

POLITICAL terms are frequently retained for daily use long after their meaning has changed and their significance has developed into something entirely new. It is so with the words Whig and Tory. A Tory of Queen Anne's days was one who clung with some tenacity to the doctrine of the divine right of Kings, and who was inclined to favour the Stuart succession on that account. The Whig, on the other hand, regarded the Sovereign as one who had entered into an engagement with the English people to govern according to certain fixed principles, which, being duly observed, ratified the King's hereditary right of passing on the succession to his children. The two terms also indicated a certain bias of mind. The Tory of the early eighteenth century would be inclined to rely upon an aristocratic rather than upon a democratic class ; he held an intense and most inspiring reverence for his Church and his Faith, he was loyalty personified to his Sovereign, providing that Sovereign was not a mere usurper placed in power by the faction of an hour. He held to the Monarchy and the State Church, and — in Queen Anne's time at least — he was strongly inclined to retain the theory of the divine sanction for the Sovereign's supremacy. It is evident that William the Third's reign had acted as a solvent to some of these ideas. He was not a King who suggested Divine Right. He came in as a convenience to the nation, and very greatly to his own convenience. Under him, inevitably, the Divine Right of Kings received a shattering blow. But Anne, of Stuart blood, restored the old ideal somewhat. And the Jacobites, of course, favoured the theory to the very utmost of their power.

The Whigs, on the other hand, had different aspirations and different methods. Parliament, rather than the Sovereign, was their mainstay and hope. With them the ideal was the will of Parliament rather than the will of the King ; Parliament being subject to the will of the people, and the King being subject, ultimately, to the expressed will of Parliament. Of course there were plenty of Whig Peers and Whig Bishops. William of Orange had seen to that. And just then the Whigs possessed the great advantage of having, at any rate, one settled policy. They were determined to keep the Stuarts out, and to avoid plunging the nation into civil war, by ranging themselves on the side of the Hanoverian King. Towards the close of Anne's reign the Tories had seemed to be having things all their own way. The Whigs had been cast out of power in 1710, and

Harley and Bolingbroke came in, apparently, to carry all before them. The story of their schemes is a part of the History of England rather than of Bridgwater, yet it cannot be left entirely out of reckoning in sketching out the fortunes of the Old Borough.

Bolingbroke's rebuff upon the very eve of the Queen's death has already been referred to ; now George the First was King. His first problem was to deal with the Whigs and Tories. Which party would he favour? What were to be the King's ideals? Who were to be the new Ministers, and what was to be their policy in keeping things quiet in the land? The Jacobites, glum and disappointed, were all alert. The Whigs were determined that King George should find out that his rights were by no means so divine as theirs. But they were ready to take him under their wing, so to say. And they devoutly hoped that George would take them under his. A Whig King would be just what they wanted. He would keep the Stuarts in their proper place.

The time had come, indeed, for quieter days and quieter methods. The nation wanted rest. *Within a comparatively short space of time the English Parliament had deposed Charles the First ; the Protectorate had been tried under Cromwell ; the Restoration had been brought about by the adroitness of Monk ; James the Second, a Catholic, had come to the throne, and had been driven off the throne by William the Third ; William had established a new dynasty and a new system, which was no sooner established than it had to be succeeded by the introduction to the throne of one of the daughters of the displaced House of Stuart. England had not had time to become attached, or even reconciled, to any of these succeeding rulers, and the English people in general — the English people outside the circle of courts and Parliament and politics — were well satisfied when George came to the throne to let any one wear the crown who did not make himself and his system absolutely intolerable to the nation.*

King George quickly settled the matter, and declared for the Whigs. He made no pretence whatever of conciliating the Tory party, many of whom, not unnaturally, he looked upon as utterly averse to his person, and inimical to his rule. He must have been aware that nearly one-half, or perhaps even a greater proportion of his subjects, were openly or secretly attached to the Stuart cause. Consequently he flung himself into the opposite scale. George the First was not a clever man ; he was a hard-headed, calm man of business, and by his sheer common sense

