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The London Journal and Its Authors, 1720-1723

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In September, 1720, the South Sea Bubble suddenly burst, and after a peaceful summer England was thrown into a period of political strife and turmoil. The ministers were thoroughly discredited before the public, the government was bitterly attacked in parliament, press and country, and hopes rose high among those who expected to profit by the worst that could befall the administration and the dynasty. A rabid opposition press flooded the country with newspapers, pamphlets and ballads that circulated in great numbers throughout London and the provinces with incalculable effect upon the credit of the ministers and their government. In the midst of this uproar there appeared in *The London Journal* of November 5 to 12, 1720,[1] the first of those letters over the name of "Cato" that were to prove for nearly three years among the most troublesome thorns that pricked the vulnerable sides of the British ministry.

In the darkness that surrounds the efforts of the government to control public opinion and expression, any light must be of great interest to the political and social historian of the period, and the story of *The London Journal* from 1720 to 1723 is of special interest for several reasons. This paper was the most influential of all those published in the years mentioned, and was probably of greater political significance than any other of Walpole's administration with the exception of *The Craftsman* which began at the end of 1726. Then, too, there is more information concerning it than is usual with newspapers of that day. The reports of the trials of those connected with its authorship, publication and distribution give an insight into eighteenth century journalism that is very in-

[1] Newspapers sometimes bore the dates of the period covered. Thus, *The London Journal*, a weekly, bore the dates, November 5 to 12, 12 to 19, 19 to 26, etc. This practice was later dropped.

teresting in itself. The plans submitted for its control reveal government policy in an aspect seldom exhibited so clearly. The results of the plan adopted show how easily and quietly the government could "draw the teeth" of a paper and bring it into subjection. The names of the men connected with *The London Journal* add further interest, including, as they do, those two outstanding figures in early newspaper history, Sir John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, as well as Benjamin Norton Defoe, natural son of the famous Daniel, and Lord Molesworth, at that time the outstanding parliamentary leader of the opposition to Walpole's government and policies. Finally, the study makes possible the correction of several errors frequently repeated by later writers on the history of the time.

In the last years of Queen Anne, Thomas Gordon, a clever young Scot from Kirkcudbright, apparently fresh from Aberdeen University, came to London to make his fortune, equipped with little but a sharp tongue and a ready wit. His success was phenomenal for a journalist of that day. He plunged at once into the political arena, and the adventures attributed to him are many and various.[2] Gordon tells us much of himself in the prefaces to his various collected writings. He tells us that he had "no fondness for noise and the Church," and soon he was able to attract considerable attention by a series of humorous pamphlets in behalf of the liberal Bishop Hoadly in the Bangorian controversy of 1717 to 1720.

It was in 1719, at the Grecian Coffee House in Devereux Court east of Essex Street off the Strand, that the great turn of Gordon's fortunes came when he became the friend and ally of Sir John Trenchard. Trenchard was about sixty at the time, an old hand at political pamphleteering and journalism. The son of William III's Secretary of State of the same name, he was by origin a west-coun-

[2] For details of his career see the *Dictionary of National Biography*; J. M. Bulloch, *Thomas Gordon the Independent Whig*, (Aberdeen University, 1918); *The Characters of two Independent Whigs, viz. T. G---- of the North and Squire T---- of the West*, (London, 1720); *An Historical View of the Principles, Characters, Persons, etc., of the Political Writers in Great Britain . . .*, (London, 1740); Rev. George Murray's letters to the Kirkcudbright *Advertiser*, several typed and the rest clipped from the paper and pasted in a blank-book in the British Museum; and the introduction to Arthur Galton's edition of Gordon's translation of Tacitus, entitled *The Reign of Tiberius*, (London and New York, n.d. [1890]).

try squire, of ample wealth and of a radical and unorthodox turn of mind. He had long devoted his talents and fortune to the spread of his ideas through the medium of the press. He "wrote what he thought, and wrote it for no other reason than because he thought it and that it would be of service for his country to know it," [3] and in Gordon he found just the man to assist him and carry on his work. Together they went off to the country "for a summer's running," and, as Gordon says of himself, "from that happy period all went well with him." The first result of the collaboration of Gordon and Trenchard appeared in the great success attained in 1720 by the weekly *Independent Whig*, devoted largely to attacks upon the High Church. Fifty-three papers from this journal were printed in book form, and before mid-century had gone through at least seven editions in England, two in America, and one in France. Although Trenchard appears to have written eighteen of the fifty-three articles, and a certain "C", said to have been Arthur Collins, best known for his "Peerage", wrote ten, it was Gordon who held the public eye, and "the Parts and Learning of the whole Junto were placed to his Account." As reputed author of *The Independent Whig*, a considerable fortune was left him by a free-thinking country physician, one Dr. Walsh, in 1728, a piece of good luck which James Ralph humorously calls "the only Retribution of the kind, perhaps, that ever any British Author met with." [4]

This was the man who, as Cato in *The London Journal*, was to win for that paper a predominant place among its contemporaries of 1721 and 1722, and to worry the government into bringing it under control just as soon as the ministry could be reorganized after the chaos of the bubble year. The Cato letters, unlike those of the Independent Whig, were not limited to one subject, but dealt with a wide range of matters of popular interest. Again it was Gordon who held the attention of the public as author of these letters, although the fifth edition of the collected essays, published in 1748 in four volumes, assigns to Gordon eighty-six, to Trench-

[3] *An Historical View*, p. 15.

[4] James Ralph, *The Case of Authors by Profession or Trade, Stated, with Regard to Booksellers, the Stage, and the Public* (London, edition of 1762), p. 37. Abel Boyer, *The Political State of Great Britain*, November, 1728, p. 499-502.

ard fifty-two, while six were the work of both in collaboration, a total of one hundred and forty-four letters published between November 12, 1720, and December 7, 1723. In a preface to these letters, Gordon says that Trenchard himself never wrote unless he had to, but that he was a great tutor. It is interesting to note that the letters ceased on the day that Trenchard died, laughing "very hearty" on his death bed at the attacks of a "certain clergyman."

Another name connected with the story of *The London Journal* must be mentioned if only to clear up what appears to be an error in regard to the authorship of the papers appearing therein. Lord Molesworth was one of the most violent leaders of the parliamentary attack on the directors of the South Sea Company and on the moderate policies of Robert Walpole in 1721. So outspoken was Molesworth in his praise of the Cato letters that they were often attributed in part to him. Contemporaries frequently spoke of his suspected authorship. Sir John Vanbrugh, writing to the Earl of Carlisle on April 22, 1721, referred to *The London Journal* as an example of the bitterness with which the ministers were attacked. "My Lord Molesworth," he added, "is reckoned the chief author of the Journal." [5] On October 4, Colonel Burges, resident in Venice, congratulated Lord Molesworth's son, the Honorable John Molesworth, on the spirit shown in a recent letter of his, which was "worthy of the eldest son of Cato." [6] Walter Molesworth, writing to his brother, the Honorable John, on November 9, 1721, speaks of *The London Journals* that were sent to him. He states that he had heard his father, Lord Molesworth, admit the silly and sometimes false character of these papers with their bitter personal attacks that would do no cause any good, "and yet," he adds, "I know the whole load of odium lies upon him, . . . his family may starve for anything either the Ministers or he will do to prevent it, . . . he protested solemnly he had not writ one this half year, nor ever was the author of any personal or scurrilous reflections, which, however, has enraged the Ministers, and particularly My Lord S[un-

[5] *Carlisle MSS.* (Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fifteenth Report, Appendix VI), p. 33. Geoffrey Webb, *The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh* (London, 1928), IV, 132-133.

