry between the two families, enthusiastically adopted by their sons Charles James Fox and William Pitt the Younger, was to continue for over half a century.

The Pitt family came from Hampshire, Cornwall and Dorset gentry. William Pitt the Elder's grandfather, Thomas 'Diamond' Pitt, acquired his nickname because of the enormous gem he brought back from India after his career as Governor of Madras. His grandson was something of an outsider as a result of his wilful, turbulent and outspoken temperament. He drank heavily as a junior officer in the cavalry, despite having contracted gout while still at Eton, excesses that he came bitterly to regret in later life. In 1754 he married Lady Hester Grenville, niece of the 1st Viscount Cobham, connecting him to the ambitious Grenville political dynasty and making him brother-in-law to Richard Grenville-Temple, 2nd Earl Temple, and to George Grenville MP.

Pitt had a natural gift for oratory, which he gladly unleashed upon the Old Whig government, deploying an array of historical allusions, witty rejoinders, hard-hitting political points and sarcasm. He spoke eloquently in favour of the vigorous prosecution of war against Spain in 1739, establishing his reputation as a popular patriot. From 1748 until Pelham's death in 1754, Pitt was a force on the government's fringe, even though on some issues, such as his support for subsidies for Hanover during the War of Austrian Succession and for peace with Spain in 1748, he demonstrated a flexibility of principle that verged on opportunism.

On entering his brother's vacant premiership, Newcastle did not want Pitt as Leader of the House of Commons, but Henry Fox would not accept the position unless he was allowed full patronage powers, which Newcastle

* 'Lack' (*Johnson's Dictionary*).

would not grant him. Newcastle distrusted both men: Pitt as a potential adversary and Fox as the recognized Commons spokesman for the Duke of Cumberland, a foreign-policy hawk whose influence was growing due to escalating tensions with the French in North America. Instead he appointed the former diplomat Sir Thomas Robinson, who held the post along with the secretaryship of state for the Southern Department. ‘The Duke might as well send his jackboot to govern us,’ complained Pitt, and joined Fox in attacking Robinson from the front bench, despite still being ostensibly in Newcastle’s Cabinet. Although the Northern and Southern secretaries were theoretically equal in rank, the way that the two roles had developed historically meant that the Southern – which handled relations with France, Spain, the Mediterranean, America and the other colonies – was in practice more important than his Northern counterpart, who dealt with Germany, Holland, Russia, Scandinavia and Scotland, as well as domestic matters.

Although he was still only seventeen in the summer of 1755, George now found an interest in art, architecture, science and history that had been sparked by his father and Ayscough but had lain dormant under the uninspiring governorships of Harcourt and Waldegrave. Now someone emerged in his life who was to reignite his curiosity, and was to play a major role in George’s life for the next eight years. John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, was a relatively minor figure in the Leicester House Set who had first become friendly with Frederick when the Prince asked him to make up a fourth at cards on a rainy afternoon at Egham Races in Surrey, and who in 1750 was appointed one of Frederick’s lords of the bedchamber.

After Frederick’s death, when many of the Leicester House Set scurried across to ingratiate themselves with the Court and government, Bute continued his friendship with Augusta, who liked and trusted him. There is nothing to suggest, however, that Augusta and Bute were lovers, as Whig propagandists were soon insinuating. One of the strongest, albeit circumstantial, rebuttals is that the pious and somewhat straitlaced George came to treat Bute, who was twenty-five years his senior, as a surrogate father-figure. Given his veneration for both his mother and his late father’s memory, had George even so much as suspected Bute of sleeping with his mother (a secret which it would have been impossible to conceal in their tiny Court) he would doubtless have despised them both.⁷⁵ Bute, a Scottish Episcopalian, was moreover happily married to Mary Wortley Montagu, with whom he had eloped in 1735 and had eleven children.

What actually brought Augusta and Bute together was not lust but horticulture. She created the royal botanical gardens at Kew; Bute wrote

learned books on botany, shrubs and flowers, including his nine-volume *Botanical Tables*. In that gossip-driven milieu and age, it took nothing more than a connecting door at the bottom of Augusta's and Bute's respective gardens at Kew to turn a baseless rumour into what the pamphleteers and the extensive gutter press constantly retailed as undoubted fact. Yet people who were in a good position to know the truth, such as Charles Jenkinson, 1st Earl of Liverpool, never believed it. As Liverpool told Lord Glenbervie in 1808, Augusta liked Bute because he was 'the only person about her husband who was attached to her on her own account'; he had not used her to get to Frederick, but treated her as a friend in her own right.⁷⁶

John Bute was tall, handsome and charming. It was said of him that in all high society Lord Bute had the 'finest calves'.⁷⁷ George II, who was never short of rude remarks about his son's friends, said of Bute that he would have made 'an excellent ambassador in any court where there was nothing to do'.⁷⁸ Bute was the nephew of the 2nd and 3rd Dukes of Argyll and, after attending Eton and Leiden University, was from 1737 to 1741 one of the Scottish representative peers in the House of Lords. Afterwards he returned to his large but low-income estate on the Isle of Bute in Scotland. When he appeared in London in 1746 it was said he was so poor that he could hardly afford to keep his own carriage, then considered the most basic social prerequisite for an aristocrat.

Bute was artistic and intelligent, and had a genuine interest in philosophy, mechanics, metaphysics and natural science. Later, his collection of mathematical apparatuses at his country seat at Luton Hoo in Bedfordshire was considered one of the most complete of its kind in Europe.⁷⁹ He was a cultured, discerning and tasteful man, ideally suited to be the moral tutor and mentor of a future king, but fundamentally ill-suited to the often undignified rough-and-tumble of eighteenth-century high politics. Bute also suffered from a problem that the political elite and the popular mob alike could never forgive: he was a Scot.

Bute was descended from an illegitimate branch of the Stuart kings of Scotland, and only a decade after the Jacobite rebellion there were many who still loathed and feared Scots, despite England and Wales having been in a legislative union with Scotland since 1707 and a union of the two Crowns having existed since 1603. Augusta nonetheless appointed Bute as George's tutor in the early summer of 1755, and suddenly the Prince of Wales' education turned from a boring but conscientious slog into a thing of delight. It was wrong to suggest, as Sir Lewis Namier did in 1953, that 'the boy spent joyless years in a well-regulated nursery, the nearest approach to a concentration camp,' but he had not been excited intellectually until Bute arrived.⁸⁰

Although Frederick had been a cultured man, he had died when his eldest son was only twelve. It was thus Bute who introduced George to many of the artistic and intellectual passions of his life, and to the people who stimulated them. He arranged for the distinguished natural scientist Stephen Demainbray to teach him a course of natural and experimental philosophy in May 1755, sparking George's lifelong fascination for the natural sciences. Bute also inspired George's keen bibliophilia, reverence for scholarship, collecting addiction, love of architecture and the intellectual satisfaction that comes from having wide cultural interests. Historical debate over the extent to which the relationship between George and Bute was personal and affectionate or political and ideological underplays the extent to which it was all four, and by far the most important influence on George's life between 1755 and 1763.⁸¹ Bute became George's teacher, mentor, counsellor and role model, in the process completely ousting Lord Waldegrave, who resigned the governorship in 1756.

Between 1756 and 1765 George wrote Bute 340 letters that survive (and it is believed that some others were destroyed).⁸² 'I am conscious of my own indolence,' he wrote in March 1757. 'I do here in the most solemn manner declare that I will entirely throw aside my greatest enemy and that you shall instantly find a change.'⁸³ Yet he was certainly not indolent, writing fifty-page essays for Bute on such demanding subjects as the 'Original Nature of Government' and a 'Short History of England'.⁸⁴ In all, the essays that survive from George's education cover 8,500 pages, breaking down into 59 per cent history, 22 per cent law, 5 per cent classics, 4 per cent mathematics and 2 per cent philosophy, political economy and geography.^{85*} George and Bute were consciously building up the necessary intellectual apparatus – including readings of Montesquieu and Hume – for George to be a monarch worthy of the Enlightenment. The essays demonstrate a good deal of reading and research, especially in George's extensive knowledge of ancient and medieval history. He did not keep a commonplace book like many of his contemporaries, but he did précis and paraphrase writers and books he admired – 500 pages for William Blackstone, 200 for Montesquieu – reshaping arguments, adding, editing and reorganizing complex texts for his own use. The Whig portrait of a lazy or ignorant student is pure fiction.