he often surmounted obstacles which a more brilliant ruler might have failed to overcome. Seeing that there were two parties in English politics, he would favour the party most favourable to himself. A rough and ready, temporising sort of rule, doubtless. Nevertheless it lasted George's time, and it served his purpose. Before long he found out the merits of that able and wise statesman. Sir Robert Walpole, and speedily the latter was promoted to high office. By 1721 he had become Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Lord of the Treasury. Not only was the first general election in the King's reign overwhelmingly in favour of the Whigs, and Walpole's power thus sealed, but the Minister — in spite of the bitterest opposition — contrived to maintain his power. The 1722 elections were quite favourable to him. Scarcely any Minister, indeed, has had so long a run of power. In 1727 George the First died, and although George the Second at first disliked Walpole, the King was bound to retain him, and the elections of that year again upheld him. Even later on, in 1741, one of the most fierce elections ever fought, the Whigs won, although they lost ground considerably. Walpole's career was then nearly, indeed, at an end. He was surrounded by enemies, and by eager rivals. The war with Spain was bringing endless trouble with it. Walpole had been, unwisely, dragged into it. In 1742 [*sic.* 1742 TW] he resigned his great office, and retired to the House of Lords as Earl of Orford.

On May the 12th, 1741, Bridgwater was, with other constituencies, asked to vote for the return of two Members to Parliament. Fortunately some details as to the ins and outs of this election are available, and they are available, curiously enough, by reason of a protest which was made by a friend of one of the candidates on behalf of Sir Charles Wyndham, who came out at the bottom of the poll.

Since Queen Anne's Accession to the throne Bridgwater had had ten elections ; this was the eleventh. Those, it will be remembered, were the days of open voting, and also of other electioneering incidents. As soon as the poll was declared, protests, pamphlets, and vehement statements frequently made their appearance, to be followed by counter-statements of equal vehemence, disdaining to mince matters. In 1741 [*sic.* 1741 TW] the partisans of the defeated Candidate were exceedingly angry that their man had not got in, and in their published statement they made, it is clear, certain allegations. The text

of this document, unfortunately, is not accessible. But whatever it may have been, it drew forth a vigorous disclaimer from the Town Clerk of Bridgwater, who proceeded, in the following printed statement, to defend himself and the victorious candidates. It is a significant instance of some of the political methods of the time, and it throws some light upon what Bridgwater elections were at the middle of the eighteenth century. It was published by Mr. Bryant, the Town Clerk, some six weeks after the election took place.

A genuine list of the Voters who polled at Bridgwater, May the 12th, 1741.

Candidates : — Hon. Vere Poulett, Esq. ; George Dodington, Esq. ; Sir Charles Wyndham, Bart.

TO THE ELECTORS OF BRIDGWATER.

A Spurious and incorrect Copy of the Poll, at the late Election for Bridgwater, fraught with Assertions, false, defamatory, and scurrilous, having been industriously distributed amongst the inhabitants and Country People in the Neighbourhood of that Place ; it is therefore judged proper to publish a true Copy of the Poll taken at the High Cross on the Day of Election, ranged in an Alphabetical Order. But before we proceed to the Poll, it may not be amiss to make some remarks on their observations.

The first Argument made use of in the Preface of the List published by Sir Charles Wyndham's Friends, is, that the Country People have been treated with great Contempt, and called an insignificant Country Mob. In order to undeceive the World, and to set every one right in this Affair, it will be necessary to observe, that the principal Agents and Managers for Sir Charles Wyndham, finding their Party weak, after practising all the Vexatious Methods it was in their Power to exert towards the Electors, who stood to their integrity, resolved to call in the Aid of the Country Farmers and others, to influence the Tradesmen of the Town to vote for Sir Charles Wyndham, and in case of Non-Compliance, they were taught to threaten them with no more Dealings : In what manner these Menaces and other indirect Means were executed, is but too notorious ; so that the Sum of the Argument is, that the Country People have been treated with great Contempt, because the Electors would not be directed by them in the disposing of their Votes.

But the chief Reason for publishing the said List is, to let the Country People know who of its (Bridgwater's) Inhabitants have honestly endeavoured to support Sir Charles Wyndham's Interest.

Had it been said, that it was rather to point out to the Country People with whom they should or should not have any Dealings, this would have carried with it the Face of Truth : But how far Sir Charles Wyndham's Interest was supported by honest Men, the World may imagine from the great Number of Electors, who solemnly promis'd, and deceived the other Candidates when they Poll'd at the Cross.

Come we now to the OBSERVATIONS,

The first of which is in Substance as follows: That many who had promised Sir Charles Wyndham before, deceived him at the Election ; nor could there well be greater Instances of Baseness and Treachery shewed, than there were at 'this Election.

"By comparing the List hereto subjoined, with the List printed by Sir Charles Wyndham's Friends, it will demonstrably be made evident, that the greatest Instances of Baseness and Treachery at this Election, were shew'd by Sir Charles's own voters.