[6] *Clements MSS.* (Hist. MSS. Com., *Various Collections*, VIII), p. 325.

derland] against him to the greatest degree." [7] About this time, a mezzotint of the popular opposition leader was published, "officiously done by Mr. Toland," in the caption of which he was given credit for the Cato letters with four lines translated from Lucian's character of the Roman Cato. However, in the preface to the fifth edition of the letters, Gordon denies that Molesworth ever wrote a single Cato letter in the journal. He speaks of him as "an able and learned nobleman," a friend of both himself and Trenchard, but he says that Molesworth "was so fond of these letters that from his great partiality in speaking of them, many people inferred they were his own." On two or three occasions he had submitted letters, but they did not coincide with Cato's design and were not used. "He afterwards published some of them in another form, which heightened the report of his being the author of Cato's Letters." All this contemporary discussion of Molesworth's part shows clearly how very seriously Cato's letters and *The London Journal* were taken by the government and the people of that period.

The fourth name of interest that appeared in connection with *The London Journal* was that of Benjamin Norton Defoe. He was the natural son of Daniel Defoe by an "oyster wench," or oyster vender, and he frequently preferred to be known by his mother's name alone, as Benjamin Norton. Pope speaks of him in *The Dunciad:*

> Norton, from Daniel and Ostroea sprung,
> Bless'd with his father's front, and mother's tongue,
> Hung silent down his never-blushing head.[8]

This son of the great Defoe preferred to follow his father's calling rather than his mother's and he left the fish market to spend his life dealing out Billingsgate through the medium of the factional press,[9] with no great success, as will later appear. It seems that nothing good was ever said of him!

While *The Independent Whig* was at the height of its popularity, toward the end of 1720, the first of the letters over the name

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 326.
[8] W. Elwin and W. J. Courthope, *The Works of Alexander Pope* (London, 1889), Vol. IV, 160. See also, notes, p. 339.
[9] Richard Savage, *An Author to be Let* (London, 1729), preface.

of "Cato" appeared in *The London Journal* of November 5 to 12, 1720, soon after the bursting of the South Sea bubble. The next number carried an article by "Britannicus," followed, in the issue of November 19 to 26, by one by Cato again. Two weeks passed before Cato reappeared in the issues of December 10 to 17, and 17 to 24. Already Cato was taking a leading place in the journalism of the day. The journal of December 24 to 31 omits Cato, but "Brutus" writes of the "Surprising Reputation your Paper has got, especially from those Celebrated Letters that are printed of late in the Beginning of it." Comments began to appear in the private correspondence of the time,[10] and the French agents in England seem to have watched the paper closely, for they frequently sent copies, translations, or accounts of it to their government at home.[11] Abel Boyer, in his monthly *Political State*, gave a great amount of space to articles that came from the pen of the popular Cato. A special supplement, published on Tuesday, January 3, 1721, was devoted entirely to Cato, and thereafter his letters appeared frequently, although not regularly. When Cato's letters were too long for the size of the paper it was expanded to two sheets, or eight pages, to accommodate them, at the same price of three halfpence, and it was so advertised in other papers.

The impression made by Cato's letters was immediate. They soon brought forth a flood of praise and criticism, and before long Cato could claim to have provided work for all the poor wits and mendicants in the town.

> Obsolete and desparing [sic] Authors once more violently grasped their Pens: The lean and ill-fed Candidates for Weekly Work from the Booksellers, brighten'd up, and began to be cloath'd; and puny Poets, and the humble Composers of Dittys, left their Tags and Ballads to live upon Cato . . . And Cato became at once the Butt of the Envious,

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[10] For example, Matthew Prior to Lord Harley, January 1, 1721, advising Lord Harley to read *The London Journal*. *Bath MSS.*, Vol. III, 493 (Hist. MSS. Com., 1908). Other comments later appear in *Clements MSS.*, *Carlisle MSS.*, and *Portland MSS.*, in the reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

[11] *Archives des Affaires Etrangères* (Foreign Office, Paris), *Angleterre*, 337, ff.103-104; 342, ff.106-112; 343, ff.121, 154-155; 344, ff.228-229, 230-231. Many other references could be given.

the Mark of the Ambitious, and the Stay and support of the Needy.[12]

To the men of that day, Cato's letters must have been full of dynamite. To later generations, unread in the smaller details of the life of the time, they may well appear dull and of little interest, for they seldom say definitely what they mean and often resort to allegory, following the suggestion of Dean Swift "of looking into history for some character bearing a resemblance to the person we would describe; and with the absolute power of altering, adding or suppressing what circumstances we please . . ." But Swift adds truly, "For though the present age may understand well enough the little hints we give, yet this will all be lost in the next. I hope [our grandchildren] . . . may have curiosity enough to consult annals and compare dates."[13] When Cato, for example, considered the "great Point," "whether the killing of Julius Caesar was a Virtue, or a Crime," and proved it the former, he started a battle of ink that spread through many articles and pamphlets.[14] Often the allegories or the other references to contemporary men and events were too obscure even for readers of that day to grasp the point, and in this case an explanation might be provided in the form of a "key handed privately about," or an interpretation might be provided orally by the book-seller.[15] However, it appears that the government seldom found difficulty in discovering in these veiled libels the true references to itself and its policy.

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[12] *A Second Collection of Cato's Letters* (London, 1723); letter of Horatius to Cato, prefixed, p. 1.

[13] Swift's *Prose Works* (Temple Scott edition, London, 1902), IX, 101-2, 110.

[14] *Julius Caesar Acquitted, and his Murderers Condemned,* by John Dennis, appeared in *The Daily Post,* and also in pamphlet form, London, 1722. *Cato's Principles of Self-Preservation and Publick Liberty . . . By a Subject of Caesar's . . .* (London, 1722). *The Conspirators; or the Case of Catiline . . .* (London, 1721). *The Censor Censur'd, or Cato turned Catiline . . .* (London, 1722). *The Judgment of Dr. Prideaux,* in Read's *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* for February 3, 10, 17, 24, and March 3, 1722, was also printed separately as a pamphlet. Good examples of the many newspaper essays on the subject are reprinted in William Lee's *Life and Newly Discovered Writings of Daniel Defoe* (London, 1869), II, 462-478. Note the great number of references in Lee's collection to *The London Journal* and its authors during the period of its great popularity. Thomas Gordon continued his discussion of the murder of Caesar six years later in the "Political Discourses" included in his *Tacitus,* of which more will be said.

[15] Examples appear in many reports to the government on journalistic activities, for instance in *State Papers, Domestic, George I* (Public Record Office, London), bundle 31, No. 39 and 41.

The London Journal liked nothing better than to publish lurid praises of its most popular writer. Soon the poets—one wonders if their number included Thomas Gordon!—were busy in eulogy of "the Godlike Cato".

> I thought no Schemes our Justice could defeat,
> Nor Albion mourn, when Godlike Cato writ.
> May poor Britannia ne'er have cause to see
> A loss, O Cato, like the Loss of Thee.[16]

> To George, to Cato, to thy Patriots raise
> Eternal Pillars of Immortal Praise.[17]

> How bright the shining Patriot stands confest.
> Great Cato's soul informs his generous breast!
> 'Gainst power usurp'd, he points his God-like Rage,
> And deals out Freedom to a future Age.[18]

Not all were so inspired by the writings of the great Cato, especially when he touched upon matters of religion in which he was far from orthodox. In a sermon before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London on "The Sins of the Times," the Reverend Edmund Massey quoted from *The London Journal* in attacking that "weekly defense of treason and sacrilege," and the sermon, published, went through five or six editions almost immediately.[19] The rival journalists, Mist, Read, and Applebee, in their papers, frequently gave attention to Cato, either in outright attacks on his writings or in sly jokes at his expense. "I wonder whether Cato goes to Church tomorrow," added October Greenwood as a postscript to his article in *The Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post* of February 10, 1722, and in *The Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* of March 3, 1722, it is hoped that "the person who calls himself Cato is no Englishman," but rather a foreigner and a Jesuit.

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[16] *London Journal*, August 26, 1721. The "schemes" that threatened to defeat justice were Walpole's plans for settling the South Sea problems, then under bitter attack in parliament and country.

[17] *Ibid.*, September 23, 1721.

[18] *Ibid.*, December 3, 1721.

[19] See Boyer's *Political State* for January-June, 1722, p. 35-44.