The practice of essay writing never left Bute's pupil, who continued a form of it with his political memoranda into late middle age. The (sadly

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* These include duplicates and redrafts, as well as, in the words of their historian Jenny Buckley, 'pages of unlabelled annotations, sheets of doodles, and notes on musical scales and works'.

undated) essays of George's youth allow us to delve into the mind of the Prince of Wales in his late teenage years and early twenties, and to dispel the myth put about by Walpole and other Whig writers that George had been taught dictatorial tendencies by a sinister absolutist descendant of the Stuarts.

In fact the precise opposite is true. George's essays suggest a young man who revered the way the Glorious Revolution had brought about liberty, took William III for his role model as king and passionately agreed with his father and Bolingbroke on the personal role of the monarch in defending the people against an overweening aristocracy. Indeed, George regarded the British constitution with something approaching idolatry. 'The pride, the glory of Britain, and the direct end of its constitution is political liberty,' he wrote in one essay.⁸⁶ In another, on William and Mary's Convention Parliament of January 1689 to February 1690, he wrote that 'with all its blemishes [it] saved the nation from the iron rod of arbitrary power,' so 'Let us still remember we stand indebted for our liberty . . . to the success of 1688.'⁸⁷

Some of the essays presented texts and arguments from other thinkers, and it is not always clear whether George agreed or was merely rehearsing their arguments the better to understand them. In one passage on the great Genoese admiral Andrea Doria, George wrote that in re-establishing self-government in the republic in 1528, 'This great action must by all free people be looked on as the most excellent and truest sign of a great man.'⁸⁸ In another essay he asserted of freedom of speech that it 'is not only the natural privilege of liberty, but also its support and preservation, every man therefore here is allowed to declare his sentiments openly, to speak or write whatever is not prohibited by the laws'.⁸⁹ There was nothing that the young George wanted more for his people than life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The conclusion of another of George's essays is worth quoting for its sophisticated appreciation of the importance of the balance of powers:

Thus have we created the noblest constitution the human mind is capable of framing, where the executive power is in the prince, the legislative in the nobility and the representatives of the people, the judicial in the people and in some cases in the nobility, to whom there lies a final appeal from all other courts of judicature, where every man's life, liberty and possessions are secure, where one part of the legislative body checks the other by the privilege of rejecting, both checked by executive, as Material by the legislative; all parts moving, and however they may follow the particular interest of their body, yet all uniting at last for the public good.⁹⁰

Exchange 'prince' for 'president' and 'nobility' for 'Senate' and there is a more than passing resemblance to that jewel of the Enlightenment, the United States constitution of 1787. That is because both the Glorious Revolution and the founding principles of the United States stemmed from the concept of the social contract as expounded by John Locke, to which George fully subscribed. George valued the balance of the British constitution, and his lifelong hostility to the Whig oligarchy stemmed from his belief that the aristocracy were intent on trying to tip its delicate balance between the prince, the nobility and the representatives of the people too far in their own favour.

Further evidence that George was not brought up to be an arbitrary monarch lies in the essays he wrote on the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, in which he emphasized how much greater was the freedom that his house of Hanover offered than the despotism of the Stuarts. The youthful George criticized Charles I who, in his words, 'had too high a notion of the regal power, and thought that every opposition to it was rebellion'.⁹¹ Although he believed Charles' execution had been illegal, he thought it was understandable, and ultimately the fault of his being 'easily governed by his favourites'.⁹²

Despite George's avowed criticism of cronyism, Bute was fast becoming precisely such a favourite. An undated letter from him to George argued of the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires that 'the cause of their destruction' was that their princes were badly educated, whereas Bute flattered himself that 'The prospect of serving you and forming your young mind is exquisitely pleasing to a heart like mine.'⁹³ He warned the Prince that one day someone would whisper to him that he (Bute) had been 'your father's friend and is strongly attached to the Princess', and he added, 'I glory in my attachment to the Princess, in being called your father's friend, but I glory in being yours too.' It was a clever way of dealing with the rumours that he knew would reach George's ears were he to establish total dominance over the impressionable teenager.

It is easy to see why George should have so admired the British constitution, considering the wide powers it gave the monarchy to appoint and dismiss ministers, to prorogue and dissolve parliaments, to make war and peace, to create and advance peerages, and so on; yet he also supported the limits on royal power inherent in the House of Commons' right to refuse taxation as a restraint on royal despotism. At that time it was taken for granted that Parliament also had the right to tax Britain's colonies if necessary, so he was not taught anything different. Thomas Jefferson was later to claim that the King had received a 'Tory education', but in fact it was classically Lockean and had at its core the rejection of absolutism.⁹⁴

At some point in the late 1750s, George made a long précis of Charles de Montesquieu's classic Enlightenment text *The Spirit of the Laws*, originally published in 1748. By comparing Montesquieu's text with the Prince of Wales' rendition, it is possible to see where the ventriloquizing ends and George's own commentary begins; this is particularly noticeable in Book 15, which covers the issue of slavery. 'The almost universal establishment of civil slavery in the hot regions of Asia, Africa and America', George writes, 'and the abhorrence of it under the more temperate zones is apparent to everyone, but yet the causes of it have been hitherto little examined.'⁹⁵ George's own abhorrence becomes very clear in further comments he made on Montesquieu's text, and indeed goes further than Montesquieu's own opposition to the practice. 'The pretexts used by the Spaniards for enslaving the New World were extremely curious,' George noted; 'the propagation of the Christian religion was the first reason, the next was the [Indigenous] Americans differing from them in colour, manners and customs, all [of] which are too absurd to take the trouble of refuting. But what shall we say to the European traffic of black slaves, the very reasons urged for it will be perhaps sufficient to make us hold this practice in execration.'⁹⁶

George then listed Montesquieu's reasons for the Spaniards' enslavement of non-whites, which included the expense involved in growing tobacco, the fact that American blacks looked different from them and their valuing glass necklaces higher than gold.⁹⁷ All this led George to conclude that, as to these 'arguments for an inhuman custom wantonly practised by the most enlightened polite nations in the world, there is no occasion to answer them, for they stand self-condemned'.⁹⁸ George's writings on this subject were much more than merely ventriloquizing Montesquieu, and have been described as being at the vanguard of the radical argument over slavery, since they predated even the arguments made in George Wallace's pioneering anti-slavery book *A System of the Principles of the Law of Scotland*, published in 1760. George clearly did not believe in either the classical or the modern arguments defending slavery and, at least before he acceded to the throne, was a convinced abolitionist.

In terms of British grand strategy, George's essays reflected the global maritime attitudes of Pitt rather than the Continental strategy of his grandfather. Also discernible was Bolingbroke's vision of foreign policy founded on 30,000 to 40,000 sailors manning a navy capable of defending British security in all circumstances. The Royal Navy, George wrote, should be 'equal if not superior to those of all other powers together, which must preserve [Britain] from invasion.'⁹⁹ Of course for financial reasons this would preclude having a large British standing army of the kind that could protect Hanover in time of war. 'Numerous armies and strong fortresses

are inconsistent with freedom,' George wrote in the same essay, although militias were acceptable because they sprang from the people and would 'reconcile the nation to that army that shall be thought necessary'.¹⁰⁰ All this conformed closely to the Leicester House political agenda of the 1740s. Although George never mentioned his father once in his letters to Bute, which cover 250 printed pages, their connection with Frederick was ever present.