The great Liberty taken by this Author in defaming several Gentlemen and others of strict Honour, Integrity and Moderation, representing them as more than commonly rude and insolent, plainly discovers the Fury, Resentment, Rancour and Prejudice still subsisting amongst his ill-natur'd and turbulent Party, the Heads whereof (in the course of all their Management) as well as other inferior Persons (in the same Interest) richly merit themselves, to be distinguished with those very genteel Epithets, which they have so lavishly bestowed on the undeserving. Nor must it be forgotten to observe, that the haughty Carriage and imperious Behaviour of Sir Charles Wyndham's principal Managers (who acted more like Bullies than proper Agents) contributed not a little to the losing of his Election.

In the next Place we are to speak of the Grand Assurance which, in the Author's words, is as followeth : —

These gentlemen (marked thus*) were unquestionably single for Sir Charles, but voted for Mr. Poulett, being assured that it would produce the like Compliment from him to Sir Charles, which (as the Customhouse Officers had not at that time poll'd) would have been returned, and must have secured Sir Charles' Election, had there not been concerted a villainous and treacherous Agreement to the contrary, between the principal Agents of Mr. Poulett and those of Mr. Dodington.

It is not doubted but William Moore, the Rev. John Coles and John Headford, voted for Mr. Poulett, in Expectation of a Return of the Compliment (tho' Mr. Poulett did not expect or want

their votes) but none of the others distinguish'd in the List with the same Mark as the three Complemeters ; for the rest were unquestionably hearty in Mr. Poulett's Interest, and always declared for him. But with what face could such a notorious Falshood be advanced, as that they were assured that this Complement should be returned? If they had any such Assurance, they are hereby called upon to declare from whom they had it. Had Mr. Dyke or Mr. Bampfylde any Assurance of this kind at the Old Angel on the Day of Election? We appeal to them. Or did Mr. Poulett give it to any of Sir Charles's Friends ? His message from the Cross to his single Voters plainly proves the contrary.

In the next Place, Mr. Poulett's and Mr. Dodington's principal Agents are charged with a villainous and treacherous Agreement, to hinder the return of this Compliment, otherwise Sir Charles's Election would have been secure. How can Gentlemen be branded with concerting a villainous and treacherous Agreement, when they no more than honestly excited themselves to the utmost of their Abilities by promoting and securing the Election of the Candidates they were engaged for, and whose Interests were separately supported by their respective Friends? So that upon the whole, this Grand Assurance has no other Foundation to be credited than the bare "ipse dixit" of an Anonymous Author, who is defy'd to prove his groundless and ungenerous Allegations."

The next Charge is brought upon the Right Worshipful Philip Baker, Esq., Mayor, who, the Author says, for weighty Reasons best known to himself, did not vote at all ; Mr. Poulett and Mr. Dodington having, at the Close of the Poll, no occasion for him. What a ridiculous insinuation is this, to charge a Gentleman for not voting, and at the same time to acknowledge there was no Occasion for his Vote? But it is said he did not vote at all for weighty Reasons best known to himself. If the Author had been endued with any Reason, or known any thing of the Duty of a Returning Officer, he would not have exposed himself in this spiteful manner ; the Returning Officer is Judge of the Poll, and as several dubious Votes were Poll'd (whereof for Sir Charles were more than seven who had no manner of right of voting) a Scrutiny might have been demanded, the Mayor therefore did not think it expedient to give his Vote, that he might with strict Impartiality determine the Legality of the other Votes as a Judge, which, had he voted, he must have been deprived of, and would have become a Party. And this is the weighty Reason, and the true one for his not voting at all.

Lastly. The malicious Libeller closes his Observations with a scandalous and base Reflection upon my self, who, he impudently asserts, promised all three, and was absent. What is intended by this false Insinuation, is easy to see, but how came the Observator to know my Secrets better than myself? And to have the Assurance to advance a thing, the first Part whereof I declare is absolutely false, and do assure him, that I did not absent myself thro' any fear of discovering my real Sentiments, or letting the World know for whom I should vote, but was confined to my Bed, as I had been many Months before, and was prevented from voting, only upon the Account of my great Infirmities, which I have more Charity than to wish may ever fall on this ill-natur'd, nameless Observator.