Thus ran the comments, humorous and serious, but meanwhile *The London Journal* was building up its circulation and spreading its poison "amonst a Populace two Ready to take up any Prejudice to ye Government."[20] *The Weekly Journal* of that notorious stormy petrel of eighteenth century journalism, Nathaniel Mist, seems to have suffered especially. His bitter attacks on his more popular rival brought forth a sarcastic reply in *The London Journal* of August 12, 1721, which pointed out that the hostile efforts of "that Worthy Gentleman . . . our friend Mist," had been so successful that "the London Journal sells above Two to his One, and has done so in Town and Country for many Months, as had been plentifully testify'd to us by the *Publishers*, *Mercuries*, and *Hawkers*, of all sorts; and of which his own Accounts are a surer Testimony." Mist himself, in the preface to the second volume of the *Collection of Miscellany Letters selected out of Mist's Weekly Journal*, complains that the distractions of his recent prosecutions by the government had given opportunity for another paper to creep into the houses of his customers. This statement is dated from the King's Bench prison, November 10, 1721. William Lee, in his biography of Defoe, believes that it was *Applebee's Journal* which supplanted Mist's because, as he says, Defoe seems to have transferred his talents to that paper.[21] There is no apparent reason for such a conclusion, and Applebee seems to have been as much perturbed about *The London Journal* as was Mist, judging from the frequent attacks upon it appearing in his pages. Rather, it would appear that *The London Journal*, then at the height of its success, was the paper to which Mist referred. This view is strengthened by the fact that already in his preface to the first *Collection of Miscellany Letters*, dated September 9, 1721, Mist had found it necessary to explain his motives in attacking the popular Cato, these attacks having clearly proved unpopular with his public.[22]

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[20] Anonymous letter of March 9, 1721/1722, in *State Papers, Domestic, George I*, bundle 30, No. 52.

[21] Lee, *Life and Newly Discovered Writings of Daniel Defoe*, I, 350.

[22] *Collection of Miscellany Letters, selected out of Mist's Weekly Journal* (London, 1722), I, preface, p. xv-xvi, and II, 320-324.

The popularity and influence of *The London Journal* increased rapidly in the country as well as in London, and comments of the time refer to it more frequently than to any of its contemporaries. In London, the demand was said to have been so great on at least one occasion that the price was forced up from three halfpence to sixpence and even to a shilling, "a price hardly ever given before" for a newspaper.[23] The great influence of the paper outside of London is shown in an interesting letter from "A.B." now in the Public Record Office. It is dated August 16, 1721, and is addressed to Lord Carteret as Secretary of State.[24] It describes the effects of *The London Journal* in the country around Birmingham. Copies of the *Journal* were sent to Birmingham hawkers by "one Pasham, a Bookseller of Northampton," and were distributed from Birmingham through the country for a radius of thirty or forty miles. Its influence was so great and so bad that "A.B." begged

> that Some Method may be taken, whereby the Country may be preserved ag^{t} the Poison that insinuating Libel begins to spread around us, not only here but in other great Towns, since the Country is (wth Submission) as susceptible of any Contagion as the City, and those that communicate it not being immediately wthin the Verge of Restriction, act their Mischiefs wth Impunity as it were . . . In this Case not knowing whether the Governm^{t} was inform'd of the Footing this Paper has got in the Country . . . I would leave no Stone unturn'd to suppress it . . . and therefore have been bold to inform yo^{r} Lp. by these Lines.

The writer gives a graphic account of the effects of the paper in the city of Birmingham itself.

> The gen^{le} Cry among the common People is of late, Oh! This is a fine Paper! This Paper contains nothing but Truth! The Man that writes this knows everything that's doing at Court! Therefore whatever Person or thing it condemns (tho' never so sacred) is condemned by the Suffrage of the giddy Multitude; and last Saturday's Paper is now become the Gen^{le} talk of not only this place, but Cov-

[23] *London Journal*, March 18, 1721. The statement may be exaggerated for advertising purposes.

[24] *State Papers, Domestic, George I*, bundle 28, No. 15.

> entry, Warwick, &. In every Alehouse People have the London Journal in their Hands, shewing to each other wth a kind of Joy the most audacious Reflections therein contained. Business is hardly any more minded by Shopkeepers, but the Fellows who have this Paper to sell, are the only Market-Men, who impudently assure the greedy Crowd that the Author of the Paper will prosecute what he has begun, and they shall have a Continuation of it next Week.

In *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal* of February 3, 1722, a letter dated from Gloucester speaks of the influence of *The London Journal* in that part of England. "'Tis notoriously known that this part of the country swarms with Phanaticks; and has done so ever since the days of the Rebellion, and since the London Journal has got among them with its poisonous Tenets, it has stirr'd up the old Eleven . . ."

Meanwhile, in the months that followed the South Sea crash late in 1720, Lord Sunderland was maintaining behind the scenes his last vain struggle to retain his dominance in the ministry against the rising power of the Townshend-Walpole faction; but in April, 1721, the strength of the latter was given public recognition when Walpole became First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, while Townshend had already become a principal Secretary of State. The government was then in a better position seriously to undertake the control of the press which was giving it no little irritation.

Some control was obviously necessary, for, as one contemporary reported, "There is now printed every week above 40 newspapers, and except the Courant and three or four more . . . all of them against the government." [25] Furthermore, the government papers were the "worst writ" and seem to have had far less than their share of influence upon the public mind. In the reign of George I, the necessary regulation could not be administered entirely at the arbitrary will of king or ministers, and some more subtle method was desirable. There were various ways in which the situation

[25] *Ibid.*, bundle 30, No. 52. An anonymous letter dated in pencil, March 9, 1721/22.

could be handled. First, there was the suit for libel, which was so often used in the early years of Walpole's administration. But this was far from satisfactory, for in all ages official prosecution has been the best advertisement for a book or paper. "I will venture to affirm," continued the writer quoted above, "that there never was a Mist [26] or any other person taken up or tryed but double the number of papers were sold upon it, beside ye irritating the people from a false notion of Persecution." It could be said that, "If the Government chastises them [the newswriters], for any Misdemeanor, it is considered the greatest blessing that can befal them." [27] Far better was it to employ a less obvious means of control, like that of Lord Townshend who, as Secretary of State a few years earlier, had engaged Daniel Defoe to write as a Tory for opposition papers, but to write in such a way as to "draw their sting" without arousing the suspicion of his Tory colleagues, and at the same time to keep an eye on the policy of the papers with which he was connected in order to block in advance the publication of dangerous material.[28] Finally, the press could be brought under control by the purchase of the paper, or by bribing or subsidizing political writers and publishers. In the last ten years of Walpole's administration, according to the report of the Secret Committee of 1742, about £50,000 was paid to authors and printers of newspapers. William Arnall, an active political writer, was reported by the committee to have received in four years for *Free Britons* and other writings the sum of almost £11,000 out of the Treasury.[29] How much of this type of control was exerted to form public opinion under Walpole's administration in the 1720's it is probably now impossible to discover, for the sums were usually drawn from the Secret Service Fund and were not separately accounted for.

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[26] Nathaniel Mist, one of the most troublesome of the journalists. See article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

[27] *A Ramble through London* (a pamphlet of 1738), p. 38.

[28] William Lee, *Life and Newly Discovered Writings of Daniel Defoe*, Vol. I, preface. The letters revealing this arrangement, found by Lee in the Public Record Office, are here reproduced.

[29] *A Further Report from the Committee of Secrecy appointed to enquire into the Conduct of Robert, Earl of Orford; during the last ten years . . . Delivered the 30th of June, 1742* (London, 1742), Appendix XIII.

The widespread influence of the opposition journals brought action in Parliament on May 28, 1721, when the "libels" were the subject of a long debate, and a committee was appointed to deal with them.[30] This was the old method of public persecution which did nothing but advertise the journalists and their work. Nathaniel Mist was among the first to suffer. Early in June, he appeared before the parliamentary committee and as a result went to prison for a prolonged term. His paper, *The Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, was not interrupted, however.[31]

Then came the turn of those responsible for *The London Journal* and its offensive expressions and insinuations. John Peele, the publisher, was sent for but absconded, and Thomas Gordon was summoned as the reputed author of the Cato letters. He was indisposed at the time, it appeared, and thought it safer to keep out of the way. Nothing was said of Trenchard, and the matter of *The London Journal* appears to have been dropped without further action.[32] For two months the journal was not molested, although several other printers, publishers, and authors suffered.