George's father would have been pleased that public finance was an area his son studied carefully between 1755 and 1760. As far as private finance was concerned, George wrote that a monarch 'will be feared and respected abroad [and] adored at home by mixing private economy with public magnificence'.¹⁰¹ This seeming dichotomy would typify George's reign, with its marked contrast between his private parsimony, frugal meals and refusal to carpet his palaces on the one hand and the public splendour of his State Coach, silver plate and even silver furniture on the other.¹⁰²

Bute was essentially a university don manqué, with all the advantages and disadvantages which that entailed. He could be pedantic. In the Royal Archives at Windsor is one of George's essays entitled 'Problems of Practical Geometry Useful in Fortification', with corrections by Bute that display his perfectionism.¹⁰³ Where George wrote 'Richard II succeeded his grandfather Edward III when he was eleven years old,' Bute corrected his syntax to 'Richard II was but eleven when he succeeded his grandfather Edward III.'¹⁰⁴ (An even more pedantic correction would have been to point out that Richard II was actually ten and a half.) Where George had written 'begged him to call his grandfather to memory', a perfectly acceptable phrase in the eighteenth century, Bute changed it to 'begged him to call to mind his grandfather'. Nor was George allowed to use ampersands, despite their being almost universally employed at the time, but was made to write out 'and' in their place.¹⁰⁵ * George received a far better all-round education than his contemporaries at the ancient universities, where, Edward Gibbon reminds us, undergraduates were almost completely ignored by their lazy, port-sodden dons.

Bute also instilled a keen sense of morality in George, one in which virtue and monogamy were paramount. Further refuting the notion that he was sleeping with Augusta was Bute's choice of example after example of illicit sex leading to political disaster, among them Robert of Normandy, Henri II of France, Roger Mortimer and Queen Isabella. Bute's real

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* Today the essays can be seen on the Georgian Papers Programme website at https://gpp.rct.uk/Record.aspx?src=Catalog&cid=GIII_ESSAYS.

intended target was probably George II, whose mistresses held established positions at Court, a practice that George was taught to believe produced bad governance. Augusta approved strongly of Bute's influence upon her son. 'Pursue, my worthy friend,' she wrote to Bute, 'those instructions you have begun, and imprint your great sentiments in him,' which, she went on, 'will make my son and his mother happy'.¹⁰⁶

Bute's influence extended far beyond schoolwork. He appointed the Scottish-Swedish architect and polymath Sir William Chambers to give George thrice-weekly tutorials in architecture and drawing. Chambers was a leading proponent of the 'Georgian' style that is such a jewel of Britain's built environment today in such places as Belgravia, Bath, Dublin and Edinburgh. He had George read a central Enlightenment text written by his friend Julien Le Roy, *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce*, on its publication in 1758. An immensely influential work, it launched the use of the colonnade in urban buildings, and George made sketches based on Le Roy's engraving of the Tower of the Winds in Athens. Chambers had worked in Rome, Paris, Gothenburg and Canton, and introduced George to Roman and Greek architecture, such as that of Palmyra and Baalbek.

The Prince of Wales has no specific powers under the British constitution, occupying a role similar to that of the American vice-president: characterized as waking up each morning and inquiring after the health of the president. He was however expected to contract a strategically useful and fruitful marriage, to which end, returning from Hanover in the summer of 1755, the King suggested that George marry Princess Sophia Caroline, the daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. The prospective bride was the niece of King Frederick II 'the Great' of Prussia, whose territorial ambitions menaced Hanover. The King hoped that an alliance between the adjoining territories of Hanover and Brunswick would deter any potential invasion. As secondary considerations, Sophia was a cousin, spoke German and was nearly the same age as George.

Yet George and Augusta violently opposed the match, so much so that the King temporarily withdrew the idea. For his part, George saw it as an attempt to draw Britain closer to Hanover, which ran contrary to Leicester House policy. Augusta explained her opposition to Dodington on 6 August, calling it 'premature; the Prince wanted to mix with the world; this would prevent it: he was shy, and backward;* this would shut him up forever,

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* 'Unwilling; averse; hesitating' (*Johnson's Dictionary*).

with two or three friends of his, and as many of hers.¹⁰⁷ She also thought Sophia's mother, the Duchess of Brunswick, 'the most intriguing, meddling and also the most satirical, sarcastical person in the world, and will always make mischief whenever she comes. Such a character would not do with George . . . he was not a wild, dissipated boy, but good-natured and cheerful, but with a serious cast [of mind], in the whole . . . he was not quick, but, with those he was acquainted with, applicable and intelligent.'¹⁰⁸ In the event, George II had nothing immediately to fear from Prussia invading Hanover: indeed, they were about to become allies.

Since 1754, border clashes in the Ohio River Valley between the British forces protecting the thirteen American colonies and French forces pushing southwards from French Canada had been escalating. As early as 9 July 1755, a large force of British regulars and some American irregulars under General Edward Braddock was soundly defeated by French and Native American forces at the battle of Monongahela near Fort Duquesne, in present-day Pennsylvania. Braddock and twenty-seven of his officers were killed or mortally wounded in the engagement, along with over 400 troops and as many again wounded. Braddock's aide-de-camp, the twenty-three-year-old Major George Washington, had two horses shot from under him and was lucky to escape with his life.

With a conflict clearly approaching, the King and Newcastle had to choose between William Pitt and Henry Fox as war leader. They chose Fox, as much for his connection to the rising power of the Duke of Cumberland as for his own influence in the Commons. Chagrined over Fox's promotion, Pitt distanced himself from Newcastle. In October Bute, now the leading figure of what remained of the Leicester House Set through his closeness to George and Augusta, proposed an alliance with Pitt and the Grenville family against Newcastle, Cumberland and Fox. It was a smart, pragmatic move, but it took the seventeen-year-old George into active opposition against his seventy-two-year-old grandfather as the country slipped inexorably towards war.

On 13–14 November 1755, the House of Commons debated a series of treaties that the government – actively encouraged by the King – had concluded with Russia and Hesse-Cassel to protect Hanover, treaties which committed Britain to paying large subsidies to foreign countries. Pitt delivered a masterful speech in which he supported the idea of defending the 'long-injured, long-neglected, long-forgotten people of America' from the French and simultaneously denounced the payment of subsidies to defend Hanover from the same enemy.¹⁰⁹ He was summarily dismissed as Paymaster-General of the Forces, and thereafter Bute took to referring to him as his 'dearest friend'.¹¹⁰ Fox meanwhile succeeded Robinson as Leader of the

House of Commons. The British government had readied themselves for war by sacking their one brilliant strategist, William Pitt, and promoting instead a corrupt placeman, Henry Fox. On 17 May 1756, France and Britain declared hostilities, less than a month before George attained his majority. It was a conflict that would later be described as history's first world war, and it would have global consequences lasting to this day.

2

Seizing an Empire

May 1756–October 1760

I have already lived long enough to know you are the only man I shall ever meet with who . . . at all times prefer[s] my interest to your own.¹

George, Prince of Wales, to Lord Bute, April 1760

The outbreak of Britain's war with France ignited disputes in Europe that had been unresolved by the War of Austrian Succession between 1740 and 1748, including Austria's wish to regain the rich province of Silesia that she had lost to Prussia. This led to the 'Diplomatic Revolution' of January 1756 by which Prussia allied with Britain and Hanover, forcing Austria to ally with France, along with Russia, Saxony and Sweden. What became the Seven Years War started badly for Britain, with a disastrous naval battle against the French off Minorca on 20 May 1756, forcing the Royal Navy to retreat to the British stronghold of Gibraltar. The humiliating fall of the island in late June, which the French were then to hold throughout the conflict, severely weakened Newcastle's ministry and led to the court martial and execution of the defeated admiral, John Byng. (It was this ruthless act that prompted Voltaire's quip that the English executed their admirals 'pour encourager les autres'.)