The Disappointments of a hot-headed furious Party must to them be terrible. What will not inveterate Malice suggest, and insatiable Revenge carry into Execution? Now their Weakness is discovered, which they have endeavoured to put a Gloss on, by all manner of Ways and Means to Profusion; now, I say, they affect to give out that they were treacherously dealt with, and were not assisted with a Number of Votes which they pretend to say were promised to them; but I am absolutely convinced there never was any such Promise made; for on the Friday Evening before the Election Sir Charles Wyndham did me the honour of a Visit, when talking about the Affairs of the Election, Sir Charles was pleased to declare upon his Salvation, and that he would give his Oath and his Honour, that he never had made nor received any Proposals for joyning, and that he would not join with any Body; and upon my taking the Freedom to ask Sir Charles how he found Matters stood, he was pleas'd to answer, that he had not made any Calculation himself, but relied wholly on his Friends, who assured him he was safe.

If any one circumstance can be pointed out in what I have here advanced, which is not literally true, I expect to be contradicted, and in perusing these Remarks, founded on Truth and Honesty, let the Reader first divest himself of Partiality, and he is left to make his own Conclusions, as Reason directs.

*I am, Gentlemen,
Your most humble Servant,
James Bryant, Town Clerk,
Bridgwater, June 20th, 1741.*

The above protest by the Town Clerk is followed (bound up within the cover of the same little pamphlet) by a carefully compiled list of the voters, giving their names, and for whom they voted. The accusing letter R is

placed against those voters who, as it was alleged by Mr. Bryant, *promised to vote for Mr. Poulett, but deceived him*. Another letter of infamy, B, is placed beside the names of those that *promis'd to vote for Mr. Dodington, but deceived him*. Sir Charles Wyndham's disappointments (if Mr. Bryant would allow that he had any) are not recorded.

The list is an interesting one, and its contents are very suggestive. Two hundred and forty-seven persons voted, and the election resulted in the return of Mr. Poulett and Mr. Dodington, Sir Charles Wyndham being, as the Town Clerk's letter has explained, at the bottom of the poll. The numbers were thus: Poulett, 157; Dodington, 132; Wyndham, 120. The sheet from which these figures are taken is slightly damaged, so that the number of electors who voted for one candidate only cannot be given, but evidently Poulett and Dodington were united against Wyndham. The latter consequently received most single votes.

Of these 247 voters, it may be instructive to note their occupations. Twenty-one were representative men of the town, known as Capital Burgesses; sixteen Maltsters; fifteen Inn-holders; fourteen Butchers; ten Bakers; eight Perukemakers; eight Joiners; eight Tailors; seven Smiths; seven Mariners; six officers of Customs; five Yeomen; five Attorneys; five Apothecaries; four Masons; four Hatters; four Shoemakers; four Saddlers; four Glaziers; four Linendrapers; three Mercers; three Ropers; three Curriers; three Coopers; three Helliers; three Brokers; three Ironmongers; three Gentlemen; two Merchants; two Whitesmiths; two Grocers; two Bricklayers; two Brickmakers; two Stone-Cutters; two Surgeons; two Aldermen; and one each of the following occupations. Brazier, Silversmith, Distiller, Shipwright, Sawyer, Sieve Maker, Sexton, Attorney's Clerk, Hosier, Excise Officer, Sailmaker, Porter, Bargemaster, Stay-maker, Architect, Basket Maker, Soap Boiler, Writing Master, and Drover. In addition to these, seven electors' occupations are undescribed, and nine appear under the designation Reverend (some clergymen and some dissenting ministers).

Some notes which are attached to the Voters' List D are exceedingly quaint, and they reveal the pleasantries which were wont to be vented upon electors in the days of open voting, and also the outspoken criticism which the Town Clerk of Bridgwater of that day felt justified in passing upon such

members of the electorate as had fallen under the lash of his political whip.