On the night of the eleventh of August, 1721, the government suddenly took action against *The London Journal*. Parliament, on the previous day, had been prorogued until October, but the country was in a fever of expectation that the prorogation would be turned into a dissolution with new elections in the near future. There was a powerful popular demand for a dissolution of this extremely unpopular "Septennial Parliament" with the stench of the South Sea scandals strong upon it, but the government was doubtful about holding elections while the country was still in turmoil, the South Sea affair still unsettled, the ministry everywhere bitterly reviled, and there was at least the possibility of a Tory government coming into office. Danger was in the air. The previous Saturday had witnessed an attack on the Parliament buildings

[30] Cobbett's *Parliamentary History* (London, 1811), VII, 803-809.

[31] *Parliamentary History*, VII, 809-810. Boyer's *Political State*, June, 1721. William Lee, *Defoe*, I, 348. *Collection of Miscellany Letters from Mist's Weekly Journal*, Vol. I, preface.

[32] *Parliamentary History*, VII, 809-810. *Political State*, June, 1721, p. 633. The copy of *The London Journal* for June 17, 1721, which caused the trouble, is in *State Papers, Domestic, George I*, bundle 27, No. 25.

by a mob. Only by calling out the Westminster constables and justices of the peace, and the reading of the Riot Act, could the agitators be restrained.[33] In the cabinet the question of the new elections took the form of a struggle between the Walpole and Sunderland factions, the former opposing and the latter supporting a dissolution.[34]

At this critical time, *The London Journal* printed for publication in its issue of August 12, an article entitled, "Examination taken by the Parliamentary Committee of Secrecy with an account of what appeared to them thereupon." It included the examinations of Aislabie, Craggs, and others of the Bubble culprits, with names printed in full, as conducted in parliament some months before. This act was bold enough in itself even after the close of the session, at a time when the debates and activities in parliament were not considered proper for public knowledge, but it is interesting to observe that the government paid no attention officially to the article itself. The official indignation was directed entirely against the introduction to the report of the examinations, a piece of writing that, to later generations, might well seem comparatively innocuous, yet it was enough to bring down the resentment of the government upon the heads of all concerned.

It will be of some interest to reproduce this introduction in full, for it is an example of the work of Benjamin Norton Defoe, it shows the sort of material that could arouse an eighteenth century government to drastic action, and finally, it is of interest because of the failure of previous students of the journalism of that day to discover at just what the government took offense. The article on Sir John Trenchard in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, says the purport of the libel is "not recorded." William Lee, in his biography of Daniel Defoe,[35] gives an account of this affair in which his opinions and conclusions are mostly erroneous. Other writers, such as Alexander Andrews in his *History of British Journalism*

[33] *London Journal*, August 12, 1721, gives an account of this matter under "London News."

[34] See, C. B. Realey, *The Early Opposition to Sir Robert Walpole* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1931), pp. 106-107. Also, *Additional MSS.* (British Museum), 9, 150, f.55 and verso.

[35] Vol. I, 352-354.

(London, 1859), and H. R. Fox Bourne in his *English Newspapers* (London, 1887), give accounts which are incomplete and partly erroneous. The offending sheet is preserved with the testimonies in the Public Record Office.[36] Defoe's introduction follows:

> The following Narrative requires but little Introduction; a long one is therefore omitted, that our Readers may have more of the Matter of Fact. We hope every Englishman, that's not a Villain, nor a Friend to Villains, will be obliged to us for this Publication, which might otherwise have never been made: If we run a Risque by it in our private Circumstances, which nothing could engage us to but *Love of our Country;* we hope, while we are Subservient to that, we have nothing to fear from honest Men and Britons: To God and them therefore we commit our Cause, nor dread the Consequence.
>
> Here we find the Source of all our Misery and Woe; here we see who have been Traytors, Harpies, Parricides; who their Aiders, Confederates, and Abettors; to whom we owe the National Calamities we labour under; and who has contributed to destroy us at Home, and make us contemptible Abroad. Here appears the Cause of the Widows Sighs, the Orphans Tears, the Ruin of Families, the Distress of Millions, the sinking of Credit, the Discouragement of Trade, the lowering of our Stocks! Here we see who have been lavish of the Nation's Wealth, and squandered away our Treasure to help to undo us: Here we see the Reason of the Hardships the poor Annuitants suffer by: Here we see to the Bottom of the Fatal Wound our dear Country has received; and They stand confest who gave the Blow. *In a Word;* Here we see to whom Grace has abounded, and who stood in need of INDEMNITY.

On August 11, 1721, Lord Townshend issued instructions to his Majesty's messengers in ordinary to take a constable and search for certain papers "tending to create sedition and disaffection," which, according to information upon oath, had been printed and were distributed in several places, and of which "more are now printing." All those in whose custody the papers were found were

[36] *State Papers, Domestic, George I,* bundle 28, No. 10 (2).

to be seized and brought before the office of the Secretary of State for examination.[37] Apparently, the messengers did their work thoroughly, for a news letter of August 12, reports that on the previous night and on the morning of that date, messengers of the various offices were employed in preventing the dispersing of *The London Journal.*

> They broke the printing press, and seized all the copies they could find in the printing house, and this day they took from the hawkers in the street all the copies they had in their possession. There is nothing remarkable in the Journal but six columns of it containing a part of the examinations taken by the Committee of Secrecy with an account of what appeared to them thereupon, which was to be continued in their next, and is the beginning of the report, but that which gave offense besides the publishing of the report is the introduction above written.[38]

On the same day, Saturday, August 12, the examinations of most of those concerned with *The London Journal* were held before Charles Delafaye, in the office of the Secretary of State, Lord Townshend. Benjamin Norton Defoe was not examined until the following Monday, August 14. These examinations[39] give an unusually clear and interesting picture of the process of publication in eighteenth century England. The personnel of the staff consisted of John Peele, publisher, William Wilkins, printer, Henry Morley, James Street and George North, pressmen, and Abraham Lickhordy, engaged as "puller off the press." In addition, there were examined Mary Zirenberg, a "mercury" or retailer of newspapers and pamphlets, Susan Norman, "runner" for Mary Zirenberg, and William Hewett, runner for Mrs. Dodd, another mercury. Later, it appears that Elizée Dobrée was proprietor of the paper, but apparently had no part in the hearings.

The publisher of a newspaper, it appears from other similar examinations, seldom knew what was in his paper until it came out

[37] *Ibid.*, bundle 28, No. 7. The power of the Secretary of State to sit as a court on such cases, and the abuses of that power, should make an interesting study in judicature. See *The Court Register and Statesman's Remembrancer* (London, 1733), p. 55; and *Considerations upon the Present State of Affairs at Home and Abroad* (London, 1739), pp. 28ff.

[38] *Portland MSS.* (Hist. MSS. Com., 1899), V, 624.

[39] *State Papers, Domestic, George I,* bundle 28, No. 9-13.

in print. For example, as one of Lord Townshend's agents informed him in regard to John Payne, a well-known publisher of *The Freeholder's Journal* and other publications several times under government displeasure, Payne "is wholly Ignorant of its Contents till he has it sent to Him by Mr. Sharp the Printer and proprietor of it . . . Payne, who is a very honest Man, Communicates the paper to me before Publication." [40] Thomas Bickerton, publisher of *The Daily Journal*, stated in an examination that he seldom read the paper before publication, not being the author or printer. It was Applebee, the printer of this as well as *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, who was responsible for the contents.[41] John Peele, however, seems to have taken more than the usual interest of a publisher in his paper.

Putting together the various testimonies,[42] we get this story.

Benjamin Norton Defoe had a close connection with *The London Journal*, both as a writer like Gordon and Trenchard, with whom he was intimately associated in the work, and apparently also in some financial capacity, for it was with him that the publisher, John Peele, said he "does account for profits from these said papers." Just what his position was in this respect is not made clear, but an interesting comment thereon appears in *Applebee's Journal* of the following August 26.