George and Bute's attitude has been widely misinterpreted as one of outright opposition to the war, although in fact they resisted only an expensive Continental war, and with good reason: a land war would increase the National Debt dangerously through the commitment of British troops and the payment of foreign subsidies to protect Hanover from France. Instead, they strongly favoured the cheaper alternative strategy, advocated stridently by Pitt, of waging a naval and imperial war against France's colonies and coastline.

In anticipation of George's eighteenth birthday on 4 June 1756 – the age at which he could rule without a regency in the event of his

grandfather's death – the Duke of Newcastle advised the King that the Prince should receive £40,000 per annum to set up his own establishment with Prince Edward at St James's and Kensington Palaces. Earl Waldegrave would head the new household as George's Groom of the Stole,* and the government entertained hopes that George could thereby be weaned off his closeness to his mother and Bute. George's answer was 'full of gratitude for the allowance', but he said of Augusta that 'Her happiness depends on their not being separated and anything so sensibly affecting his mother must prove extremely uneasy to him.'² He also insisted on Bute rather than Waldegrave becoming Groom of the Stole, which displeased the King and Newcastle owing to Bute's closeness to Pitt, but they eventually accepted in early October. On his birthday, Augusta gave George his father's political testament which in accordance with Frederick's wishes she had read to him routinely over the past four years.

On 1 July, George wrote Bute a letter to mark the first anniversary of his tutorship. 'I have had the pleasure of your friendship during the space of a year,' he began, 'by which I have reaped great advantage, but not the improvement I should if I had followed your advice; but you shall find me make such a progress in this summer that shall give you hopes that with the continuation of your advice, I may turn out as you wish.'³ Of the government's tardiness in granting Bute the groomship, George complained:

It is very true that the ministers have done everything they can to provoke me, that they have called me a harmless boy, and have not even deigned to give me an answer when I so earnestly wish to see my friend about me. They have also treated my mother in a cruel manner (which I will neither forget nor forgive to the day of my death) because she is so good as to come forward and preserve her son from the many snares that surround him.⁴

In what was possibly an oblique reference to the rumours of his mother's affair with Bute, which disgusted him, George wrote:

My friend is also attacked in the most cruel and horrid manner, not for anything he has done against them, but because he is my friend, and wants to see me come to the throne with honour and not with disgrace and because he is a friend to the blessed liberties of his country and not to arbitrary notions. I look upon myself as engaged in honour and justice to defend these my two friends as long as I draw breath.⁵

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* The term derived either from the Latin for a long vest (*stola*), implying close personal contact, or from 'stool' or a commode, implying even closer and more intimate contact as the courtier responsible for managing the prince's ablutions and excretions.

Of course there was no indication that Newcastle, Fox, the King or anyone else wanted him to come to the throne with anything but honour; this was melodramatic histrionics of a kind not unusual in a teenager but which, as we shall see, George also occasionally displayed well into middle age.

George made a series of promises 'in the presence of Our Almighty Lord' to remember the insults against his mother and never to forgive anyone who spoke disrespectfully of her; moreover, he promised Bute to 'show to the world the great friendship I have for him', especially against 'all the allurements my enemies can think of'. He ended by telling his friend and mentor:

I hope my dear Lord you will conduct me through this difficult road and will bring me to the goal. I will exactly follow your advice, without which I shall inevitably sink. I am young and inexperienced and want advice. I trust in your friendship which will assist me in all difficulties . . . I do hope you will from this instant banish all thoughts of leaving me . . . I have often heard you say that you don't think that I shall have the same friendship for you when I am married as I now have. I shall never change in that, nor will I bear to be in the least deprived of your company.⁶

George's expressions of attachment, and his elevated, platonic male friendship with Bute, would have profound political implications over the coming years.

Such was Bute's influence over George that when the Prince of Wales formally joined the House of Lords on 13 November 1759, he wrote to ask 'whether I am not to put on my hat on taking my seat' later that day.⁷ The occasion excited much interest in high society, since George lived mainly at Kew and was not seen much in London, except for occasional visits to the theatre and opera. He probably did not return to the House of Lords during his grandfather's reign, although some sources claim he attended the sensational murder trial of the 4th Earl Ferrers for shooting his steward, for which the Earl was hanged (in deference to his rank, with a silken rope).

The loss of Minorca, combined with attacks upon the government by Pitt, forced Newcastle to resign on 11 November 1756, and the Whig grandee William Cavendish, 4th Duke of Devonshire, became Prime Minister five days later, with the understanding that Pitt would be free to run the war as Southern Secretary and Leader of the House of Commons. 'My lord,' Pitt told Devonshire soon afterwards, 'I am sure I can save this country, and nobody else can.'⁸ It was an outrageously egocentric claim, but it proved to be well founded. Although Pitt's energetic prosecution of the

war made him extremely popular with the British people, the Devonshire–Pitt ministry was neither strong nor stable: the King disliked it on account of its perceived lack of commitment to the security of Hanover. For George and Bute, however, there was delight that Pitt might be able to pursue a more expansive ‘blue water’ campaign – that is, one both navalist and colonial in its outlook.

Before embarking for Europe to take command of the British forces already on the Continent, Cumberland convinced his father to dismiss Pitt and Earl Temple, First Lord of the Admiralty, together on 6 April 1757. It was an obvious misstep. Buoyed by his public reputation as a patriot – as attested by the thirteen British cities that declared him a freeman in close succession – Pitt was back in office by late June. The incident provided an object lesson in the underappreciated lobbying power of public opinion: although only one British male in twelve had the franchise, governments were obliged to keep a weather eye on the vast majority beyond the electorate.*

Pitt’s dismissal also serves to overturn an enduring myth that George II was the minion of his ministers, and that one of his successor’s aims was to restore those royal prerogative powers that George I and George II had allowed to fall into abeyance (it has been suggested this was because they spoke German, and were so persistently interested in the fate of Hanover). In fact, George II was a fully engaged monarch: he exercised exactly the same powers over army and Court appointments that George III would, made and unmade ministries, approved candidates and authorized expenditure at elections; he also controlled honours, bishoprics and peerages closely. He was an effective monarch conscious of his rights, quite different from the fable of a distant Hanoverian who allowed his authority to be undermined by Old Whig politicians such as Walpole and the Pelhams. That he did not often clash with his various ministries was simply because he generally supported the policies the Old Whigs pursued, not because he was in thrall to the Whig grandees themselves.⁹

In early June 1757, George somehow inferred from rumours of an Opposition alliance between the recently deposed Newcastle, Cumberland and Henry Fox that his succession to the throne itself might be in danger. Fearful of ‘this fatal alliance’, he wrote to Bute in a wild combination of hyperbole and paranoia that ‘I will rather die ten thousand deaths than truckle at their impious feet.’¹⁰ He added that he would only accept the crown ‘with the hopes of restoring my much loved country to her ancient state of liberty; of seeing her in time free from her present load of debts

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* The word ‘democracy’, under which the masses received the vote at a time when there was no statutory education, tended to be used pejoratively to describe a self-evident evil.

and again famous for being the residence of true piety and virtue'. If such hopes were lost, he proposed 'retiring to some uninhabited cavern as that would prevent me from seeing the sufferings of my countrymen and the total destruction of this monarchy; for if the government should remain two or three years in the hands of these myrmidons of the blackest kind, I imagine any invader with a handful of men might place himself on the throne and establish despotism here.'¹¹ Bute's more measured response was to ask Newcastle's friend the 4th Earl of Chesterfield* to try to repair relations between Newcastle and Pitt.