Richard Axford is pilloried in the Town Clerk's notes as *A disappointed place-hunter*; so also are John Hayne, Apothecary, and William Hozee. Henry Lasher is termed *A disappointed Placehunter in behalf of his Son-in-Law*, and William Laroche was said to have been *Disappointed in his Expectation of the Disposal of Places*. William Prior, it was alleged, *Has a Son a Placeman, and had the Ideas which he had form'd succeeded according to his Application, he would have been Distributer of the Stamps for the Western Division of Somerset*. John Bryant and John Culliford were labelled as *inhabitants of Chilton*; Christian Vanderborst was accused of being *an Alien*; while John Rogers, William Williams, and Sealy Bridge were said to be *not rated*. James Coles, Attorney's Clerk, must have been singularly obnoxious to the Town Clerk, for he is termed *Busy and impudent, and never paid Scot and Lot*. Thomas Davis, one would fain think, had other views than his country's sole benefit when he voted, for Mr. Bryant says that he was *Disappointed in his Expectation of the Disposal of Places, to his great Mortification*. The Rev. James Knight, it was said, "*Had an excellent Method of Influence in this Election, call'd Henpecking, by which is supposed to be meant, That the Electors' Wives bias'd their Husbands in favour of his Party on account of the private Treats he gave them at his House, tho' we cannot say, at his Expence.*" The Rev. Henry Parsons was said to be *A mighty Discloser of his Party's Secrets*," while the Rev. John Coles was labelled as *Exceeding busy and clamorous, un-becoming the Cloth*. Mr. Charles Clement's failing, the Town Clerk averred, was that he was *A great Consumer of Mr. Dodington's October, &c.* John Pine, a Cutler and Maltster, against whose name the terrible letter B appears on the voting list, is scathingly rebuked. *On receiving a sum of Money for Malt of a Land lord (his dealer) he called for a Sneaker of Punch to treat him, and after it was drank, order'd it to be placed to Mr. Dodington's Account. A sneaking Trick.* With this culminating instance of political iniquity the Town Clerk's list of the sorrows and sins of the Electors comes to an end.

This was the last Bridgwater election which had any concern with the political fortunes of Walpole; before the town was polled again — in 1745 — the powerful Minister was dead. The protest of the Town Clerk has in it, however, some insinuations that there was a considerable amount of laxity, of treating, and favouring, and

promising without performing, at these elections. There can be no doubt that this was lamentably and entirely true. The days of the Georges were more corrupt and more immoral than the days of Charles the Second. It was an unhappy yet a fully recognised principle in political life to outwit the opposing party at all costs. Thus a Minister might hold the most strenuous views on some political matter, and be daily in consultation with his party as to the best means of carrying their plan. Yet this would by no means prevent him from seeking to gain entrance — by any scheming, gift, persuasion, or pretence — to the circle and secret counsels of the opposing party, whose projects and position it was his desire to know. To seek their intimacy under colour of conversion to their own political attitude, and afterwards to betray their confidences, was looked upon as a *ruse de guerre* which was quite the proper means to use. Even Walpole, in his ministerial dealings, was an entirely unscrupulous man. His desire was to carry on the Government of the country in the most open and proper way, but if these methods failed, others had to be employed. He was prepared to follow the pursuit of a really noble plan for the good of his country, yet to follow it up by methods which can only be regarded as degrading and vile. Corruption and bribery were, in his days, magnified to the dignity of a fine art. This was being done within the walls of the House of Commons; what was likely to be done in the heat and excitement of public elections, when, very soon, votes came to have their regulated market price? Even votes for Ministers' measures were bought, at that time, from Members of Parliament. It was said of Walpole that he would buy the vote of any man who would sell it. If it were easier or more pleasant to bribe the member's wife, then he would adopt that plan, using diamonds, probably, instead of gold. It mattered not if the bribe were direct or indirect, secret or open. Votes must be had, or measures could not be passed. Such were the morals of high political life in 1741.

An immense improvement came at length within the walls of Parliament, or a crash must have ensued. The time came, and was not so very long in coming, when no member of any respectability would sell his vote to any Minister on any terms whatever. Yet, with a strange inconsistency which has persisted for many a year, and even lingers in some quarters today, such a member would cheerfully adopt the most liberal and free-

handed corruption amongst the electors of the constituency which he hoped to win. This was certainly the plan in many of the Provincial towns of England during the eighteenth century. Bribery and treating flourished like the cedars in Lebanon ; they were the recognised means. The Prime Minister would achieve his ends by means of the gifts of lucrative posts, pensions, and pleasant sinecures. The Candidate for Parliament attempted to secure his by parallel methods amongst the voters. One thing must be said. Walpole himself could not be bribed. He was not avaricious, and no man could influence him by any temptation of place or reward. He played upon other men's weaknesses, and used them. But he would not consent to be thus used himself.

Very probably Mr. James Bryant's plaintive plea about the disappointment which certain electors in Bridgwater experienced in 1741 was a well-founded protest. There were, it is to be feared, some seekers after Place and Power, as well as some consumers of Mr. Dodington's October and his Punch. Private treats in private houses in favour of this or that candidate did, there is but little doubt, occur. Promises of favours were made, and some of them are certain not to have been fulfilled. The Town Clerk's final appeal is an *argumentum ad hominem*. He appeals to the reader to divest himself of partiality, and to form his own conclusions. Those conclusions probably would be that there was considerable bribery and influence at that election ; that some at least of the voters thoroughly approved of this ; and that the electorate must, on the whole, have had a very merry time.