> The *late* writers of the *London Journal* have published an Advertisement to signify their great Dignity and Quality, *pretending* that the young Scribbler that has lately fallen into the Hands of Justice, is not the writer of *their* Letters, but that they are too great to be named; whereas 'tis eminently known who the Persons are, and they are in particular, Enemies to Religion, as well as to the Government:—Deists and Atheists, with an *Independent Whig* [Gordon] at the Head of them. Also 'tis known, that the young Defoe is but a Stalking Horse and a Tool, to bear the Lash and the Pillory in their stead, for his Wages; that he is the Author of the most Scandalous Part, but is only

[40] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 39. E. Curll to Lord Townshend, April 25, 1722.
[41] *Ibid.*, bundle 29, No. 39b. December 2, 1721.
[42] *State Papers, Domestic, George I*, bundle 28, documents No. 9 to No. 13, inclusive.

made Sham *Proprietor* of the whole, to skreen the true Proprietors from Justice; and we hear their Paper sinks upon it every Day.[43]

Thomas Gordon was not examined at this time, his Cato letters being discontinued during the publication of the reports of the parliamentary committee. Nevertheless, it was Gordon himself who was instigator of the offence. It was he who presented the idea of the introduction to Defoe, and he had made it clear that the intention should be that "of deprecrating [sic] some great Men." [44] Furthermore, we now discover one reason why the piece was so seriously regarded by the government, for it appears that it had a definite political purpose in connection with the vital issue then worrying the ministers, the question of whether or not to risk a general election. The article was definitely intended to dispose the people to petition for a new parliament, just what Walpole was then trying to avoid. Gordon told Defoe that it would have this effect, and "that there would be persons of Capacity that would put it about, that he, Gordon, spoke of this as a thing to be desired, that there would be petitions written to be sent down into the Country to this purpose." No part of the introduction was dictated to Defoe or given him in writing, but he composed and wrote it entirely himself in accordance with Gordon's general idea.[45]

Defoe submitted the piece in his own handwriting to Wilkins, the printer. Wilkins, being responsible for the contents of the paper, at first objected to printing such obnoxious material, but Defoe insisted and agreed to take all responsibility for it, which he did without hesitation in the examination. According to the recollections of Wilkins, the first part of the introduction was given him by Defoe on Monday or Tuesday, August 7 or 8, and the rest on Tuesday, either at Wilkins's own house in Little Britain, or at Mr. Peele's in Paternoster Row, or at a place in Lombard Street, he could not recall exactly which. The paper was immediately put into print and was presented by Wilkins to the publisher, Peele, at

[43] Reprinted in Lee's *Defoe*, I, 353, and attributed to Daniel Defoe.

[44] *State Papers, Domestic, George I*, bundle 28, No. 13. Examination of Benjamin Norton de Foe, August 14, 1721.

[45] *Ibid.*

Wilkins's house on Tuesday night in the presence of Defoe. The three of them went over the proof at that time and various corrections and amendments were made by the author. The next morning, Wednesday, another proof was struck and taken to Peele's house, where Defoe was also present and made his final changes and corrections. From this revised proof, the article that appeared in the issue dated Saturday, August 12, was printed on Friday, August 11. Clearly, the publisher was nervous to the last about this issue, for he went to the printer's and walked home in company with Defoe, discussing the paper. Defoe gave him full authority to use his name as author of the introduction and "said he would stand by the publication of the said paper." The employees at the printing house declared that they knew nothing about the authors of the articles they printed, and would not even admit a certainty as to the publisher of the paper. On Friday night, Wilkins sent Peele ten thousand copies of the paper, a very large edition for a newspaper of that day.[46] The mercuries or retailers sent their runners at once for their supplies, and several parcels were delivered on Friday night, before the government's messengers arrived to seize the rest and break the presses at the printing office.

Lord Townshend's warrant for the committment to Newgate of "Benjamin Norton alias de Foe" for writing and publishing "a scandalous and seditious Libel", was dated August 14; but Defoe was admitted to bail and, although his appearance before the King's Bench Bar was set for the first day of the next term, nothing more on the case has come to light. William Lee, in his biography of Daniel Defoe,[47] suggests that it was out of consideration for the father that the ministry dropped proceedings against the son; but a more probable reason is indicated in a letter in the Public Record Office, dated Thursday, March 1, 1721 (1722), to Charles Delafaye, and signed "Norton." This letter shows that Benjamin Norton, alias de Foe, had by that time made his peace with the government and was performing certain services that he had agreed

[46] James R. Sutherland, "The Circulation of Newspapers and Literary Periodicals, 1700-1730," *The Library* (Transactions of the Bibliographical Society, London), June, 1934, pp. 110-124.

[47] Vol. I, 354.

to, it may be, in return for his release. It appears that he was then reporting weekly to the office of the Secretary of State. "The paper Enclosed," he writes the Under Secretary, Delafaye,

> being something latter [later] than ordinary I Attended with it my Self y^t^ you might have had a sight of it as Soon as it was possible; but not haveing y^e^ Honour to see yourself I left it with your servant in such Coverts as He Could furnish me with w^ch^ I hope you'l please to Excuse as not being able to get at any other. These Due Attendances I pay, S^r^, I hope may be Look'd upon as Testimonys of y^e^ Sincerity of my Intentions to performe Engagements. You are Sensible S^r^ I submit every thing to your Direction; but I must beg leave to Intreat y^t^ if my Lord Townshend will not be so kind to me as he has given me reason to Expect I may have the Liberty to pursue any other measures I may think for my advantage to Enter into. I shall attend for your Orders S^r^ on Monday night as usual.[48]

He seems to have continued his Monday visits, and when he again failed to find his superior at home on April 2, he wrote out his assurances that he thought it his duty to attend when directed, "whether you are pleased to come or not." [49]

The London Journal went on its way, but the rest of the hearings of the Secret Committee, promised for the issue of August 17, never appeared, and Cato, who was to have taken a vacation during the continuance thereof, came back once more in that issue in a way as effective as ever. The government seems to have gained little by the prosecution, and in fact probably contributed considerably to the free advertising of the troublesome journal, for in the following months its prestige and popularity were evidently on the increase, judging from the frequency of references to it in contemporary writings.

Early in 1722, the government seems to have decided to deal more vigorously with its critics. On January 22, the house of commons resolved that no newswriters, printers or publishers should reproduce any debates or proceedings of that house or its commit-

[48] *State Papers, Domestic, George I*, bundle 30, No. 42.
[49] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 5. April 3, 1722.

tees, and on February 19, a committee was appointed to inquire into these matters.[50] In March and April, 1722, the general election, so long deferred and dreaded by the ministers, was held, and the new parliament that resulted was entirely under the domination of Walpole and his colleagues. During and after the elections, the government appears to have been especially active in its attack on hostile publications.[51] Among the men who came under official displeasure at this time were Thomas Payne and his printer, Thomas Sharp; the publishers, John and Samuel Redmayne; Dr. Gaylard, the printer of Mist's journal; Abel Boyer, of *The Political State of Great Britain;* William Wilkins again, this time for printing *The Whitehall Evening Post* which had lately come into his hands; Richard Phillips, the printer, and many other printers, publishers, and hawkers. Evidently, the government, with the South Sea affair rapidly fading in the past, and victory assured in the elections, was determined to bring the press into a better state of control. Most of these prosecutions and examinations were of the usual legal type that seldom got permanent results. Far more interesting and effective was the more subtle method applied to *The London Journal,* and perhaps to other papers as well, typical, as it seems, of the political methods of Robert Walpole.

Various proposals for the control of the press appear among the State Papers of about this time, making it appear that the government was desirous of finding a more effective method than the expensive and often futile prosecution for a particular libel. One unsigned paper, marked on the back, "Memo concerning Mist &," inspired by the attack on the government's Spanish policy, appearing in *Mist's Weekly Journal* of October 25, 1718, concludes with "A Method proposed for Suppressing News papers of this nature."[52] The "Method" was recopied and appears again in the State Papers, dated 1721, which would seem to indicate that it was being reconsidered in that year.[53] The proposal follows:

[50] *Journals of the House of Commons*, XX, 98, 143.