In one respect, however, George was not exaggerating: Britain's 'present load of debts' amounted to over £74 million in 1753, to £77.8 million in 1758 and to £82.8 million in 1759, prompting a deep concern in Parliament over the nation's creditworthiness, and reaffirming those fears in George that had been planted by Bute's teachings and his father's political testament.¹² George wrote several essays on the subject in the second half of the 1750s, which in total covered no fewer than 557 pages.¹³ For the young Prince, revenue and expenditure profoundly affected national power and prosperity, and 'to know this is the true essential business of a king'.¹⁴ The seriousness with which he and Bute approached this subject was no mere intellectual exercise; it was a blueprint for what they believed needed to be done about the economy once George became king and Bute his Prime Minister.

George's conception of economics was staunchly conservative. He dreamed not of conquering great territories such as Canada and India, but rather of redeeming the National Debt and leading a great, unleveraged trading nation which would be 'the residence of true piety and virtue'. His essays articulate his belief that the establishment of the Debt, in the reign of William III and Mary, had emerged from the cowardice of politicians in borrowing for William's wars rather than incurring unpopularity by increasing taxation, which he characterized as a willingness 'to live and die without the least regard to posterity, a way of thinking now become fatally prevalent'.¹⁵ As he wrote elsewhere, 'The world ever produces wrong-headed individuals who would rather pay £10 imperceptibly than £4 out of their pockets at once.'¹⁶ If there was a specific period when George conceived his low opinion of politicians for their short-termism, factiousness and pusillanimity – a general view that was to last throughout his reign and cause him a good deal of trouble – it was when he studied in detail the way the National Debt had ballooned in the six decades after the 1690s.

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* Author of the posthumous *Letters to his Son on the Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman*.

George likened the Whig governments' behaviour in allowing this to happen to 'a young spendthrift who eagerly compounds for a present convenience at the expense of any future encumbrance, however burdensome or reproachful'.¹⁷ Economics, for George, was profoundly moral. He denounced the first national lottery, of 1694, as 'a most pernicious precedent, too often made use of since, as it serves not only to excite, but even authorize, a spirit of gaming in every man who is able to raise a few pounds, though perhaps at the expense of his morals, credit and character'.¹⁸

George was brought up with a horror of gambling, and Augusta and Bute kept him far from the high-stakes gaming and carousing with which eighteenth-century upper-class society was rife. He therefore had no social interaction, either as prince or later as king, with the very fast set of rich young Whig aristocrats who drank, gambled and whored at the new clubs in St James's such as Almack's (founded in 1759), Boodle's (1762) and Brooks's (1764). White's, founded in 1693, was Tory, but the Prince of Wales was not to be found there either. Although he adored horses and was a keen rider, he eschewed the fashionable race meetings of the day too. Whig aristocrats thought of George as straitlaced and boring; he thought of them as louche and godless.

When in mid-June 1757 Henry Fox unsuccessfully attempted to form an administration, Lord George Sackville refused to serve in it, earning George's admiration. 'Lord George shows himself the man of honour you have often described him to be,' he wrote to Bute.¹⁹ This positive feeling towards Sackville, then no more than a forty-one-year-old cavalry colonel, was unimportant at the time but was to have empire-shattering consequences later on. Tall and long-faced with strong features, clear blue eyes and a melancholy look, Sackville was a proud, reserved man with a grave manner that some saw as aristocratic hauteur, though his friends thought him 'capable of genial and engaging frankness and sincerity'.²⁰ He was a younger son of the 1st Duke of Dorset, and his mother had been a maid of honour to Queen Anne.

Sackville had attended Westminster School and Trinity College, Dublin, when his father was Viceroy of Ireland,* then entered the army and served under both the Duke of Marlborough and the Duke of Cumberland. He had been shot in the chest at Fontenoy in 1745, a battle in which only three officers of his regiment were not killed or wounded. Cumberland had commended Sackville's 'courage and soldierly ability' during the Jacobite rebellion.²¹ After his well-timed refusal of office under Fox, Sackville

* Also known since 1690 as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and before that as Chief Governor.

became a junior member of the Leicester House Set, and by December 1758 George was numbering him along with William Legge, General Henry Conway and the ambitious, capable George Montagu-Dunk, 2nd Earl of Halifax, as prospective ministers in the next reign.

On 29 June, following protracted negotiations to find a ministry that would have the support of both the King and the Leicester House Set, a momentous compromise was struck: George II's man Newcastle was restored to the nominal premiership, while Pitt regained the two key posts he had held previously, granting him unbridled control over the war, foreign affairs and the House of Commons. The Duke of Devonshire agreed to stay in the Cabinet as Lord Chamberlain. In a move aimed largely at placating the Duke of Cumberland, a place was found for Henry Fox as Paymaster-General of the Forces. Over the next eight years, Fox made an estimated £400,000, on top of his £3,000 per annum salary, largely from the way he was permitted to run the nation's huge wartime balances through his own private bank accounts.

On 26 July 1757, following a French invasion of Hanover, British and Allied forces under Cumberland's command were defeated by the French at the battle of Hastenbeck. On 8 September in the battle's aftermath, Cumberland was forced to sign the humiliating Convention of Klosterzeven, an agreement which took Hanover out of the war and allowed for its partial occupation. Despite having been given full plenipotentiary powers to conclude the peace treaty, Cumberland on his return to London was publicly humiliated by his father, who remarked, 'Here is my son, who has ruined me and disgraced himself.'²² With his reputation destroyed, and his rivals now in the political ascendancy, the disavowed Cumberland withdrew from politics for the remainder of his father's reign.

Although George did not regret his uncle's and thus Henry Fox's eclipse, he did worry that Frederick the Great might now agree a separate peace with France. 'This will certainly bring the French back to their native air,' he told Bute on 5 November, 'and enable them by putting soldiers into their ships to man a great fleet; I begin now to think that you and I my friend shall see the end of this once great and glorious country; yet I will not give way to black thoughts . . . If you are but well and Providence assists us, England may yet be free and happy.'²³ Pessimism clearly came easily to the nineteen-year-old George. He added as a postscript, 'The more I think on Henry Vth[s] soliloquy, the more I admire it.' He was presumably referring to the King's speech at the end of Act IV, scene 1 of Shakespeare's play:

Upon the king! let us our lives, our souls,
Our debts, our careful wives,

Our children and our sins, lay on the King!
 We must bear all. O hard condition,
 Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath
 Of every fool, whose sense no more can feel
 But his own wringing! What infinite heart's ease
 Must kings neglect that private men enjoy!

But George's fears were once again unfounded: the rumour about Prussia was untrue; indeed, on the very day that George wrote his letter, Frederick won one of his greatest victories over the French, at Rossbach, and a month later defeated the Austrians at Leuthen.

No sooner was Pitt in the political ascendant than George began to understand his grandfather's misgivings towards the populist hero of the hour, especially once it became clear that he no longer advocated George and Bute's preferred strategy of a minimal Continental commitment. In late June 1758, Pitt approved plans to field a 9,000-strong British expeditionary force in western Germany under Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, his own choice to replace Cumberland. He persuaded the reluctant Bute to agree to it, but only on the basis that 'a small body should not lead to a great one'.²⁴ The Leicester House Set had few options but to concede: its own alternative strategy had come to nothing once its preferred expedition against Saint-Malo failed only three weeks after it began. 'I had but little hopes that these cautious g[eneral]s would choose to think any part of the F[renc]h coast fit for them to land,' George wrote to Bute on 2 July.

I am certain the K[in]g will make a push to have them sent to G[ermany]; and I can't help fearing your wavering friend [that is, Pitt] would not be against it; if this unhappy measure should be taken we shall be drawn deeper into a Continent [*sic*] War than ever; and when I mount the thr[on]e I shall not be able to form a m[inistr]y who can have the opinion of the people . . . what a pretty pickle I should be in a future day if I had not your sagacious counsels.²⁵

From having been an outspoken opponent of Continental commitments on the ground that they weakened Britain's imperial and maritime efforts, by the autumn of 1757 Pitt had become the leading advocate for deeper British military involvement on the Continent. He now spoke in open support of Frederick the Great, with whom he had formed a strong personal alliance despite their never having met. This seeming volte-face earned him George's lasting distrust. Copying comments on Pitt's letter was too rude, at least in private, when holding forth to his chief adviser whom he now consistently addressed in his letters as 'my dearest friend'. The reversionary

interest* at Leicester House was overwhelmingly 'blue water' and the sense of betrayal expressed on 11 April 1758, when Britain signed a treaty promising an annual subsidy to Prussia for protecting Hanover, was total.²⁶ For the Leicester House Set, Pitt's perfidy threatened to realize George's nightmare of financial catastrophe. Despite Frederick the Great's undoubted brilliance as a general, he had committed Prussia to war with Austria, France, Russia and Sweden, financed by Britain, and ultimately could not possibly hope to overcome them all.

Pitt's sole concession to George and Bute had been to appoint Lord George Sackville as the 3rd Duke of Marlborough's second-in-command in the new Continental force. Sackville's secret instructions from the Leicester House Opposition were to ensure that the army was employed in the pursuit of British interests as much as those of Hanover.²⁷ When Marlborough died of dysentery on 20 October, Sackville took over the British contingent, and almost immediately began to clash with Prince Ferdinand and other senior officers in the Anglo-German force over victualling costs and overall strategic direction. As in any coalition force, a measure of goodwill was needed, but between Ferdinand and Sackville there was precious little – a situation not helped by Augusta and George's dislike of the Brunswick family in general.

If George despaired of the King and Pitt alike, he was also highly critical of himself at this time, promising Bute in late September that he would 'throw off that incomprehensible indolence, inattention and heedlessness that reigns within me'.²⁸ His supposed laziness was a theme to which he would return regularly – describing it as his 'natural indolence' – yet nothing seems to justify it. He was still writing his long, well-researched essays. In one, he argued that the present high wage rate encouraged the poor to buy 'unnecessary things', among which he included brandy, sugar, foreign fruit, strong beer, printed linen, tobacco, snuff and tea.²⁹ If tea had indeed been an unnecessary commodity, it would have saved George a good deal of trouble in years to come.

George's frugality contrasted sharply with Pitt's policies. While the Great Commoner – as he had begun to be called because he was not a titled grandee – had declared that he would not 'send a drop of our blood to the Elbe to be lost in that ocean of gore', he showed no such circumspection about losing money. The year 1758 saw millions spent on an ever expanding theatre of conflict, seemingly with little resistance in Parliament. Indeed, by November, Pitt was arguing that Parliament ought not to question the

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* A legal expression from trust law, the reversionary interest in eighteenth-century politics meant the group around the heir to the throne who would benefit when the monarch died.

expense of the army in Germany at all.³⁰ For George, Pitt's change of tone was astonishing: having actively opposed the expenditure of £700,000 at the opening of a parliamentary session, at the opening of the next he advocated spending £3 million. 'I cannot conceive what the great Orator wants,' George wrote sarcastically to Bute in December before Bute was due to meet Pitt, 'but am glad of his interview with my dearest friend, thinking it will either produce an explanation with regard to past conduct, or end in a rupture, either of which I prefer to uncertainty, particularly as I have in you a friend, and an able man, whose integrity and ability I should do great injustice if I did not look on them as superior to any of the politicians.'³¹

'I am certain he has given himself either up to the K[ing] or the D[uke] of N[ewcastle],' George wrote dejectedly to Bute of Pitt soon afterwards, 'or else he could not act the infamous and ungrateful part he now does.'³² Allied with Newcastle, Pitt could afford to overrule the financial objections of the Leicester House Set, and informed Bute only after the subsidies decision had been taken. 'Indeed, my dearest friend,' George wrote to Bute, 'he treats both you and me with no more regard than he would do a parcel of children. He seems to forget that the day will come when he must expect to be treated according to his deserts.'³³

With the King now aged seventy-five, at a time when life expectancy in no country in the world exceeded forty, it was characteristically egotistical for Pitt to treat the heir to the throne so flippantly: privately he also remarked upon George's innocence and the reclusive manner in which he lived. George's references to being treated like 'a harmless boy' and 'a parcel of children' betrayed a sensitivity over the disparity between his mere twenty years and those of all the major political figures of the age, such as Newcastle (who was sixty-five), Fox (fifty-three), Pitt (fifty), Bute (forty-five), Devonshire (thirty-eight) and Cumberland (thirty-seven).

In February 1759, George II and the Duke and Duchess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel renewed the suggestion that George marry Sophia Caroline, which George, Augusta and now Bute again rejected. George both believed he should be allowed to choose his own bride and did not want to marry someone to satisfy his grandfather's desire to draw the Opposition into protecting Hanover. 'The more I think of the D[uke] of Br[unswick's] letter, the more I am incensed against him,' George told Bute angrily; 'it manifestly shows a mind greatly embittered against our part of the family and a certain pride that generally attends those petty princes . . . I would never consent to take one out of that House.'³⁴ (In fact, George's elder sister Princess Augusta was to marry the Duke of Brunswick's heir with George's blessing five years later.)

After his twenty-first birthday on 4 June, George's hope, expressed to the King the following month, was that he would be allowed to serve in the army, as so many princes of Wales, although not including his own father, had done in the past. 'Now that every part of the nation is arming for its defence,' George wrote to the King on 20 July,

I cannot bear the thoughts of continuing in this inactive state . . . Permit me, therefore, humbly to request of Your Majesty to give me an opportunity of convincing the world that I am neither unworthy of my high situation nor of the blood that fills my veins. Your Majesty's known valour will diffuse its influence on my head and make the presence of your grandson an encouragement to your people, a terror to the enemy, and joined to his own resolution may in some measure supply his want of experience in military affairs, and enable him to support with dignity the post of danger, which he esteems the post of honour.³⁵

It was a good letter – once again mentioning his honour – but the King, Pitt, Newcastle and Robert Darcy, 4th Earl of Holderness, the Northern Secretary, did not reply for a week. 'The K[ing] and those he has consulted have treated [me] with less regard than they would have dared to have done any Member of Parliament,' George complained to Bute.³⁶

Finally, on 27 July, the King replied from Kensington Palace, his London residence, to say, 'I received your letter which is a mark of duty to me, and have the highest satisfaction in your spirit and zeal for the defence of my kingdoms. It is my intention to give you, on a proper occasion, an opportunity of exerting them.'³⁷ This obviously temporizing but hardly rude letter had George fulminating to Bute about 'how shuffling it is and unworthy of a British monarch; the conduct of this old K[ing] makes me ashamed of being his grandson; he treats me in the same manner his knave and counsellor the D[uke] of N[ewcastle] does all people.'³⁸ He described 'this unworthy letter', which he showed to his mother, as 'an absolute refusal', which on the face of things it was not.

George had an audience with the King three days later, which Newcastle told Holderness only lasted 'some seconds'.³⁹ After George had thanked his grandfather 'for his promises', the King replied that he would send for the Prince when the need arose but did not say when that might be, and George said nothing in reply. Before leaving for the audience, he had asked Bute whether it would be 'totally improper for me to go as a volunteer if the K[ing] refuses my petition, for I really cannot remain immured at home like a girl whilst all my countrymen are preparing for the field and a brother younger than me allowed to go in quest of the enemy'.⁴⁰ Of course, it was because he was the eldest brother and heir apparent that he could not be

risked in battle, whereas his younger brother Edward was given the captaincy of the newly launched forty-four-gun ship *Phoenix* and was allowed to go on Channel raids.