[51] See *State Papers, Domestic, George I,* bundles 29, 30 and 31, and frequent references to examinations and prosecutions in the newspapers of the time.

[52] *State Papers, Domestic, George I,* bundle 13, No. 31.

[53] *Ibid.,* bundle 29, No. 67; the second document bearing this number. See also, Sir Lyttleton Powys to Lord Chancellor Parker, 1719, quoted in Knight Hunt, *The Fourth*

> That besides punishing the authors printers and publishers, the Justices of Peace should have it given them in charge by My Lord Chancellor to punish the Coffee houses and other publick Houses that take them in. That Mr. Cracherode Solicitor to the Treasury should be at the trouble of reading all the News papers as they come out; and when he finds anything in them punishable he should attend Mr. Attorney General for his Opinion; and if it be deemed a Libel he should give notice to the Justices in several parts of the Town who should immediately by themselves or Agents search such Coffee houses and publick Houses particularly those where disaffected persons resort, and punish them by binding them to ye Sessions as the worst kind of publishers and taking away their Licenses. If this should be reduced into practice in Town and Country it would soon make people weary of printing and publishing such papers.

Another anonymous paper, dated London, March 9, 1722, speaks of a plan previously offered but never adopted. It, too, includes a "Method proposed." The idea here offered is to publish a paper in the interest of the government twice a week, written by the best available authors, emphasizing news about the royal family calculated to endear them to the public, and selling at a halfpenny, a price below that of any privately owned paper, thus forcing the latter out of business. Success would depend upon the careful selection of the persons entrusted with the conduct of the paper, but the author had little hope of achieving much at this late date, for when the plan was originally proposed, he said, "ye Govt. had a mob of theire side which I am sorry to say I am afraide all gone on ye other." [54]

On April 7, 1722, Mr. Cracherode, Solicitor to the Treasury, wrote to the Secretary of State, Lord Townshend, of the plan for suppressing libels which he had reduced to writing for the Under Secretary of State, Charles Delafaye, suggesting that Mr. Paxton at £200 per annum could do the business required in the plan, under Cracherode's direction and oversight, and with his assistance

Estate (London, 1850), I, 197; Alexander Andrews, *History of British Journalism* (London, 1859), I, 125.

[54] *State Papers, Domestic, George I*, bundle 30, No. 52.

and advice.[55] The details of this plan do not appear, unless it was one of those described a moment ago.

The most interesting of all these plans is that having to do with *The London Journal*. This plan was accompanied by a letter in French signed "E.D." and dated February 15, 1722. "E.D." was Elizée Dobrée, who was the proprietor of the journal at the time. Translated into English, the letter follows:

> Sir I send you enclosed my proposition, I do not know whether it is made as it ought to be but as I do not dare to show it to anyone for their advice I hope you will excuse the faults in it, and if you find it proper to put it in a better form I shall have an eternal obligation to you for it. As I have never cared to tell Mr Norton that I have had the honor of your company if you have not already told him I pray you not to do it for some reasons of my own.

The proposition which accompanied this letter is in English in the original.

> A Computation of The London Journal.
>
> by the Acco[t] which I have had the honour to deliver into yo[r] Hands, the profitt Computing the Sale att 15000, is abt — per Ann. £960:-
>
> If by turning off the Strength of Expressions, & thereby Lessning the Sale to ab[t] 7 or 8000, there would be Little or no proffitt att all & therefore in order to make A reasonable Satisfaction for that Loss tis Humbly proposed that an Equivalent may be given by the Government for the term of ten Years that the proprietor may be Enabled to pay Extr: Sallary to y[e] person (in Question) & making it sure to him during the ten Years, & if these Articles, are perform'd the Government shall have the power to order the Journal in such manner as they shall think fit & as if it was their own The proprietor Assuring them that all that Can possibly be done by him shall be perform'd. Therefore his demand to be
>
> £800
>
> £160 will still be his Loss According to this proposal.

[55] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 17.

made Sure to him is humbly propos'd to be £800 per ann: ye 2 first Yrs to be paid att the Signing of this agreement & If it Appears afterwards, that The Paper does not Suffer so much Loss, as the Government shall pay for those 2 Years then in Such Case for the 8 years afterwards, The Proprietor Will Engage himself to take only Such Sum as it Shall be made Appear that he has realy Lost by Lowering ye Sale of ye Paper Occassioned by the present Proposal.[56]

This or a similar plan was probably used in bringing *The London Journal* over to the support of the government, but the change did not take place until September. During the intervening months, the proprietor, Dobrée, was careful to keep in the good graces of the ministers, and was receiving payments from the treasury. He dealt through Charles Delafaye, Under Secretary to the Principal Secretary of State, Lord Townshend, but he did all he could to keep his relations with the officials as secret as possible. In his letter of February 15, 1722, just quoted, he was hoping to keep from Benjamin Norton Defoe any knowledge of the negotiations concerning *The London Journal.* In other letters to Delafaye, he urged that all communications be sent by the penny post in care of Richards's Coffee House in East Cheap, since to send them directly to him by a messenger of the Secretary's office would clearly have revealed that something was afoot. Furthermore, he stipulated that letters to him should bear no signature. "I shall know your writing," he told Delafaye.[57]

The government, it appears, had agreed to pay for the papers that had been seized, and Benjamin Norton Defoe continued to handle the money. The character of this shifty young man was not one to reassure Dobrée that all would be well with the accounts, and he wrote Delafaye on April 14, 1722, "You will oblige me infinitely if you will have the goodness to tell me by a short note when the money has been paid to Mr Norton, for I fear that he

[56] *Ibid.*, bundle 30, No. 34.
[57] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 25. April 17, 1722.

may trick me, also please tell me the sum paid to him."[58] The collection of the money due from the government seems to have been no easy matter, and several letters exist in which Dobrée urged that Lord Townshend carry out his part of their agreement.[59]

For his own part, Dobrée was doing what he could to keep the journal in line with the government's wishes, but his influence must have been indirect and not entirely effective. "I hope that you have found nothing contrary to your desire in the Journal during the month," he wrote on April 14, in the course of a correspondence with the Secretary's office regarding the contents and policy of the paper. "I assure you that I have given orders to him who takes care of the paper," he said on April 28, "never to put in any article which can displease the ministry." [60]

During these negotiations, Benjamin Norton Defoe was keeping in the ministerial favor with his weekly visits already mentioned,[61] but William Wilkins, the printer of *The London Journal*, succeeded in getting into more trouble, this time with his newly acquired *Whitehall Evening Post*. "I have obtained a power from the proprietors," he wrote on April 23, 1722, "to remove the cause of it [i.e., the official displeasure] as soon as I know in what particular it lies."[62]

The situation of *The London Journal* was not entirely satisfactory to Dobrée, it seems, and on May 21, 1722, he finally wrote Delafaye asking him to set a time when they could get together over a bottle and discuss "some little propositions" he wished to make to the government.[63] The government was apparently not very prompt in its replies,[64] and the course of the negotiations is not recorded. The results are first definitely apparent in September, when *The London Journal* suddenly and quietly appeared for the first time as a thorough-going ministerial paper.

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[58] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 22. Original in French.
[59] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 25, April 17; No. 47, April 28; No. 114, May 21, 1722.
[60] *Ibid.* The originals of these letters are in French.
[61] *Ibid.*, bundles 30, No. 42, and 31, No. 5.
[62] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 33.
[63] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 114.
[64] *Ibid.*, bundle 31, No. 120.