In the government's defence, it was hard to know where they could have placed a Prince of Wales who was completely militarily untrained, although he would probably have been brave and a keen and quick learner. After a discussion with Bute, Pitt suggested various uses: George might review Guards regiments, inspect the great naval bases at Chatham and Portsmouth, or perhaps join the staff of Lord Ligonier, the seventy-eight-year-old Commander-in-Chief of the army, and report to the King on the state of national readiness in the event of a French invasion. Despite Newcastle adding his support, nothing came of any of it. George again blamed Pitt: 'I am not much surprised at this insolence of Pitt's,' he told Bute on 30 July, 'he has long shown a want of regard both of you my dearest friend and consequently of myself.'⁴¹ But the rebuke was undeserved; it had ultimately been the King's decision to refuse George military employment, which Pitt told Bute was due to 'repugnancies hard to be eradicated in age'.⁴²

The repugnance was mutual, and in early August George was already lamenting the seemingly chaotic military situation on the River Weser caused by his grandfather's commitment to Hanover, which he privately described as 'that horrid Electorate, which has always lived upon the very vitals of this poor country'.⁴³ There had been further contretemps between Sackville and Ferdinand, the former's criticisms of the latter being dutifully passed back to George and Bute. These were personal, tactical and strategic, the most serious being that in order to keep lines of communications open with Prussia, Ferdinand had cut the British Army off from its shortest lines of communication via Holland.

On 1 August 1759, however, Prince Ferdinand won a famous victory over the French at the battle of Minden, in what is now the North Rhine-Westphalia region of Germany. It saved Hanover and completely altered the strategic situation in the Allies' favour. But in the battle's aftermath Ferdinand alleged that the only reason why it had not been a complete rout was that Sackville, commanding the British cavalry on the right flank, refused three direct orders to press home the attack at the decisive moment. In a proclamation the following day, Ferdinand stated that had Lord Granby, Sackville's second-in-command, been in charge of the cavalry the victory would have been even more emphatic. Outraged, Sackville demanded a court martial to clear his name of what amounted to an accusation of incompetence at best, at worst cowardice. Only two years after the execution of Admiral Byng for the similar offence of 'failing to do his utmost', British commanders did not lightly call for their own court martial.

After the news of Minden arrived in London on 8 August and the capital gave itself over to wild celebration, the Leicester House Set had to face the unsettling fact that one of their number would be tried for cowardice. After Bute had received a report from Sackville of what had transpired, George initially stood by his follower, saying of Ferdinand, 'I think it is pretty pert for a little German prince to make public any fault he finds with the English commander, without first waiting for instructions from the King on so delicate a matter.'⁴⁴ Yet George II was only too happy to disgrace Sackville, and was supported enthusiastically in his determination by Pitt, more reluctantly by Newcastle. Because the officers needed to give evidence in a court martial were still on active service, the trial could not be held for six months, further poisoning the atmosphere between the Court and government on one side, and the Leicester House Set and Opposition on the other, with long-term effects that neither could have foreseen.

The victory at Minden was followed on 13 September by an even greater one in Canada, where Anglo-American forces under Major-General James Wolfe, having driven the French from the northern part of the British colony of New York, took Quebec, the capital of French Canada, in a battle on the Heights of Abraham. George II, not one known to joke much, remarked upon learning from Newcastle of Wolfe's reported mental imbalance, 'I wish to my God he would bite some of my Generals, and make them mad too.'⁴⁵ Scaling the Heights in a surprise attack at night had been an audacious, near-suicidal manoeuvre by Wolfe, but his victory opened up the British conquest of the whole of Canada. Killed during the battle (and subsequently memorialized in a portrait by Benjamin West), Wolfe became a heroic symbol of the empire.

For George, however, September 1759 would for ever hold sad memories instead. In that month, his eighteen-year-old sister Elizabeth died from appendicitis, the first of his eight siblings to predecease him. His deep-seated Christian faith helped him face these tragedies.

In November 1759 George fell in what he persuaded himself was love with Lady Sarah Lennox, the fourteen-year-old sister of Charles Lennox, 3rd Duke of Richmond, and sister-in-law of Henry Fox, who had just made her debut at Court. Horace Walpole, an aesthete who can at least be trusted in matters of beauty (if on little else regarding George), wrote that there was 'no Magdalen by Corregio half so lovely and expressive' as Lady Sarah, observing that she was 'a very young lady of the most blooming beauty, and shining with the graces of unaffected, but animated nature'.⁴⁶ George Scott had written of the eighteen-year-old George that he had 'the greatest temptation to be gallant with the ladies, who lay themselves out in the

most shameful manner to draw him in', but he had hitherto resisted.⁴⁷ (There is no truth in the gossip that George had secretly married Hannah Lightfoot, the daughter of a Quaker tradesman from Wapping, by whom he was alleged to have had several children.)⁴⁸

George initially tried to hide his feelings for Sarah from Bute. 'You have often accused me of growing grave and thoughtful,' he wrote to him in late 1759 without mentioning her by name; 'it is entirely owing to a daily increasing admiration of the fair sex, which I am attempting with all the philosophy and resolution I am capable of to keep under . . . princes when once in their hands make miserable figures.'⁴⁹ He cited the Bourbon courts, and alluded (though not by name) to George II and his German mistress the Countess of Yarmouth as examples of the pitfalls and pathos of petticoat government. 'When I have said this you will plainly feel how strong a struggle there is between the boiling youth of twenty-one years and prudence.' He hoped the latter would 'ever keep the upper hand', and that, in 'a few years, marriage will put a stop to this combat in my breast', believing that 'keeping the mind constantly employed is a likely means of preserving those passions in due subordination to it.'

But he could not keep Sarah's identity secret from Bute for long. 'If I say things you think improper,' he confided in his next letter, 'impute them to the violence of my love.'⁵⁰ After identifying her, George went into raptures, saying, 'She is everything I can form to myself lovely. I am daily grown unhappy, sleep has left me, which never was before interrupted by any reverse of fortune; I protest before God I never have had any improper thought with regard to her; I don't deny having often flattered myself with hopes that one day or other you would consent to my raising her to a throne.' When he heard that the twenty-year-old George Spencer, 4th Duke of Marlborough, was flirting with her, he 'retired to my chamber where I remained for several hours in the depth of despair'.

George ended his letter with a melodramatic, adolescent flourish, telling Bute, 'Let me preserve your friendship, and though my heart should break, I shall have the happy reflection in dying that I have not been altogether unworthy of the best of friends though unfortunate in other things.'⁵¹ Bute's reply was equally gushing, promising that he would certainly consider the matter carefully, but forewarning that when they met George must 'prepare your mind with a resolution to hear the voice of truth, for such alone shall come from me . . . though death looked me in the face'.⁵² Death was certainly not looking either of them in the face, but if George could write that way then so could he.

It is remarkable, given the sexual proclivities of the courts of that era, that George did not even contemplate simply making Lady Sarah his

mistress, or at least attempting to. His religious piety and emphasis on personal virtue precluded the path of sexual infidelity taken enthusiastically by his father, grandfather and great-grandfather – none of whom had a strong Christian faith. Indeed, among the whole Hanoverian dynasty, from George I to William IV, stretching over more than a century, George was the only uxorious husband and pious Christian. Having heard what he called Bute's 'voice of truth' about the political impossibility of his marrying Lady Sarah, a commoner related to Henry Fox, he concluded that 'The interest of my country ever shall be my first care, my own inclinations shall ever submit to it; I am born for the happiness or misery of a great nation, and consequently must often act contrary to my passions.'⁵³ Here at last he was not being histrionic, as that sentiment might serve almost as a leitmotif for George's whole life and reign.

George ultimately had a lucky escape from Lady Sarah, who, after marrying Sir Charles Bunbury in 1762, became one of the great *femmes fatales* of the era. 'So Lady Sarah Bunbury is with child!' Lady Mary Coke, the Duke of Argyll's well-informed daughter, wrote to her sister the Countess of Stafford in 1768. 'The town is rather ill-natured upon her subject, and think it a lucky circumstance for her that this pregnancy happens at a time when she has no particular lover.'⁵⁴ Lady Sarah's illegitimate daughter was fathered by the 3rd Duke of Gordon's son Lord William Gordon, with whom she ran away to Paris soon afterwards. When she refused to marry him the following year, Lady Mary was prompted to add that she was 'void of shame or principles'.⁵⁵ Despite such scandals, some lasting fondness clearly remained between George and Sarah: in 1804, after the death of her second husband, he granted her a pension of £800 per annum for the education of her daughters.

George promised Bute never to marry an Englishwoman, who could not be of royal birth and marriageable, and during that winter he asked him 'by some method or other [to] get some account of the various princesses in Germany', using a process that 'binds me to nothing, and would save a great deal of trouble whenever I consent to enter into those bonds'.⁵⁶ He reported that he and his mother were already 'looking in the *New Berlin Almanack* for princesses, where three new ones have been found', almost in the manner of modern mail-order brides.⁵⁷ Bute misinterpreted this to mean that George wanted to marry in the summer, but was put right when George told him, 'I can never agree to alter my situation whilst this Old Man lives; I will rather undergo anything ever so disagreeable than put my trust in him for a single moment in an affair of such delicacy.'⁵⁸

In mid-November, Richard Grenville-Temple, 2nd Earl Temple, Pitt's brother-in-law and a key figure in the powerful Grenville clan, threatened to resign as Lord Privy Seal on being refused the Order of the Garter, putting the entire survival of the government in jeopardy. George was furious that Temple had acted without informing him, and was still fuming days later when Temple withdrew his threat after the King reluctantly appeased him by promising the next vacant blue riband. 'I could write you volumes if I attempted enumerating the many insolences we have received from that faithless band,' George wrote to Bute of the Grenvilles, who were to loom large throughout his reign.⁵⁹ His dislike and distrust of them started early, merging with that of their cousin, William Pitt.

Admiral Edward Hawke won a great victory at the battle of Quiberon Bay in the Bay of Biscay on 20 November, where he sank, destroyed or captured seven French ships-of-the-line.* When this was added to the victories of Minden and Quebec, successes in India under Robert Clive, the capture of Guadeloupe in the West Indies in May, the defeat of a French squadron in the Bay of Lagos off Portugal in August and the capture of the fortresses at Ticonderoga, Crown Point and Niagara in North America in September, the year 1759 rightly became known as the *Annus mirabilis*, and William Pitt was hailed as the greatest war leader since Elizabeth I defeated the Armada.

One might assume that, set against such a backdrop, past mistakes might have been ignored or forgiven. Yet even in this climate of universal victory the demand for vengeance upon commanders who had allegedly underperformed did not subside. Sackville's court martial for 'disobedience of orders' began at Horse Guards in Whitehall, the British Army's headquarters, before fifteen generals on 29 February 1760. Over the next five weeks the details of what had transpired at Minden the previous August were highly disputed: the orders had gone through three generals in three languages and appeared to be contradictory; the nature of the wood that the cavalry was expected to ride through was challenged, as was the exact position of a Saxe-Gothan infantry regiment which had to get out of the way before the cavalry could move. Most contentious was the amount of time lost by Sackville's purported inaction: some accounts claimed as long as ninety minutes, others forty-five, while Sackville himself stated only eight.⁶⁰

There were moments of drama as on the fourth day of the trial when a Colonel Sloper alleged that 'My Lord George Sackville was alarmed to a very great degree,' an imputation of cowardice which was later proved to

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* A ship-of-the-line typically had seventy-four guns or more, although in this battle the French *Inflexible* had sixty-four.

be down to personal malice and without substance.⁶¹ The trial was highly political: Sackville was a member of the Leicester House Set and had made enemies in both the government and the army, ostensibly through his haughtiness but also possibly because he was suspected of bisexuality (although that was not raised). The court martial found him guilty on 3 April, and declared him 'unfit to serve His Majesty in any military capacity whatsoever'.

A delighted King had Sackville's name struck off the list of privy councillors; he was also forbidden from attending Court, and the sentence was read out to every regiment in the army, with the comment that it was 'worse than death'.⁶² As had been the case with John Byng's sentence three years earlier, the verdict may have satisfied certain political circles, but it met with stony-faced incomprehension from those who understood the nature of warfare and the fog of battle. Three months later, General Sir Jeffery Amherst, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in North America, wrote, 'I have carefully read the court-martial relating to the affair of Minden, all my garrison have studied it, and I may venture to affirm that there is not an officer in it who does not blush that such a sentence should have been pronounced by a British court.'⁶³

It was an indication of how vicious and polarized the conflict between the rival courts had become that the King stated he would not exercise mercy for his grandson's friend Sackville, who would be shot by firing squad if ten generals of the fifteen voted for it – in the event, only seven did so.⁶⁴ There were plenty of other examples of these intergenerational feuds within the European nobility: Peter the Great of Russia had his son Alexis executed in 1718; Charles Emmanuel of Savoy arrested and imprisoned his father in 1731; Frederick William I of Prussia threatened to execute his son, Frederick the Great, instead imprisoning him for a time and beheading his best friend (and probable lover) Hans Hermann von Katte. With the Hanoverians such hatred ran deep, continuing for generation after generation, fuelled to a degree by the partisan cliques of British politics. The late Prince Frederick's abiding hope that this dreadful tradition might finally cease at his accession died with him.

When it was reported by Lady Yarmouth that George intended to receive Sackville at Leicester House, the Duke of Devonshire informed Bute that 'The King has forbid Lord G. Sackville the Court,' with the clear implication that George must too.⁶⁵ Augusta's Chamberlain was meanwhile given the same message, infuriating George. 'The K[ing]'s message is a true slap in the face to me . . . he told Bute; my honour forces me to remain but little longer passive; my dearest friend I don't doubt sees the necessity of my taking a bolder and more resolute part; nothing but that can draw men

to follow my banner.⁶⁶ Yet for all George's talk about his honour, Bute sensibly advised him not to expend any more political capital over Sackville, who had after all been found guilty, and so George did not receive him again until the following year – when his appearance at Court caused such an outcry that Bute had to tell him to stay away until the war was over. George felt profound embarrassment, even guilt, at effectively endorsing Sackville's public shaming, and these feelings were to have significant repercussions in later years.

For all the great victories of the *Annus mirabilis*, the war was exorbitantly expensive, and George and Bute worried about the National Debt, which grew from £77.8 million in 1758 to £90.4 million in 1760. By January 1761 it was due to increase by a further £8.2 million.⁶⁷ In April 1760 George lamented in an essay on public finance that 'We can scarce expect a peace before we have increased our debt to £130 or £140 million.'⁶⁸ He fully recognized that great things could be achieved by spending money wisely, citing the Duke of Marlborough's victories in the War of Spanish Succession of 1701–14, Robert Clive's victory at Plassey in West Bengal in June 1757 and the victories in North America that led to the capture of Montreal on 8 September 1760 and of Detroit a week later, delivering large swathes of the world into British hands. Despite these gains, and while acknowledging the jubilant public sense of victory, George and Bute nonetheless remained determined, in the words of one historian, 'to lighten the burdens on posterity as much as they could, and as soon as they dared'.⁶⁹

While the Treason Act forbade Britons even so much as to 'imagine' the death of the monarch, George and Bute constantly did just that, and when he was king George recalled to Bute how much they had been preparing for 'the hour . . . which has been so long been wished for by my d[earest] friend, I mean the entering on a reformation in government', one in which 'the wicked machinations of faction' would be replaced by a virtuous commitment to 'the wellbeing of this country'.⁷⁰

George was relatively uninterested in the actual personnel of government, beyond the overwhelming necessity of Bute becoming Prime Minister. This was pivotal, since that post controlled the main fount of government patronage. 'Whilst my dearest is near me,' George wrote to Bute on 4 May 1760, 'I care not who are the tools he may think necessary to be in [the] ministry provided the blackest of hearts [that is, Pitt] is not one of them.'⁷¹ The reference to ministers as mere 'tools' of government gives another indication of his general view of members of Parliament.

George readily accepted that he would attract what he called 'the ingratitude of some, the pusillanimity and enmity of others', when he appointed