Cato's last letter in *The London Journal* was published in the issue of September 8, 1722. The issue of September 15 shows clearly that the paper had been taken over by the government and its whole policy changed. Henceforth it was a government organ. The exact date of this transfer has caused students some difficulty, for *The Gentleman's Magazine* for February, 1733,[65] says that the journal "gave the Government so much Uneasiness in 1720, about the S. Sea Scheme, that they thought fit to buy it into their own hands." H. R. Fox Bourne, in his *English Newspapers*,[66] quotes this statement, but instead of the words "in 1720," he substitutes "about 1726," and other writers have followed him in this error.[67]

Thomas Gordon had apparently received no adequate compensation as yet for turning from opposition to the support of Walpole's administration. He transferred his efforts to the new *British Journal*, a paper of the same style and appearance as *The London Journal*, which came out with its first issue on September 22, 1722. Under its heading in several of its early issues, *The British Journal* printed the following statement in large letters:

> The Managers of the London Journal having made some Difficulty to publish some of CATO's Letters, written upon the same popular subjects which they had publish'd for near Two Years together with no small Success; has made it necessary for him to publish these Letters hereafter in this Journal; where Care will be taken, that no such Remora's will be thrown in their Way. And the Publick is left to judge, whether there can be any other Objection against the Letters publish'd here, than against those publish'd heretofore in the London Journal? And whether CATO has, in any Instance, chang'd his Conduct or his Politicks.

Cato does not seem to have attracted so much attention in *The British Journal* as he had in *The London Journal*, and the former never achieved the prestige of the latter in the great days of its opposition to the government.

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[65] Vol. III, 91.

[66] Vol. I, 123.

[67] Among them, the present writer in his *Early Opposition to Sir Robert Walpole, 1720-1727*, p. 147.

Meanwhile, *The London Journal* went into the hands of the ministerial journalist known as Osborne,[68] and the place of Cato's letters in it was taken by a series published over the name, ever popular with eighteenth century journalists, of Britannicus, perhaps Osborne himself. In his first two articles, the new attitude is clearly indicated. In the issue of September 15, he began:

> There is nothing that has done more Mischief to good Conduct with Regard to the Publick, than the *Extremes* Men have been apt to run into, in the Heats of their Opposition to one another; and there is no Time perhaps in History in which this has been more seen, than it is at present amongst our selves. In the *Common Writers*, who have of late very much governed the Politicks and Passions of Men, there seems to have been a Conspiracy to destroy the right Notions of Things from off the Earth, and to substitute in their Room something which is agreeable to the Resentment and Anger of themselves and others, something that, instead of correcting or abating, falls in with and flatters the Uneasiness and Outcries of the World; fomenting and encreasing that Ferment upon which it is form'd, and out of which entirely it springs. I will give now one very remarkable Instance of this, and perhaps afterwards several more.

He goes on with a very accurate description of opposition policy in the recent general elections, when "patriotism" and "opposition" were made to appear synonymous, and no one holding an office or voting on any issue with the government was regarded as worthy of the vote of any lover of his country. Anyone familiar with the writings of Cato can see at once at whom the writer is striking.

In *The London Journal* of September 22, 1722, Britannicus was even more direct in his attack on his predecessor.

> It has fared in our Days with the *True Patriot*, just as it seems to have done with CATO in *Horace's* Time; or at least, according to the Allusion he makes for the Use of miserable Imitators of Great Characters. *A Man*, (says he) *puts on a scrow Countenance, and comes abroad in a severe and horrid Dress; but what then? Is this to personate the Virtue and Manners of Cato?* . . . The Man in *Martial*

[68] *Gentleman's Magazine*, February, 1733, III, 91.

> might as well have hoped to be like the *elder Cato,* by being *sometimes drunk*; or like *Tully,* by *making bad Verses*; as any one may hope to come up to the Character of a *True Patriot,* by having only a few of the worst *Lineaments* that perhaps ever belong'd to any of them. *To look sowr—To be constantly and remarkably out of Humor—To dictate with a loud Voice,* if a Man be bless'd with strong Lungs—*To be impatient of all Contradiction—To bestow the worst Names upon all who differ*—Sometimes upon great Occassions, *to foam at the Mouth, and look black in the Face*—And above all, *To be resolv'd to approve of nothing that is done*—I have myself known some, or all of these, to pass for the Marks of a *True Patriot*. . .

Britannicus knew the reply that would be made to him, and in defending himself against the anticipated charges that he is a courtier, a "Ministry Man," designing to lull men to sleep and prevent all opposition to those in power, he says that he is so far from "leading Men into a base and servile Submission to Great Men," that he is sure he will do more against it than all those who by constant bitter opposition grow nauseous to those about them. Later articles are devoted to praising the ministry, and defending the current policies of the government, occasionally bringing in the name of Cato with no evident affection. In general, the writings of Britannicus would probably impress the modern reader as stronger, more convincing and even better written than those of Cato, perhaps because Britannicus had no fear of prosecution for libel and could say what he meant with less concealment of his true meaning.

One might feel safe in assuming that Walpole was not far from the right hand of the writer of these articles, and this assumption is supported by an interesting letter in the Public Record Office, dated July 4, 1723 The letter was addressed only to "Sr.", but its intended recipient is apparently indicated by the reference to Chelsea, where Robert Walpole had a residence. The letter clearly implies that the minister and the writer were in close cooperation.

> You promised Britannicus, last time He had the honour of waiting on You, to call before this, at his Cottage in the

> Country; & favor Him with Some of your Thoughts etc. He knows what an Uninterrupted Succession of the Greatest Affairs fill up every Moment of your time: & therefore, dos not at all wonder that Such a Promise is not perform'd. He only has a mind now that You should know his present Design, & contradict it, if you don't approve of it . . . Britannicus, (having finish'd Mr K's) thinks it absolutely necessary to proceed now to the *Examination* of the Bishop's;[69] & the more necessary because his Case is in a particular Manner represented by the *True Briton*, and so as to raise Indignation and Compassion; & (which is always a prevailing Motive in Britannicus's opinion) because the Bulk of Readers are so entirely Strangers to the true State of the Cause and ye Evidence, as to want very much that Light, which they really shew themselves ready to yield to, as soon as they have it. If Britannicus hears nothing from You, in opposition to This, immediately, He will conclude Your Judgment not to differ much from His; & will upon that account go on with greater Satisfaction. [In a postscript the writer adds] If you chuse, He should come to You, a word will presently bring Him to Chelsea.[70]

Two days later, July 6, 1723, *The London Journal* came out with the last of the series of articles attacking Kelly, the Jacobite plotter, and demanding his conviction; and the next issue, July 13, turned upon Bishop Atterbury whose speech in his own defense had meanwhile appeared in print.

In the issue of *The British Journal* for July 27, 1723, Cato made his last bow, vindicating his performances of the last three years, and stating that able hands were to carry on his work, with his assistance as occasion required it. In fact, he seems to have written at least six of the articles later appearing over the name of "Criton," for these were attributed to Gordon himself in later collections of the Cato letters. In the next issue, Criton wrote,

> Cato is no more! and his Departure has left a mighty Gap in the Array of Weekly-Writers; perhaps the greatest

[69] The case of Bishop Atterbury and the Jacobite plot was then the center of public interest. Kelly was one of the conspirators, and Britannicus had been concentrating on him in his letters of May 25 to June 29, inclusive.

[70] *State Papers, Domestic, George I*, bundle 44, No. 16.

> that ever was made, and the hardest to fill . . . My Ambition therefore, is not to emulate *Cato;* it is much smaller; and only write a great deal better than my Brethren. I wish for my own sake they may continue their Performances; and I heartily condole with them, on the Retirement of *Cato;* His great Name, and good Sense, furnish'd them Weekly Matter for their Nonsense.

Criton himself claimed to be neither Whig nor Tory, but he said:

> I would rather make bold with the *Whigs* than the *Tories*: The former give fairer Quarter when they are in Power, than the others do ever when they are out of it. Of this my Predecessor has lately found a very flagrant Proof: For tho' he had for some Years taken a Liberty with his Betters, which I shall not venture to take, and which perhaps was never taken by any Man before him, yet I cannot find that he suffer'd in his Character, his Person, or his Fortune; but he no sooner touched *Aaron's* Bells, but you see what a Storm he raised about his Ears! A Storm from those very Men, who, while they thought that he opposed the Administration, had been crying him up these three Years as an unanswerable and only Defender of publick Liberty! But now they represent him as an Atheist, a Republican, and deserving to be punish'd, for having defended the Administration against Popery and Popish Servitude . . .

Cato had never been sympathetic towards High Church orthodoxy, and his last essays support the conclusion that his attacks on orthodox religion had indeed contributed to his sudden disappearance. Clearly, it was dangerous to tamper with the interests of churchmen, even in that so-called age of reason.

The British Journal of August 10 discussed the speculation heard in the coffee houses concerning the reasons for Cato's passing, and on August 17, the following verses appeared:

> Cato's retir'd, and so our Isle has lost
> As great a Cicero as the Age could boast. . . .
> And thou, Great Cato! shall for ever stand,
> *Sovereign of Wit,* an *Honour to our Land*: . . .

Among the Bards of *Athens* and of *Rome*,
The *British Cato* shines in Times to come.

Thomas Gordon, the man, however, was still a long way from death. His tampering with "Aaron's bells" may have had something to do with the demise of Cato, but Gordon, it may be suspected, dropped his activities for reasons not entirely unrelated to financial remuneration. For one thing, we find him appearing in the list of those favored by the smile of the Great Man he had so bitterly attacked, when Walpole made him First Commissioner of Wine Licenses, a profitable sinecure which he held for the rest of his long life. Five years after the disappearance of Cato, Gordon published the first volume of his translation of Tacitus, and his close relation with Walpole at this time is revealed in his dedication of the work to his great patron.[71] This effort won him wide and lasting recognition, and his translation was republished in part as late as 1890 in the *Camelot Classics* with a eulogy by the editor, Arthur Galton, of New College, Oxford. From this work, too, Gordon made a good profit.[72]

It was certainly much better from Walpole's standpoint for Gordon to be translating classics, than to be producing *Independent Whigs* and Cato Letters, and he encouraged the writer in his new interest, as did others in the administration, including Lord Townshend, Lord Carteret and the Duke of Argyle.[73] Meanwhile, the essays of Cato and the Independent Whig continued to go through many editions in their collected form, including in the case of the former those of 1724, 1733, 1737, 1748, and after Gordon's death, 1754, while editions of the latter appear in the British Museum under the dates, 1721, 1722, 1726, 1728, 1732, 1735, 1736, and 1743. In addition to all this good fortune for Gordon, it was in 1728 that the estate of the free-thinking Dr. Walsh, already men-

[71] *The Works of Tacitus*, Vol. I, published in London, 1728, containing the "Annals" to which are prefixed "Political Discourses" by Gordon, the whole dedicated to Sir Robert Walpole. Vol. II appeared in 1731, containing the "Five Books of History", the "Treatise of the Germans", and the "Life of Agricola", dedicated respectively to Frederick, Prince of Wales, Lord Carteret, and the Duke of Argyle. The "Political Discourses" are of great interest in revealing Gordon's view.

[72] John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1813), I, 709.

[73] James Ralph, *The Case of Authors*, pp. 37-38.

tioned, was left to him, in admiration for his works and his conversations at the Grecian Coffee House.[74] Gordon had already inherited a considerable sum of money and a library from his friend, Sir John Trenchard. The latter died on December 7, 1723, the day on which the last of the Cato letters appeared, over the name of Criton; though, as already noted, it was attributed to Gordon in later collected editions. Thereupon, Gordon married Trenchard's widow, the daughter of a rich Newcastle coal family, the Blacketts.[75]

As soon as he had a competency, Gordon quietly sat down, according to a contemporary,[76] and troubled his head no more about politics or religion. For as Pope inquires, where's the glory in opposing the government, when

> 'twill only be thought
> The great man [Walpole] never offered you a groat.
> There's honest Tacitus [Gordon] once talked as big,
> But is he now an Independent Whig? [77]

In fact, however, Gordon does appear to have continued some political activities, and political pamphlets of later years were occasionally attributed to him.[78] He is also said to have been employed by the government to revise or edit articles by court writers before they were published.[79] In a scandalous pamphlet of 1732, he appears as "Tom Starch," and in it a story is told of his bringing about secret meetings between Sir Robert Walpole and Maria Skerret, who became Walpole's mistress and eventually his second wife. This pamphlet describes Gordon as the ablest of Walpole's writers, mixing Greek and Latin, civil law terms, atheism and nonsense![80] He lived until 1751, a very large and corpulent man in his later

[74] Boyer's *Political State*, November, 1728, pp. 499-502.

[75] Bullock, *Thomas Gordon the Independent Whig* (Aberdeen University, 1918).

[76] *An Historical View of the Principles, Characters, Persons, etc., of the Political Writers of Great Britain* (London, 1740), p. 16.

[77] Elwin and Courthope, *Works of Alexander Pope* (London, 1889), III, 459, "Epilogue to the Satires," Dialogue I.

[78] See S. Halkett and J. Laing, *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature* (Edinburgh and London, 1926-1934), index under "Thomas Gordon of Kirkcudbright."

[79] *An Historical View* . . . (1740), p. 17.

[80] *Bob-Lynn against Franck-Lynn, or, a Full History of the Controversies and Dissensions in the Family of the Lynns* . . . (London, 1732).

years,[81] and one of the few political writers of his day who achieved wealth as well as notoriety; but none of his later writings attained the lasting popularity and influence of the Cato letters.

No such good fortune attended Benjamin Norton Defoe. In seventeen years, he became the father of seventeen children, but by 1739, he had buried fourteen of these and their mother, and his abject poverty now is revealed in his letters of 1738 and 1739 to the Duke of Newcastle, begging miserably for some means of feeding and clothing the three remaining children. From these letters it appears that he had for many years written effectively for the government, and had received the approbation of Sir Robert Walpole along with more substantial rewards for his merits. Unwisely enough, he had "taken refuge" in *The Craftsman,* that stormy journal of opposition, but only, according to his own story, when his motherless children were deprived of food and he had not a shilling to provide for them. There was nothing he craved so much as to reveal to the government the secrets of those "wretches" of the opposition who had given him refuge in his hour of need, and to be restored to the good favor of his old employer, the government. If he was so restored, no evidence of it has come to light, and Benjamin Norton Defoe drops wailing into the limbo of forgotten authors.[82]

Thus it was that the influence of *The London Journal* rose and then declined. It continued to attract much attention after it passed into the control of the government in September, 1722, and was frequently and bitterly attacked by opposition writers. Fifteen years later, the following comment appeared in a pamphlet: "As for the London Journal it is just where it was many Years ago, so little devoted to either Party that it is disliked by both: The Malcontents do not relish its Author's Notions of Politicks; some other People think he has too much Religion, while a great Party among the Clergy think he has none at all." [83] Nevertheless, William Wilkins, the printer, received from the government in the

[81] John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes,* I, 709.

[82] British Museum, *Add. MSS.* 32,691, ff.390-391, 409, and 32,692, ff.454-455, 480-481.

[83] *Memoirs of the Times; in a Letter to a Friend in the Country* . . . (London, 1737), p. 34.

three years, 1732, 1733, and 1735, for *London Journals* and writing, the sum of nearly three thousand pounds.[84] It would be interesting to know whether its circulation actually fell to half, as anticipated in 1722, in the "Computation of the London Journal", but no later estimates seem to be available. On the other hand, *The British Journal*, in spite of the temporary efforts of Cato and his successors, was never able to attract the popular interest that had formerly followed *The London Journal* when it was publishing the Cato letters.

The government had won without noise or evident public reaction, by a means far more effective than any amount of public prosecution could have been, and in the long run perhaps no more expensive. The method used was typical of Walpole in all his political policies: he preferred winning men by finding their price and paying it to using public persuasion or compulsion. A similar story might be told, perhaps, of many other organs of public opinion during the years in which Walpole controlled the government; and the £50,000 distributed in the last ten years of his administration, to printers and writers, may be accounted for by a widespread system of this kind, which has never been investigated and which may well have been developing steadily during the earlier half of that long administration.

[84] *A Further Report from the Committee of Secrecy appointed to enquire into the Conduct of Robert, Earl of Orford, during the last ten years . . .* (London, 1742), Appendix XIII.

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